



## National Museums in the Republic of Ireland

Andrew Sawyer

### Summary

As the current director of the National Museum of Ireland has noted, ‘to understand the National Museum of Ireland both as an institution and in terms of tradition from which its collection evolved, is in some ways to understand the complexity of modern Ireland itself’ (Wallace 2002: 1). Wallace’s references to evolution and tradition highlight the significance of the past in the life of the Republic of Ireland, a past closely linked to Britain. In her comprehensive analysis of Irish museums, Bourke concluded that their development followed a route similar to British, and latterly American museums. They did not devolve from princely possessions, but were built on objects from antiquarianism and private collections, with funding from government or scholarly societies. The difference in Ireland is that this development coincided with the emergence of the nation-state (Bourke 2011: 427).

The emergence of the Irish state was marked by conflict. It is remembered in popular culture, for example in the films *Michael Collins* (Jordan, 1996), about the nationalist leader, and *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (Loach, 2006), about the tragedies of the Anglo-Irish War and the Civil War. Each film, successively, broke all box office records in Ireland. They address the 1916 Uprising, the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921) and the Irish Civil War (1922-1923), which were pivotal in Irish history. In brief, until the 1920s, the entire island was part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and museums in Ireland were part of that wider context. An Anglo-Irish elite, though largely Protestant (Anglican) and British in outlook, nonetheless contributed to the development of distinctly Irish learned societies and institutions, including early museums. In the north-east, industrialisation in Belfast, and earlier immigration, led to museums more influenced by Dissenters (Protestants who rejected Anglicanism) and commercialism. As British governments began to contribute to funding, they also began to shape and eventually to take control of key Irish museums. The Gaelic Revival of the 1880s, however, celebrating Ireland’s Gaelic past (a ‘golden age’), was reflected in museum collections with a growing interest in Irish antiquities. The 1916 rising, attempts by the British to impose conscription (1918), the Irish War of Independence and the Civil War reshaped Irish society.

After independence, national museums were largely ignored by governments faced with harsh economic conditions, despite having provided substance to the emerging, nationalist ‘Gaelic Revival’. Towards the end of the twentieth century government attitudes changed, and with EU help, funding was increased. Expansion enabled new approaches to Ireland’s history and new avenues for art. Pre-historic antiquities began to make room for displays on the Viking and Anglo-Norman contributions to Irish culture. More recently, there is a measure of awareness that the Republic of Ireland, formed on the basis of a distinct cultural identity, now faces the challenge of a more pluralistic, multicultural society, which Bourke reflects on in the context of Irish museums (2011: 423-6).

## Summary table, Republic of Ireland

Name	Inaugurated	Initiated	Actors	Ownership	Type	Values	Temporal reach	Style Location
National Museum of Ireland, Archaeology	1908	1890s	Politicians in Dublin	Semi-autonomous organisation under the aegis of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht*	Archaeology and Medieval History	National	Prehistory to ca. 1550	Victorian Palladianism. In Kildare Street, near other branches of the NMI, the National Gallery and Irish government at Leinster House, Dublin.
National Museum of Ireland, Natural History	1908	1890s	National Museum of Ireland	As above	Natural History	Universal	Pre-history to present times.	Influenced by South Kensington and designed to match Leinster House. Near other branches of the NMI, the National Gallery and Irish government at Leinster House. Dublin.
National Museum of Ireland, Decorative Arts and History	1997	1997	National government	As above	Decorative Arts and History	National	Ca. 1550 to the present day.	Neo-Classical military building (18 <sup>th</sup> c.), large barracks built by the British, Situated near the town of Omagh 2 km from the centre of Dublin
National Museum of Ireland, Country Life	2001	2001	National government	As above	Folklife	National	Ca. 1845 to 1950s.	Turlough Park House in Victorian Gothic style (other galleries in modernist building. Sited in countryside (County Mayo), western Ireland.

\* The Gaeltacht refers to the part of Ireland where Gaelic is still spoken as a first language.

## Introduction

The past plays a greater role in Ireland than is common in the British Isles. In fact, 'it has often been said the Irish history, even from the earliest times, is current affairs' (Bardon, 2001: xi; see also O'Mahony and Delanty, 1998: 11; Jackson, 1999: 1; Brett, 1996: 8). This history is also contested, among academics and more widely, not least because 'much of what Irish, British and American politicians and commentators have to say about contemporary Irish problems has been given a historical gloss', and 'some popular ideas about history have been used to justify political extremism and even violence' (Coohill, 2008: 4; see also Dixon, 2008: 18-20). Hence Crooke's comment that 'in order to understand the values held in Ireland that underpinned the establishment of a public museum, one must consider how important 'the past', and the institutions that manage the past, were to Irish nationalism' (Crooke 2000: 100).

Traditionally, Ireland has been divided into four provinces (Ulster, Connacht, Leinster and Munster). The Republic of Ireland is made up of three of these provinces, Connacht, Leinster and Munster, together with three counties from Ulster (making up twenty-six counties in all). The remaining six north-eastern counties of Ulster form Northern Ireland, which remains part of the UK. The current population of the Republic is around four and a half millions.

## Historical background

The island of Ireland has been subject to external influences from prehistoric times and developed a rich Celtic culture. In the fifth century Christianity was adopted and Ireland's monasteries were renowned for their learning. The Romans never established a presence in Ireland, but by the ninth century Norse raiders were settling there and founded Dublin. Anglo-Norman adventurers arrived in 1169, and the island became subject to English monarchs. An Irish Parliament was formally established in 1297. In practice English authority declined in the Middle Ages, until it was re-established by the Tudors. Rebellions (and, in English minds, the threat of foreign intervention), were met with occupation by English troops and a policy of 'plantations', that is, establishing English (Protestant) settlers on the land. In the 1600s, rebellions and foreign interventions were countered by firm, if not brutal suppression by Cromwell during the Commonwealth (1649-60) and later by King William III of England. Confiscation of land and discrimination against Catholics followed, leading to the dominance of the 'Protestant Ascendancy'.

From the seventeenth century onwards, the Ascendancy shared a cultural outlook with British and other European elites and formed learned societies along similar lines. They were mainly landowners, and largely Anglican (the Anglican Church is the 'established church' in Britain and associated with government). The Ascendancy nonetheless represented an Anglo-Irish nationalism, resisting union with Britain until the late 1700s. An Act of Union abolished their Parliament in 1800. Meanwhile, in the countryside, a range of factors such as absentee landlords and harsh conditions for tenants led to unrest. As Irish society became increasingly polarised, attempts by Irish MPs and Britain's Liberal Party to provide Home Rule in the late nineteenth century were defeated. In line with developments elsewhere in Britain, the nineteenth century saw increasing government funding and control of museums, with collection being transferred to government ownership in 1877 as the Museum of Science and Art.

The later nineteenth century also saw a renewal of interest in Ireland's Celtic past, known as the Gaelic Revival. Historically, Celtic refers to a diverse pre-Roman tribal culture in Europe. The modern form of their language still spoken by some Irish, Manx and Scots is referred to as Gaelic, and Gaelic is also used more broadly as a cultural definition. This Gaelic Revival became associated with movements towards independence. At the same time, tensions were rising between those who wanted to remain part of Britain ('Unionists', mainly Protestants living in the north-east of the island) and those who wanted independence ('nationalists', mainly Catholics). Renewed British attempts to legislate for Home Rule were seen as a threat by Unionists, and the more extreme supporters of both sides became engaged in clandestine activities and arms smuggling with a view to possible conflict, when the First World War started. Although many Irish supported Britain (some hoping for Home Rule after the War), and troops were raised throughout Ireland, a minority of nationalists opposed this.

On Easter Monday 24 April 1916, extreme nationalists seized key points in Dublin (the 'Easter Rising') and declared an independent Irish Republic. British troops quickly regained control and the insurrection lasted little more than a week. Initially the rising met with bewilderment in Ireland, as it had not been expected, it had caused a great deal of death and destruction, and some families had members fighting for the British in France. However, the British quickly tried the survivors in a military court and started executing them by firing squad, causing revulsion in Ireland, and some embarrassment in London. By 1918 the British were desperate for recruits to make up for losses in France, and conscription was imposed, further alienating the Irish, many of whom resisted it. In the 1918 General Election, the Irish Parliamentary Party was practically wiped out by the nationalist Sinn Féin party: its MPs refused to sit in the British parliament at Westminster, and met in Dublin instead as a precursor of Dáil Éireann, the Irish parliament.

The Anglo-Irish War (1919-21) saw nationalist forces (the Irish Republican Army) engaged against British troops and their specially recruited units, the 'Auxiliaries' and the 'Black and Tans', who had a reputation for brutality. The war was a propaganda victory, at least, for the Irish. Tortuous negotiations led to the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921. This was negotiated with the British threatening full-scale war if there was not settlement. As a result the Irish Free State was established as part of the British Commonwealth, with an option for the six counties in the north-east to remain part of the UK. The Dáil, by a narrow majority, approved the Treaty, but the President of the Republic, Éamon de Valera (1882-1975) and his deputies resigned.

