This book is about the relationship between the past and the present in Irish society, and the ways in which Irish identities have been shaped by oral tradition, icons and images, rituals and re-enactments. It examines pivotal moments in Irish history, such as the 1798 rebellion, the Famine, the Great War and the Northern Ireland troubles, investigating the ways in which they have been recalled, commemorated and mythologised.

Beginning with the conviction that commemoration has its own history, the essays address questions concerning the workings of communal memory. How have particular political and social groups interpreted, appropriated and distorted the past for their own purposes? How are collective memories transmitted from one generation to the next? Why does collective amnesia work in some situations and not in others? What is the relationship between academic history and popular memory?

Such questions are central to the study of nationalism and national identity, the ‘invention of tradition’, post-colonial studies and the development of the heritage industry, as well as ongoing debates on Irish historiography and current cultural politics on both sides of the border. The range of contributors is interdisciplinary and international, and includes many of Ireland’s leading historians and literary critics.

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HISTORY AND MEMORY IN MODERN IRELAND

EDITED BY
IAN McBRIDE
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of illustrations</th>
<th>page vii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of contributors</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Introduction: memory and national identity in modern Ireland  
   Ian McBride  
   1

2 Martyrdom, history and memory in early modern Ireland  
   Alan Ford  
   43

3 Remembering 1798  
   Roy Foster  
   67

4 Famine memory and the popular representation of scarcity  
   Niall Ó Ciosáin  
   95

5 The star-spangled shamrock: memory and meaning in Irish America  
   Kevin O’Neill  
   118

6 ‘Where Wolfe Tone’s statue was not’: Joyce, monuments and memory  
   Luke Gibbons  
   139

7 ‘For God and for Ulster’: the Ulsterman on the Somme  
   David Officer  
   160

8 Commemoration in the Irish Free State: a chronicle of embarrassment  
   David Fitzpatrick  
   184

9 Monument and trauma: varieties of remembrance  
   Joep Leerssen  
   204
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Northern Ireland: commemoration, elegy, forgetting</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Edna Longley</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>‘No lack of ghosts’: memory, commemoration and the state in Ireland</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D. George Boyce</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Index                                                                 | 272  |
Illustrations

1.1 ‘Blessed are those who hunger for justice’: dying hunger striker and the Blessed Virgin Mary depicted in a mural, Rockmount Street, Belfast, 1981. Photo: © Bill Rolston

1.2 12 July procession, Belfast, 1913. East Belfast Historical Society, courtesy of Keith Haines

1.3 Colonel Robert Wallace, Lord Londonderry and Sir Edward Carson at the 12 July procession, 1913. East Belfast Historical Society, courtesy of Keith Haines

1.4 Orange arch c. 1900, Nelson Street, Belfast. Reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland

1.5 Commemoration of the 1798 rebellion in Belfast, 1898. Reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland

2.1 Engraving showing Protestant cruelties towards Catholic clergy in Ireland, ‘Persecutiones adversus Catholicos a Protestantibus Calvinitis excitae in Hibernia’, from Richard Verstegan, Theatrum Crudelitatum Haereticorum Nostri Temporis, Antwerp, 1588

2.2 Martyrs’ deaths by decade: 1520–1639

3.1 1798 memorial by Oliver Sheppard, 1908. Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford. Photo: © Judith Hill

3.2 1798–1898 Centenary Committee membership card, by courtesy of Dr Senia Pašeta

5.1 ‘The Minuteman’, Concord, Massachusetts. Photo by Kevin O’Neill

7.1 Irish National Foresters’ banner depicting Patrick Pearse, by courtesy of Neil Jarman

7.2 Orange banner depicting the Ulster Division at the battle of the Somme, 1916, by courtesy of Neil Jarman
Illustrations

9.1 Memorial to Carolan, ‘the last of the Irish bards’, in St Patrick’s Cathedral, Dublin. Photo: Lensman

9.2 Battle of the Bogside mural showing a boy with gas mask and a petrol bomb, Rossville Street, Derry, 1994. Photo: © Bill Rolston
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Several of the chapters in this volume originated as papers at the Eleventh Conference of Irish Historians in Britain, which met in Durham in April 1998. The Irish have long been great observers of anniversaries, but that year, the bicentenary of the 1798 rebellion, witnessed a commemorative fever of unprecedented proportions. It seemed fitting then, that ‘Memory and Commemoration’ had been chosen as the conference’s theme. I am grateful to the organisers, Marianne Elliott and Roy Foster, for maintaining the intellectual and convivial traditions of these biennial gatherings. In the course of assembling this collection, I have contracted a number of considerable debts to many other Irish scholars: Guy Beiner, Ray Gillespie, Jane Leonard, Tadhg O’Sullivan, Senia Pašeta and Chris Woods all helped in different ways. In particular, I am deeply grateful to George Boyce, who has given valuable advice and assistance throughout the editorial process. For permission to reproduce illustrations, I should like to thank the Cultural Relations Council of Northern Ireland, Keith Haines of the East Belfast Historical Society, Judith Hill, Neil Jarman, Senia Pašeta once again, Bill Rolston, the Ulster Museum and the trustees of the National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland. Finally, I owe a great debt of gratitude to William Davies at Cambridge University Press for his patience and support during the last two years.

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