

Methodologies of Access and Working with Sensitive Material (Memory).

Dr. Barry Houlihan
Archivist
University of Galway



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHE
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY

Collections at University of Galway Library



Archives at University of Galway – Out of the Western World

Key heritage collections themes:

Landscape

Language

Politics and Human Rights – Northern Ireland and international

Literature and Drama - Music (Traditional/Classical)

University heritage / Life in the West of Ireland

Working with sensitive material – Categories of Users / Encounters.

- **There are thresholds of sensitivity above and beneath which users may experience or encounter trauma within an archival context.**

These can include:

- **directly affected persons**
- **Immediate family**
- **Descendents**
- **Wider community**
- **This is subjective/personal and difficult to predict.**

**Working with
sensitive
material –
How can we
contextualise
the archive?**

Working with archive donors AND affected people – e.g. oral history.

Allow space for counter/conflicting narratives and memory to be heard, documented, and accessed.

Critically and honestly consider collecting policy thus far.

Survivor-led / person-centred archiving.

**Content alerts / triggers
Embed into workflow.**

What is Trauma- Informed Practice for Archives?

- "Trauma-informed practice is a strengths-based approach for organizations that acknowledges the pervasiveness of trauma and the risk and potential for people to be retraumatized through engagement with organizations such as archives and seeks to minimize triggers and negative interactions.
- It provides a framework of safety and offers a model of collaboration and empowerment that recognizes and centres the expertise of the individuals and communities documented within the records held in archives."

Wright and Laurent (2021)

Oral History – Form and Methodology

In *Doing Oral History*, Donald Ritchie explains:

“Oral History collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews.”



Oral History – Form and Methodology

Oral History and memory work – deeper contextualisation

Paddy McMenamin Archive

"If I had been born in Donegal or Galway I would have joined the local GAA team, but being born in Belfast, as a Catholic, left me joining the IRA. Also, to realise that if the conditions for conflict are not addressed then the potential is always there to be born into it, be it Sarajevo, Beirut, Baghdad, Kabul or Belfast."



Institute Name



Presence and Absence

Uncovering Truth from Archival Memory

- Whose records are preserved? - Where are they preserved?
- Who has access? Role of the State (Power) over the vulnerable/affected (Powerless)
- Mary Raftery – *States of Fear* (1999, RTÉ)

Timeline of Irish Institutional Reports

- Commission to Enquire into Child Abuse in Ireland (2009)
- Enquires into clerical abuse in Ferns/Cloyne/Dublin (2005/2009/2011)
- The McAleese Report – Magdalene Laundries (2013)
- Mother and Baby Homes Commission (2015 - Jan 2021)



Mother and Baby Home Commission and Deletion of Testimony

– Silencing the Record

- **Mother and Baby Homes Commission (2015 - Jan 2021)**
- **Multiple facets:**
 - **Investigative Committee**
 - **Confidential Committee**
 - **The latter heard testimony from 550 survivors – no transcripts given to survivors.**
 - **Records destroyed – but subsequently recovered (Feb 2021)**
 - **Commission Archive Sealed for 30 Years despite public outcry**



**AN BILLE UM THAIFID A CHOIMEÁD, 2019
RETENTION OF RECORDS BILL 2019**

Mar a tionscnaíodh

As initiated

CONTENTS

Section

1. Interpretation
2. Disposal of certain records
3. Transfer of records on dissolution of relevant body
4. Amendment of Act of 1986
5. Application of Act of 1986 to records
6. Regulations
7. Amendment of Act of 2000
8. Amendment of Act of 2002
9. Restriction of Freedom of Information Act 2014
10. *Finascas*

**“The Report is
the record of
what
happened.....”**

Judge Sean Ryan.

