

Social Science History Association 2008 Conference

Niall Cunningham (Research Associate) – Lancaster University

Ian Gregory (Principal Investigator) – Lancaster University

Ian Shuttleworth (Co-applicant) – The Queen's University of Belfast

Abstract

New Approaches to the Troubles in Northern Ireland

Religion has played a central role in the construction of identity in Northern Ireland. While much work has been done in attempting to understand the relationship between religion, politics and society, there has been limited focus on the spatial aspects of religious affiliation. While the recent 'Troubles' may be considered largely resolved at a political level, it is at a territorial level that antagonisms endure. The relationship between identity and space continues to be reinforced through powerful physical and notional boundaries. This paper will present the findings of preliminary research on one aspect of the major Religion & Society project 'Troubled Geographies: Two Centuries of Religious Division in Ireland', which analyses the relationship between religion and killings directly attributable to the recent Troubles. In addition to the religious context, this paper will also seek to posit patterns of violence within broader socio-economic and temporal perspectives in order to better understand why violence occurred and how this changed over space and time. It will also seek to interrogate the established view of the conflict, understood in terms of a binary struggle between Catholics and Protestants by addressing the full temporal and spatial complexity of confessional relationships that exist in Northern Ireland.