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## Evaluation of Response to 'Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict' Exhibition.

Karine Bigand

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**Everyday Objects  
Transformed by  
the Conflict**

**Evaluation of Response  
to 'Everyday Objects Transformed  
by the Conflict' Exhibition**



# **“Can the Walk be Done, not Just the Talk?”**

**Addressing the Conflict in Northern Ireland:**

**The Contribution of Healing Through Remembering’s  
‘Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict’ Exhibition.**

**Evaluation of Response of ‘Everyday Objects  
Transformed by the Conflict’ Exhibition**

September 2013



Report by Karine Bigand



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## Research summary

This project seeks to assess the contribution made by the 'Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict' exhibition to addressing the legacy of the conflict in museums and exhibitions in Northern Ireland. The exhibition was put together by the cross-community organisation Healing Through Remembering, whose remit is to explore mechanisms for dealing with the past in Northern Ireland. Having reflected for several years on the idea of a Living Memorial Museum of the conflict, the organisation conceived the exhibition as a trial run for its ideas. This project comments on Healing Through Remembering's role in the debate on dealing with the past as well as its reflection on a Living Memorial Museum of the Conflict. It provides a thorough analysis of the exhibition by presenting the curatorial choices made in terms of contents, venues, interpretation and layout and by assessing the visitor feedback collected in the five venues where it toured in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties between March and August 2012. By looking at the visitors' opinion of the exhibition as well as their experiences of it, feedback analysis allows reflection on museum practices when representing conflict and whether the curatorial specificities of the exhibition are transferable to the museum world.

## Chapter 1 Introduction

This dissertation aims to assess the contribution made by the 'Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict' exhibition to addressing the legacy of conflict in Northern Ireland in museums and exhibitions. The exhibition was put together by the cross-community organisation Healing Through Remembering, whose purpose is to reflect on and explore "possible mechanisms and realisable options for how remembering should occur so that healing can take place for all people affected by the conflict in and about Northern Ireland" (HTR, 2002: i). It toured in five venues across Northern Ireland and the Irish border counties between March and August 2012, displaying about fifty conflict-related artefacts. The exhibition was a real-life test of the reflection carried out by one of the five sub-groups in Healing Through Remembering in charge of exploring what contents and form a Living Memorial Museum of the conflict could take. In words spoken at the first meeting where the exhibition was debated in practical terms, it was a case of seeing "Can the walk be done, not just the talk?" (LMM, 2011a). The exhibition presented several innovative curatorial specificities in its choice of objects, venues and interpretation which will be assessed in this work. Central to this dissertation will be the analysis of feedback left by visitors, with a view to assessing both the curatorial practices of the exhibition and the different types of visitor experiences it engendered.

### 1 Research context and structure

The research context for this project is a combination of three conversation strands relating to heritage, museums, history and politics. The first one relates to the growing importance of memory as separate to history. The cultural importance of memory was theorized, among others, by sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, archeologist Jan Assmann and historian Pierre Nora (Halbwachs, 1992; Assmann, 1995; Nora, 1989). Memory studies have emerged as a new discipline that "directs its interest not toward the shape of the remembered pasts, but rather to the particular presents of the remembering" (Erl, 2011: 11). This in turn ties in with heritage studies, if heritage is to be defined as what is remembered of the past in the present. Questions about memory and commemoration are pregnant in discussions about heritage, entwined with questions about identity and ownership, especially when it comes to the uses – some would add "and abuses" – of contested or dissonant heritage(s) (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996; Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2000: 11-28). Because of the difficulties of dealing with the legacy of violent pasts, some advocate forgetting rather than remembering (Assmann, 2011; Rieff, 2011).

Museums, as media to represent collective heritage, also take part in the general conversation this project seeks to explore. A second strand therefore deals with the changing role of museums and their transition from passive repository of collections to socio-cultural actors (Hudson, 1998; Witcomb, 2003: 13-26). Over the last decades, museums have seen their function change, notably due to the political will to democratize culture, the evolution of learning styles and the effort towards cultural diversity (Black, 2005: 123-156; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999: 3-25, 137-145). Visitors, rather than objects, have become the focus of museums (Cameron, 1971; Silverman, 2010: 1-21). Where contested heritage is concerned, the new emphasis on the museum as a service to the public pushes them out of their comfort zone and forces them to relinquish their "interpretative control over the past" (Bradburne, 2011: 276). In turn, this leads to a redefinition of museums' missions and good practices, sometimes with mitigated results (Stam, 2005; Lynch, 2011; Williams, 2011; Lehrer, 2011).

The final conversation strand is the ongoing debate on dealing with the past in post-conflict Northern Ireland. With the legacy of the conflict still visible in the enduring divisions of Northern Irish society, initiatives, comments and suggestions have come from the government, community groups, academics and the voluntary sector. Healing Through Remembering has been one of the prominent actors in the debate, offering a comprehensive reflection on the past and contributing a series of mechanisms, the most relevant for our purpose being the creation of a Living Memorial Museum (Bell, 2002: 1136-38; HTR, 2002).

The actors, evolution and general stakes of the debate on dealing with the past in Northern Ireland will be presented in the first chapter of this work, which will also comment on the role museums have played and been given so far in dealing with the legacy of conflict. The second chapter will focus on the devising and designing process of the exhibition, looking at the work of the Living Memorial Museum Sub Group since its inception in 2004. The third and last chapter will focus on the evaluation of the exhibition by the analysis of the visitor feedback. It will be informed by the literature on the changing role of museums and emphasis on its social role. However, the literature on history and memory, while serving as a background to this research, will not be dwelled upon, given the already large scope of material to process in the required format.



## 2 Contribution to existing literature and objectives of research

This research will contribute to the already extensive literature about the representation of contested heritage in museums, where the most commonly studied cases are certainly the Holocaust and any material relating to the recognition of minority identities in a dominant culture (Purbrick, Aulich and Dawson, 2007). Research about the difficult representation of a contested past in Northern Ireland's museums has been carried out, over the last decade or so, chiefly by Elizabeth Croke, with a strong emphasis on the relation between museums and communities (Croke, 2001a, 2001b, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2010). Louise Purbrick and Cathal McLaughlin have explored the heritage of the Maze/Long Kesh site as a contested space (Purbrick, 2006; McLaughlin, 2006, 2007). More modestly, I have explored the representations of history in the Ulster Museum and the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, as well as the idea of a peace museum for Northern Ireland (Bigand, 2011, 2012). Finally, while Healing Through Remembering is frequently mentioned in research, reports and consultations about dealing with the past in Northern Ireland (Bell, 2002; NIAC, 2005; CGP, 2009a for example), research on its proposition of a Living Memorial Museum and its current exhibition is yet to be carried out, which is what this project intends to do. From that point of view, it will contribute to the literature on visitor experiences in museums.

The objectives of this project are threefold. A first objective is to provide better knowledge about Healing Through Remembering and its role in the debate about dealing with the past in Northern Ireland. A second objective is to reflect on museums' practices in representing a contested past and provide an assessment of new exhibition practices, possibly to be used by other actors in the museums or heritage sector in the future. A third objective is to give insight into visitors' experience through an assessment of the visitor feedback in the five venues where the exhibition was displayed. This will supply information not only about the reception of the exhibition by local people and tourists, but also about their relation and perception of the conflict and the debate on remembrance and forgetting.

This project is of prime interest for Healing Through Remembering and the continuation of its reflection on a Living Memorial Museum in Northern Ireland. In return for access to their material and archives, the organisation has offered to consider this project as consultant's work and to publish it, pending funding, thereby possibly enhancing its visibility and impact. As a result, institutional participants in the debate about dealing with the past in Northern Ireland and indeed anyone interested in the topic – including visitors to the exhibition – may benefit from learning about the outcomes of this initiative. The project is also relevant for collectors of artefacts relating to the conflict and museum professionals. They may consider opening their collections or making them more accessible, or find examples to emulate or avoid in the Healing Through Remembering exhibition format. Finally, this research project is likely to draw international attention, as Healing Through Remembering is a member of several networks. Among them is the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, a grouping of memorial museums (ICSC website), of which the Gernika Peace Museum Foundation recently showed great interest in hosting the exhibition, as have other museums in Great Britain, the Republic of Ireland and Brazil (Turner, 2012).

## 3 Methodology

A range of qualitative research methods will be used to address the identified research issues. The overview of the debate on dealing with the past in Northern Ireland since the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement of 1998 will draw on official reports, policies and published research to describe how the debate unfolded and place Healing Through Remembering and museums within it. As there is a vast array of material to consider, it is important to prioritise and leave out details on certain initiatives on the ground and in museums, so as to draw a state-of-the-art picture of the situation.

The second chapter will look at the genealogy of the exhibition by exploring the lineage between the initial proposal for a Living Memorial Museum published in Healing Through Remembering's first report in 2002 and the current exhibition. This part will rely on the organisation's publications, including a report on an Open Call For Ideas for such a museum (HTR, 2007) and an Audit of the existing artefacts related to the conflict (HTR, 2008c). Corporate documents, including minutes of meetings and annual reports, will be consulted to retrace the development of the idea of the exhibition. Where the exploration of the Living Memorial Museum Sub Group's archive is not satisfactory, for instance where the minutes are not fully written or contain too little material, interviews with Healing Through Remembering staff and members of the Sub Group will supplement the gaps in information.

