



Academic Event Report

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Event: The 76th Irish History Students' Association Annual Conference

Venue: University College Cork

Date: 1st March 2025

In 2025, the Irish History Students' Association (IHSA) Annual Conference returned to University College Cork (UCC) for the first time since 2011. The IHSA, established in 1950, is the national association for third-level history students in Ireland. Each year, the IHSA hosts an annual conference that brings together undergraduate and postgraduate students, researchers, academics and history enthusiasts from both across Ireland and internationally.

The 76th IHSA Conference was hosted and organised by the UCC History Society, one of the oldest societies at UCC. Originally founded in 1947, it currently enjoys one of the largest followings of any university history society in Ireland. Known for its innovative programming and inclusive events, the society collaborates with academic departments and student organisations to make history accessible and engaging through lectures, panels, publications and themed social nights. Hosting the 2025 IHSA Conference was an opportunity for the UCC History Society to re-engage at a national level and reflected the society's continued commitment to historical dialogue and student-led scholarship.

The IHSA Conference enables students from across Ireland to meet scholars at a similar career stage, as well as more senior academics, and presents an avenue for forging professional networks. The 76th IHSA Conference was no exception, welcoming attendees and presenters from a

range of institutions, including Trinity College Dublin (TCD), New York University Glucksman Ireland House (NYU GIH) and a range of other universities from Ireland and beyond. As the IHSA is open to all areas of history, the papers ranged from the post-Great Famine funeral system and post-Independence Irish identity to contemporary LGBTQ+ rights movements in the United States. To accommodate the number of papers, the conference ran two concurrent sessions, each with three thematically linked panels.



Figure 1: UCC History Society Organising Committee for the IHSA 76th Annual Conference

Left to right: Bill Shanahan, Conor Taylor, Rachel Cotter, Will Ryan, Becky Bourke, Donogh Hutchinson, Justin Isberg, Keela Dixon, Cian Mulhearn, Brendan Mee, James Power, Daniel O’Connell, Tommy Cosgrave
(Photo Credit: Cian Casey).

Keynote Address and Opening Panel

The conference began in the Dora Allman Room, located in the Hub building on UCC's campus. Following opening remarks from Rebecca Bourke (Chairperson of UCC History Society) and William Ryan (Conference Director), Dr John Borgonovo, senior lecturer at the School of History at UCC and co-author of the *Atlas of the Irish Civil War* (Cork University Press, 2024) and *Atlas of the Irish Revolution* (Cork University Press, 2017), delivered a keynote speech. He talked about how history is remembered and celebrated, explaining the important roles that historians and academics can play in this process. By working with the public, these experts can ensure that history is shared in a way that helps have a positive impact on wider society. A panel followed, in which John and some of his fellow editors of the *Atlas of the Irish Civil War*, Mike Murphy (UCC) and Dr Donal Ó Drisceoil (UCC), discussed this recently published work. Participants then proceeded to the West Wing, where the first panels of papers began. With two sessions running concurrently, attendees chose between parallel panels.



Figure 2: Dr John Borgonovo and Rebecca Bourke

(Photo Credit: Cian Casey).

Session One

Broadly speaking, Session One explored various aspects of Irish identity and culture. Panel One examined Irish identity in the context of historical conflicts, while Panel Two considered texts and images spanning the thirteenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Panel One

Donal O'Connell (UCC) presented on prevalent ideologies of Young Ireland in a post-War of Independence Irish political sphere, while Henry Swords (TCD) discussed the heroes of the Seven Years' War (1756–1763) and the construction of Irish identity. Martin MacMahon (University College Dublin (UCD) presented a talk discussing John Anderson, who purchased land in Fermoy in 1791 and established British military barracks there.

Panel Two

Benjamin Casey (Maynooth University) delivered a paper titled 'Picturing the Professions: 1760 to 1850', which examined artistic satire in Dublin from the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries, focusing primarily on postcards and other works of art. Pierce Woodall's (UCC) paper, 'The Spirit of Cú Chulainn', explored the art of Louis le Brocquy in the 1969 Publication of the *Táin*, focusing on how the narrative was presented in le Brocquy's illustrations. While the first two presentations engaged with aspects of art history from different perspectives, the third paper of this panel shifted focus toward textual history. Dr Natasha Dukelow (UCC) presented her research, 'Reconsidering the Dating of a Thirteenth-Century Franciscan *Exempla* Collection', which offered a reassessment of the dating of a medieval preaching text.

Session Two

The second session of the day continued to reflect a broad range of research topics. Panel One focused on personal and social experiences within historical Irish contexts, exploring healthcare inequality during the Land War (1879–1882) and the experiences of Irish emigrants. Panel Two broadened the scope to examine social, political and cultural issues in post-

Independence and mid-to-late twentieth-century Ireland and Europe, addressing crime, motherhood and Cold War-era European diplomacy.

