

Institution: Goldsmiths, University of London		
Unit of Assessment: 28_History		
Title of case study: Building Bridges, Deepening Understanding: The Community Impact of Belfast's First World War Military History		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2005-2019		
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:
Prof. Richard Grayson	Lecturer in British Politics (2004-6); Senior Lecturer in British and Irish Politics (2006-10); Professor of 20 th Century History (2010-)	1/9/2004 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013-Dec 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? Y		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Grayson's new 'military history from the street' methodology challenged received narratives of World War One (WW1) in Northern Ireland (NI) which have been central to sectarian identities. In particular, he demonstrated that WW1 in Belfast was less sectarian than previously thought. His methodology and findings have been used by NI community groups committed to an on-going process of peace and reconciliation, by contributing to the development of a new shared history in areas that were formerly bitterly divided.</p> <p>Furthermore, Grayson's research and his methodology contributed significantly to UK-wide, WW1 commemorative projects in collaboration with the Imperial War Museum, National Archives, BBC and the Department for Education.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Ireland's First World War history played a central role in the founding myths of the two states created on the island in 1921. It continues to inform people's identities, especially in Northern Ireland (NI) and particularly West Belfast (WB) in ways very different to the situation in Great Britain (GB). WB was a Troubles frontline which remains bitterly divided between the Loyalist Shankill and Republican Falls. First World War history has resonant contemporary meanings in street politics and expressions of identity. However, much of the history told and used for the past century, and often represented in public murals, is inaccurate and sectarian. In WB, it is commonly said that Shankill men joined the political and sectarian 36th (Ulster) Division (part of the British army formed from the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), a Unionist paramilitary organisation), and were mostly killed on the Somme in 1916. In so far as Catholics (largely from the Falls) served, popular narratives have them in the 16th (Irish) Division which mirrored the 36th in its nationalist political and sectarian tone.</p> <p>British Academy-funded research from September 2005 deployed a new 'military history from the street' method pioneered by Grayson and not previously used for any part of the United Kingdom (UK). Previously, when analysing service from a geographic area, research examined units known to be connected to that area. However, such an approach reinforced WB's sectarian narrative because it focused on one battalion (the 9th Royal Irish Rifles) formed from the WB UVF and part of the 36th (Ulster) Division. 'Military history from the street' meant finding ALL WB service (as far as possible), regardless of the unit served in, by scouring records such</p>		

as newspapers (not traditionally used by military historians) for service from any part of West Belfast. Key sources were Belfast newspapers for every day of the war and 18,000 British army service records, with a later focus on data on 140 UVF members including men from East Belfast. The resulting outputs (*Belfast Boys* in 2009 [R1]; two articles in 2014 [R2, R3], and a chapter in 2016 [R4]) showed that sectarianism had been greatly overstated and that in reality Protestants and Catholics often served side-by-side.

Specific findings:

1. Overall service was higher and more diverse than in traditional narratives. Shankill popular narratives suggest 760 men from the area joined the 36th Division, with 684 killed, and say nothing about men who joined other units. The result was that people overstated the fatality rate and underestimated the total who served and believed that most men served in a political/sectarian unit. In fact, at least 6,431 Shankill men served, with at least 1,358 killed. Those far beyond UVF ranks enlisted, so service in the British army from the Shankill was not only linked to paramilitary membership. Another 2,341 from the Falls served, with at least 644 killed. Catholics and Protestants enlisted in line with their share of the population. Men served in regular, not only volunteer, British army battalions because WB is and was a working-class area and fertile ground for recruiting. That meant Protestants and Catholics were serving side-by-side, rather than in sectarian units. Only 'military history from the street' can uncover such data.

2. Irish and Ulster Volunteers served alongside men from Great Britain. Popular narratives of the Battle of Messines since the late-1990s have the nationalist 16th and unionist 36th divisions as serving 'side-by-side'. In fact, by mid-1917 much of the composition of both units was English and Scottish, so Irish-Ulster reconciliation narratives need to factor in contact with men from Britain.

3. Even UVF members who joined the British army did not all join the 36th Division. Around one-third served in other units, challenging the narrative of the UVF simply becoming the 36th Division in 1914. Instead, those men also served alongside Catholics.

3. References to the research

R1. Richard S. Grayson, *Belfast Boys: How Unionists and Nationalists Fought and Died Together in the First World War*, (London: Continuum, 2009, revised pb 2010). ISBN 978-1847250087 (HB) 9781441105196 (PB). [Available on Request]

R2. Richard S. Grayson, 'Military History from the Street: New Methods for Researching First World War Service in the British Military' *War in History*, 21, 4 (2014), pp. 465-495. ISSN 0968-3445. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2F0968344513505403> [Submitted to REF2]

R3. Richard S. Grayson, '[Ireland's New Memory of the First World War: Forgotten Aspects of the Battle of Messines, June 1917](#)', *British Journal for Military History*, 1,1 (2014), pp. 48-65. ISSN 2057-0422 [Online Access]

R4. Richard S. Grayson, 'Beyond the Ulster Division: West Belfast members of the Ulster Volunteer Force and Service in the First World War', in Richard S. Grayson and Fearghal McGarry, eds., *Remembering 1916: The Easter Rising, the Somme and the Politics of Memory in Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 112-137. ISBN 978-1-107-14590-0 Hardback & 978-1-316-50927-2 Paperback. [Available on Request]

4. Details of the impact

Simplistic readings of history underpin sectarianism, but historical research that explores the complexities of the past can help break down such divisions. Communities in Belfast believed they were divided because their 'tribes' were divided in the past. However, Grayson's book

Belfast Boys helped to show people that this was not the case. It has empowered local communities to challenge sectarianism at a time when Northern Ireland continues to navigate a process of peace and reconciliation; and it informed the work of national agencies in developing and delivering their WW1 commemorative projects.