**Chair of the Commission to Enquire into
Child Abuse in Ireland. (2019 – ‘The
Ryan Report’)**



**Catherine Connolly
T.D. – “The
powerful against the
powerless’.**

“This assigns no blame for the source of the shame. Women didn’t shame themselves. They *were* shamed, they *experienced* shame, the shame was inflicted upon them. . . .Society did this, a society composed of the powerful against the powerless”

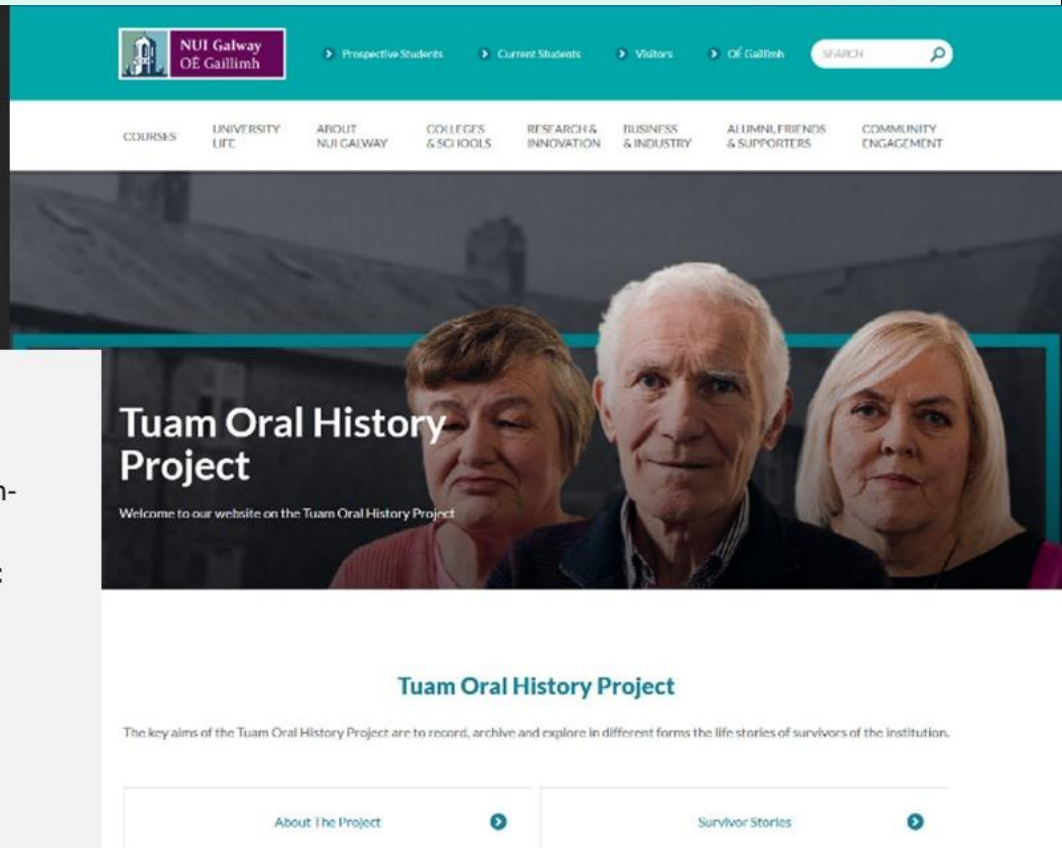


**The Commission Report, 3,000
pages – the print Copy weighs
9kg.**

Project Team – Tuam Oral History Project

The key aim of the Tuam Oral History Project is to enable the survivors of the Tuam institution and their families to tell their own life stories, in the way that they want them to be told. In that regard, members of the project team will record and archive the histories and life stories of survivors and their families, as well as the memories of others connected in any way with the institution or with those who spent time there.