Neither archival work nor interviews are ideal methods to collect accurate information on a past process. Archives are valuable because care and attention have generally been used in compiling them and because they allow the researcher to access “the language and words of informants” (Creswell, 1994: 150-1). Yet unless they include an audio or verbatim record, archives rarely provide the full contents of a debate. Rather, they record what is deemed relevant, sufficient for general understanding and/or worthy of publication. All written sources – except maybe diaries – are acts of communication, involving a context, source, a message and a receiver. Understanding them therefore implies keeping the components of the basic model of communication in mind (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 2008: 296). Corporate annual reports, and minutes of meetings to a lesser extent, may be shaped to answer tacit questions or expectations of possible receivers – funding institutions, partners, stakeholders or rivals – to show the work of an institution or an individual in a favourable light or to hide internal dissensions. Similarly, interviews are a valuable research method since the interviewee can provide missing information and since researchers can direct the line of questioning into specific areas with semi-guided interviews. However, interviews pose the risk of offering an inaccurate version of the events, where patchy recollection might be filled up for the sake of a satisfying narrative. Indeed, interviews are better tools for knowledge construction than for knowledge collection (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 48-49), that is to say when looking for impressions and perceptions rather than when looking for facts. However, it is hoped that a series of face-to-face interviews with members of the Living Memorial Museum Sub Group and other Healing Through Remembering staff, combined with archival work, will provide enough concurring information to have a reliable overview of the process that generated the exhibition.

The last part of the project will mostly consist of assessing the visitors’ feedback on the exhibition. Before that main task can be tackled, the venues, contents and layout of the exhibition will be presented to give a general taste of the physical reality of the exhibition. Pictures will be interspersed throughout the chapter to illustrate the analysis of feedback.

Healing Through Remembering gathered feedback on the exhibition in three forms. A feedback area in the exhibition allowed visitors to record their impressions or leave comments on feedback tags that they could then tie up for all to see, on a circular structure sitting on a table. Visitors could also choose to fill in evaluation forms that go into a filing basket on the same table (Picture 1.1).



*Picture 1.1 – Feedback area (Ballymoney)*

These two different formats used different prompts, triggering different responses. The prompt for the feedback card was very broad, encouraging visitors to “please leave any response you like – it could be about a particular object, a memory evoked or your views on how the stories of the conflict should be told”. Visitors were thus free to decide what they wanted to share, and whether to leave their personal details. The evaluation sheet was more structured, asking three questions and leaving space for comments on the front page, while the back of the page asked details about the visitor’s profile, how he/she heard about the exhibition and who they were visiting with (Appendix 2-4: 48-50). The last type of feedback available was that left by volunteers who invigilated the exhibition in certain venues: it included visitor numbers and any

feedback they may have gathered from visitors while interacting with them. Here, visitor feedback was filtered through what volunteers considered relevant to record or not. This type of feedback will not be processed systematically but used only as a backdrop to visitor experiences in the exhibition.

I chose to use the system of evaluation designed by the exhibition's curator for my own research as it was already in place when I started the project. Collecting data through another questionnaire that I would have designed would have added another layer of evaluation for the visitor to respond to and may have been detrimental to the system in place. This choice might prove a limitation if the information given is scarce (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 2008: 279) but it is consistent with the nature of the project, which is to assess the exhibition, not only regarding its impact on visitors but also as a potential template for future use. The evaluation process, as organised by the curator, is therefore part of the exhibition project and should be assessed as such.

Overall, 199 feedback tags and 74 evaluation sheets were left by visitors, without any way of knowing what proportion of visitors left both. Each tag and evaluation sheet was given a reference that includes the venue, the type of feedback and a number (Appendix 1: 47). Given the haphazard nature of the corpus, qualitative methods of analysis will be favoured over quantitative ones. The information will be segmented into categories/topics dictated by the prompts and the information available in order to be interpreted (Creswell, 1994: 153-7). The visitor's understanding and endorsement, or lack thereof, of the "big idea" (Serrell, 1996: 1-8) behind the exhibition – that the conflict in Northern Ireland is best represented through a multi-perspective narrative – will be analysed separately from their own experiences. Regarding the latter, I will use the analysing framework set up by Pakerik, Doering and Karns to explore satisfying visitor experiences in museums of the Smithsonian Institution in the late 1990s (Pakerik, Doering, Karns, 1999). My choice is justified by the empirical nature and ease of use of this framework which was defined by interviews with visitors about their expectations and experiences in museums and exhibitions. From the interviews, the researchers established a list of fourteen different satisfying experiences, later grouped into four strands, namely social, cognitive, object and introspective experiences, which I will use to analyse the feedback on the 'Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict' exhibition.

The last point of this introduction and methodology section needs to address the question of independent research within an institution. I worked as a volunteer for Healing Through Remembering from February to August 2012. During that period, I assisted the Curator/Coordinator of the exhibition in planning the exhibition, setting it up and taking it down, occasionally invigilating it. Over the last few weeks of my stay in Northern Ireland, I spent most days in Healing Through Remembering's office working on this project, which allowed me nearly unrestricted access to the organisation's publications and corporate material. I have grown to be a supporter of their work which I think is useful for the future of peace in Northern Ireland. My position as a volunteer for Healing Through Remembering and my full endorsement of their values may be considered to undermine my independence as a researcher as I used their material and values to produce a report on their work. However, I think that having worked with the organisation prior to and during this research project is more of an advantage than a handicap in so far as I am familiar with the exhibition, which I have helped design and set up, and I have built a relation of trust with the staff. My position as a volunteer also gave me privileged access to collectors and members of the Living Memorial Museum Sub Group, who might otherwise be suspicious or uneasy around independent researchers. Most importantly, I retain control of the research brief that I am presenting here. I consider this project mainly as a working document for Healing Through Remembering to further the idea of a Living Memorial Museum, as well as a document for practitioners involved in representing conflict in a museum or exhibition in a Northern Ireland context. Criticism is therefore neither to be avoided nor to be all positive. It is, however, to be constructive and solidly researched, through constant resort to published literature on the fields explored to complement the information found in the corporate documents of the organisation. Given the nature of the project, I will naturally abide by the usual ethical rules of anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent when dealing with sensitive material (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 61-79). For that reason, neither the evaluation sheets nor the feedback tags will be included in full in appendix. Only anonymous excerpts will be used in the last chapter.

## Chapter 2 Dealing with the Past in Northern Ireland - charting the debate

The peace process negotiations that followed the paramilitary ceasefires in 1994 and the ensuing Belfast Agreement in 1998 signalled a new era for Northern Ireland. Since then, multiple official and non-official initiatives have taken place, involving or targeting people affected<sup>1</sup> by the conflict, with the aim of achieving justice, reparation, reconciliation and/or sustainable peace. Over the years, the approach to “transitional justice” has evolved, reaching out beyond special interest groups – victims, ex-prisoners – towards more generic societal healing. The phrase dealing with the past was little used in 1998. It is now commonly used and understood, although the debate is ongoing about the goals of and participants in the process.

The purpose of this chapter is threefold. While charting the whole debate on dealing with the past would be impractical in the remit of this dissertation, a broad overview of developments on this theme, taking into account official policies, consultations and collective projects is needed as a backdrop to this study. It is also necessary to place Healing Through Remembering within this debate by describing its set of values and the work the organisation has been engaged in. Finally, the role of museums in the debate also needs to be mapped out, by looking at how they have been included in good relations policies and how they have engaged with the contested past of Northern Ireland.

### 1 Dealing with the past in Northern Ireland: debate and mechanisms since 1998.

It is one of the particularities of the Northern Ireland peace process and the Belfast agreement that the exploration of the reasons for, nature of and accountability in the conflict has not been a priority. Instead, the peace negotiations and ensuing legislation were more focused on addressing the needs of specific interest groups. The initial focus was largely on victims, with the setting up of the Victims’ Commission in 1997, leading to the Bloomfield Report in 1998, and the setting up of the Saville Inquiry into Bloody Sunday, also in 1998. Politically motivated prisoners were later catered to by the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 1998, which organised the conditions of their early release. The Belfast Agreement was largely influenced by past political pitfalls in provisioning for a power-sharing devolved executive, as well as closer North-South and East-West cooperation. It also provided the necessary framework for institutional reform, notably of the police service. Yet the Agreement was described as “constructively ambiguous” in avoiding taking position on issues where no consensus prevailed, for instance on the establishment of a truth recovery commission on the model of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Bell, 2003: 1107). Truth recovery happened in other contexts – in testimonies to public inquiries into several events of the conflict, notably the Cory Inquiries into specific murder cases; in public consultations; in the work of the Historical Enquiries Team, set up in 2005 by the newly reformed Police Service of Northern Ireland to investigate the unsolved murder cases committed between 1968 and 1998. It also happened in community-led projects, such as the Ardoyne Commemoration Group (Lundy and McGovern, 2002). Many local groups were also involved in storytelling activities, formally or informally recording personal accounts of the conflict, after the model set by An Crann/The Tree in Derry~Londonderry in the 1990s (HTR, 2005: 21-25). In the early 2000s however, none of these activities was branded or advertised as ‘dealing with the past’.

The issue started to acquire higher profile in the mid-2000s. In 2004, the House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, prompted by Paul Murphy, then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, launched a consultation to find “ways of dealing with the past which recognised the pain, grief and anger associated with it” (NIAC, 2005i: 7). Their report reflected on the lack of consensus on the definition of victims and reconciliation as well as on the relevance and/or timeliness of a truth recovery institution for Northern Ireland. While recognising that “the quality of life there for *all people* has been diminished substantially for over three decades” (11, my italics), much of its contents was focused on acknowledging the experiences and rights of victims and survivors who “are a primary resource in the process of transformational healing” (26). The report also encouraged continuous support and funding for the “healing work” carried out by community-led groups, but considered the time for setting up a truth recovery institution had not yet come. In March 2005, the same focus on victims was visible in the British government’s decision to appoint a Victims and Survivors’ Commissioner.