Panel One

Dr Maura Irwin of University College Galway (UCG) gave a paper titled 'Medical Inequality in the Land War in Mayo', which covered disparities in healthcare provision during the Land War. Examining a case in which a large group of people were attacked in a rural setting, Dr Irwin contrasted their treatment with the superior treatment of a wealthy doctor injured in an urban area. Helen Hayes Sweeney's (UCG) paper, 'Dear Father and Mother...', looked at the letters of Irish emigrant Mick McGee, who left Donegal for the United States. Her research followed his story through these letters, considering the places where he lived and worked and how he communicated with his family in Donegal. The presentation concluded with the man's death in a mining accident and the loss of a prospecting claim he believed would have transformed his family's fortunes.

Panel Two

Gregory Walls (TCD) presented his paper, titled 'Crime and Violence in Post-Independence Ireland', examining the wave of crime that hit the country in the wake of independence. Aviv Corrigan presented her paper, 'The Feeding Work of Motherhood in Ireland, 1945–1974', discussing such topics as advertising and innovations in food-preparation technology and how these impacted mothers. Glen Rothwell (UCC) closed the panel by presenting his research on 'The Common European Home', a doomed proposal made by USSR Premier Mikhail Gorbachev in 1989 which would organise Europe into a network of interdependent commonwealth nations. Rothwell detailed the vague, noncommittal details of Gorbachev's proposal, and how the ultimate failure of the idea as the USSR collapsed.

Session Three

The final session featured two panels that covered a wide array of topics. Panel One looked at the debates of the Anglo-Irish Treaties, the clash of religions in, and the constitution of Dáil Éireann. Panel Two focused on international topics, such as the position of women in Colonial Korea and queer identities in New York.

Panel One

Conor Roddy (Dublin City University (DCU)), presented the paper ‘Liaison During the Anglo-Irish Truce’, which covered the period of Irish revolutionary history during which a truce was agreed. He examined how the IRA and Dáil Éireann maintained the truce with Westminster. His paper also discussed the impact on Northern Ireland and the consequences of accidental breaches of the agreement. Dr James Meighan’s paper ‘The Constitution of Dáil Eireann’, analysed the elements of the first Dáil’s constitution. Emma Hurley’s presentation, ‘Keeping the Faith – Examining the Nationalist Reaction to The Most Reverend Dr. Daniel Cohalan’s Excommunication Decree, December 1920’, discussed the bishop of Cork’s decision to excommunicate the IRA following the burning of Cork (1920) and the reaction of the Republican forces at his actions.

Panel Two

Aoibhínn Callaghan (UCC) presented a paper on the women of Colonial Korea and their relationship with university education in the 1920s. She examined the role and influence of Japanese colonialism on universities and how this affected the education of Korean women, including their access to higher education and the barriers imposed on them during this period. Gracelyn Barmore-Pooley (NYU GIH) concluded the panel with her paper, ‘Reconciling Queerness and the Irish Identity in New York’, discussing the “othering” of Irish members of the LGBTQ+ rights movement in New York in the 1980s and 1990s. She detailed the knock-on effects of this tribalism in the movement and how both Irish and American members of the LGBTQ+ community reconciled these identities.

The conference ended with closing remarks from Rebecca Bourke, William Ryan and IHSA Chief Organiser, Dr Sarah-Anne Buckley (UCG).

Conclusion

The 76th IHSA Conference, hosted in collaboration with the UCC History Society, was a resounding success, reinforcing the dynamic and active research culture present in history departments across Ireland. A key takeaway from the conference was its inclusive and welcoming environment. Participants, ranging from undergraduate and postgraduate

students to established academics, valued this aspect. Feedback from attendees indicated that this was especially beneficial for first-time presenters, who found it helped build their confidence in public speaking and academic presentation. The Q&A sessions, held after each panel, gave speakers useful feedback and allowed the audience to explore the topics further. These respectful and collegial exchanges embody the collaborative spirit that the IHSA aims to promote.

This conference is highly recommended for undergraduate and postgraduate students who are keen to present their research in a supportive setting. History enthusiasts from all backgrounds are encouraged to contribute their research and consider presenting at future IHSA conferences. UCC History Society looks forward to seeing both familiar and new faces at the 2026 conference at Maynooth University, where the IHSA will continue to showcase vibrant and diverse historical scholarship and discussion.

REBECCA BOURKE is a master's student in Business Law at UCC, focusing on intellectual property law. She completed her BCL at UCC, where she began her involvement with the UCC History Society as an Ordinary Committee Member. She later served as Chairperson for the 2024/2025 academic year, during which the society won Best Arts, Cultural, and Debating Society at the UCC STAR Awards. Rebecca also received a STAR Award for her individual contributions to student societies. She has published articles on topics like Amelia Earhart, Roman law and the Battle of Rochestown in the History Society's publication, the *UCC Student History Journal*.

CIAN MULHEARNE is a final-year accounting student at UCC. Like his predecessor, he made the leap from Ordinary Committee Member to Chairperson, elected for the 2025/2026 term. His leadership experience and commitment to student engagement are set to guide the society through another dynamic year.

CONOR TAYLOR is a History and Politics graduate at UCC and the 2025/2026 UCC Student's Union Entertainments Officer for the academic year 2025/2026. His final-year dissertation focused on the raid of the Mallow Barracks during the War of Independence. Passionate about

fostering student engagement, Taylor brings both academic insight and enthusiasm to his roles within the UCC community.