1. *Belfast Boys* changes local understanding of Belfast's war, inspiring five new murals and five community projects in Belfast

Belfast Boys, influenced a series of murals ('The Poppy Trail') funded by the NI Housing Executive in Belfast's Loyalist 'Greater Village' area (now part of South Belfast but was 'West' in 1914-18) which have been cited as a highlight of the UK's First World War Centenary in a House of Commons Select Committee report.[S1] The displays are radically different to other sectarian murals in the area because they focus on service beyond the 36th Division and depict Protestant-Catholic soldiers side-by-side. Between 2015 and 2018, five new murals inspired by *Belfast Boys* have been erected in the former West Belfast area. Each mural depicts a different year, (1914, 1915, 1916 and 1917 respectively) with the 5th marking the sinking of the HMS *Hawke*.

Those not familiar with Belfast's murals must understand that these artworks are not produced by individuals or detached groups. Their existence denotes significant community buy-in to their meaning. These visual displays are the product of in-depth local debate and are crucial to territorial demarcation as communities use murals as potent signifiers of who they are. New mural sites are hard fought over (sometimes literally 'fought') and discussions often involve former prisoners and/or paramilitaries. This means that Belfast residents can be reluctant to voice their reasons for displaying certain murals and the significance of new murals must be judged by the fact that they exist at all.



We are indebted to Professor Richard Grayson of Goldsmiths, University of London, for working with us on this project. His book *Belfast Boys, How Unionists and Nationalists Fought and Died Together in the First World War* has had an important impact on our work.



**Housing
Executive**

[Image: '1914 – Kitchener 'Your Country Needs You' (Egeria Street) and enlargement of text (bottom left of mural) which acknowledges impact of *Belfast Boys*]

As part of his research for *Belfast Boys*, Grayson established a longstanding connection (since 2007) with the 6th Connaught Rangers Research Project (a broad nationalist group including former Troubles-era Republican prisoners) and the Fellowship of Messines Association (a cross-community body of former Troubles' combatants). One member of both organisations, commented in 2019 on the adoption of Grayson's data and methods to discuss First World War commemoration:

'The research carried out and the publication of *Belfast Boys* had a significant influence in supporting changes to the research efforts of both the 6th Connaught Rangers Research Project and The Fellowship of Messines Association, in compiling accurate records of Belfast men who had served. The listings compiled by Prof. Grayson opened up new sources of information that helped us to turn the regimental numbers into the human stories of local men who had enlisted and served. The impact of this had, and is still having, positive results in the work of both groups both within and across communities here.'

The data collected for *Belfast Boys* also informed Grayson's work with the Shankill Area Social History (SASH) a leading social history group with a strong local influence. Grayson first met SASH members in 2009 at the launch of *Belfast Boys* and worked with them to co-produce 'The Shankill Great War Project' website launched in November 2019 which is about the history of this unionist/loyalist area. In 2019, a member of SASH said that the launch of *Belfast Boys*

directly 'inspired' SASH 'to research, compile and educate ourselves and our community around the same subject' and that the book 'led to a better understanding of our history, how at that time, against a common enemy, the division within Ireland was put aside.' In reference to SASH's activities, he also says that *Belfast Boys* expanded his community's, 'knowledge of the complexities of that time, and about the role the Catholic Nationalist Community played in the Great War too. Something we never truly grasped, or learnt about, given recent history [...] everything we have done, we have done so because of the interest gained through that book launch. All those men, all those names, but nothing anywhere about them until reading that book, & meeting Richard.'

The Shankill and the Great War website endorses this testimony: 'S.A.S.H. would like to thank Professor Richard Grayson of Goldsmiths, University of London, who has given many valuable hours over a number of years, and without whom we could not have achieved this outcome.' [S2]

Grayson's work contributed to other local community projects between 2014-2020. Doing for East Belfast what he did for West Belfast, the 'East Belfast and the Great War' project would not have been possible without Grayson's research methods. As the project website confirms, 'The research methods that are used by East Belfast & The Great War are modelled on those developed by Professor Richard Grayson in the research for his book *Belfast Boys*'. Project creator, Jason Burke, said, 'Belfast Boys fundamentally changed how I approach the writing of history. It led me into a world of history by numbers, a scientific approach to the craft which is underpinned by statistics.' [S3]. Other examples of community projects that use *Belfast Boys* as a case study and promote Grayson's methods in training volunteers (from twelve community groups) include the NI Community Relations Council's *Decade of Anniversaries Toolkit* and in Mid-Antrim and Causeway Museum Services' 'On the Brink: The Politics of Conflict, 1914-16' [S4, S5].