<sup>1</sup> Terminology is important when talking about conflict. No consensus exists as to who the people affected are. Healing Through Remembering has chosen to restrict the use of this phrase to include the victims and survivors and ex-offenders (HTR, 2006: 2-3) but in this sentence, I refer to the wider society, whom I think was impacted at large, physically, psychologically or materially by the conflict. I have chosen, however, to adopt Healing Through Remembering’s recommendation of talking about the “conflict” and not the “Troubles”, a euphemistic description not dissimilar in my view to “les événements” (the events), long used in France to describe the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962).

Further impulse for broadening the debate beyond victims and survivors undoubtedly came from the extension to 2006 of the European-funded Peace II programme, initially planned for 2000-2004. The programme had a special focus on reconciliation and the projects it funded were beginning to deliver results by 2005. The Peace III programme (2007-2013) further underlined the importance of 'dealing with the past' as part of any reconciliation process, notably by adopting Brandon Hamber and Gráinne Kelly's working definition of reconciliation as a "voluntary act that cannot be imposed" and involves five strands (Hamber and Kelly, 2004). One of them, "acknowledging and dealing with the past", is defined as follows:

**Acknowledging the hurt, losses, truths and suffering of the past. Providing the mechanisms for justice, healing, restitution or reparation, and restoration (including apologies if necessary and steps aimed at redress). To build reconciliation, individuals and institutions need to acknowledge their own role in the conflicts of the past, accepting and learning from it in a constructive way so as to guarantee non-repetition. (SEUPB, 2007: 29)**

In contrast to the driving role of the Northern Ireland Office and European PEACE programmes, the devolved government had less of a lead in the debate on dealing with the past. The early years of the Northern Irish institutions were not without difficulty, notably when the local assembly was suspended for more than four years between October 2002 and May 2007. In 2005, the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) launched its community relations policy, 'A Shared Future'. Based on public consultation, the goal of the policy was to eradicate sectarianism, racism and any form of prejudice, reduce tensions at interface areas and facilitate the development of a shared community, through actions at individual, community, local government, regional and central levels (OFMDFM, 2005: 10-11; Hughes, 2009). With the debate on dealing with the past snowballing outside Stormont, 'A Shared Future' is remarkable for not even using the phrase. As the consultation paper did not raise the question of historical understanding, few responses addressed "the significance of the interconnection of territoriality and representations of the past to 'good' (and poor) relations" (Graham and Nash, 2006: 163). It is to be noted that the policy was made public in a context marked by mutual suspicion between political parties and towards the concept of community relations itself (Hughes, 2007: 24). This is exemplified, according to Graham and Nash, by the lack of response to the consultation from the DUP, a lip-service tribute to shared society by the UUP and a submission by Sinn Féin rejecting community relations policy (2006: 264). The document, while laudable in its inspiration, was criticised for lacking solid definitions, failing to address territoriality in the Northern Irish cultural landscape and providing uncritical observations and recommendations, notably on the causes of the "culture of intolerance" it denounces from the onset (Graham and Nash, 2006; Hughes, 2009). As a result, the remediation proposed was deemed inefficient.

Despite difficulties in local policy-making, dealing with the past had become a hot issue in Northern Ireland by 2007. The Consultative Group on the Past was appointed by the Northern Ireland Office in 2007 to make recommendations to the Secretary of State on how best to approach the legacy of the past. An extended consultation process ensued, involving 290 written submissions, meetings with 141 individuals or groups as well as several public meetings throughout Northern Ireland (CGP, 2009a: 13). The working principle of the recommendations of the Consultative Group on the Past was that "the past should be dealt with in a manner which enables society to become more defined by its desire for true and lasting reconciliation rather than by division and mistrust, seeking to promote a shared and reconciled future for all" (13). The recommendations included the inception of new institutions in the form of a Legacy Commission and a Reconciliation Forum in charge of dealing with society issues such as sectarianism and conflict-related health needs. The Legacy Commission was also to take over the role of the Historical Enquiries Team and the Police Ombudsman in reviewing historical criminal cases, as well as examining thematic issues such as state collusion and paramilitary activity. Another recommendation was a recognition payment to be made to relatives of all those who had died in the conflict. Finally, the report argued there should be no more public inquiries but that remembering activities, including a Day of Reflection and Reconciliation, were to be supported. Participation in such events by political parties was strongly encouraged, as was their signing of a declaration against political violence at the end of the Legacy Commission's five-year term. The working principle of the Consultative Group on the Past was generally embraced but the recommendations of the report received mixed reactions, if not furore. Most of the controversy surrounded the recognition payment to relatives of the dead of the conflict, underlining the sensitive issue of the definition of a victim. Likewise, the new proposed institutions were met with scepticism because they risked overlapping with or duplicating existing bodies. The publication of the report was followed by another consultation on the recommendations (CGP, 2009b), with what was then understood to be the initial summary of responses being published in July 2010 by the Northern Ireland Office (CGP, 2010). The responses received affirmed the position of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee that Northern Ireland was not ready for the implementation of the Consultative Group on the Past's recommendations (NIAC, 2009). Since then, the report and its recommendations have disappeared from public debate.

Finally, in July 2010, the OFMDFM launched another consultation on a draft community relations programme for *Cohesion, Sharing, Integration* (OFMDFM, 2010). The document relinquished the idea of reconciliation developed in *A Shared Future* in favour of the development of shared/safe places and mutual accommodation (Todd and Ruane, 2010). The consultation analysis was published in January 2011 (Wallace Consulting, 2011) and the OFMDFM published its own response to the responses in July 2011 (OFMDFM, 2011). However, the final version of the policy has yet to be published at the time of writing (July 2012). Two parties, the Alliance party and the UUP, left the committee working on the policy in Stormont and the current Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Owen Paterson, recently expressed his disappointment that the policy was still not out (BBC, 19 July 2012). This certainly highlights the difficulty in reaching a consensus on the contents of a community relations policy, if not on its nature. It also underlines the discrepancy between bottom-up and top-down engagement with the issue. Several respondents to the consultation, active in community work and familiar with conflict transformation/transitional justice terminology, regretted the fact that the draft policy was not set against the specific divided historical backdrop of Northern Ireland, thereby leading to a policy managing the symptoms of division rather than addressing their causes (Wallace Consultants, 2011: 6-7, 119-120). To this, the OFMDFM replied:

**We acknowledge that the need for a programme like CSI arises out of the unique set of circumstances in which we live. We don't believe, however, that CSI needs to dwell unduly on the past in order to give shape to our future. [...] We believe CSI needs to take these issues into account and to look beyond them, and set out our positive vision for the future. (OFMDFM, 2011: 11)**

The difficult dialogue on community relations and its articulation with dealing with the past has recently been underlined in a report on *Progressing Good Relations and Reconciliation in Post-Agreement Northern Ireland* by INCORE (International Conflict Research Institute at the University of Ulster). It noted that "by far, the most commonly raised issue among respondents was the perceived lack of political vision and leadership around the challenging issue of good relations in Northern Ireland" (Kelly, 2012: 61). It also pointed to some ambiguity as to the understanding of the relevance of dealing with the past: few respondents, if unprompted, mentioned dealing with the past as an essential part of good relations policy; yet many, once prompted, recognised progress in cross-community dialogue about the past and the benefit of dealing with the past activities – truth recovery, storytelling, memorialisation, acknowledgement – to reconciliation (58-59). As a consequence, one of the recommendations of the report is to formulate "a clear articulation of the connections, commonalities and intersections between dealing with the past and broader reconciliation processes at individual, community, political and societal levels [to] replace the current siloing of dealing with the past and relationship-building processes into separate grant programmes, policy documents and community projects" (129).

It can be argued that what INCORE describes here has been taking place at community level over the years. The large participation of groups and individuals in public consultations shows the wide interest in dealing with the past that exists in Northern Ireland and the relevance granted to such a process. A poll commissioned by the Commission for Victims and Survivors in 2009 showed that 63% agreed that it was important to deal with the past in order to move on and 74% that it should be done in a way to promote reconciliation (CVS, 2009: 28-29). Much of the work on dealing with the past is done at community level. Storytelling in particular, where people share their personal experience of the conflict, is common practice across a broad range of local groups, be they special interests groups such as victims, ex-offenders' or women's groups, or broader intra or cross-community groups. Such projects are not necessarily branded as dealing with the past projects, but still partake in societal healing and the collective need to address the legacy of conflict, especially in the absence of a consensus on a narrative of the past and of a top-down mechanism to address it. Projects which have recently attracted academic attention include *Towards Healing and Understanding in Derry~Londonderry* (Shea, 2010) or the *Ballymurphy Commemorative Trail* (Wing, 2010).

