

# Expert Network of Centres Meeting – QUB

December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2008

*Niall Cunningham (Lancaster)*

## **Harnessing digital technologies for spatio-temporal analysis in historical research: A GIS approach to long-term religious division in Ireland**

Religion has long played a central role in the formation of identity in Ireland to the extent that religious affiliation has become a convenient proxy by which to summarise a wide range of cultural, political and to an ironically lesser extent, theological differences between the main religious traditions in Ireland. This presentation will draw on some of the preliminary findings of the major AHRC-funded project 'Troubled Geographies: Two Centuries of Religious Division in Ireland as an example of the powerful role Geographical Information Systems (GIS) can play in historical research by enhancing our understanding of past events. Specifically, it will highlight the spatial and temporal complexity that exists within the two main themes of the project: religious settlement in Ireland since the Famine and political violence in Northern Ireland during the modern Troubles. Not only is the reality more complex than the traditional discourse of a simple duality between Catholics and Protestants would have us believe but it is a reality that has not remained constant but continues to alter through space and time. The presentation will also illuminate some of the methodological challenges which have arisen and are inherent in major longitudinal studies of this nature.

W/C:197