2. 'Military history from the street' methodology influences commemorative projects in the UK

The centrality of Grayson's research to any NI discussion of WW1 is recognised by the UK government, the Imperial War Museum, The National Archives, the BBC and The Centre for Hidden Histories who have sought his insight and advice on commemorative works.

Grayson became an Associate Member of the NI Centenary Committee (a sub-group of the UK government committee) because his; 'research is vital in terms of our preparations for the Centenary' (Jeffery Donaldson MP, 2014) [S6]. His expertise meant that overlooked aspects of the war, such as the deployment of the 10th (Irish) Division at Gallipoli in August 1915, were included in the commemorative programme and marked through a memorial service held at Lisburn Cathedral in August 2015. He also chaired the Imperial War Museum's (IWM) digital projects experts' panel from 2012, who stated in a press release at the time: 'We invited Richard Grayson to chair the group because his book *Belfast Boys* pioneered using large quantities of digital and other sources to analyse the war experience of one area.' Grayson's expertise ensured that Lives of the First World War (launched in May 2014) included community dimensions based on the 'military history from the street' approach. More than 8,000 community sections were created in five years by over 160,000 volunteers who also contributed to a database containing 7.7 million 'life stories'. Operation War Diary (run by IWM with The National Archives from January 2014 to 2019) also drew on Grayson's 'military history from the street' approach and engaged over 15,000 volunteers who worked on approximately 134,000 pages of war diaries over five years.

As a member of the academic group advising the Department for Education on English schools' battlefield visits and the Belfast Somme 100 advisory group, Grayson offered counsel on ways of engaging the public in hidden histories using 'military history from the street'. As historical adviser on the BBC's 2018 Armistice Day website (which had over 600,000 users for an average of 9 minutes each) he ensured that pages on Ireland included the latest research, selected examples which covered the breadth of Irish service and corrected errors on the time soldiers spent in trenches [S8]. Grayson is a regular speaker at public lectures (such as Belfast City

Council's Messines centenary lecture) and as a media commentator (extensively, but most notably on location on the Somme with BBC Radio Ulster on 1st July 2016, BBC 1 NI's 2015 two-part *Ireland's Great War*, and the RTÉ/BBC 2020 production *Hawks and Doves*).

In 2019, The Centre for Hidden Histories, one of five World War One Engagement Centres funded by the AHRC, chose two schools that use Grayson's 'military history from the street methods' (The Hemel Hempstead School (HHS) and Bishops Grant School in Streatham) as the sole representatives of the East of England and London in the national 'Young People's Learning Hub on World War One' [S9, S10]. Leanne Williams, Head of History at HHS, said in 2019,

'Over the past decade, Professor Grayson's excellent approach in enabling students to see the links between international and local history has been so important in changing our students' views of the war, helping them to understand how the World Wars affected their local area in a way that they had not done before.'

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

S1. Evidence of impact on mural content and the project's impact in terms of 'the success of the commemorations in involving all four nations of the UK, in particular Northern Ireland'; a) [The Poppy Trail Murals, Living Legacies 1914-1918](#), [Website reference], b) UK House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee [Lessons from the First World War Centenary](#) (2019) p.9 [Report] [Grouped source]

S2. Evidence of the use of Grayson's methods and material for work by a key NI community group; Shankill Area Social History (SASH) ['The Shankill and the Great War'](#) [Website reference]

S3. Evidence of impact of methodology in the East Belfast and the Great War project; a) Living Legacies, 1914-1918 ['About the Project'](#) [Website], b) Testimony from project leader, historian and presenter of the Historical Belfast podcast, Jason Burke, ['Belfast Boys with Professor Richard Grayson'](#) [Website] [Grouped source]

S4. Demonstrates use of Grayson's methods by key NI body tackling sectarianism; [Community Relations Council, Decade of Anniversaries Toolkit](#), developed by Healing Through Remembering; Compiled by Jayme Reeves and Helen McLaughlin (September 2013) p.26. [Publication]

S5. Demonstrates use of Grayson's methods by community groups; [On the Brink: Learning Resource Toolkit](#), Mid & East Antrim Museum and Heritage Services, supported by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (2017) p. 7 and resources published online as part of the On The Brink [Learning Resources](#) [Published materials]

S6. Invitation to become Associate Member of First World War Centenary Committee in Northern Ireland; Rt Hon Jeffery Donaldson MP, 6th January 2014 [Letter]

S7. Demonstrates use of Grayson's methods and material to challenge sectarian narratives. Queens University, Belfast, Living Legacies UVF [The Geography of Service and Death](#) [Website]

S8. Demonstrates use of Grayson's expertise by a national media outlet. BBC ['Armistice Day 2018'](#) [Website]

S9. Demonstrates use of Grayson's methods by Hemel Hempstead School; [Hemel at War, Year 9 Research](#) and [Year 12 Research](#) [Website]

S10. Demonstrates use of Grayson's methods by Bishop Thomas Grant School. ['Streatham at War'](#) [Website]