

## Remembering and Commemorating the Irish Famine

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CULTURAL



POLITICAL



SOCIAL

### SUMMARY

Dr Emily Mark-FitzGerald's research explores the history of the 1840s Irish Famine in visual representation, commemoration, and cultural memory from the 19th century until the present, across Ireland and the nations of its diaspora. Her work has included the first extensive global survey of community and national responses to the Famine's 150th anniversary in the 1990s, documenting more than 140 Famine memorials worldwide. By outlining why these memories matter and to whom, her research offers an innovative look at a well-known migration history, and explores how a now-global ethnic community redefines itself through acts of public memory and representation. This research impacts upon four primary groups: academics, policy-makers, museum and heritage professionals, and Irish diaspora community groups, in addition to the wider public.

Dr Mark-Fitzgerald advises commemorative project groups on protocols concerning the commissioning of public monuments, and is a Core Advisory Board member of the International Network of Irish Famine Studies.

### RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

As the watershed event of 19th century Ireland, the Famine's political and social impacts profoundly shaped modern Ireland and the nations of its diaspora. Yet not until the 150th anniversary of the Famine in the 1990s did it receive widespread commemorative attention, with more than one hundred monuments newly constructed across Ireland, Northern Ireland and beyond.

Whether at small or large scale, these commemorative monuments offer unique insight into the interplay between Irish history, memory, and heritage. The work of commemorative committees, fundraising activities, commissioning of artists, physical construction of the works, and their ongoing maintenance reveal much about the significance of the Famine for people in the present. They are important records - not only of how Famine visual iconographies and commemorative practices have shifted over the past 150 years - but also as evidence of the social value of the Famine and its memory.

Dr Mark-FitzGerald's research over the past decade has included extensive site visits; in-depth interviews with Irish, British, American, Canadian and Australian government officials, NGOs, commemorative committees, visual artists; and the collection of thousands of photographs, records of inscription and historical information. Significantly her study addressed both community and national forms of commemoration and memorialisation. Whilst the former tend to be overlooked in most studies of public memory, her work considered together both 'popular' and 'official' responses to the anniversary. Uniquely Dr Mark-FitzGerald's research explores how disparate ethnic communities coalesced globally around a singular anniversary—an approach to diaspora that connects local, national, and global layers of activity and meaning.



*Famine*, Rowan Gillespie, Dublin (1997)



*Ireland Park / The Arrival*, Jonathan M. Kearns (park) / Rowan Gillespie (sculptures), Toronto, Canada (2008)

## DETAILS OF THE IMPACT

The four primary groups impacted by this research include academics, policy-makers, museum and heritage professionals, and Irish diasporic community groups, in addition to the wider public.

### Academic

The publication of Dr Mark-FitzGerald's monograph *Commemorating the Irish Famine: Memory and the Monument* (Liverpool University Press, 2013) established her as the primary expert on the Famine's commemoration and visual history. Selling out of two hardback print runs, a paperback and e-book was published in 2015. The book attracted high press coverage, including a full-page review in the *Irish Times* and interviews on Irish, Canadian, U.S., and New Zealand radio. Garnering widespread scholarly praise and acclaimed as 'a superb book about a complex subject... a landmark study, which will stand the test of time' (*Irish Arts Review*, Spring 2014), Dr Mark-FitzGerald has travelled extensively internationally to speak about this research, in invited keynote and public lectures in the US, Canada, Australia, the UK, Malta, Sweden, and Turkey. She is currently one of the core members of the International Network of Irish Famine Studies, funded by the Netherlands Society for Scientific Research (NWO).

### Public Policy

The publication of Dr Mark-FitzGerald's book coincided with the commencement of the Decade of Centenaries; as consequence she has been in high demand as a speaker and commentator on programmes developed as part of the Decade. She has advised commemorative project groups on protocols concerning the commissioning of public monuments, and is an affiliated researcher with the Cultural Policy Observatory Ireland. Through her popular blog [www.artsmanagement.ie](http://www.artsmanagement.ie), with 4,000+ subscribers, she shares news and writes commentary on public arts policy and management in Ireland and internationally.

### Museum and Heritage Professionals

As one of the directors of the Irish Museums Association, Dr Mark-FitzGerald has consulted with domestic and international museums developing exhibitions of migration and Irish history. In addition to numerous presentations at Irish/Northern Irish museum professional conferences and public history workshops, internationally she has discussed and presented her research at the Immigration Museum, Melbourne; Migration Museum, Adelaide; Canadian National Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, Halifax; National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh; Lower East Side Tenement Museum, New York City; and Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC.