## 2 Healing Through Remembering's contribution to the debate on dealing with the past in Northern Ireland

Healing Through Remembering has been an important actor in dealing with the past as its own *raison d'être* was "to identify and document possible mechanisms and realisable options for healing through remembering for those people affected<sup>2</sup> by the conflict in and about Northern Ireland" (HTR, 2002: iii). The organisation grew out of an event jointly organised in 1999 by Victim Support Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders – Dr Alex Boraine, then Deputy Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, was invited to Northern Ireland to reflect on the South African post-conflict experience and its relevance to the local situation. The ensuing discussion between Dr Boraine and attendees resulted in a report, *All Truth is Bitter*, published in 2000. The report recommended that "a detailed and representative process of discussion and development of how truth may be explored" should take place (VSNI and NIACRO, 2001: 34). A number of individuals interested in pursuing and structuring the discussion then came together and agreed to become the Healing Through Remembering Project Board in 2001, with the plan to carry out a public consultation to answer the following question:

**How should people remember the events connected with the conflict in and about Northern Ireland and in so doing, individually and collectively contribute to the healing of the wounds of society? (HTR, 2002: iii).**

The founding document of Healing Through Remembering is the resulting report, published in 2002, which details recommendations based on the discussions had and a further 108 written submissions. The Report concluded that various processes of "remembering, reflecting, informing and educating" (HTR, 2002: vii) were necessary for individual and societal healing. The Healing Through Remembering Project Board decided to continue its work by appointing Sub Groups in charge of exploring each recommended strategy or mechanism, namely:

- A Network of Commemoration and Remembering Projects
- A Day of Reflection
- Collective Storytelling and Archiving Process
- Acknowledgment and Truth Recovery
- A Living Memorial Museum.

While this dissertation is mostly interested in the work of the Living Memorial sub-group, as detailed in the next chapter, all five mechanisms are, as often stated by Healing Through Remembering, interrelated and overlap to some extent.

Over the years, each sub-group has reflected, carried out consultations and published material on their respective themes.<sup>3</sup> Healing Through Remembering also responded to consultations on dealing with the past, notably those carried out by the Northern Irish Affairs Committee in 2005, the Consultative Group on the Past in 2009 and the OFMDFM in 2010 (NIAC, 2005ii; CGP, 2010; Healing Through Remembering, 2010a). Its message has constantly been focused on the need to deal with the past, the necessity for the whole of society to be involved in the process by acknowledging their own responsibilities and reflecting on various experiences, as well as the necessity of combining reflection, commemoration, information and education – the idea being that a shared future can only find its foundations in an informed knowledge of the past.

Because it represents and acknowledges the diversity of backgrounds and experiences of conflict in Northern Ireland; because it makes decisions based on collaborative and participative work; because it does not address groups with specific interest but considers that the whole of society could benefit from and take part in addressing the legacy of the conflict; in other words because it provides keys for civilised dialogue between opposite opinions on difficult issues, Healing Through Remembering has built up a solid local and international reputation. Its initial consultation process in 2001-2002 has been hailed as "the most thorough

<sup>2</sup> In 2002, "affected by the conflict" in the language of Healing Through Remembering included the whole of society. This acceptance was later changed to include victims and survivors and ex-prisoners only.

<sup>3</sup> All Healing Through Remembering publications are available in pdf format on the following page <http://healingthroughremembering.info/index.php/resources/reports> (accessed July 28 2012).

public and civil society investigation to date of strategies for dealing with the past” (Hamber, 2002: 1088). The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee described its recommendations as “a very bracing renewal agenda for any society” in its 2005 consultation/report on ways of dealing with the past (NIAC, 2005i: 16). In the contributions made to the same consultation, the Community Relations Council fully endorsed Healing Through Remembering’s idea that the whole of society should participate in dealing with the past (NIAC, 2005ii: ev35) and Brandon Hamber, representing Democratic Dialogue, fully supported Healing Through Remembering’s holistic approach (NIAC, 2005ii: ev 202). In 2009, the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland commented that Healing Through Remembering was “widely regarded locally and internationally as amongst the best known and most influential local specialist organisations working on dealing with the past issues” (Gormally and McEvoy, 2009: 23). The same year, the previously mentioned INCORE report was also perfectly in line with Healing Through Remembering’s vision in stressing the need to articulate dealing with the past with good community relations (Kelly, 2012). Healing Through Remembering’s work has therefore been instrumental in shaping the debate and the vocabulary used about dealing with the past in Northern Ireland, with expressions such as “non-piecemeal approach”, “society-wide” being now frequently used. Its influence is certainly most visible in the language employed by Consultative Group on the Past and its recommended Day of Reflection and Reconciliation, directly inspired by Healing Through Remembering’s similar initiative. In a less openly acknowledged way, it can be argued that the organisation has influenced political parties to engage with the issue by issuing legacy policies or appointing legacy officers. The Alliance Party has long been the champion of a broad discussion on dealing with the past in Stormont (Long, 2011), yet Healing Through Remembering’s language pervades that of other political parties too. This is exemplified by a recent statement of the Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness, reflecting on the violence perpetrated in the summer of 1972:

**It is my firm view that we need to find a better way of dealing with the legacy of the conflict which goes beyond individual acts of commemoration or remembrance and begins to deal with the very real hurt that exists throughout our society. (BBC, 31 July 2012)**

The organisation has been gradually drawn away from its initial remit as a think tank looking into ways of promoting dialogue on the past into hands-on events planning. In 2007, it promoted a pilot Day of Reflection on June 21st. The evaluation of the event showed that there was a strong popular demand for such reflective moments (HTR, 2008b) and the initiative has been repeated every year since. While Healing Through Remembering would like the project to be embraced by other actors in the community, it finds that the trust for organising the event is with the institution. This somewhat defeats its effort to encourage proactive engagement with the past but the positive feedback on the event outbalances this and it is hoped that the organisation’s patronage of the Day of Reflection can gradually be reduced (Turner, 2012). Healing Through Remembering also completed a PEACE II funded project, “Diverse Past, Shared Future, Expanding the Debate” reaching out to less-engaged audiences in 2008 (Gormally and McEvoy, 2009: 31-32; HTR, 2008d: 14-15). A result of this project was to develop a set of *Principles on Dealing the Past* (HTR, 2008a) as well as *A Conversation Guide on Dealing with the Past* (HTR, 2008e) to be used by groups and organisations wishing to develop dealing with the past activities. A final hands-on experiment is the ‘Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict’ exhibition considered in this dissertation, which has grown out of the work of the Living Memorial Museum Sub Group.

This brief overview of Healing Through Remembering’s values and work over the last decade shows it is a rigorous, respected and influential actor when it comes to addressing the legacy of the conflict. Before launching into a close analysis of the exhibition and an assessment of its possible influence, it is necessary to chart the role and contribution of museums in relation with dealing with the past.

### **3 Engaging with the past? Museums in Northern Ireland.**

Northern Ireland has a relatively young museum sector. A 1983 report on the museum provision in the region considered that only 6 museums complied with the International Council of Museums’ standards (Museums and Galleries Commission, 1983: 19), compared with today’s 42 accredited museums. Most of Northern Ireland’s museums thus appeared and developed at the end of the conflict and beginning of the post-conflict era. Their engagement with the past has had two specificities: museums have strived to remain “oases of calm” or “neutral environments” (Buckley and Kenney, 1994) and there has been an avoidance, at least until the early 2000s, to represent conflictual history in exhibitions and galleries, because of its divisive potential (Crooke, 2001a). This was true of older historical episodes, such as the Famine, the 1641 rising or the 1690s Williamite/Jacobite war, but even truer of the recent conflict. The common point between all these historical events is the multiple narratives and constant historical debates around them, as well as their being used as



markers of cultural identity. The recent conflict in Northern Ireland shares the same characteristics but, without the distance of time, is even more highly politically and emotionally loaded. As a result, representation of it in museums or exhibitions has been all the more challenging. It is to be noted that the Tower Museum, opened in Derry~Londonderry in 1992 and run by Derry City Council, was an early exception, with a parallel display of unionist and nationalist perspectives of the crucial 1900-1920 period and a film on the recent history of the city.

Since the mid-1990s, the engagement of museums with the past has been done through the prism of community relations, with a focus on cultural diversity and similarities (Buckley and Kenney, 1994; Crooke, 2001a: 126-131, 2007b: 95-108). This was encapsulated in a review of the main museums in 1995, which argued that "museums have an important role to play in developing cross-community contact in neutral settings" (Wilson, 1995: 49). In the second half of the 1990s, the Community Relations Council and the Northern Ireland Museums Council organised touring exhibitions, respectively on "Symbols" of cultural identities (1994) and "Local Identities" (1999-2000), thereby moving away from the strict "oases of calm" position and providing a space for mutual discovery and possible dialogue, even if on a temporary basis. The contribution of museums to good community relations was furthered in the following decade, as it combined with New Labour cultural policies focusing on the social role of museums (Dodd and Sandell, 2001), themselves influenced by a seminal report on museums and social inclusion (GLLAM, 2000), and as social inclusion was understood to mean better community relations in a Northern Ireland context (Crooke, 2001b). Consequently, it is not surprising to find museums mentioned in 'A Shared Future' policy in 2005. Along with the setting up of a common national curriculum, museums were seen as tools to "encourage understanding of the complexity of our history" (OFMDFM, 2005: 10). They were to contribute to good relations by building collections and setting up exhibitions and educational programmes representative of the cultural diversity and interests of the communities they served (OFMDFM, 2005: 33). Indeed, educational programmes have been at the core of the outreach work of museums. For instance, in 2008-2009, 17 museums carried 48 educational programmes broadly geared at good community relations, reconciliation and mutual understanding (NIMC, 2009: 33), partly spurred by the focus of funding programmes on such outcomes. The Northern Ireland Museums Council itself set up a training scheme funded by PEACE II to develop community-relations skills among curators (Crooke, 2001b: 69). It recommended the continuation of outreach programmes in museums and that:

**NIMC and museums reinforce their links with the community and voluntary sector with a view to advocating the benefits of museums' learning activity as a valuable component in community development, building good relations and in extolling the benefits of cultural diversity. (NIMC, 2009: 33)**

The more recent – but belated compared to other UK regions – Northern Ireland Museums Policy, setting out directions for the museum sector for the coming years, enshrined the broad social role of museums in the following terms:

**Museums can make a very important contribution to a shared and better future for all based on equity, diversity, interdependence and mutual respect. They can reflect and promote understanding of the history, culture and people of the region and beyond. They can be catalysts for bringing communities together both physically and through formal and informal opportunities to explore the complexities of history and culture. (DCAL, 2011: 6)**

Museums have been firmly included in community relations strategies but less openly present in the debate on dealing with the past. Commenting on the Northern Ireland museum sector in 2001, Elizabeth Crooke observed that:

**There has been little open discussion about what role Northern Ireland museums can contribute, if anything, to the peace process. The museum sector, which has such an important role in the representation of people in Northern Ireland, has, in general, played a passive role where debate about cultural and political identities is concerned. (Crooke, 2001b: 70)**

Since then, it can be argued that museums have certainly engaged with the past in much of their outreach work, such as storytelling or community history projects (Crooke, 2010). Yet, as underlined above by INCORE, the articulation between good relations and dealing with the past – in other words between addressing the symptoms of division and setting them in the historically specific Northern Ireland context – is not always clearly made. This is clear, for instance, from the limited number of permanent exhibitions engaging with the legacy of the conflict.