A brief and murderous Civil War followed in 1922 and 1923 in the Irish Free State, over whether to accept the Anglo-Irish Treaty or reject it in the pursuit of a more complete independence. Meanwhile in Northern Ireland there was sectarian violence whilst the Unionist administration was accused of persecuting Catholics. The war caused many casualties and lasting bitterness. Two of the Republic's main political parties, Fianna Fáil (anti-treaty) and Fine Gael (pro-treaty), were to some extent defined by the Civil War. This split is in contrast to the more common left/right division of politics in the rest of Europe (Prager, 1986; Dunphy 1985).

W.T. Cosgrave emerged as leader of the pro-treaty faction in the Irish Free State and took a hard line against anti-treaty forces, authorising many executions. Constitutional means were used to dismantle remaining links with the UK, and in 1937, in a series of legislative reforms driven by de Valera, the Irish Free State became Éire. Further changes led to the Republic of Ireland being

founded in 1948/49. Trade disputes with the UK, particularly in 1932-38, caused some damage to the economy. Culturally, the new state took note of the Catholic Church's view and of Catholic sensibilities, censoring films and publications, whilst challenging economic circumstances constrained museum development. During the 'Emergency' (the Second World War), Eire maintained a neutral stance, and de Valera adroitly avoided entanglements with the Axis whilst providing some covert support to UK and American efforts. Thousands of Irish served in American and British forces.

After the Second World War, and several decades of relative peace, violence escalated in Northern Ireland, a period known as the 'Troubles', lasting from about 1967-1998. The Republic engaged from time to time with the British government in search of a solution. The Good Friday Agreement of 1998, which brought a cessation of violence in Northern Ireland, received overwhelming support from the Republic's population (albeit on a modest turnout) in an all-Ireland referendum.

The Irish economy is generally seen as performing poorly from the 1920s to the 1950s, but it improved in the 1960s and unemployment and emigration were both reduced. Membership of the European Economic Community in 1974 had some positive impacts and from the late 1980s, the economy enjoyed considerable success. Museums benefitted significantly from this from the 1990s, with significant funds coming from the EU. The financial crises following 2007 had a severe impact (Coohill, 2008: 195). The Catholic Church remains an important element of Irish society, although its influence was in decline from the 1950s, and it was further damaged in the early 2000s when it was rocked by scandal, particularly around child abuse.

Many of these events are addressed in Ireland's national museums: the Celtic 'Golden Age', the Vikings and Anglo-Normans are covered at the National Museum Archaeology branch in Kildare Street; at the Decorative Arts and History branch at Collins Barracks, Dublin, 'Soldiers and Chiefs' covers the period from 1550 to the present. It includes sections on Cromwell, King William, the Ascendancy, the role of the Irish in the British Empire, and the complex events around the First World War. Also exhibited are sections on the War of Independence and the Civil War, together with more recent history such as that of Irish troops serving in the United Nations and collaborating with UK forces against terrorism. The Easter Rising is addressed in 'Understanding 1916', whilst the Decorative Arts collections, numismatics, and some overseas collections are also here. Dublin is also home to the National Museum's Natural History branch, at Merrion Street, whilst at Turlough Park in County Mayo, the Museum of Country Life exhibits the way of life of the rural Irish from 1850 to 1950, and includes exhibits on the period after the 1845 famine, struggles over land (the 'Land War' of the later nineteenth century), Home Rule agitation and changes to land ownership after independence. Kilmainham Gaol, managed by OPW, addresses the 1916 rising. At the same time, the development of Irish art from the eighteenth century, and in a European context, is on show and the National Gallery.

## **Historiography**

Against this background, the historiography of Ireland can be challenging since history is still so significant. Traditional nationalist historiography tends to see Ireland as subject to endless (mis)rule and interference by English powers since 1169, invoking the brutality of Cromwell's reconquest (1649-50), and the harsh Penal Laws (late 1600s) as examples. The trauma of the Great

Famine of 1845, which had a major impact on the demography, politics and culture of Ireland, remains a point of contention among historians, in particular, the extent to which it was deliberate genocide on the part of the British (Coohill, 2008: 74-78). The Republic is also affected by events in the North: the Troubles, including atrocities such as 'Bloody Sunday' (30 January 1972, when British paratroopers shot and killed demonstrators), and occasional atrocities since, such as the 'Omagh bombing' (15 August 1998, when an Irish nationalist bomb resulted in twenty nine deaths), have impacted the Republic and its politics.

However, narratives assuming 'that the "British" inflicted on the "Irish" 700 years of conquest and colonisation are no longer given much credence in historical writing', according to O'Mahony and Delanty (1998: 33). There is more support for a thesis that looks to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as significant in shaping the outlook of three major religious groups (Catholics, Anglicans and Dissenters), so that by the nineteenth century we see polarisation between Protestant and Catholic, respectively opposed and in favour of independence for Ireland (O'Mahony and Delanty, 1998: 33; Jackson, 1999:1; Kinealy, 2004: 480).

The quest for independence, and its definition, has been a recurring and contested theme in Irish history, but the development of the journal *Irish Historical Studies* from the late 1930s played a role in countering simplistic interpretations, and the historiography of the period has itself been analysed and outlined (Coohill, 2008: 2, 3; Jackson, 1999, 2-5; see also Dixon, 2008: 2-18 for the north east). Marxist writers such as the nationalist James Connolly (1868–1916), emphasized class, with the unionist working classes are portrayed as being held to the unionist cause by a marginal superiority over their Catholic fellows. Connolly's arguments were in tune with later Marxist historians in general, and had the support of left wing political groups (Michael Farrell took a similar approach in his *Northern Ireland: The Orange State* of 1980). More recently, 'revisionist' or 'liberal' views emerged from the 1950s to the 1990s, with professionally trained historians developing more sophisticated approaches to an Irish history that was much more complicated than the traditionalists would suggest. Their work was typified by liberal and inclusive interpretations and the broad sweep of history.

### **National identity and museums**

Given its troubled history, national identity in Ireland is a complex issue. In terms of the Republic, O'Mahony and Delanty sketched the development of Irish national identity during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, quoted here at length:

In the first instance, the formation of a modern, mass national identity, and its institutionalisation in a nation-state, gained momentum in the late nineteenth century and continued until the late 1950s. In this period, Catholic southern Ireland shared in the cultural anti-modernism and political authoritarianism of much of the Catholic part of Western and Central Europe, including Italy, Spain, Portugal, Hungary and southern Germany though, unlike these other countries, democratic institutions were preserved. In the second phase, which began later in Ireland, and continues to the present, a gradual shedding of the extreme versions of \anti-modernism came with a slow acceptance of growing secularisation, state welfare provision, sexual liberation, more pronounced individualism. However, in a third phase, which begins somewhere in the second phase and runs alongside it, the international

return to explicit themes of the nation is also happening in Ireland. This return to the nation has two strands: it has been both backward looking in the sense of seeking a return to the certainties of traditional, Catholic Ireland, and also forward looking, accommodating itself in somewhat uneasily to social change whilst seeking to create a new cultural nation-code extending beyond existing institutional frameworks. (O'Mahony and Delanty, 1998: 5, 6.)

National museums have responded to a challenging past and evolving Irish identity. Two examples illustrate this. The first is Kilmainham Gaol, managed by *Oifig na nOibreacha Poiblí* (the Office of Public Works, a state agency). It was built in 1796 and key players in rebellions were gaoled, and in some cases executed here. In particular, in 1916, the British executed nationalists at Kilmainham after the Easter Rising, and in 1922, during the Civil War; the Irish Free State executed Irish prisoners here, before closing the gaol and abandoning it to the elements in 1924. The site with its painful memories may have presented for the Irish government after the Civil War. In any case, it became something of a shrine and the Kilmainham Gaol Restoration Society, founded in 1960, with many veterans 1916-24 among its members, worked to preserve it. In 1966 de Valera, who had inspired the anti-Treaty movement, and was now President of the Republic, opened a new exhibition there commemorating the Easter Rising.

The Office of Public Works took over the Gaol in the mid 1980s, appointing Pat Cooke as Curator. By now the Troubles in Northern Ireland, and revisionist approaches to Irish history, threatened to render the site of interest only to hard line nationalists. In an article in 2000 (from which this information is drawn) Cooke notes that the Troubles, and the rise of a new generation who had forgotten many of the details of the war for independence, presented challenges (2000: 8). He explains how the Gaol needed to address a wider audience whilst still presenting the events of 1916-24 in a straightforward way without 'deconstructing' the history of the period. As he noted, 'it is one thing to describe nationalist passion as a form of delusion in a discursive essay; it is another thing to stand on the spot where a man was shot by firing squad and say to yourself: "this man died for a delusion."' the site remains loaded with emotion for visitors, and could be described as a reliquary housing a museum (Cooke, 2000: 7). Cooke's article describes how, by choosing an exhibition layout that was 'non-linear', and without a fixed route, the Museum strove to allow people more freedom to interpret the past.