### Community

Dr Mark-FitzGerald has worked frequently with Irish diasporic community groups and local heritage societies, in Ireland,

Northern Ireland, the US, Canada, Australia, Scotland, and England. Many of these groups participated in the Famine's commemoration during the 1990s, or have projects that are ongoing. These groups have both contributed to Dr Mark-FitzGerald's ongoing research, and benefited from contextualising their own work within a wider global frame. Her research has aided community groups in developing new briefs and approaches when developing plans for commemorative monuments. Her visits to local societies are frequently featured in local media and attract large audiences, and have sparked contributions of further material to Dr Mark-FitzGerald's archive of Famine commemorative material and ephemera.

### Other Public Impacts

The publication of *Commemorating the Irish Famine* was accompanied by the launch of an online resource [www.irish-faminememorials.com](http://www.irish-faminememorials.com), a project engaged in digitising historical details and Dr Mark-FitzGerald's archive of more than 140 commemorations of the Famine worldwide. This material will be migrating to UCD's Digital Library in 2017. The featuring of her website on the BBC's online resource site *iWonder - The Irish Famine: From crop failure to catastrophe* ([www.bbc.co.uk/timelines/zpmhycw](http://www.bbc.co.uk/timelines/zpmhycw)) has generated high traffic to this resource; she also acted as a historical consultant to the BBC series 'Ireland with Simon Reeve' (2015).



*National Famine Memorial / Ghost Ship,*  
John Behan, Murrisk, Co Mayo (1997)



*Famine memorial,*  
Action from Ireland (Afrl), Doolough, Co Mayo (1994)

## RESEARCH REFERENCES

### Monograph

*Commemorating the Irish Famine: Memory and the Monument.* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013.

### Edited books

*The Great Famine and its Impacts: Visual and Material Culture.* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, forthcoming 2017.

### Peer-reviewed journal articles and essays

'Irish migration and the museum: histories of public history making', in *Art History after Francoise Henry: 50 Years at UCD*, Dublin: Gandon Editions, 2016.

'The Persistence of Vision: Seeing Eviction in the Nineteenth Century', in *Creating History: Irish Historical Painting*. Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland/Irish Academic Press, 2016.

'Famine memory and the gathering of stones: genealogies of belonging', in *Irish Global Migration and Memory: Transnational Perspectives of Ireland's Famine Exodus*. Oxford: Routledge, 2016.

'Famine memory and the gathering of stones: genealogies of belonging', *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents*, 11:3, 2014. DOI 10.1080/14788810.2014.921105

'Photography and the Visual Legacy of Famine', in *Memory Ireland Volume 3: Memory Cruxes: The Famine and The Troubles*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014.

The 'Irish Holocaust': Historical Trauma and the Commemoration of the Famine", in *The Visual Politics of Psychoanalysis: Art and the image in post-traumatic cultures*, ed. Griselda Pollock. London: IB Tauris, 2013.

'The Irish Famine and Commemorative Culture', in *Holodomor and Gorta Mór: Histories, Memories and Representations of the Famine in Ukraine and Ireland*, ed. by Christian Noack, Lindsay Janssen and Vincent Comerford. London: Anthem Press, 2012.

'Commemoration and the Performance of Irish Famine Memory', in *Crossroads: Performance Studies and Irish Culture*, ed. Fintan Martin Walsh and Sara Brady. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009.

"Towards a Famine Art History: Invention, Reception, and Repetition from the Nineteenth Century to the Twentieth", in *Ireland's Great Hunger: Relief, Representation, and Remembrance*, ed. David Valone. Lanham MD: University Press of America, 2009.

'Pathos and Paddywhackery: Erskine Nicol and the Painting of the Irish Famine', in *Beyond the Anchoring Grounds: More Cross-currents in Irish and Scottish Studies* (Belfast Studies in Language, Culture and Politics 14). Belfast: University of Aberdeen/Queen's University Belfast, 2005.

### Websites

[www.irishfaminememorials.com](http://www.irishfaminememorials.com)

### Grants/Awards

Career Enhancement Fellowship, Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation (2011-12), nationally competitive award for promising early career researchers, to enable completion of first monograph.

Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation (2005), awarded research grant to fund Famine commemorative research in the United States and Canada.

Thomas Dammann Award, Royal Hibernian Academy (2004), awarded research grant to fund research in the United States, Scotland, England, Wales.

Mellon-Mays Research Grant / Social Science Research Council, (2003-4), awarded research grant to fund research in Australia and Canada.

Humanities Institute of Ireland Fellowship (2003-6), awarded three year PhD research fellowship.



*Westchester County Great Hunger Memorial, Eamonn O'Doherty, Ardsley, New York (2001)*