At the time of the Belfast Agreement and until recently, the Tower Museum in Derry~Londonderry – opened in 1992 – was the only museum in Northern Ireland to include the conflict in its permanent exhibition, in the form of a film about the recent history of the city. This inclusion had the virtue of existing even if, understandably as the conflict was still ongoing, it separated it from the rest of the history of the city by giving it a special artefact-free interpretation. When in 1995 the museum tried to include artefacts in its exhibition, namely a former IRA rifle, it was accused of republican propaganda and had to remove it (Cooke, 2001a: 126). It remains to be seen whether the Tower Museum will feel the need to review the way it displays the legacy of the conflict in Derry~Londonderry in the coming years. Arguably, the guided tours and educational programmes on offer engage with the issue. In any case, the Tower Museum can be considered as a pioneer for including the recent conflict in its exhibition from its inception, even before the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994.

In contrast, the main national museum in Northern Ireland, the Ulster Museum, did not include any post-partition history in its permanent exhibition until it closed its history gallery in 2001. The permanent exhibition was replaced by successive temporary exhibitions until the museum closed for refurbishment in 2006. Two of them are worth mentioning, as a sign that the ever-changing narrative of the past led to “the presentation of history in the museum [...] being tested, sampled and evaluated” (Cooke, 2007: 310). An exhibition entitled “Icons of identity” ran from 2000, exploring the myths and realities behind nine Irish icons, from the Virgin Mary to King William III to Edward Carson and Michael Collins. Another, called “Conflict: The Irish at War”, started in 2003 and was extended repeatedly until 2006. It covered the history of conflict in Ireland in the last 10,000 years, including the 1912-23 period, the two World Wars and the Troubles (Parkhill and Ferguson, 2004; Houlihan, 2006).



Picture 2.1: “Conflict: The Irish at War” at the Ulster Museum (Source: Houlihan, 2006)

The “Irish at War” exhibition was part of an outreach programme, for which the Ulster Museum had an Outreach officer funded by PEACE II and administered by the Community Relations Council (Parkhill, 2008). The programme also included oral history workshops on the recent conflict and public lectures on the role of museums in divided societies but its main innovation was the multiple-perspective interpretation offered by panels and audio-guides (Picture 2.1), as well as the comment wall which was kept up throughout the duration of the exhibition (Reid, 2005: 216). Because of this promising new take on the past, expectations were high about the new “Troubles gallery” that opened in 2009 in the newly refurbished museum. Disappointment and controversy broke out at the minimalist and over-cautious contents of the gallery, which only contained text and pictures, where the “Conflict” exhibition has displayed artefacts, including ones used in the recent conflict. Adopting a very minimalist approach, the “Troubles gallery” is a series of thematic panels following a rough chronological timeline, closer to a series of fact files than a proper narrative of the conflict (Picture 2.2). Despite involving academics and community workers in an advisory panel and plans for a rich interpretative exhibition that had leaked in the press, the museum seemed to have suffered from institutional cold feet at the time of reopening (Bigand, 2011). The museum is currently working on improving the gallery, but the fact remains that no national museum engages with the legacy of the conflict in a way that could promote societal healing.



Picture 2.2 – The “Troubles” Gallery at the Ulster Museum

At the other end of the spectrum in terms of engagement with the conflict is the Museum of Free Derry, whose purpose, as described on its website, is to give “the community’s story told from the community’s perspective, not the distorted version parroted by the government and most of the media over the years” (MFD website), on a time-scope ranging from the civil rights movement of the 1960s to events of 1972 including Bloody Sunday and the invasion of the Free Derry area with Operation Motorman. The museum was set up by the Bloody Sunday Trust in 2006 as part of its campaign for truth-recovery and acknowledgement of responsibility for the Bloody Sunday deaths, at a time when the Saville Inquiry into the events was still underway. It displays objects loaned or donated by relatives of the victims (Picture 2.3). The narrative given is highly subjective and does not attempt to offer multiple perspectives on the period. It is one of what Kris Brown has termed the “sectional museums” in Northern Ireland which “represent one communal, group or political voice” (Brown, 2008: 31).



Picture 2.3 – Museum of Free Derry (source [http://www.visitderry.com/vd/?page\\_id=47](http://www.visitderry.com/vd/?page_id=47))

Brown argues that with a single-perspective narrative and a defensive message, such museums serve to foster the community's self-confidence and cohesion, memorialize its difficult past and redress the wrongs it endured. Because they do not acknowledge the possibility of multiple narratives, sectional museums fit awkwardly in the museum world – the Museum of Free Derry has been granted an interim accreditation by the Heritage Council in Eire but is not yet a registered museum in Northern Ireland – as well as in the debate about dealing with the past. Yet they can be seen as an intra-community storytelling activity, which serves the empowerment and healing of that community. The work done by the Museum of Free Derry is a mechanism for dealing with the past, as revealed by the curator's approach to the conflicting versions of the past:

**What we should be aiming for is a point where we understand and acknowledge the different perceptions and they become something that we can discuss, rather than fight about. But to get to that point we need to know what they all are. So we are doing it in this area, but we need others to do the same. (Redfern, 2010: 22)**

Apart from the Museum of Free Derry, museums in Northern Ireland have shied away from proactively engaging with the background for the conflict and its legacy in today's society. Many have engaged in valuable community relations and outreach work, but the limited number of permanent exhibitions on the conflict and the controversial nature of two of them – one for its lack of engagement, the other for its overt activism in favour of one community – make the difficulty of the task all the more obvious. Healing Through Remembering's current exhibition on 'Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict' has been specifically designed to offer multiple perspectives on the conflict, with minimal curatorial control. The devising, curating and designing process of the exhibition is the subject of the following chapter.

## Chapter 3 A Living Memorial Museum of the Conflict in and about Northern Ireland? Healing Through Remembering's Theory and Practice.

The 'Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict' exhibition was devised by the Living Memorial Museum Sub Group, one of the five entities of Healing Through Remembering. A permanent Living Memorial Museum was one of the five recommended mechanisms for dealing with the past in the organization's initial report, with the view that:

**The Living Memorial Museum will serve as a dynamic memorial to all those affected by the conflict and keep the memories of the past alive. It will also provide a diverse chronicle of the history of the conflict in and about Northern Ireland, increase public awareness of the impact of the conflict, disseminate information and provide educational opportunities ensuring lessons are learned for the future. (HTR, 2002: 46)**

The choice of words is worth commenting. The stress on the "living/dynamic/alive" nature of the future project suggests an underlying criticism of the then museum sector and commemorative processes, and is therefore a commitment to promote a different approach. The stress is also put on the necessity of a multiple-perspective approach to telling the conflict, away from a single narrative, as well as the informing and educating mission of the project.

This chapter describes how the 'Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict' exhibition came to be by reviewing the work of the Living Memorial Museum Sub Group since its inception in 2004. It also describes the principles governing it and its curatorial specificities.

### 1 Living Memorial Museum of the Conflict in and about Northern Ireland – genealogy of an idea

The origins of the idea for a Living Memorial Museum are to be found in the consultation and discussion that led to the report. Like the other remembering processes, a Living Memorial Museum was about recognition and acknowledgement, promoting better understanding of the causes and impact of the conflict, challenging set views and empowering people by enabling them to reflect on their own experience and that of others (HTR, 2002: 19-20). It is interesting that the suggestions for a memorial and for a museum were incorporated into one recommendation. Choosing not to dissociate the commemorative and educative dimensions may be seen as a way to avoid ill-informed commemoration through the continuation of myths, and to encourage personal reflection and engagement with the museum.

No strict definition of a Living Memorial Museum is provided in Healing Through Remembering's report, purposely since the point was to define what it could be. It can be seen as a collage of two compound concepts, the "living memorial" and the "memorial museum", which have been relatively well theorized. Living memorials are to be contrasted to traditional commemorating monuments or statues in that they can take the form of any civic space, such as community centres, libraries or parks. Calls for living memorials notably emerged in the USA after the two World Wars, and resulting projects contributed to urban renovation and community empowerment (Shanken, 2002). The focus of a living memorial is on the present rather than the past:

**As a stimulant and organiser of collective memory, a memorial has as its purpose official history, the maintenance of a national or local narrative. A living memorial departs from these roles. In lieu of official history, it promotes the present; collective memory yields to collectivity or collective experience, and the marking of time gives way to "living". (139)**

Memorial museums are usually dedicated to represent and commemorate mass suffering. Adopting a "never again" approach, they share the same focus on the present and the living rather than the past and the dead, as they "attempt to mobilize visitors as both historical witnesses and agents of present and future political vigilance" (Williams, 2011: 220). Itself a compound, the phrase "memorial museum" suggests a different approach to history than traditional memorials or history museums, bringing together "both a moral framework to the narration of terrible historical events and more in-depth contextual explanations to commemorative acts" (Williams, 2007: 8).

