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Local Histories in Northern Ireland

Catherine Nash 

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Abstract

This essay explores the ways in which local history is presented, practiced and promoted in relation to the politics of culture, history and identity in Northern Ireland. Though the politicization of history inevitably frames the practice of local history in Northern Ireland, the level of interest in local history does not support the common argument that Northern Irish society is marked by a uniquely obsessive focus on the past. Instead it suggests a

more complex picture of historical knowledge, interest and practice than that contained within the image of two violently destructive, intense and permanently irreconcilable historical perspectives. This essay discusses the ways in which ideas of history and the local are imagined and mobilised, conflicting arguments about approaches to the past and the practical ways in which local historical societies and other organisations engage with the past, and in doing so, rework the meaning of the local. It highlights innovative attempts to explore a shared history of conflict, shared histories of common experience, and the distinctive experiences of those patterns of commonality and division for specific localities in Northern Ireland and for Northern Ireland as a whole.

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