A second example is the significance given to Ireland's Gaelic past. Societies such as the Royal Irish Academy (henceforth, RIA) were, by the 1850s, focussing on Irish material (Cooke, 2000: 104). But this Irish past took on a nationalist tone with the 'Gaelic Revival' of the 1880s. This permeated Irish society, and nationalist leaders such as Collins and Pearse greatly valued this Gaelic past, perhaps because 'the vision of an ethnic golden age told modern Irish men and women what was "authentically theirs" and how to be "themselves" once again in a free Ireland' (Smith, 1991: 67). This emphasis on a Gaelic past was emphasised in the new Irish Free State, and Wallace noted that prehistoric archaeology, especially Ireland's ancient Celtic culture, was privileged at the expense of medieval historical archaeology, including the study of the Viking Age and Anglo-Norman invasions, until the 1960s (Wallace 2008: 166).

The discovery of the remains of a significant Norse settlement during work at Wood Quay in Dublin in the 1970s helped to change this. It turned out to be perhaps the most important site of

its kind in Europe, yet it attracted criticism from some quarters. Perhaps the museum could have done more to gain acceptance that ‘the Vikings and the heritage of urbanisation [were] as much a part of Ireland as the Celts or as any of the prehistoric peoples’ (Wallace 1989: 24), but since then it has created a Viking gallery to display the finds, and in 2001 opened *Medieval Ireland 1150-1550*, including sections on the Anglo-Normans. These are significant shifts from a monolithic, ancient Celtic past. Here, the National Museum and Kilmainham Gaol are examples of the museum’s role in shaping national pasts.

## **National museums and cultural policy in the Republic of Ireland**

### **Ireland under British rule**

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries an Anglo-Irish elite, largely Anglican (and therefore hostile to both Catholics and Dissenters) dominated the political and economic life of the island. Two of the societies they founded proved to be particularly significant: the Dublin Society (founded 1731), which was to become the Royal Dublin Society when George IV became patron in 1820 (henceforth, the RDS); and the Irish Academy, founded in 1785 and the Royal Irish Academy from 1786 (henceforth, the RIA). Because of concerns with the primitive state of agriculture in Ireland, the RDS was from the start very concerned with agricultural improvement, rather than science. Trinity College (the Ascendancy’s university) also played an important role in enabling the evolution of private collections into the public sphere as national museums (Bourke, 2011: 29).

The Ascendancy were certain of their Britannic identity, in that they moved easily in the legal, legislative, military, geographic and social milieu of the British Empire, but their interests were closely linked with land and possessions in Ireland, and even those from the Protestant north east would have seen themselves as ‘Irishmen’ (Bardon, 2005: 213). They were ready to confront what they perceived as impositions from the London, and concerned with improvements in trade and agriculture. They were also closely linked with English garrisons in Ireland, and they had to take account of the mass of the Irish, who were Catholic. In the north-east especially, society was increasingly marked by sectarianism, which could explode into violence. The American War of Independence and the French Revolution heightened fears of revolution, or of invasion by foreign powers as a step to the conquest of Britain. Dublin was the Ascendancy’s capital and was graced with a range of fine buildings in the eighteenth century. Leinster House was built by James FitzGerald, Earl of Kildare, in the 1740s, on a site south of the Liffey river (Berry, 1915: 98), and other magnates followed his example and built houses there, creating a fine Georgian city centre.

Leinster House was later sold to the Dublin Society, in 1815, which moved its collections there. Croke (2000: 70-73) suggests that these learned societies were, by the end of the 1780s, reflecting Anglo-Irish insecurity, and served as an attempt to insert themselves into Irish history. Thus, whilst formal state promotion of museums was not a feature of the eighteenth century government in Ireland, nonetheless, the ruling elites did play a key role in founding collections that showed early signs of, and would become, national museums.

By the late eighteenth century the Ascendancy was waning, and the abolition of the Irish Parliament in 1800 was a sign of this decline. Although Irish MPs now sat at in Britain’s

parliament at Westminster in London, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, electoral reform and land reform imposed by that parliament would break the Ascendancy's dominance.

In the nineteenth century, British concerns about social control and the needs of an educated workforce, together with concerns about poverty and unemployment in Ireland, prompted efforts to educate the wider population. This reflects Bennett's argument that by the mid-nineteenth century, the 'governmentalisation of culture' was aimed precisely at the modification of the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of the wider populace (Bennett, 1995: 19-20). From the eighteenth century to the mid nineteenth century, then, these concerns were significant drivers for the formation of the collections and institutions that would, in many cases, form the basis of Irish national museums.

Among the societies established during the Ascendancy, four developed collections that would eventually make up the national museums, three were in Dublin, and one in Belfast. These were the RDS, the RIA, Trinity College (associated with the Ascendancy), and Belfast Natural History Society, associated with the growth of new industrial and commercial classes in the north-east.

The RDS (as the Dublin Society) was founded (by members of the existing Dublin Philosophical Society) in July 1731. Its objectives were 'to educate those concerned in the first principles of successful farming, and in endeavouring to promote industries which might afford employment', (Berry, 1915:6). Its members proved extraordinarily influential, and it was 'one of the most successful Irish Enlightenment bodies of the eighteenth century' (Bourke 2011: 33) As part of its activities, the RDS developed a collection, open to visitors, from as early as February 1733 (Scharff, n.d.: 2), making it perhaps the earliest museum in Ireland. In 1792, its acquisition of the Leske's cabinet of minerals formed the basis of its natural history collection, which was kept with other collections in the Society's Hawkins Street House until 1815 when they were moved to Leinster House. In 1857, the RDS opened a new Natural History Museum nearby in Merrion Street. It is now the NMI's Natural History Museum.

Trinity College (that is, the University of Dublin) had been founded by Queen Elizabeth I and was closely associated with English rule. James Patten, surgeon to Captain Cook on his second expedition to the Pacific in 1772-75, had presented his own collection from that expedition to the College. The minutes of the Trinity College Board of 22 July 1777 record that a room was to be prepared to house it. (Freeman, 1949). Patten's contribution formed the basis the museum. It moved to a new, imposing building (now housing the Geology Department) built in the mid-nineteenth century, which was designed by Thomas Deane and Benjamin Woodward (O'Dwyer, 1997: 132). The geological and zoological collections became increasingly important in the museum (they are now held there on the top floor), whilst the ethnographic collections would become part of NMI's collections.

The RIA had for some time had an interest in, and collected antiquities. When, in 1846, Jens Worsaae (1821-1885), a noted Danish archaeologist, visited Britain, he read two papers at the RIA in Dublin, demonstrating how the law of treasure trove had been reformed in Denmark, enabling museums to enhance their collections. By contrast, in Britain, valuable items would (in theory) be handed over as 'treasure trove' to the government and melted down for bullion. Inspired by the Danish example, legislation was promoted so that finders were to be offered compensation for handing over treasure trove. These changes were effected in 1861 and henceforth the RIA obtained 'first refusal' on any treasure trove, together with the role of valuing

it, and an annual budget of £100 for purchases (Wilkins, 1961; Dawson, 2007). Meanwhile, in 1851 it sought larger premises, in part to find room for its growing collection of antiquities. This collection was organised into a new display and catalogued, in anticipation of the British Association visiting Dublin in 1857. However, it proved difficult for the RIA to manage the collection, and it transferred the collection to the Museum of Science and Art – by then, effectively a national museum - in the 1890s, where it still a significant part of the NMI displays.

In the nineteenth century Belfast, in the north east of Ireland, was growing into a major industrial city with a range of societies. As with much of the surrounding area, Protestants, often Dissenters rather than Anglicans, made up a majority of the population. An important early museum was that formed by the Belfast Natural History Society (itself founded in 1821). Its museum opened to the public in 1833 in a new building. In 1909 it was taken over by the Corporation's principle museum, which itself was looking to move to new buildings on the outbreak of war in 1914. These institutions would go on to become part of National Museums Northern Ireland, and their history and subsequent development may be considered as part of the history of Northern Ireland.

Besides these four institutions, there were other initiatives. Robert Kane, a prominent Irish chemist who had helped to found the *Dublin Journal of Medical Science* and was elected to the Royal Irish Academy in 1832, published *The Industrial Resources of Ireland* in 1844, stressing the need to utilise the country's resources to ensure future prosperity. He pressed for the establishment of a teaching museum, which was instituted in 1846. It became the Museum of Irish Industry and Government School of Science applied to Mining and the Arts and had a very strong educational role (Coolahan, 1981: 121). Although the museum had a short life (1845-67), it is notable that Kane insisted on it being open to all regardless of gender, and on its offering a 'united' (i.e. non-denominational) education, which drew sharp criticism from some quarters. Lectures were delivered in the evenings as well as during the day and were free, and used the museum's collections, laboratories and staff. Audiences of over one hundred often attended them. These features led Cullen (2000: 99) to regard it as 'one of the British government's most innovative experiments in education in Victorian Ireland'.

