

Institution: Queen's University Belfast		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 17 Business and Management		
Title of case study: Using Economics to Inform Public Understanding of Ireland's Troubled Past		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Matthias Blum	Lecturer	2014 to 2018
Graham Brownlow	Senior Lecturer	2007 to present
Alan de Bromhead	Senior Lecturer	2014 to present
Chris Colvin	Senior Lecturer	2012 to present
Áine Doran	Research Assistant	2017 to 2018
Alan Fernihough	Senior Lecturer	2014 to present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: November 2014 - May 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Research carried out by academics at the Centre for Economic History at Queen's Management School has provided important new insights into the economic, social and political history of the island of Ireland. The research has reached, at a minimum, hundreds of thousands of people in the United States, tens of thousands of people in Ireland and the UK, and an audience in other countries. It has also enhanced public understanding, enriched the programming of a community TV station and two economics podcast series, and sparked a lively debate on government industrial policy among readers of the <i>Wall Street Journal</i>.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>The defining event in Ireland's modern history is the Great Famine of the 1840s, which resulted in 1,000,000 people dying and 1,000,000 people emigrating. An ESRC-funded study, led by Alan Fernihough (with Áine Doran as research assistant), explored the role of both poverty and population pressure in Ireland's Great Famine. The two-year study, which started in 2016, re-examined the Famine using digitised parish-level data from population censuses in Ireland, together with GIS data. Reflecting on the project's findings with Cormac Ó Gráda (University College Dublin), Fernihough found that poverty was a major contributor to the severity of the Great Famine [Ref 1].</p> <p>A key output of the study was the creation of an interactive digital map of the island of Ireland, which drew on the data to graphically demonstrate the impact which the Famine had on the population during the nineteenth century, and which also illustrated subsequent population density changes in the twentieth century [Ref 2]. This helped to shed light on the uneven spatial distribution of the Famine's impact.</p> <p>After the Famine, Ireland's economy grew rapidly between 1850 and 1911. Chris Colvin led a study which aimed to contribute to explanations as to why this growth occurred [Ref 3]. The other members of the research team were Matthias Blum, Laura McAtackney (Aarhus University) and Eoin McLaughlin (University of St Andrews). The researchers examined detailed prison records from the nineteenth century to ascertain the numeracy of prisoners at that time. They found that the advent of state schooling improved numeracy in the population, and that this improvement was particularly pronounced in the case of women. Their evidence ultimately suggests that human capital played a very important role in the post-famine growth of the Irish economy.</p>		

The 1918 UK General Election in Ireland coincided with the rise of the previously obscure Sinn Féin party. This revolutionary republican party secured 73 of Ireland's 105 parliamentary seats in that election. For 100 years, most observers had believed that this dramatic rise was due to the electoral franchise trebling in size, following a major extension of the franchise in 1918. However, this view was challenged in 2020 by the findings of a study, funded by the British Academy, which was carried out by Alan de Bromhead, Alan Fernihough and Enda Hargaden (University of Tennessee). The research team implemented an analysis which drew on digitised data from the 1911 population census in Ireland. They found little evidence that the franchise reforms benefited Sinn Féin. New female electors appeared less likely to have supported Sinn Féin while new male electors were no more likely to have voted for Sinn Féin than the existing electorate. The researchers concluded that Sinn Féin's electoral success was more likely to have been driven by a change of heart by the Irish electorate than by a change in its composition [Ref 4].

The 1918 election result presaged further civil unrest which led to Ireland's independence from the UK and, in 1921, to the partition of the island of Ireland into two self-governing entities, Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland. While the latter opted for independence, resulting in the creation of the Irish Free State (later Republic of Ireland), Northern Ireland remained a devolved entity within the UK. Graham Brownlow has charted the impact of devolution and continuing civil unrest in Northern Ireland on its industrial policy from 1920 to the present day [Ref 5]. He highlights the fact that the region's industrial policy was very reliant on government grants between 1945 and the early 1990s, and questions the value of some of the inward investment attracted as a result of this policy focus.