- **Lead Researchers/Co-PIs:** Dr Sarah-Anne Buckley and Dr John Cunningham.
- **Interviewers:** Mary Cunningham, Dr Sarah-Anne Buckley and Dr John Cunningham.
- **Creative Writing and Community Output:** Elaine Feeney
- **Director/Producer of Tuam Oral History Theatre Production:** Dr Miriam Haughton
- **Archivist:** Dr Barry Houlihan
- **Marketing:** Lorna Farren



University of Galway:

Library and Archives

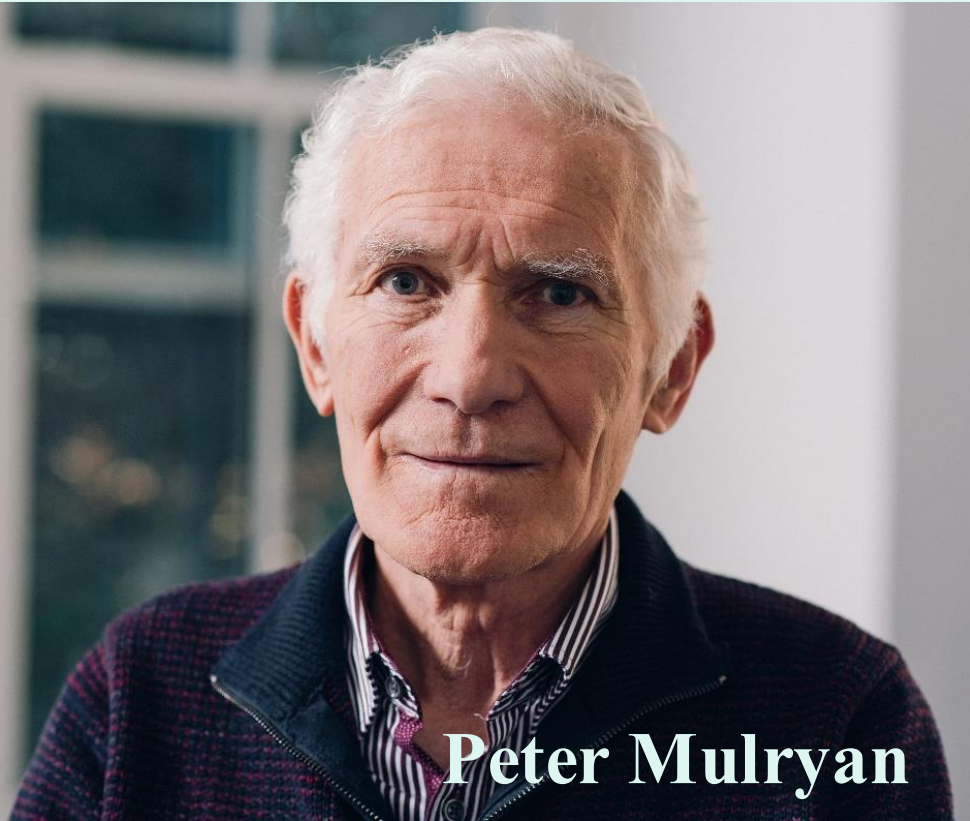
Dept of History

Irish Centre for Human Rights

Centre for Drama, Theatre, and Performance

English and Creative Writing

Listening to Memory – Tuam Oral Histories



Peter Mulryan



Listening to Memory – Tuam Oral Histories



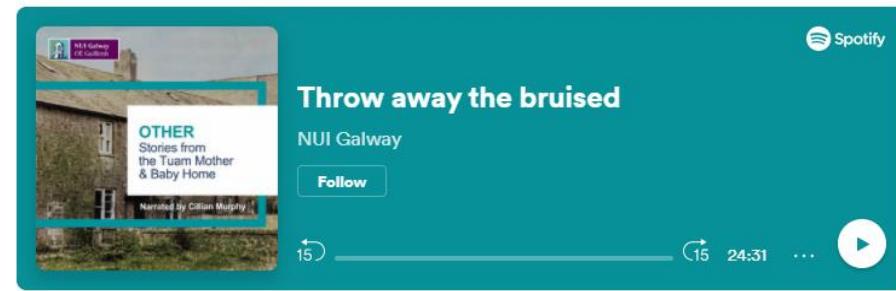
Archiving Tuam MBH Oral History - Processes