The initiative would move towards London in the nineteenth century, but the RDS museum was popular and called itself the 'National Museum of Ireland' in a catalogue as early as 1832 (Bourke, 2011: 184). The Society was, by now, in receipt of government funding from London, where policy was to make its collections available. With the establishment the Government Schools of Design in Dublin in 1849, the Society had to make room for them on its own premises.

In common with Britain's elites, the Ascendancy families also collected fine art. As participants in the Grand Tour, they naturally collected art from other countries, but Irish artists also received patronage (Bourke, 2011: 75), so that Ireland's 'great houses' contained the basis of a national collection. However, despite efforts by for example the Society of Artists, there was no gallery for exhibition and teaching. Later, John Ellis, a landscape painter, opened a gallery in Dublin in 1792 to exhibit fine art, and although it eventually failed (its collections being purchased in 1810 by the RDS), Bourke noted that his ideas showed foresight (2011: 85).

The Royal Hibernian Academy had been established in 1823 as a result of the work of a group of artists, among them supporters of a national gallery. However, there was little progress until an

International Exhibition was held in Dublin in 1853. It was modelled on the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace in London in 1850 (though the RDS had been holding exhibitions since 1834, see Turpin, 1980: 2). William Dargan, who had profited from building railways, sponsored the 1853 exhibition. This was in a context where, after the famine of 1845, and increasing agitation for Home Rule, an enhanced role for commerce and industry was seen as essential. It included an exhibition of paintings and antiquities, and, finally, provided the impetus for a permanent gallery, with funding raised by the 'Dargan Committee' and an Act of Parliament in 1854 establishing a 'National Gallery for Ireland'. The building itself (now the 'Dargan Wing') was designed by Francis Fowke, based on early plans by Charles Lanyon, and was completed in 1864. The first director was George Mulvaney, who had been Keeper of the Royal Hibernian Academy's collections.

The National collection was thus built up by purchase and endowment. In 1897 the Dowager Countess of Milltown indicated her intention of donating the contents of Russborough House to the Gallery, including a large number of paintings, and this prompted construction from 1899 to 1903 of what is now called the Milltown Wing, designed by Thomas Newenham Deane. Another substantial bequest came with the untimely death in the sinking of the director of the Gallery, Hugh Lane in 1915, but this was disputed and a large part of this bequest initially went to the Tate, in London, which caused some controversy.

A series of enquiries by London resulted in an Act of Parliament transferring the RDS collections and buildings to the government, and the creation of the Museum of Science and Art, with the Natural History Museum becoming one of that museum's divisions. At the same time, parts of Trinity College's collections were transferred to the new museum. The RIA transferred its collection of antiquities to the museum when it opened a new building in Kildare Street in 1890. In the galleries there was a shift of emphasis to the Irish antiquities inherited from the RIA. The objects were very much in tune with a rising interest in Ireland's Gaelic past. The establishment of a Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction shifted control of the Museum of Science and Industry to Dublin, and in 1908 the institution (which now had a nationalist director, George Noble) was renamed as the National Museum of Science and Art.

Thus by the end of British rule, rich collections, many originating with the Ascendancy, had coalesced into major collections: the National Museum of Science and Art at Kildare Street, of which the Natural History Museum on Merrion Street was a division, and National Gallery with its growing art collection. All their buildings were grouped closely around Leinster House, where the museum had additional accommodation and where the RDS lecture theatre was sited.

### **Analysis: state formation and national museums to 1922**

To what extent were early collections national? Certainly Bourke suggests that Ascendancy society was discussing the possibility of a national gallery by the end of the eighteenth century (2011: 81, 87), though here 'national' was perhaps the concept of a landowning Anglican elite – certainly the learned societies of the eighteenth century represented the Ascendancy (Adelman, 2005: 415). But they were losing power, and as their influence waned, they 'thought the Union [of 1800] would represent a return to the *status quo ante*, instead of which it witnessed its marginalisation' By the 1830s, it can be argued that the collections of the learned societies were coming under increasing influence from London.

Crooke has argued persuasively that by the mid-nineteenth century, antiquarians and other key figures in the learned societies conceived a distinctly Irish culture in their collections, and took a patriotic, Irish view of their activities. Nonetheless, most of these antiquarians did not desire independence and many were critical of nationalist ambition (Crooke 2000: 68-99). Similarly, Bourke (2011: 251-54) detects a strong national consciousness, a desire for a 'self-reliant, self-controlled, self-sufficient Ireland' (253). With hindsight, it is clear that by the 1900s, Home Rule or moderate Irish nationalism seen in the context of the British Empire, was – like Redmond's Irish MPs – about to become irrelevant. The celebration of Ireland's Gaelic past in Ireland's museums was an indication:

By 1890, when Robert Kane died, his brand of nationalism was out of step with the culture of the Gaelic revival [...] the political and cultural changes in twentieth-century Ireland and a different image of the national identity marginalised science, its institutions and its scientists for several decades. (Cullen, 2009: 111)

Between 1916 and 1918, a militant nationalism came to prominence which, combined with Britain's reaction, drove the agenda in new directions.

Irish national museums emerged from the Ascendancy, to which they owed much, in step with wider British developments but with distinctive Irish features. The collections, based on elite collecting and the work of the societies, and the expertise, knowledge and audiences around them, formed a nexus that the London government could absorb, and the trend towards collections to serve science and art (that is, in modern terms, technology and design) was felt strongly in Dublin as London exerted more control. Nonetheless, Dublin institutions continued to express an Irish identity, and resonated with Anglo-Irish nationalism and ambitions for Home Rule. Ireland had a national museum and a national art gallery, both grouped, with other institutions, around a 'cultural quarter' centred on Leinster House.

However, the Gaelic Revival, which sidelined London's 'science and art' agenda, was perhaps outflanking Anglo-Irish nationalism culturally and it was certainly being overtaken by more extreme nationalism. The rise of armed sectarianism, bitter struggles among the political elites in Westminster and Ulster over Home Rule, and the tensions around the First World War and British army recruitment would be challenging enough: the Easter Rising, and Britain's response, tipped the country into crisis.

These events cut Northern Ireland off from Dublin, where the country's national museum was emerging, Northern Ireland would have to start afresh, and Belfast's Natural History Museum, which came under the control of Belfast corporation, would form the basis of a national museum for Northern Ireland.

### **The Republic of Ireland's heritage after independence**

In 1922, Michael Collins requisitioned the RDS Lecture Theatre at Leinster house for the early meetings of the lower house of the Irish parliament, the Dáil Éireann (it, and the Oireachtas, that is Ireland's parliament, is still based there). The entire building was acquired by the state in 1924. Following independence in 1922, the Irish Free State became responsible for the upkeep and development of the national museums. In general, the new state took over the existing British system: ninety-eight per cent of the civil administration transferred to the Free State in April

1922, which ‘emerged with a unusually large number of relics from the *ancien régime*’. (Jackson, 1999: 276). As Jackson notes, these administrators were not popular, but did give continuity.

Responsibility for the National Museum passed to the Department of Education in 1924, and remained there for sixty years. A Committee of Inquiry reported on the National Museum in 1927 (including the ‘Lithberg Report’, considered below), but initially the new state faced great economic challenges and showed little interest in museums during this period. Bourke (2011: 338-9) noted that in 1969 and 1973 internal reports for the Irish Government indicated that the National Museum was an under-used resource and had not been managed very well by the Department of Education, but these seem to have had little impact.

Although the Irish economy ultimately expanded beyond agricultural exports and tourism (the ‘Celtic Tiger’), tourism has played a very significant role in the Irish economy. Besides its economic role, tourism can also be seen as a framing and structuring history and identity, for both visitors from outside the country and inhabitants who may be tourists (Ashworth and Larkham, 1994). Irish policy directives have from time to time sought to shape the telling of Ireland’s past in tourism, for example in rejecting a chronological approach to Ireland’s complex history, which tourists may find perplexing, to one driven by themes (Johnson, 1999).

Moving control of the National Museum to the Taoiseach’s Department in 1984 was followed in 1993 by further moves. Currently the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht oversees the National Museum, through its Cultural Institutions Unit. More significantly, the status of the National Museum was changed to that of an ‘autonomous semi-state organisation’ in the National Cultural Institutions Act of 1997.