While the characteristics and specificities of a Living Memorial Museum of the conflict in and about Northern Ireland were to be thought out and refined through the work of the Living Memorial Museum Sub Group, the “never again” agenda and community-oriented mission linked to living memorials and memorial museums are present in Healing Through Remembering’s recommendation. The submissions supporting the idea of a museum or an exhibition also further called for a dynamic museum by stressing the need for frequently changing displays to encourage repeat visits (HTR, 2002: 25). Some suggested separate sections representing different backgrounds, that visitors could choose to visit or not, depending on how ready they were to engage with alternative perspectives on the conflict (25- 26). This idea was included in the final recommendation, with the mention that such separation might be necessary in the early days of the museum but could hopefully be reviewed once visitors’ self-confidence in their story could allow them to embrace others. The recommendation also mentioned the idea of a community gallery to house a rotating community-curated exhibition (47) as part of a “dynamic” museum and to foster community-empowerment. Two other planned outcomes of a Living Memorial Museum need mentioning: it could serve as a metaphor for a shared future in Northern Ireland by showing that, if tolerance and sensitivity were used, various backgrounds could be juxtaposed and cohabit within the same space; it could also serve as a model and resource place for other institutions, by documenting the process of its establishment and making it part of the exhibition (47). The museum was to be a “peaceful”, “reflective” and “safe” place, but the notion of a “neutral place”, often advocated for Northern Ireland’s museums (Buckley and Kenney, 1994), was nowhere to be seen.

## 2 The Living Memorial Museum Sub Group’s work and its impact on museums

The Living Memorial Museum Sub Group was established in 2004 and is composed of members of the Healing Through Remembering board as well as co-opted academics, museum practitioners and community workers. Through regular meetings, nearly monthly in the first three years of its existence, the Sub Group reflected on how to implement the recommendation of the report. The minutes of the meetings reveal discussions about the current political situation in Northern Ireland, especially after the Assembly was restored in 2007 and the debate on dealing with the past picked up. The Sub Group also supervised the creation of an archive about national and international examples of museums and memorials in post-conflict societies. Field trips were taken to museums across Northern Ireland, Great Britain and in Berlin to inform the reflection on museum designs, contents and best practices. The Sub Group also kept updated about academic debates on museums in post-conflict societies, with members regularly representing it at conferences and seminars. It organised its own seminars, in collaboration with the Institute of Irish Studies in Queen’s University, Belfast, as well as a conference “Should we put history behind glass?”, in April 2008. Reflecting on how to implement a Living Memorial Museum of the conflict implied gauging its relevance and feasibility. Between 2004 and 2008, two main projects of the Sub Group served to “kickstart the debate” (LMM, 2005) about a memorial/museum on the conflict and define what form it could take. An Open Call for Ideas was launched about the concept, contents and design of a Living Memorial Museum of the conflict. It resulted in the publication of the *Without Walls* report in November 2007, as well as five Displays Books regrouping the submissions received (HTR, 2007). In parallel, collaboration with the Institute of Irish Studies at Queen’s University secured a two-year research fellowship to carry out an audit into private and public collections, as little was known at the time of the material culture associated with the conflict that was available (HTR, 2008c: 5). The audit took place throughout 2006 and 2007. It resulted in an extensive online database of artefacts hosted on the CAIN website<sup>4</sup>, as well as an *Artefacts Audit* report published in April 2008 (HTR, 2008c).

Both projects illustrate the participative nature of Healing Through Remembering’s work, seeking and valuing the voices of communities, and its focus on process rather than result alone. The Open Call for Ideas took place between June and September 2006, in the form of public and private workshops organised throughout Northern Ireland, Dublin and London, as well as an open call for submissions. About 75 contributions from individuals, organisations or workshop participants were submitted, collectively drawing the portrait of what a museum of the conflict might be. Pregnant in the submission is a sense of distrust towards traditional museums in being able to represent the conflict in a dynamic, non-elitist, accessible manner that would engage the community at large. Issues about control and ownership were raised as to the story told (HTR, 2007: 13-14). The contributions broadly agreed that the emphasis should be put on people’s stories alongside – or sometimes rather than – more conventional academic interpretation (12). The submissions amounted to a reflection and definition of the role of a museum: the building was deemed less important than the outreach and educational programmes on offer and the principle that “participants in

<sup>4</sup> <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/htr/> (accessed 8 August 2012)

history should represent it for themselves” (20). Creating a dynamic museum meant including multiple rather than a single narrative, engaging community by devolving curatorial control to them and having mobile – ie, travelling, changing or multi-site – exhibitions (24). It is worth noticing also that there was no systematic support for the association between museum and memorial, although no strong disagreement about it (27). A common point of many contributions, whether related to a museum or a memorial, was to reflect on “ways to allow private reflection in public spaces” (28). Interestingly, the contributions reflected both global recent trends in museology with an approach focused on visitors rather than artefacts, as well as a very local frustration or fear of being robbed of one’s story or not having it told. From that perspective, the report was not only a tool to further the idea of a museum but also a sign of people’s engagement in the debate about dealing with the past.

Similarly, the *Artefacts Audit* contributed to the debate by charting the material culture related to the conflict and making the information accessible to the community. Seventy-nine public and private collections from across the UK and the Republic of Ireland are represented in the audit and database (HTR, 2008c: 54-61). Curators of public institutions and private collectors provided information as to the number and type of conflict-related artefacts they owned, the period and groups represented, as well as their collecting policy (11). They also gave more specific description of their star items and most relevant artefacts. In total, the audit found that 424,395 conflict-related artefacts were accessible in the seventy-nine collections, of which 246,435 were photographic images. Conflict-related artefacts were defined to include “object[s], artwork, poster[s], correspondence and personal papers, audio and film recording[s], photograph[s], or printed ephemera”, but exclude “books, pamphlets, newspapers or magazines unless there is a particular historical importance attached to a given item” (14). Most collectors/curators were still actively collecting conflict-related artefacts and happy to consider further collaboration with other collections to display material (52). Given the scale of the research and results, the *Artefacts Audit* report, initially intended as an internal document, was widely distributed (5). Apart from being an invaluable tool for museum practitioners and researchers, the audit also served to promote the development of a Living Memorial Museum and to create a network between the various collections. The collectors/curators’ interest and support to the project of a Living Memorial Museum is visible in their continuous engagement with Healing Through Remembering and the Living Memorial Museum Sub Group, notably in lending objects for the ‘Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict’ exhibition.

These two publications marked the end of a cycle for the Living Memorial Museum Sub Group. Before moving on to further developments of the Sub Group’s work, a brief appraisal of the impact of these documents is needed. The set of Open Call for Ideas Display Books, regrouping the submissions in text and image forms, was circulated in seminars and workshops throughout 2007 and 2008 in the hope of generating some feedback in a Comment Book. Although only limited feedback was gathered (LMM, 2008), the conversation about a Living Memorial Museum continued in other forms, notably in the abovementioned “Should we put history behind glass?” conference. More importantly, the conversation had started, and major institutions were taking part in it. The Ulster Museum, for instance, sent a submission to the Open Call for Ideas, mentioning its recent outreach work on the “Irish at War” exhibition and recognising the necessary redefinition of its role:

**The increased visitor engagement we have undertaken, much of it with communities seriously affected by violence, has indicated the extent to which it is now desirable, perhaps even necessary, for a museum to see itself as having a more self-conscious role in helping, in the Northern Ireland post-conflict context, to foster a greater degree of cross-community tolerance while at the same time maintaining its curatorial integrity. (HTR, 2007: 17)**

Elsewhere, Trevor Parkhill, then Keeper of History at the Ulster Museum, acknowledged the challenge that Healing Through Remembering’s report represented for the museum world but also its influence on the Ulster Museum’s outreach work (Parkhill, 2008: 27). Later, the Ulster Museum used the *Artefacts Audit* in the preliminary work for the Troubles Gallery, before the decision to display artefacts was overturned (Brown, 2012).

### 3 From Living Memorial Museum to 'Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict' exhibition – putting ideas into practice

The *Without Walls* report, its accompanying Display Books and the *Artefacts Audit* report and database showed the relevance and feasibility of Healing Through Remembering's initial recommendation. The organisation also joined the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, which brings together museums or historic sites "dedicated to remembering past struggles and addressing their contemporary legacy" (ICSC website). The coalition's activist take on museum practice is an overt critique of traditional memorial museums – the goal of the coalition is to "transform historic site museums from places of passive learning to places of active citizen engagement" (Williams, 2007: 149). Pending the creation of the Living Memorial Museum, Healing Through Remembering joined the coalition as a non-site, sharing as it did the other members' will to deal with the past and involve the community in the conversation. This allowed members of the Sub Group to attend events organised by the coalition, thereby raising the international profile of the Living Memorial Museum project and of Healing Through Remembering (HTR, 2011d: 13).