- **Twenty Interviews conducted.**
 - **Each interviewee file has audio of interview(s) / Transcript(s) / Personal documents.**
-
- **All materials arrive unredacted.
(Default status – open)**
 - **Archivist task to decide on all access levels, identify all individuals mentioned, check status of each individual / their connection to the interviewee – legal clearance of any issues.**



Tom Warde

Access the voices of Survivors: Podcast series narrated by actor, Cillian Murphy



Episode guide

Episode 1: Throw Away the Bruised



Episode 2: They'll even come after your soul



Episode 3: I love every bone of you



COURSES

UNIVERSITY
LIFE

ABOUT
NUI GALWAY

COLLEGES
& SCHOOLS

RESEARCH &
INNOVATION

BUSINESS
& INDUSTRY

ALUMNI, FRIENDS
& SUPPORTERS

COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT

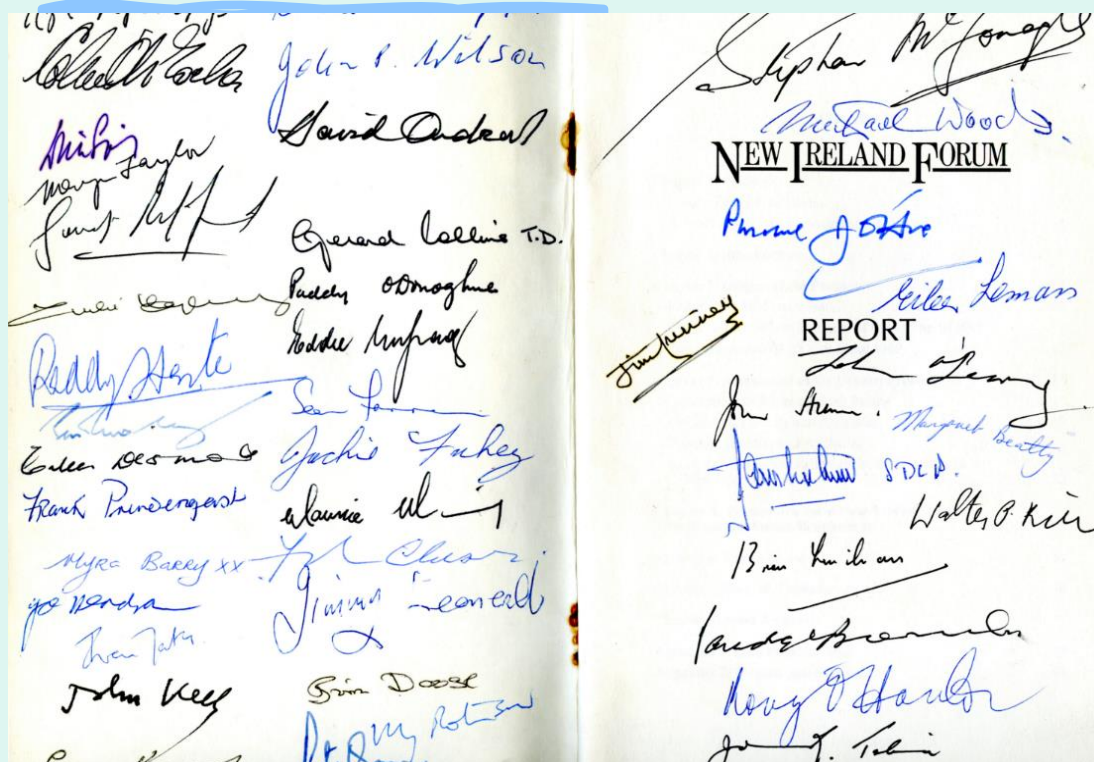
Tuam Oral History Project

Welcome to our website on the Tuam Oral History Project



Northern Ireland – Conflict and Context

- **Hugh Logue Archive**
 - SDLP founding member
 - Elected to NI Assembly 1973
 - New Ireland Forum
 - European Commission
 - GFA and after – Office of DFMFM



Northern Ireland – Conflict and Context

Seeking Truth from Memory

- Omagh Bombing 1998 – Inquiry 2025

Fax from Hugh Logue to Séamus Mallon

15th August 1998

Happy Birthday, Seamus. I hope that your holiday was enjoyable and restful.