The Cultural Institutions Unit funds ‘National Cultural Institutions’ in different ways. The National Library of Ireland and the National Museum of Ireland are autonomous and funded by direct grant. Secondly, several organisations receive grant-in-aid: the Chester Beatty Library (a public trust), the Irish Museum of Modern Art and the National Concert Hall (both listed as companies), and the Crawford Art Gallery in Cork. Other museums receiving some form of funding from the Department are the Hunt Museum, the National Print Museum and the Foynes Flying Boat Museum, though these are ‘other bodies’, not regarded as national cultural institutions, whilst the National Gallery of Ireland is funded by the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht Affairs (Cultural Institutions Unit 2011)

### **The National Gallery of Ireland, the Chester Beatty Library and Museum, and the Irish Museum of Modern Art.**

The National Gallery of Ireland had benefited under Walter Armstrong, who was director from 1892 until 1914, and had overseen major building works and acquisitions. Sir Hugh Lane, a noted Dublin collector, became director in 1914 but his death in 1916 (when the *Lusitania*, on which he was travelling, was sunk by a German submarine), led to some complications. He had left his personal collection to London, but a codicil appeared to bequeath it to Dublin. In any case the bequest went to London’s National Gallery, remaining a source of dispute for many years, until agreement was reached in 1959 to show the pictures in Dublin from time to time, and from 1993 most of the paintings are now exhibited permanently in Dublin.

Like other museums, the National Gallery suffered from a lack of government interest in the decades following independence. However, it continued to benefit from gifts and bequests, and

was again extended in 1962 with a new wing designed by Frank DuBerry of the Office of Public Works. This (the Beit Wing) opened in 1968, housing additional galleries and a library. Most recently, the Millennium Wing, opened in 2002, was built, on the designs of London based Benson & Forsyth, after an international competition.

In 1978 the National Gallery received from the government the paintings given to the nation by Chester Beatty and in 1987 the Sweeney bequest brought 14 works of art including paintings by Picasso and Jack B. Yeats. The gallery was also given some further contents of Russborough House when Alfred Beit donated seventeen masterpieces, including paintings by Velázquez, Murillo, Steen, Vermeer and Raeburn. It is thus an attempt to present European art and the Irish contribution to it. Currently, having been made an autonomous National Cultural Institution in 1997, the Gallery operates under the aegis of the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Alfred Chester Beatty (1875-1968) was an American mining magnate who had a remarkable collection of Oriental artworks and books. He became a naturalised British citizen in the 1930s, but moved to Dublin in 1950. With the encouragement of senior figures in the Irish government he established his collections in Ireland. The somewhat collection included European, Asian and Egyptian artefacts, and the Islamic collection is of international importance. The museum is a Charitable Trust but receives ninety per cent grant-in-aid from the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism (Bourke, 2011: 302-3). The institution has a strong educational agenda and its website states that:

The purpose of the Library, having regard to its duty of care, is therefore to contribute new value to the cultural life of Ireland at home and in its relations with peoples and cultures everywhere. (Chester Beatty Library 2011)

Originally sited in the suburbs of Dublin, the collection moved to the Clock Tower Building in Dublin Castle, a central location and popular with tourists. Bourke notes (2011: 306) that its collection is of particular relevance to a multi-cultural society.

There was a growing interest in modern art, due in part to a series of modern art exhibitions held from 1967 onwards which gave an international edge to the Irish modern art world and exposed Ireland to new trends. The Irish Museum of Modern Art was established in 1990, in a seventeenth century building, the Royal Hospital, which had been a home for old soldiers, and was modelled on Les Invalides in Paris. The inaugural collection consisted of over two hundred Irish and international works gifted by the Gordon Lambert Charitable Trust for Modern Art (Bourke, 2011: 311-2).

### **Government and professional bodies**

A range of government and professional bodies have played a role in Ireland's national heritage and have been indicative of the government's stance on museums. The Heritage Council, established in the 1960s, is an indication of a growing realisation of the importance of heritage. According to the organisation's website:

[...] the Local Government Act of 1963 recognised the need for more rational planning throughout a wide range of areas. This led to the establishment of An Foras Forbartha which set

up six committees in 1964. One of these, the Committee of Nature and Amenity, Conservation and Development, identified a number of pertinent issues. (Heritage Council n.d.)

These included the unrealized extent of Ireland's heritage, the fragmented nature of State responsibility for various parts of heritage, and the frequency with which heritage interests were relegated to secondary importance.

The Office of Public Works maintains the Irish Government's buildings (except schools and hospitals). It is significant because some of these are national monuments and historic properties. One of the most significant of its properties is Kilmainham Gaol, near Dublin, built in 1796, and opened as a museum in 1971, referred to above.

In 2001 the Council of National Cultural Institutions (CNCI), a statutory body, was established under the Heritage Fund Act. The purpose of the Council is to facilitate the pooling together of talent, experience and vision of the directors of the national cultural institutions in furtherance of the national cultural interest, and to make recommendations to the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism on proposed acquisitions using the Heritage Fund Act, 2001. The Council includes the directors of the National Museum, the National Gallery and the Irish Museum of Modern Art (CNCI n.d.).

### **Analysis: state formation and national museums after 1922**

Besides rich collections, the Ascendancy had bequeathed a cultural quarter, around Leinster House, to Ireland. With the arrival of the new government there in 1922, the new state had a cultural and administrative nexus. However, the Irish Free State and its successors faced many difficulties including a poor economy, and the economic situation remained difficult until at least the 1960s. Also, it is easy to forget that Ireland has a population of around four and a half million. Several European cities have larger populations.

As we have seen there was a growing awareness of the significance of heritage in the 1960s. In the 1970s, the National Museum garnered public support for its attempts to preserve the archaeological site at Wood Quay (considered in detail in the case study below). Meanwhile, in the upper house of the Irish parliament, it was admitted that 'our National Collections, which are a priceless cultural asset, fared better at the hands of former alien governments' (quoted Bourke, 2011: 339).

These events are perhaps clues to the government's administrative changes from the 1980s, which began to address the issues and emphasised tourism. The 1997 Act was significant in giving the National Museum its own Board and some control over its destiny during these changes. Considerable investment then took place, aided by the EU and marked by the opening of two new sites by the National Museum and a third by the OPW. Bourke (2011: 290-91) also links these developments closely with Irish politics. Mary Robinson, elected president in 1990, brought a strong cultural impetus to government. There was in any case a growing interest in heritage, the economy was growing rapidly, and the EU was able to provide additional resources.

However, the relative neglect of museums from independence until the 1980s still needs investigating (Bourke, 2011: 440). Perhaps the recent past in particular was seen as difficult for both the Irish and British tourists. The decline of the Anglo-Irish elite in the nineteenth century (and their ultimate destruction in the early twentieth century) may have contributed by destroying the basis for patronage. This is presumably the point Fitzgibbon (2009: IR-1) makes, that 'in a

country with little tradition of patronage, institutional or otherwise, the arts were seen as a luxury, which the new state could not afford. Thus the story of this period is one of official neglect.’ A more subtle analysis is presented by McGonagle, formerly director of IMMA, who suggested that ‘for places like Ireland, initially colonised and now post-colonial ... the idea of value was always thought to lie somewhere else’ (2007: 38). McGonagle goes on to argue that ‘one response has been for institutions and art production to mimic those of elsewhere or have such models imposed’ (2007: 39), and this was disempowering. The 1998 Good Friday agreement, he suggests, stressed ‘parity of esteem’ and thus marked a turning point and an acceptance of difference. Hence, the creation of the IMMA allowed the ‘right question’ to be asked at the end of the twentieth century: what is it to be Irish when ‘Irish’ has become a question rather than an answer (2007: 44).

### **Case studies in chronological order**

The National Museum of Ireland is made up of four museums (archaeology, natural history, decorative arts and history, and country life). It is one of the oldest museums, including some of the original Royal Society of Dublin collections. These were acquired when it was established, with the RDS existing Natural History Museum as a division, by the London government in 1877. It is also the largest museum, in terms of visitor numbers, with nearly a million visitors to its four sites in 2010 (Cultural Institutions Unit n.d.). There are of course other institutions which receive national funding, as noted above, but of those only the National Gallery is funded, like the NMI, by direct grant; others, which are public trusts or guarantee licence companies, receive some grant-in-aid. Given their age, size, and their relationship with the government, the four museums making up the NMI have been chosen as case studies.

The Irish Parliament had funded the RDS generously in the eighteenth century. It had a very wide range of activities besides its collections, especially around education. However, when the Irish Parliament was dissolved in 1800, the RDS found itself increasingly reliant on Westminster, yet reluctant to surrender its independence. Whilst it obtained funds from Westminster towards a new building to house its natural history collection, which was opened to the public in 1857, there were signs that RDS control of the museum, and its other activities, would be challenged by Westminster.

Jarrell (1983) argued that this represented British colonial and centralising policy. Adelman quotes some evidence that it was seen that way at the time: the British government was accused of aiming ‘to quietly obliterate the last traces of Irish nationality and Dublin metropolitan rank, to complete the provincialisation of both island and capital, and to root out every independent Irish institution’ (*Freeman’s Journal*, 1877, quoted in Adelman, 2005: 415).