In order to deliver a rounded package of ideas and principles for the implementation of the project, the Living Memorial Museum Sub Group continued working towards a proposal or blueprint for a Living Memorial Museum. Yet the Sub Group met difficulties in reaching a consensus on a written document to be used by other institutions or individuals interested in setting up a museum or exhibition on the conflict. It was felt that the limits of abstract discussion had been reached. This apparent stalling of the Sub Group coincided with an uncertain future for the organisation, as further funding was unsure towards the end of 2008. When funding was once more secured in 2009, the Living Memorial Museum Sub Group came to the conclusion that the conversation could only revive through practical implementation and therefore moved away from the proposal/blueprint project. Instead, the idea emerged of putting up an exhibition using the *Artefacts Audit* and recommendations from the Open Call for Ideas (LMM, 2009). The theme of 'Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict' was suggested and agreed on as the "big idea" for the exhibition, or "single focus that unifies all its parts" (Serrell, 1996: 1). Building on the suggestions from the Open Call for Ideas, a travelling/multi-site exhibition was considered from the start of the discussion.

In 2010, while funding applications were being sent and considered, expression of interest was sought from all the collectors/groups/institutions that had taken part in the *Artefacts Audit*. While some did not answer, none gave a negative answer to this first call, thereby allowing for further planning (HTR, 2010b: 9). Although the details of the contents and design of the exhibition were yet to be decided, the purpose of the project is described in Healing Through Remembering's Annual Report for 2010:

**It is hoped that the exhibition will provide a collective space where a variety of different histories and experiences are represented, a space that fosters dialogue, promotes peace- building and creates a living record of how people's everyday lives were touched by the conflict. (9)**

The project gained momentum in the spring of 2011 when funding was finally secured and a new call to collectors/curators took place. The Living Memorial Museum Sub Group continued discussing different issues, including insurance, staffing and venues. The will to have a mobile exhibition, as recommended in the Call for Ideas, was epitomized by the suggestion of having the exhibition touring on a bus. The final decision was on a travelling exhibition, which allowed access to a wider audience and testing with different types of venues. The first meeting between the Living Memorial Museum Sub Group and the Collectors/Curators took place in June 2011, with a Coordinator/Curator<sup>5</sup> of the exhibition appointed in July 2011.

<sup>5</sup> This was the official title of the job description, suggesting a non-traditional approach to curating and highlighting Healing Through Remembering's usual participative process.



#### 4 'Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict' Exhibition – devising process and curatorial characteristics

Four joint Living Memorial Museum Sub Group and Collectors meetings took place over the course of 2011-2012 to set out the details of the exhibition and review its progress once it started. Again, a collective/participative process was adopted and highlighted in the organisation's literature as being as important as the end result, i.e. the exhibition itself. The joint meetings allowed discussion of several issues, including the choice of objects and venues, representation and interpretation, on which agreed criteria were reached in September 2011 (LMMC, 2011b).

Initially, each collector/curator interested in the project was asked to contribute one object. The definition of an everyday object was extended to include objects used everyday whose purpose was transformed by the conflict as well as conflict-related objects that became everyday objects (LMMC, 2011a). The choice of objects was left free except for certain restrictions. For instance, the selection was conditioned by the size of the display cases used – three relatively small cases were loaned by one of the collectors, which made the displaying of large objects impossible. Large objects were not considered a good option as they might distract attention from smaller objects. When objects did not fit in the cases and could not stand alone, it was agreed that photographic reproduction would be displayed. It was also decided the objects should be in good condition and not need conservation, as they were to travel and all venues might not meet strict relative humidity and temperature standards. Moreover, no object likely to present a security risk was to be displayed and visual displays – photographs, videos – were to be sensitively chosen not to show dead or injured people (LMMC, 2011b).

In keeping with the idea of reaching out to the widest possible audience, it was decided that venues should be geographically spread and not necessarily usually used for exhibitions – including churches, libraries and shop spaces. The museums and galleries that contributed objects to the exhibition were excluded as possible venues, not to favour one collection over another – this ruled out, de facto, the three museums which included the conflict in their permanent exhibition, namely the Ulster Museum, the Tower Museum and the Museum of Free Derry. Venues were to be community-focused and offer secure buildings for the display of objects (LMMC, 2011b).

As the exhibition was to include multiple perspectives of the conflict, there was a need to ensure a certain balance in what groups/backgrounds were represented. As the devising process progressed and there appeared to be a dearth of artefacts representing a unionist/loyalist perspective, specific collections were asked to contribute more than one artefact to the exhibition (White Hamilton, 2012a). With the emphasis on multiple narratives and with many collections involved in the project being single-identity collections, the issue of interpretation was crucial. It was decided that 60-word labels should be written by the collectors/curators for their objects, using non-offending and accessible language, while Healing Through Remembering would phrase the introductory panel. No veto was allowed on the phrasing of labels from other collectors/curators, but the grouping of objects was left in the charge of the coordinator/curator, with no veto allowed from collectors/curators (White Hamilton, 2012c).

A pilot exhibition, including only a few objects, was presented in Healing Through Remembering's offices for two weeks in November 2012 as a "taster event" (LMMC, 2011c). It also served as a formative evaluation for the project since visitors were encouraged to leave feedback about their preferred forms of presenting objects and stories as well as to suggest possible venues. People wishing to contribute an object to the exhibition were given the opportunity to get in touch with the coordinator/curator and facilitated workshops were organised with special interest groups, notably students in museums studies. This participative process helped to identify what worked best in the exhibition but also what was missing from it, notably rural and recent experiences – it was precious information that the coordinator/curator was able to address while setting up the complete exhibition in time for its tour of five venues starting in March 2012. It was also useful to generate interest in the project and empower visitors by asking for their contribution, thereby "enabling them to feel competent and confident" (Serrell, 1996: 132). The introductory text to the pilot exhibition set out what Healing Through Remembering sought to achieve with the forthcoming exhibition:

**It is hoped that the proposed exhibition will stimulate an interest in the original collections lending the objects, inform the debate on a Living Memorial Museum and dealing with the past, and also create a network of communication between the collections. [...] It is hoped that once the exhibition is displayed in various locations around Northern Ireland and beyond it will act as a catalyst to help open up a platform in which diverse voices and experiences of the conflict can be heard.**

This passage shows original outcomes for an exhibition that is less about supplying information about the conflict than about facilitating social interaction between visitors and collections, between collectors and between venues. It is presented as a trigger for further dialogue about the conflict, thereby as part of a wider process rather than an end in itself. The use of “everyday objects”, identified in research as a way to promote conversation in exhibitions is a case in point (Morrissey, 2002: 297 quoted in Black, 2005: 203). The exhibition is experimental too in that it is also a real-life test of the guiding principles for a Living Memorial Museum as defined by the Sub-Group through years of reflection and consultation. From its experimental outcomes and nature followed curatorial idiosyncrasies that are worth listing as they are rarely combined in the museum sector:

- deliberate choice of non-museum venues
- limited curatorial control of the organization on the choice of artefacts, chosen by the collectors/curators or contributed by the public
- limited curatorial control of the organization on the interpretation of displayed artefacts, epitomised by the use of quotation marks and the name of the writer being mentioned on the labels (Picture 3.1)
- emphasis put on process and feedback.

It is clear from this list that the ‘Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict’ exhibition challenged several conventional museum practices. The choice of non-museum venues can be interpreted as a literal outreach exercise where the exhibition goes to meet the visitor in venues that are familiar to them and their community rather than them coming to the sometime unfamiliar world of the museum. This is all the more interesting when the initial responses about the idea of a Living Memorial Museum showed a degree of mistrust in traditional museums. Going to more ordinary venues than a museum was a way to display proximity and interest in the community and possibly attract non-visitors. A lot of the exhibition’s specificities are to do with the question of authority and control. People who are uncomfortable in or with museums often are because they perceive it as “sites of authority”, as “the source of expert knowledge and visitors as the recipient of that expertise” (McLean, 2011: 70). Healing Through Remembering chose to display very limited curatorial expertise and control by not including any chronology or collections of facts in the exhibition. It does not impose a narrative of the conflict on its visitors, but rather offers them the space to explore different stories through an array of artefacts. This choice is adequate not only because there is no single accepted narrative of the conflict but also because the multiple voices represented in the exhibition allow for visitors to express their own. They can choose what they relate to or not and are under no perceived obligation to follow a prescribed narrative. This is especially important as the exhibition was intended for local populations who often had first-hand or second-hand experience of the conflict and whose stories were not always acknowledged in the past. Moreover, not only is visitor participation enabled but it is actively encouraged and valued by the presence of the feedback areas, where comments can be made visible, thereby making the visitors’ stories part of the exhibition too.



Picture 3.1: Label written by owner of object, offering personal interpretation of story.

For all its iconoclast characteristics, the 'Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict' exhibition does not lie outside current standards for museum practice. In particular, it was purposely designed to comply with the International Council of Museums and British Museums Association codes of ethics, both focused on the public service mission of museums to society or community (ICOM, 2006; MA, 2007). The 'Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict' exhibition complies with Healing Through Remembering's principles on dealing with the past (HTR, 2008a) and received financial support from the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, thereby suggesting that a different take on representing the conflict than a factual or sectional one is possible. It remains to be seen whether such experimental curating choices struck a chord with visitors' expectations of a representation of the conflict in an exhibition-environment. This will be the subject of our next chapter.

## Chapter 4 ‘Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict’ exhibition Venues, Contents, Layout and Feedback

The first two chapters served to define the background to and genesis of the ‘Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict’ exhibition. The purpose of this chapter is to look at it in detail. Venues, contents and layout will be presented here, with extra information in the appendix. The core of the chapter will be devoted to a qualitative analysis of the visitor feedback on the exhibition in order to assess their opinion of the exhibition and their experiences of it.