Word is just coming in of the utter horror of Omagh, and much of the work attached feels empty. But ^{one} can we, bomb by bomb, ^{to} be dragged down, or ^{to be} hauled back from the peace-building destiny ^{for which} ~~that~~ such a vast majority voted ~~for~~. Our task remains to give voice to that overwhelming vote, ^{the} bombers' task is to render it speechless, literally in the most horrific sense of the word. ~~wordless~~.

Conclusions

Being aware that of user expectations and already heightened expectations

Greater dialogue between Archives and Staff about T.A.P.

Devise new methodologies in metadata generation - ACCESS

Changing language and terminology – affected peoples at centre – caution of archival processing perpetuating trauma – what terms are used for searching and are they contextualised – E.G. 'Home' Vs. Institution, Mother and Birth Mother.

T.A.P. - Less about 'blocking' or preventing trauma but facilitating listening, engagement, access, and context. Improve the process.

'The Archive' cannot be all things to all people

Northern Ireland – Conflict and Context

- Tribunals and Seeking Truth from Memory
- Saville – Bloody Sunday
- Omagh Bombing 1998

- Residual nature of trauma
- Unresolved justice
- Impossibility (?) of truth

THE BLOODY SUNDAY INQUIRY

I, Hugh Logue of *European Commission, 200 Rue de la Loi, 1049 Bré and Room 14, Parliament Buildings, Belfast* will say that:
Europ. Comm. Officer.

Background

1. I first became involved with the civil rights movement while ^{at} University. I ~~can~~ remember deciding to ^{ed} join the Burntollet march when it went past ^{my} ~~our~~ house. I was injured on the march and ~~I~~ had to ^{have} six stitches in my head afterwards. *home*
2. After that, I joined the North Derry Civil Rights Association. Together with my colleague, Finbar O'Kane, I became active in organising a number of civil rights demonstrations. Finbar and I were both ~~actually~~ elected to the Executive of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association ("NICRA"). The NICRA Executive had representation from all six *N. Ireland* counties. It consisted of twelve elected ~~members~~ and three co-opted members. The three co-opted members were intended to give a regional balance to the Executive. At the time – early in the 1970s - I had just started teaching. I had also joined the SDLP with John Hume. I considered myself a non-violent ~~socialist~~ republican, not a nationalist. *substantial* *Social & democratic*
3. In 1971 Ireland celebrated 50 years of independence and, as a result, NICRA ~~managed to~~ attract ^{ed} a lot of publicity in the international press promoting the civil rights movement, which at that stage had an impetus and a profile.

ICTIAP.ie

Irish Community for Trauma-Informed Archival Practice

Trauma-Informed Archival Practice

Home Page

About

Guide to Resources

Secondary Trauma

Introduction to Trauma-Informed Archival Practice

Dealing with Donors

Irish Community for Trauma-Informed Archival Practice

"Trauma-informed practice is a strengths-based approach for organizations that acknowledges the pervasiveness of trauma and the risk and potential for people to be retraumatized through engagement with organizations such as archives and seeks to minimize triggers and negative interactions. It provides a framework of safety and offers a model of collaboration and empowerment that recognizes and centres the expertise of the individuals and communities documented within the records held in archives." Wright and Laurent (2021)



Memory, the Family and the State – Archives of us.

“Part of the reason families put up with the institution, and put up with the loss of their sons and daughters – was not to have to talk about it. And in the end, perhaps, not to have to think about it.”

Clair Wills, *Missing Persons, or My Grandmother's Secrets*. (2023)

Thank You

Email:

Barry.houlihan@universityofgalway.ie



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHE
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY