

## ***Impact Case Study***

### **UoA 28A: Modern Languages & Linguistics (Celtic Studies)**

#### **The History of the Irish Language in an Urban Environment**

This case study demonstrates the social, economic and cultural impact of research carried out by members of the Irish and Celtic Studies Research Institute (ICSRI) into the history of the Irish language in Belfast in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This research has revealed the extent of Irish language activity in Belfast in the 19th century, focussing on the one hand on Gaelic revivalism and antiquarianism and on the other on the history of an Irish-speaking community who migrated to this urban area from Omeath, Co. Louth. Our research into the Irish language in an urbanised and industrialised setting has been adopted and utilised by statutory bodies, the Irish speaking community in Belfast, Irish language organisations, the media and the tourist industry.

The research published by Hughes and de Brún has played a significant role in promoting awareness throughout Northern Irish society of its Irish language heritage and the importance played therein by protestants such as the industrialist Robert MacAdam. Belfast City Council's Good Relations Unit has taken the 19th century community revealed and explored in de Brún's research as a central theme in its cross-community partnership embracing Cultúrlann MacAdam Ó Fiaich, Windsor Women's Centre and the 174 Trust; and our exhibition on the history of the Irish language in Belfast was launched by the DUP Deputy Lord Mayor Ruth Patterson. This increased awareness is reflected in highly significant cross-community advances such as the appointment by the East Belfast Mission of an Irish Language Development Officer (Linda Ervine, wife of former Progressive Unionist party leader Brian Ervine) and the establishment in East Belfast of flourishing classes in the language. These developments were featured in a BBC documentary with William Crawley broadcast in November 2013, for which de Brún was interviewed (see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01klc2f>).

This case study demonstrates how our research has impacted on the wider community, in particular, in the key areas of broadcasting, cultural heritage and tourism initiatives. As an indication of the reach and significance of this impact, it is shown that an Irish-language TV documentary describing the findings of our research achieved very significant viewing figures (over 100,000 on its first showing); a permanent exhibition illustrating the history of native Irish speakers in Belfast has become a major tourist attraction in an economically disadvantaged area of Belfast; a cross-community cultural heritage project on this urban gaeltacht was funded by Belfast City Council and a specially commissioned drama was produced by Aisling Ghéar Theatre. Furthermore, a transportable exhibition on the Irish language in Belfast formed part of the centenary celebrations of Belfast City Hall and went on tour to the United States as part of an investment drive by the West Belfast Economic Forum.

The following examples show specifically how our research in the history of the Irish Language in an Urban Environment have been used by Belfast City Council, Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Department for Social Development, the Irish-speaking community in Belfast, Irish language organisations and the media:

- NITB commission for Cultúrlann MacAdam Ó Fiaich permanent digital interactive exhibition, opened by President Mary McAleese in September 2011;
- DSD's 'Streets Ahead' Urban Regeneration based its concept of the redesign of Bank Square Belfast on our research on the history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century 'Fadgies' community of Irish speakers;
- Belfast City Council's Good Relations Unit has taken the 'Fadgies' research as a central theme in its cross-community partnership embracing Cultúrlann MacAdam Ó Fiaich, Windsor



**CAPTION: Berry Street, Belfast, late 19th century**



**CAPTION: Fruit seller, Belfast, late 19th century**