Turpin (1982) traced this ‘take over’ in some detail. The RDS sought government funding in aid of its existing Drawing Schools in the later 1840s, noting that its natural history museum could provide content (Turpin, 1982: 2,3). Some funding was granted after negotiation. Meanwhile in London, Henry Cole was appointed head of the new Science and Art Department, which increasingly (and somewhat brutally) gained control of the School from 1853 (Turpin, 1982: 10; Bonython and Burton, 2003: 158). Competition between the RDS and the Museum of

Irish Industry led to the establishment of a Committee of Lectures at Dublin Castle from 1854 to 1865 to manage the expertise of both (Cullen, 2000: 106).

A Royal Commission in 1864 interviewed key witnesses, and the general response was that Irish control was best because local leaders understood the country, that they could respond to Ireland's needs more effectively, and, significantly, that the Irish did not have confidence in the London government. A further Commission in 1868 discovered the same doubts about control from London (Crooke, 2000: 109). However, Sir Henry Cole, director of the Department of Science and Art in London, whilst condemning past British policy in Ireland, still pressed for control of the collections on the basis that they could be run better with expertise from London.

The RDS already had its Natural History Museum, opened in 1857. It was designed by F.V. Clarendon, an Irish architect based in the Office of Public Works, but reflected the ideas of Fowke, associated with the South Kensington Museums. Bourke (2011: 190-1) argues that that it was increasingly seen as a national collection by the senior staff, and saw its role in part to explain the natural history of Ireland. Adelman (2005: 414) claimed that the staff in the natural history section 'aspired to the status of the national museum of natural history (and later geology) for Ireland,' and that in fact the museum already fulfilled that role. 'In the minds of its curators and Dublin's scientific elite, the Dublin Natural History Museum was not a stagnant survivor of an earlier and less scientific period of natural history, but was integral to the future of Irish natural history.'

This sense of ownership by the natural history staff was carried forward when it became a division of the Museum of Science and Art. Adelman highlights the balance of tension between cooperation with South Kensington, and a desire to promote the Irish nature of the museum and its collections – it was not to be a 'poor cousin' of London, nor should it ignore its Irish audience. She argued that the reorganisation of natural history exhibits (from 1896) to reflect Darwinist theory represented a deliberate alignment of the museum with US and European practice, not British (Adelman 2005: 417). Adelman goes on to suggest that leadership in the National Museum was typified by a loose 'patriotic nativism'.

During 1875 Dudley Rider, Viscount Sandon, who had a strong educational agenda, visited Ireland and in 1876 the London government formally approached the RDS and RIA to 'request' support for a merger of some of the Dublin collections under the Department of Science and Art. The RDS was informed that 'the time has now arrived when the wants of the community at large have outgrown the useful action of private societies' (Turpin 1982: 15). The Dublin Science and Art Museum Act of 1877 saw the RDS relieved of its responsibilities for some activities including the Natural History Museum, and the Museum of Science and Art established. The new museum originally continued in Leinster House, and it was intended that this area should become something of a cultural quarter along the lines of South Kensington in London:

The plan was to create a public educational complex filling Leinster Lawn in south Dublin. This complex eventually included a museum housing antiquities, handicrafts and anthropological items; the Natural History Museum; the National Gallery of Art; and the National Library. (Adelman, 2005: 415)

The RDS Natural History Museum formed a division of the new museum along with Art and Industries. The museum was now the responsibility of the Department of Science and Art, which

was also responsible for the South Kensington museums in London. Thus policies and strategies relating to the development of museums in Dublin were linked inextricably to the British State's vision for their role. Crooke (2000: 129) notes that this was an imperial museum established to promote the development of Britain and Ireland. However, it also embodied some of the rising Anglo-Irish tensions. The dispute over the Broighter Hoard, a collection of first century objects found near Lough Foyle in County Londonderry in 1896, which were obtained by the Trustees of the British Museum, is illustrative: after some heated debates, questions in the Westminster Parliament, and a court case, the Hoard was assigned to Dublin.

The first director of the new museum was W.E. Steele, and the collections emphasised technology and design. In 1883, Valentine Ball succeeded to the post, and in 1884 he visited America and Canada to study museums there. On his return supervised a more narrative approach in the natural history collections. Electric lighting, Sunday opening, and printed labels and guide books were introduced.

However, new buildings were planned for the National Library and the Museum of Science and Art. The initial competition for the design led to protests, as no Irish designs were included, so a new competition was held, won by T.N. Deane and his son T.M. Deane (the elder Deane had worked with Woodward on Trinity College's museum). The award represented a 'growing sense of national self-determination' in Bourke's view (2011: 194).

The new building was opened in 1890, on Kildare Street, facing the new National Library (also created as part of the 1877 Act) and flanked by Leinster House. It was clearly regarded as a national museum by some (and was referred to as such in the opening ceremony: Bourke, 2011: 195). Although the RDS retained accommodation at Leinster House following the 1877 Act, these comprised mainly of a lecture hall, laboratories and offices. These were renovated in the 1890s, the lecture hall in particular being upgraded to a high standard (Berry, 1915: 326-8).

The arrival of the RIA's antiquities to the new building in 1890 provided an immediate attraction (Bourke, 2011: 199) and was in tune with the Gaelic Revival. Whilst not a nationalist, Ball was patriotic and encouraged his staff to visit America and Europe (but not, apparently, England - Adelman, 418, 419). Colonel G.T. Plunkett succeeded as director of the Museum in 1896, retiring in 1907.

Meanwhile, in 1899, control had passed from London, via the Agricultural and Technical Instruction (Ireland) Act, to the new Dublin based Department of Agriculture, Trade and Instruction (DATI). This move was led by Horace Plunkett,<sup>1</sup> an Anglo-Irish unionist who favoured Home Rule or even some form of independence, and who had been instrumental in establishing DATI. Grants relating to technical education formerly administered by the Department of Science and Art in London were henceforth managed by DATI, which brought the museum under its remit.

George Noble (1851–1948), who was Count Plunkett in the papal nobility, replaced Colonel Plunkett. Noble formally changed the name of the museum to the 'National Museum of Science and Art, Dublin' in 1908 (it was already being called the national museum informally). Emphasis shifted increasingly to Irish antiquities, and Noble developed the use of the museum by students and schools, seeing significantly increased visitor numbers (Bourke, 2011: 324-7; O'Connor Lysaght, 2004). However, his son Joseph took part in the Easter Rising in 1916 and was executed, and Plunkett left the museum (he later served briefly in the Free State government as a minister).

Robert Francis Scharff (1858-1934) was born in Leeds, England, and joined the Dublin Museum of Science and Art in 1887, becoming Keeper in the Natural History division three years later. He held this post until 1921, and in the last few years he was acting director of the museum. Thus he was in charge of the museum at a very difficult time. Scharff had studied at universities in Edinburgh, London and Heidelberg, and had an international profile as a leading zoologist, and Adelman (2005: 422) notes that he strongly defended the museum's efforts to gain national importance and international stature. Scharff worked hard to keep the museum open as the country became increasingly unstable after the outbreak of the First World War. The museum closed briefly in 1916 due to the Easter Rising, but continued with several exhibitions to retain public interest (Bourke, 2011: 329). In 1921 the museum was renamed the National Museum of Ireland.

During the Civil War (1922-1923) the museum remained closed in line with government instructions. The new government had taken over part of Leinster House, including some of the natural history collection's space. Following the establishment of the Irish Free State, the museum came under the Department of Education, but the Irish Free State faced many challenges, and it was some years before it could turn its attention to the museum, which it did when the Minister of Education, Prof. J.M. O'Sullivan, commissioned an enquiry, with Dr. Nils Lithberg, director of the Northern Museum in Stockholm, as its special advisor. Its report, presented in 1927, was not revolutionary: 'Gone were the romantic sentiments of the pre-independence era and more practical concerns were addressed' (Croke, 2000: 142). The report was mainly concerned with a definition of the museum's purpose, management structure and public role. It suggested that the Irish archaeological collection 'receive the most prominent position in the Museum, so that the visitor at his first entrance should at once recognise its national character' (Committee of Enquiry Report, 1927, cited Croke, 2000: 144).

The impact of the report was limited because the Department of Finance opposed additional expenditure, and with the promotion of the archaeological collections, Croke contends that the new government lost interest in the museum. Once the archaeological collections were once again fore grounded, the Irish Free State turned to tackle social and economic problems (Croke, 2000: 146-147).

Dr Adolf Mahr, appointed as Keeper of the Antiquities Division of the National Museum in September 1927, became the director of the Museum in 1934. Mahr was a noted archaeologist and is warmly remembered by many of those who met him. Kibrade-Jones (1993: 30) provides a useful description of the atmosphere before the war: 'everyone was happy because everybody felt free, and having thrown off the foreign yoke were eager to build for the future. It was most heartening to an outsider like me [...] to see such enthusiasm and desire to succeed.' Besides improving the administration of the museum, Mahr brought a new level of professionalism to its archaeological activities, and it benefitted from his experience and help from Harvard University in the USA in carrying out some very significant excavations (Raftery, 1988: 23). It is also clear that despite the conflict around independence, collaboration between professionals in Ireland and those in London continued amicably (Bourke, 2011: 334).

However, Mahr was also a member of the Nazi Party, and his activities in Ireland caused increasing concerns. Being in Germany on the outbreak of war, he became involved with Ribbentrop's propaganda division, in particular the Nazi radio service Irland-Redaktion (Wills,

2007: 193-94). De Valera had supported his original appointment, and after the war suggested his reinstatement, but this was discouraged on the advice of Irish security chiefs (O'Donoghue, 2006) or possibly English pressure (Raftery, 1988: 23). Joseph Raftery, an experienced Celtic archaeologist of note, replaced Mahr in 1949, succeeded in turn in 1954 by Dr. T.A. Lucas.

In 1949 Thomas Bodkin, who had served as director of the National Gallery, submitted a *Report on the Arts in Ireland*, which highlighted the failings of heritage institutions and the need for action on the part of government. He recommended that the National Museum be transferred from the Department of Education to the control of a department of art or similar, under the Taoiseach (or Prime Minister, see Bourke, 2011: 336).

The collections remained focussed on Ireland's Celtic past. Directors such as Joseph Raftery 'agreed with the then received orthodoxy that early Irish society was familial, rural, and hierarchical, a world in which towns [such as Viking Dublin] had no place' (Wallace 2008: 169-70) Not unreasonably, perhaps, Irish archaeologists and academics wanted to understand the origins of their rich Celtic past, and the Vikings and Anglo-Normans were seen as 'foreign'. Archaeology was a celebration of indigenous Irish culture. The establishment of the Irish Folklife division in 1974 recognised the importance of its folklife collections, which would find a home in the new Country Life Museum at Turlough Park in 2001.

The National Museum remained part of the Department of Education until 1984, when it was moved to the Taoiseach's Department. This enabled some improvements in management and some control over policy. A second move to the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands followed in 1992/3. This was significant, since for the first time the cultural sector had permanent full ministerial representation. The museum was later moved to the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, but is currently listed on the Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht's website, where the Cultural Institutions Unit 'seeks to create an environment enabling the National Cultural Institutions to flourish through the provision of financial resources and an appropriate policy framework' (Cultural Institutions Unit 2010).

Changes in departmental names and arrangements are fairly common, and of much more significance was the National Cultural Institutions Act of 1997, which defined a policy framework for Ireland's national cultural institutions, and made possible a new governance structure, by which the National Museum gained an independent board. The Board of Trustees is made up of 15 persons, and their role is:

To maintain, manage, control, protect, preserve, record, research and enlarge the collection of museum heritage objects for the benefit of the public and to increase and diffuse in and outside the State knowledge of human life in Ireland, of the natural history of Ireland and of the relations of Ireland in these respects with other countries. (National Museum of Ireland, 2008)

The director's role is 'to manage and control generally the administration and business of the Museum and perform such other functions as may be determined by the Board of the Museum' (Anon 2008). It can be argued then, that the 1997 Act 'brought about the most important legal and structural changes in the governance of the Museum since the enactment of the Dublin Science and Art Museum Act of 1877, approximately half a century before the foundation of the State' (O'Mahony, 2008: 6).

In addition to its national remit, the Museum has a specific role in relation to archaeology and antiquities legislation. This includes the fact that all archaeological objects found in Ireland are State property, including those from archaeological excavations. The Museum also has a consultative role in relation to the issuing of excavation licences and Ministerial directions and consents, as well as administering licences to export archaeological objects. (Fitzgibbon, 2009: IR-27; Ó Floinn, 2008: 44).

Meanwhile, from the 1990s, more funding was available for culture and the arts, in particular with the European Union providing considerable help via structural funds. The National Museum had a share of these funds and they helped with several new projects, including the conversion of the Michael Collins Barracks to the Museum of History and the Decorative Arts in 1997. This and the development of a new museum at Turlough Park, were major developments for the National Museum. Although the later twentieth century saw significant increases in funding, the 2007 financial crisis has taken its toll, and between 2005-2009 the National Museum has seen cuts of around twenty percent in its funding (Fitzgibbon, 2009: IR-11).

The National Museum is now organised as follows:

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Division</b>	<b>Location</b>
Archaeology and History	Irish Antiquities	Kildare Street, Dublin
Decorative Arts and History	Art and Industrial	Collins Barracks, Dublin
Natural History	Natural History	Merrion Street, Dublin
Country Life	Irish Folklife	Turlough Park, Castlebar, Co Mayo

It may be useful to note the connection between the buildings and Irish history. A powerful Ascendancy magnate originally built Leinster House, home to the embryonic national museum of 1877. South Kensington, though designed in Ireland by an OPW architect, influenced, in terms of its design, the Natural History Museum of 1857 and was intended to complement Leinster House. The competition for the 1890 building in Kildare Street appears to have caused some controversy until Irish architects were appointed (Thomas Newenham Deane and his son). As for Collins Barracks, built in 1702 as the ‘Royal Barracks’, it has a significant history: ‘the esplanade in front is the site of Croppies Acre, a mass grave containing the bodies of the 1798 and 1803 insurgents, and the backdrop to a soup kitchen during the Great Famine’ (Anon 1997). The Museum of County Life is housed in part in a ‘big house’ belonging an Ascendancy family (the Fitzgeralds), associated with British rule (and also designed by Deane). The barracks and others like it were clearly part of a network of domination, but have been successfully recast as museums that celebrate Ireland’s past as a people and a nation.

## **Conclusion**

Museums in Ireland have their roots in the Anglo-Irish elite, who, despite their implication in Britain’s imperial project in Ireland, did have their own sense of an Irish identity, and as such their collections were Irish and they bequeathed the basis of national art, archaeology, and natural history museums to the Free State. However, the Ascendancy was always divided from the mass of the population by religion (Catholics of course, but also Dissenters), and because they were associated with the British occupation (Collins Barracks is an eloquent expression of that reality).

There was a colonial aspect to Irish history and any sense that their collections were ‘national’. With the abolition of the Irish Parliament in 1800, London became increasingly involved in Irish museums, culminating in the 1877 Act, which created the Museum of Science and Art, itself beginning to be regarded informally as a national museum. By the 1900s these museums were formally being recognised as national institutions, and the Gaelic Revival lent great importance to the collections of antiquities, so that they supported a renewed Gaelic identity. Yet, after independence, the new state had neither the resources nor the inclination to support national museums, and they appear to have languished for decades, for reasons which are not entirely clear.

However, EU membership, political changes in the 1980s, powerful economic growth, a burgeoning tourist industry, and perhaps a willingness to look with fresh eyes at a difficult history (hence the popularity of that history in other media, such as films), have all contributed to significant new investment in national collections. Many of the buildings now serving as museums, of which four belong to the National Museum, another to the National Gallery and another to the Irish Museum of Modern Art, could be seen as emotionally charged reminders of Britain’s imperial project and the domination of Ireland by a small elite. However, they are not presented that way by the national institutions. Instead, they are used as a platform for a modern independent state with strong European links, increasingly at ease with its past. For some observers at least, the agenda has moved on to how museums will interact with a more pluralistic society in future (Bourke, 2011: 422-426; McGonagle, 2007).

### **Acknowledgements**

This research is part of the EuNaMus project, (European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen) a three year project (2010 – 13) funded by the EU Seventh Framework programme in which the School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester is a partner. We are grateful for comments from Simon Knell, Peter Aronsson, Gabriella Elgenius, and Thomas Cauvin.

Information about the museums in Ireland has been taken from a number of sources but we are particularly indebted to the following: Bourke, M. (2011) *The Story of Irish Museums 1790-2000. Culture, Identity and Education*. Cork: Cork University Press and Crooke, E. (2000) *Politics, archaeology, and the creation of a national museum in Ireland: an expression of national life*, Dublin: Irish Academic Press.

Dr. Andrew Sawyer is a Research Associate in the School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, England.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Plunkett is a common Irish name: Colonel Plunkett, Horace Plunkett and George Noble, Count Plunkett discussed here are three different and unrelated persons.