In a further study, Brownlow throws the spotlight on one particularly controversial example of this issue; the infamous DeLorean Motor Company which received generous government funding in return for locating its car manufacturing plant in Northern Ireland in the late 1970s, but which ultimately collapsed a few years later [Ref 6]. Brownlow rejects two common explanations for the ultimate failure of the firm; namely, John DeLorean's psychological flaws or the limitations of "activist" government policy. Rather, Brownlow argues that the pressures created in Northern Ireland in the late 1970s by civil unrest help to explain why DeLorean's proposition was an attractive one at the time for local government officials.

3. References to the research

1. Fernihough, A. and Ó Gráda, C. (2018) "[Population and Poverty in Ireland on the Eve of the Great Famine](#)", *QUCHE Working Paper* 2018-13.

2. Fernihough, A. (2018) [Irish Famine Project](#), online database and interactive digital map.

Fernihough's work was funded by an ESRC grant entitled 'The Causes and Consequences of the Great Irish Famine.' He was the only investigator on the grant [for £149,674], which ran from 2016 to 2018.

3. Blum, M., Colvin, C. L., McAtackney, L. and McLaughlin, E. (2017) "Women of an Uncertain Age: Quantifying Human Capital Accumulation in Rural Ireland in the Nineteenth Century", *Economic History Review*, vol. 70, pp.187-223. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/ehr.12333> Peer-reviewed journal.

4. de Bromhead, A., Fernihough A. and Hargaden, E. (2020) "Representation of the People: Franchise Extension and the Sinn Féin Election in Ireland, 1918", *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 80, pp.886-925. DOI: 10.1017/S0022050720000376. Peer-reviewed journal.

De Bromhead and Fernihough's work on this paper was funded by a British Academy grant entitled 'Representation of the People: Franchise Extension and 'The Sinn Fein Election' in Ireland, 1918.' They were the only investigators on the grant [for £2,550], which ran from 2016 to 2018.

5. Brownlow, Graham (2020) "Industrial Policy in Northern Ireland: Past, Present and Future", *The Economic and Social Review*, vol. 51, no. 3, pp. 407 – 424. Peer-reviewed journal.

6. Brownlow, G. (2016) "Soft Budget Constraints and Regional Industrial Policy: Reinterpreting the Rise and Fall of DeLorean", *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol. 40, pp.1497-1515. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/cje/bev077> Peer-reviewed journal.

4. Details of the impact

The combined research of Blum, Brownlow, Colvin, de Bromhead and Fernihough has reached, at a minimum, hundreds of thousands of people in the United States, tens of thousands of people in Ireland and the UK, and an audience in other countries. It has enhanced public understanding, prompted public debate, and enriched broadcast and podcast programming.

Enriching community TV programming

Between September 2018 and March 2019, four of the researchers drew on the research to contribute to four different programmes in the long-running *History Now* series on Northern Ireland's only community TV channel, NVTV, which reaches 300,000 households [Source 1]. The show's presenter highlights contributions from Fernihough and Colvin as offering the series and its audience new insights. The presenter observed that Colvin "provided some interesting perspectives which were not well-known to history audiences", when he discussed his team's research on prison records reported in [Ref 3]. Meanwhile, another episode of the show, in which Fernihough discussed his research on the Irish Famine [Refs 1 and 2], "brought a new economic-based perspective on the Famine", according to the presenter.

Enhancing public understanding of the Great Famine

Fernihough's interactive digital map, charting the population impact of the Irish Famine [Ref 2] was covered in a feature article by one of Ireland's leading national newspapers, *The Irish Times* (2019 digital and ePaper circulation: 79,000, estimated 11,900,000 online users monthly) [Source 2]. Among the reader responses to this article, a nurse living in the west of Ireland commented on Twitter, "It's sad to read the levels [of population loss] within the areas my family lived in. I've run through some of the old pilgrim passes [and] villages while training ... and the isolation & harshness explain why the Irish are such survivors." [Source 2].

