

Impact Case Study

UoA 30 History

Dr James Loughlin: Shaping documentary narratives through the RTÉ television programme, 'The Queen and Us' on Queen Elizabeth II's visit to Ireland, 17 May 2011.

James Loughlin's reputation as an expert on the British monarchy and Ireland was shaped by his production of a major book for Cambridge University Press, one of the world's most respected publishing houses, and several related shorter works. This world-leading research formed the essential basis for Irish state broadcaster's, RTÉ's, account of Elizabeth II's historic visit to the Irish Republic in 2011. He was advisor to the programme-makers from inception and his work formed the spine of the resulting documentary, 'The Queen and Us'. Loughlin's research fundamentally shaped how the programmers presented knowledge of the monarchy's standing in Ireland, both historically and contemporaneously, and influenced strongly their creative practice. Audience levels reached 400,000+, including the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh themselves. The work spread worldwide via the RTÉ player.

Loughlin is alone among scholars of Ireland and the monarchy in examining both twentieth-century and nineteenth-century dimensions. It is the crucial later period, after Partition, and through the lens of Northern Ireland's continuing relations with monarchy, that Loughlin's work was able to provide a basis for creative content that other historians' could not. This is why the programme-makers turned to him and why his work formed the continuous spine of influence throughout.

The Impact of Loughlin's work

Loughlin's research directly influenced the creative practice of the programme maker and secondly, his insights helped creative professionals and a major broadcasting organisation adapt to changes in the historical and cultural landscape in Ireland that, by 2011, enabled a ground-breaking visit by the British monarch. The research findings presented and recorded included: the history of Anglo-Irish tension from 1800 onwards and the expectations and disappointments in respect to the Anglo-Irish treaty of 1921; the importance of Éire's neutrality during World War II; How the war impacted on Princess Elizabeth; how and why she viewed Ireland through an Ulster prism; her visits to Northern Ireland, especially their significance at different times since 1969; and the significance of the joint visit of the Queen and the Irish President, Mary McAleese, to the Great War memorial at Messines in Belgium and its importance in marking a positive change in Anglo-Irish relations.

The wider impact of the programme may be understood in terms of individual and public understanding of the history and contemporary relevance of the visit. The programme was part of a concerted series of news, media and programming items timed to coincide with the Queen's visit. The programme itself was watched by over 400,000 people when broadcast on 17 May 2011. The Producer reported reach beyond the general audience, stating: 'Among those who also commented positively on it were Dr Kevin Cahill, who is Chief Advisor for Humanitarian Affairs of the President of the UN General Assembly, Director of the Institute of International Humanitarian Affairs at Fordham University and President of the Irish American Historical Society. Another very positive reaction came from Gerry Murphy, the New York based director of Enterprise Ireland'.