## Bibliography

- Adelman, J. (2005) 'Evolution on display: promoting Irish natural history and Darwinism at the Dublin Science and Art Museum', *British Journal for the History of Science*, 38 (4) December: 411-436.
- Anon. (1997) 'The National Museum of Ireland Opens Collins Barracks (Sort Of)', *History Ireland*, 5:4 (Winter): 5.
- Ashworth, G.J. and Larkham, P.J. (1994) *Building a new heritage: tourism, culture, and identity in the new Europe*, London; New York: Routledge.
- Bardon, J. (2001) *A History of Ulster* (updated edn.), Belfast: The Blackstaff Press.
- Bennet, T. (1995) *The birth of the museum: history, theory, politics*, London; New York: Routledge.
- Berry, H.F. (1915) *A History of the Royal Dublin Society*, London: Longmans, Green and Co.
- Bonython, E. and Burton, A. (2003) *The great exhibitor: the life and work of Henry Cole*, London: Victoria and Albert Museum.
- Bourke, M. (2011) *The Story of Irish Museums 1790-2000. Culture, Identity and Education*, Cork: Cork University Press.
- Brett, D. (1996) *The Construction of Heritage*, Cork: Cork University Press.
- Chester Beatty Library (2011) 'Mission Statement', *Chester Beatty Library*. Online. Available HTTP: < <http://www.cbl.ie/About-Us/The-Chester-Beatty-Library.aspx> > (accessed 10 August 2011).
- CNCI (n.d.) 'Welcome', *Council of National Cultural Institutions*. Online. Available HTTP: < <http://www.cnci.ie/> > (accessed 14 September 2010).
- Coolahan, T. P. (2008) *Ireland. A Short History* (new rev. ed.), Oxford: Oneworld Publications.
- Cooke, P. (2000) 'Kilmainham Gaol: Interpreting Irish Nationalism and Republicanism', *Open Museum Journal* 2: 1-11.
- Coolahan, J. (1981) *Irish education: its history and structure*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.
- Crooke, E. (2000) *Politics, archaeology, and the creation of a national museum in Ireland: an expression of national life*, Dublin: Irish Academic Press.
- Cullen, C. (2009) 'The Museum of Irish Industry, Robert Kane and education for all in the Dublin of the 1850s and 1860s', *History of Education*, 38 (1) January: 99-113.
- Cultural Institutions Unit (2010) 'Cultural Institutions Unit – Overview', *Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht*. Online. Available HTTP: <<http://www.arts-sport-tourism.gov.ie/culture/overview.html>> (accessed 10 August 2011).
- Cultural Institutions Unit (2011) 'National Cultural Institutions', *Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht*. Online. Available HTTP: <[http://www.arts-sport-tourism.gov.ie/culture/national\\_cultural\\_institutions.html](http://www.arts-sport-tourism.gov.ie/culture/national_cultural_institutions.html)> (accessed 10 August 2011).
- Cultural Institutions Unit (n.d.) 'Attendance Figures', *Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht*. Online. Available HTTP: <[http://www.arts-sport-tourism.gov.ie/culture/attendance\\_figures.html](http://www.arts-sport-tourism.gov.ie/culture/attendance_figures.html)> (accessed 10 August 2011).
- Dawson, N.M. (2007) 'National Antiquities' and the Law', *The Journal of Legal History*, 28 (1): 57-92.

- Dixon, P. (2008) *Northern Ireland. The Politics of War and Peace* (vol. 2), Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dunphy, R. (2005) *The making of Fianna Fáil power in Ireland, 1923-1948*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Farrell, M. (1980) *Northern Ireland: The Orange State*, London: Pluto Press.
- Fitzgibbon, M. (2009) *Country Profile: Ireland, Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe*. Online. Available: HTTP: <<http://www.culturalpolicies.net>> (accessed 7 June 2010).
- Freeman, J. (1949) 'The Polynesian Collection of Trinity College, Dublin; and the National Museum of Ireland', *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 58(1): 1-18. Online. Available HTTP: <[http://www.jps.auckland.ac.nz/document/Volume\\_58\\_1949/Volume\\_58,\\_No.\\_1/The\\_Polynesian\\_Collection\\_of\\_Trinity\\_College,\\_Dublin%3B\\_and\\_the\\_National\\_Museum\\_of\\_Ireland,\\_by\\_J.\\_D.\\_Freeman,\\_p\\_1-18](http://www.jps.auckland.ac.nz/document/Volume_58_1949/Volume_58,_No._1/The_Polynesian_Collection_of_Trinity_College,_Dublin%3B_and_the_National_Museum_of_Ireland,_by_J._D._Freeman,_p_1-18)> (accessed 15 September 2010).
- Heritage Council (n.d.) 'History', *Heritage Council*. Online. Available HTTP: <<http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/about-us/history>> (accessed 11 February 2011).
- Jackson, A. (1999) *Ireland 1798-1998: politics and war*, Oxford; Malden MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Jarrell, R. (1983) 'The Department of Science and Art and control of Irish science, 1853-1905', *Irish Historical Studies*, XXIII: 330-47.
- Johnson, N.C. (1999) 'Framing the past: time, space and the politics of heritage tourism in Ireland', *Political Geography* 18: 187-207.
- Kinealy, C. (2004) Politics in Ireland, in *A Companion to Nineteenth Century Britain*, Oxford; Malden, MA; Melbourne: Blackwell Publishers.
- Lithberg, N., et al., (1927) *Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Workings of the National Museum*, Dublin (cited Crooke, 2000).
- McGonagle, D. (2007) 'New Negotiations: A role for Art and Institutions Within Society, in J. Osmond (ed.), *Myths, memories and futures: the National Library and National Museum in the story of Wales*, Cardiff: Institute of Welsh Affairs.
- National Museum of Ireland (2008) 'Board and Director', *National Museum of Ireland*. Online. Available HTTP: <<http://www.museum.ie/en/info/board-and-director.aspx>> (accessed 16 Sept 2010).
- O'Connor Lysaght, D.L. (2004) 'Plunkett, George Noble, Count Plunkett in the papal nobility (1851-1948)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn. Oxford University Press. Online. Available HTTP: <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/54747>> accessed 14 Sept 2010.
- O'Donoghue, D. (2006) 'State within a State: The Nazis in Neutral Ireland', *History Ireland* 14 (6, Nov-Dec): 35-39.
- Ó Floinn, R. (2008) 'The National Museum of Ireland', *Archaeology Ireland*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Summer, 2008): 44-45.
- O'Dwyer, F. (1997) *The architecture of Deane and Woodward*, Cork: Cork University Press.
- O'Mahony, P and Delanty. G. (1998) *Rethinking Irish History. Nationalism, Identity and Ideology*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Prager, J. (2009) *Building democracy in Ireland: political order and cultural integration in a newly independent nation*, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Raftery, J. (1988) 'A Backward Look', *Archaeology Ireland* 2 (1) 1988: 22-24.

- Scharff, R. (n.d.) *The Aims and Scope of a Provincial Museum. An Address delivered in the Museum, College Square, on 5th March 1912*, Belfast: Library and Technical Instruction Committee.
- Smith, A.D. (1991) *National Identity*, Reno: University of Nevada Press.
- Turpin, J. (1982) 'The Royal Dublin Society and Its School of Art, 1849-1877', *Dublin Historical Record*, 36: 2-20.
- Wallace, P.F. (1989) 'Conservatives Lose out in Museum Race', in *Archaeology Ireland* 3 (Spring): 21-25.
- (2002) 'The Museum; Origins, Collections and Buildings', in R. Ó Floinn and P.F. Wallace (eds) *Treasures of the National Museum of Ireland; Irish Antiquities*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan.
- (2008) 'Irish Archaeology and the Recognition of Ethnic Difference in Viking Dublin', in Habu, J., Fawcett, C.P. and Matsunga, J.M. (eds), *Evaluating multiple narratives: beyond nationalist, colonialist, imperialist archaeologies*. New York: Springer.
- Wilkins, J. (1961) 'Worsae and British Antiquities', *Antiquity*, XXXV: 214-220.
- Wills, C. (2007) *That Neutral Island: a cultural history of Ireland during the Second World War*, London: Faber and Fabe.

## Annex table, Republic of Ireland

Name	Inaugurated	Initiated	Actors	Ownership	Type	Values	Temporal reach
National Museum of Ireland, Archaeology	1908	1890s	Politicians in Dublin	Semi-autonomous organisation under the aegis of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.*	Archaeology and Medieval History	National	Prehistory to c. 1550
National Museum of Ireland, Natural History	1908	1890s	National Museum of Ireland	As above	Natural History	Universal	Pre-history to present times.
National Museum of Ireland, Decorative Arts and History	1997	1997	National government	As above	Decorative Arts and History	National	c. 1550 to the present day.
National Museum of Ireland, Country Life	2001	2001	National government	As above	Folklife	National	c. 1845 to 1950s.
National Gallery of Ireland	1864	1854	Private citizens, London Government	Semi-autonomous organisation under the aegis of Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport.	Art	National and universal	13 <sup>th</sup> to mid – 20 <sup>th</sup> c.
Chester Beatty Library	1997	1997	Philanthropy and government	Public charitable trust, under aegis of and with grant-in-aid from Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.	Art	Universal	From about 2700 BC to the present century
Irish Museum of Modern Art	1991	1990	Irish Government	Private company with grant-in-aid from Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.	Art	National and universal	1500 to present day
Kilmainham Gaol	Mid – 1980s	Mid – 1980s.	Private individuals, government	Office of Public Works.	Prison (history)	National	18 <sup>th</sup> century to c. 1916
Crawford Municipal Art Gallery	2006	2006	Learned societies, university, philanthropy	Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and private donors.	Antiquities, Fine Art, Decorative Arts	National and universal	Twentieth century

\* The Gaeltacht is that part of Ireland where Gaelic is still spoken as a first language.