The project also excited local interest around Ireland. County Kerry's local newspaper, *The Kerryman*, highlighted the study's specific findings with regard to Kerry [Source 3]. It quoted a local genealogist, Kay Caball, who carried out her own analysis of local statistics from the project's database, noting in particular the famine's impact on the least well-off. "Some of the figures make for shocking reading", she commented. In Northern Ireland, the leading regional newspaper, the *News Letter* carried a feature on the research which highlighted a further finding, namely that the province of Ulster was not as badly affected as some other parts of the island, due to a more egalitarian system of land tenure [Source 4].

In addition, the research reached tens of thousands among the Irish diaspora community in both Britain and the United States. The project was featured in the *Irish Post*, which is the largest-selling newspaper aimed at the Irish community in Britain; it has a print circulation of 80,000 and an online presence of 2,000,000 visitors monthly [Source 5]. It also featured in the *Irish America* magazine (print circulation: 100,000) and website [Source 6].

However, the project reached its widest audience through a feature on the *Newsweek* website which has a global monthly audience of 72,000,000 (measured by unique visits), and claims to be read by one in five Americans, in addition to its audience in other countries [Source 7]. The article commented that Fernihough's map "helps to bring this important period in Irish

history to life”, and it also invited its readers to “... check out the interactive map for yourself and see how the Great Famine may have affected your ancestors” [Source 7].

Challenging preconceptions

Another Centre for Economic History study which reached a wide audience was de Bromhead et al’s analysis of census and election data to reassess the factors behind Sinn Féin’s success in the 1918 UK General Election. In December 2018, *The Irish Times* (2019 digital and ePaper circulation: 79,000, estimated 11,900,000 online users monthly) ran a feature article on the study’s findings [Source 8]. Another major Irish national newspaper, the *Irish Examiner* (print circulation 25,000), also published an article about the findings [Source 9]. The study was also covered by the *News Letter* which commented that “electoral reforms have long been touted as one of the factors behind the rise of Sinn Féin, but the research from Queen’s finds these reforms did not cause the rise of the radical republican party” [Source 10].

Prompting public debate and engagement on industrial policy

Brownlow’s research on DeLorean reached a large audience in the United States and in the island of Ireland, and prompted debate on government industrial policy in the US. In August, 2016, the influential *Wall Street Journal*, which has the largest print circulation of any newspaper in the US (2016 print circulation: 1,200,000; combined 2018 print and digital circulation: 2,600,000), published an opinion piece on Brownlow’s study which the author described as “a fascinating revisiting of the DeLorean case” [Source 11]. The author, Holman W. Jenkins Jr., a regular *Journal* columnist and a member of the newspaper’s editorial board, had discovered Brownlow’s study and was clearly impressed by it. In the article, Jenkins Jr. provided a hyperlink to an earlier version of [Ref 6] and highlighted key findings. His article drew parallels between the bold attitude of John DeLorean and that of the contemporary entrepreneur, Elon Musk, and the direct or indirect government subsidies supplied to both.

The article prompted a lively online debate on the newspaper’s website, with 664 comments in the space of four days. Much of the debate focused on whether, in the light of the DeLorean case, the US government should provide subsidies for Musk’s electric car company, Tesla. For example, one commentator observed:

On one hand, I agree [with the article’s argument]. Let’s get rid of subsidies ... On the [other] hand the electric car subsidy has helped put the US at the lead of the electric car market in the world. We should be celebrating this achievement, despite the small subsidy. ...

But another reader responded:

Until batteries can store energy commensurate with gasoline, electric cars will remain a novelty. So because of government subsidies we’re the market leader in a novelty product. ... [Source 11]

Brownlow also drew on his DeLorean study and his wider research on Northern Ireland industrial policy [Refs 5 and 6] to contribute to two podcast series. His research formed the subject of a podcast in the US Apple podcast series, *Economic Rockstar*, in June 2016. The series, which ran until 2019, was designed for economists, financial analysts, students and teachers. [Source 12]. In May 2020, Brownlow was interviewed for a podcast on the Northern Ireland economy, as part of the Irish economics podcast series, *At the Margin*. In an introduction to the programme, the presenter and producer, the economist, Niall Farrell, commented:

Graham’s expert knowledge really gives us a depth of understanding that I have not heard elsewhere. Indeed, I learned a lot from this discussion... Of course politics has influenced the [Northern Ireland] economy and Graham talks about that but not always

in the ways that you would expect. One such example is the story of how the DeLorean car from Back to the Future came to be manufactured just outside Belfast. It's a fascinating story ... **[Source 13]**

The broadcast was well-received by listeners. Comments on Twitter included "This is just excellent. A fantastic economic primer on how the NI economy got where it is today.", "Very good discussion on the NI economy. Always love hearing about the DeLorean story.", and "Fascinating dive into Northern Ireland's economic history..". **[Source 13]**

In November 2014, the findings from Brownlow's study were also covered in articles in *The Irish Times* (2019 digital and ePaper circulation: 79,000, estimated 11,900,000 online users monthly) and in two of Northern Ireland's leading newspapers, the *Belfast Telegraph* (2014 circulation: 46,000) and the *News Letter*. **[Source 14]**

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Testimonial, dated 16th March, 2021, from presenter, *History Now*, NVTV.
2. McGreevy, Ronan, "[Great Famine's impact illustrated by interactive map](#)", *Irish Times*, 16th March 2018. The newspaper's combined print and ePaper circulation, and its estimated online circulation for January to June 2019 are [here](#) (*Irish Times* and ABC figures). The [tweet quoted](#) was in response to a tweet about the article and the research by @IrishTimesCultr (18th March 2018). A screenshot is available.
3. Evans, Tadhg, "[QUB lecturer maps effect of famine on our county](#)", *The Kerryman*, 31st March 2018.
4. "[Ulster weathered famine better due to 'more egalitarian' farm system](#)", *News Letter*, 2nd April 2018.
5. Audley, Fiona, "[Interactive map shows devastating impact of Ireland's Great Famine at local level](#)", *Irish Post*, 16th March 2018. Circulation figures (accessed 17.3.21) are available [here](#).
6. Lewis, Dave, "[New Map Animates Devastation of the Great Hunger](#)", *Irish America*, June/July 2018. Print circulation figure (accessed 17.3.210) available [here](#).
7. Dovey, Dana, "[Use This Map to See Exactly How the Great Irish Famine Affected Your Ancestors](#)", 16th March 2018, *Newsweek*. *Newsweek's* 2020 audience data available [here](#).
8. McGreevy, Ronan "[No evidence women were key in Sinn Féin's 1918 election win](#)", *Irish Times*, 5th December 2018. See source 2 for circulation information.
9. Buckley, Dan "[Study: Rising and threat of conscription key to Sinn Féin success](#)", *Irish Examiner*, 5th December 2018. See source 2 for 2019 print circulation figure, citing ABC.
10. Copy via Nexis of "Landslide Sinn Féin victory in 1918 Irish election not down to voting reform", *News Letter*, 3rd December 2018.
11. Jenkins Jr, Holman W. "[From DeLorean to Tesla](#)", *Wall Street Journal*, 16th August 2016. The 2018 circulation figures quoted are sourced from Statista and are available [here](#). The 2016 print circulation figure quoted is sourced from circulation figures for the 'top 10' US newspapers, published in the *Press Gazette* and available [here](#). The Journal's website states that comments on this article were closed four days after it was published.
12. "[Graham Brownlow on Rent Seeking, Cliometrics and the Economics of the DeLorean](#)", *Economic Rockstar*, podcast 092, 30th June 2016. Information on the podcast series' intended audience is available [here](#).
13. "[The Economy of Northern Ireland – Dr Graham Brownlow](#)", *At the Margin*, podcast 19, 12th May 2020. A screenshot of some of the reaction on Twitter is available.
14. Collated impact source document "Graham Brownlow – other media coverage". This document contains details of *The Irish Times*, *Belfast Telegraph* and *News Letter* items on Brownlow's DeLorean study, referred to above. A link is provided to the *Irish Times* article, while screenshots of the other two articles are available. Circulation figures for *The Irish Times* and the *Belfast Telegraph* are also provided.