

## ***Impact Case Study***

### **UoA 30 History**

#### **Dr Éamonn Ó Ciardha's role as Researcher, Historical Advisor and Narrator of 'Wolfland', the first ever Irish-language, historical documentary co-commissioned by RTÉ and BBC, broadcast 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> January 2013 (RTÉ) and 7<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> January 2013 (BBC2).**

Irish historians at the Ulster University provide outstanding partnership opportunities for historical documentary makers on the island of Ireland. A strong example of this was Dr Éamonn Ó Ciardha's work as researcher, advisor and narrator of 'Wolfland', the first Irish-language, historical documentary ever co-commissioned by RTÉ and BBC. The two part show was first broadcast on 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> January 2013 (RTÉ) and 7<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> January 2013 (BBC2) and has been aired several times since (a clip is available here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p013fhng>). The project evolved from Ó Ciardha's underpinning research on outlaws in Irish history, and he provided the historical, literary, folkloric background to Ireland's instinctive fascination with the wolf, a sense matched by viewing figures.

Ó Ciardha impacted the very shape and content of television production, especially on the Series Producer and Director, whose testimony indicates his significant and growing effect on her TV series, Wolfland. Without the findings from his research the programme would have taken very different directions; but he was brought on board at an early point due to the prior knowledge of his work for the commissioning TV stations. The essential narrative, which pinpoints the major landmarks in the development of the wolf in Irish history, draws centrally on Ó Ciardha's work to shape the story-line. The key evidence base was sourced or verified by him. Ó Ciardha also provided the interpretative framework through which the narrative is to be understood. Specifically, the programme was shaped by the following insights from Ó Ciardha's research:

1. How Ireland's indigenous inhabitants lived side-by-side with the wolf and how the country's ultimate predator etched itself into their history, literature, mythology, nomenclature and psyche.
2. By the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the country plunged into increasing turmoil as English and Scottish settlers began to be planted on vast swathes of the country. For these new arrivals, the wolf became a fearsome symbol of a wild and dangerous land.
3. How large-scale farming and deforestation saw the wolf lose its hunting and breeding grounds.
4. How war, rebellion, massacre, famine and atrocity provided rich pickings for this opportunist carnivore.
5. How the savage wolf became one of an unholy trinity, which included the rebel Irishman ('Tory') and Catholic priest.

In addition to shaping the script and presentation of the documentary series, there is evidence of the reach of the impact. The documentaries were shown during prime-time TV slots (7.30pm and 9.00pm). The viewing figures for Northern Ireland for the two episodes were over 30,000 (BBC Programme 1: 18,000; BBC Programme 2: 13,000), a significant proportion of the Irish-speaking population of the region (which does not include viewers from the Republic of Ireland). Over 200,000 viewers tuned into the two episodes in the Republic of Ireland (RTE Programme 1: 219,000 or 13.36%; RTE Programme 2: 208,000 or 12.75%) – a figure which represents over 25% of the Irish-speaking population. Wolfland also was the subject of a BBC Ulster, Irish-language documentary, as well as receiving positive reviews in national and local newspapers.