### 1 Venues

The main criteria for the choice of venues were their full accessibility and commitment to engage with all communities, as well as their offering a wide geographic spread. Calls for venues were posted on various websites and sent to mailing lists. The wallspace in the preview exhibition was dedicated to venue suggestions from visitors. Seventy venues were contacted individually by January 2012, of which 18 replied from Belfast, Derry~Londonderry and counties Fermanagh, Tyrone, Armagh, as well as Southern border counties Monaghan and Louth (White Hamilton, 2012a). A great deal of pragmatism had to be used in the final choice (Brown, 2012) to meet the criteria and the availability of the venues to host the exhibition for two to six weeks over the period March-August 2012.

The overview of dates and venues (Table 4.1) shows the diversity of environments tested by ‘Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict’ exhibition. The venues were reasonably spread geographically, as shown in the map below (Figure 4.1).

*Table 4.1. ‘Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict’ exhibition – venues and dates*

First Derry Presbyterian Church (Derry~Londonderry, NI)	5 March – 28 March 2012
Bell Architects’ studio (Ballymoney, Co. Antrim, NI)	12 April – 25 May 2012
Clones Library (Clones, Co. Monaghan, Republic of Ireland)	5 June – 28 June 2012
Strule Arts Centre (Omagh, Co. Tyrone, NI)	6 July – 21 July 2012
Exhibition shared over two sites in Belfast (Co. Antrim, NI): St Mary’s College (Falls road, nationalist/republican area) Spectrum Centre (Shankill Road, unionist/loyalist)	2 August – 11 August 2012



*Fig. 4.1. Map of venues*

As well as broad spatial coverage, the selected venues offered access to areas with various ethno-political backgrounds. Census statistics inform us on the distribution of the local population according to their community background (Catholic or Protestant and other Christian) in Northern Ireland and according to their religion in the Republic of Ireland. This information is included in the appendix (Appendix 5a: 51). It is somewhat unsatisfying as it perpetuates the “two traditions” reading of Northern Ireland, with Ballymoney being predominantly Protestant, Derry~Londonderry and Omagh predominantly Catholic, Clones nearly exclusively Catholic and Belfast more evenly mixed. I have chosen to include also the composition of local council to reflect the diversity of the concerned areas (Appendix 5b: 51). The different party systems in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland make for imperfect comparison between the venues in Northern Ireland and Clones but at least the background of four areas can be compared on similar terms. Nationalist parties have the majority of seats in Derry and Belfast City Councils as well as Omagh District Council, with a stronger SDLP than Sinn Féin presence in Derry~Londonderry. The Alliance Party is present in Belfast City Council only, while Unionist parties, including the Traditional Unionist Voice, largely dominate Ballymoney Borough Council. Clones Town Council offers a nearly even distribution between Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, Sinn Féin and independent candidates.

The variety of ethno-political backgrounds went together with a variety of experiences of the conflict in each area. Derry~Londonderry, Omagh and Belfast are obvious locations to host the exhibition, given how much their population was directly physically affected by the conflict, be it through iconic tragedies like Bloody Sunday in Derry~Londonderry, Bloody Friday in Belfast, both in 1972, or the Omagh bombing in 1998, or through a segregated urban landscape and underlying everyday violence, particularly in Derry~Londonderry and Belfast. Clones is a small border town in Monaghan, a county which was directly hit by a car bombing in its county town in 1974. The impact of the conflict on Clones included a non-fatal bomb attack in 1972 and was otherwise largely social and economic, the town suffering from the closure of cross-border roads and experiencing, according to the Chairman of the Clones Regeneration Partnership, “the stifling of economic development that has occurred in similar-sized towns in Northern Ireland because of the ‘Troubles’” (Morgan, 2012). Finally, efforts were made by the Coordinator/Curator, encouraged by the Living Memorial Museum Sub Group and Collectors/Curators, to find a venue in County Antrim after the first calls for venues did not return any for that county. A venue was eventually found in Ballymoney, a small town in North Antrim which was less directly affected by the conflict than the other Northern Ireland locations, with fourteen deaths recorded in the Sutton Index of Deaths from the conflict in Ireland (CAIN website). The death of three Catholic children, killed in the petrol bomb fire that destroyed their home in 1998, after the Belfast Agreement was signed, was the last but highly publicised incident in the town (BBC, undated).

With one church, a library, an arts centre, a college and a community centre, four out of five venues were definitely community-centred. The First Derry Presbyterian Church, located in a predominantly Catholic area, is well-known for its cross-community engagement, as exemplified by the cross-community ceremony that saw its reopening after restoration in May 2011 (Irish Times, 2011). Clones Library was declared the town inhabitants’ second favourite place in Clones in a recent community survey (Clones Community, 2012: 2), while the Good Relations Officer in Omagh was keen to host the exhibition in Strule Arts Centre (White Hamilton, 2012a). Similarly, Féile an Phobail in Belfast was keen to include the exhibition in its programme. Bell Architects’ studio in Ballymoney was the only venue that was not community-focused in its purpose. Yet the choice was made to host the exhibition there in response to suggestions made by visitors to use shop-windows, everyday locations par excellence. The architect agreed to host the exhibition and invigilate it while at work.

## 2 Contents and layout

The complete exhibition consisted of fifty-objects on loan from forty-four collections, although not all were displayed in each venue. The catalogue of the exhibition contains all the objects bar those brought in to the Coordinator/Collector after its publication. All objects are available to see on the exhibition website and, with their labels, on a dedicated Flickr gallery<sup>6</sup>.

Objects on loan included everyday objects whose purpose was transformed by the conflict, as well as conflict-related objects that became everyday. In the first category, one can quote the binlid used by women in West Belfast to warn about army patrols, bus tickets with security phone number printed on them or a jar

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.flickr.com/photos/healingthroughremembering/sets/72157628894614629/with/6915874805/> and <http://www.healingthroughremembering.org/everydayobjects/gallery/> (both accessed on August 16, 2012).

of marmalade with a 'William of Orange' label. In the second category can be included prison art objects, an RUC bulletproof clipboard or a riot helmet. A number of reproductions were included in the exhibition when the objects could not be displayed. Several photographs were also displayed, usually on walls rather than in cases. Placed on walls too was the series of twelve drawings by Brendan Ellis, showing scenes of passengers in black taxis. A few objects stood alone, notably the Relatives for Justice Quilt and a mixed media piece by local artist Rita Duffy, 'Veil', mixing prison doors with glass and salt (Picture 4.1). In some venues, some objects were also left out on tables for visitors to peruse or touch – such as the photo album by Vincent Dargan, the armoured clipboard and the bin lid – thereby enhancing, along with two audio recordings, the multi-sensory nature and “palette of approaches” needed to encourage visitor participation (Black, 2000: 206).

The basic touring material for the exhibition included:

- Four small display cases (dimensions of displaying space: W 0.64m x L 0.64m x H 0.60m)
- Four large display cases (dimensions: W 1.20m x L 0.60m x H 0.60m) mounted on pallets, after a design from a contemporary art exhibition at the Leopold Museum in Vienna (Leopold Museum website; Picture 4.1).
- An introductory panel explaining the nature and aims of the exhibition
- A feedback area, composed of a cylinder sitting on a table, on which feedback tags could be pegged. Evaluation sheets were also available on the table for visitors to fill in.
- A set of stands on which to display the objects to create volume within the display case and maximise the visibility and aesthetic impact.

In Derry~Londonderry and Omagh, a purpose-built wall was set up to display the framed pictures (Picture 4.1). In the other venues, they were hung on the exhibition area's walls (Ballymoney, Clones) or placed in cases (Belfast Spectrum Centre). In Clones and the Spectrum Centre, the venue's own cases were used instead of Healing Through Remembering's own (Appendix 6-7F: 52-58).



*Picture 4.1. Relatives for Justice Quilt and Veil standing alone, large display case on pallet stand and purpose-built wall for framed pictures. Derry~Londonderry.*

The size of the room, lighting conditions and presence of cases mean that the layout of the exhibition changed with each venue. The same is true of the way the objects were grouped in cases, with associations changing from one venue to the next, especially for the larger display cases. The contents of the small display cases were more stable as the back pane of the case was fitted with a stick-on picture giving some context about the objects. One case was dedicated to telling the story of Alex Bunting, a taxi driver injured by shrapnel, by displaying a newspaper cutting of his story, the WAVE Trauma Centre publication 'Injured on that Day' opened at the page featuring his picture and his account, and the pillbox containing the shrapnel – bent coins mostly – removed from his legs (Picture 4.2). A second case covered the theme of security, with objects such as the RUC torch or riot helmet and the “windows cleaned” card related to paramilitary protection money against the visual backdrop of a women holding a rifle to protect her farmer husband (Picture 4.2). A third case was used to display an old tape recording machine used by the pirate Radio Free Belfast – with adjoining CD playing one of the radio programmes (Picture 4.3). The last small case used a backdrop of

defaced political posters to deal with the theme of shared practices – objects displayed in that case included the defaced coins, postage stamps and/or pens (Picture 4.3). Three broad themes – “household/mundane objects”, “streetlife/riots”, “prison and protest” – were used in the first venue to regroup objects in the larger cases but they were not kept throughout the whole period the exhibition was travelling. In the next venues, an aesthetic approach was favoured over a strict thematic one, making sure cases were not too cluttered by objects and labels, or small objects overwhelmed by larger ones. Another concern was to constantly mix the backgrounds which the objects illustrated, thereby avoiding single-identity cases.

The list of objects and the collection they came from is included in the appendix (Appendix 6: 52). The table also shows how the objects were displayed and associated. The table is to be used with the floor plans provided in the appendix (Appendix 7a-7f: 53-58) and the online gallery. A colour code shows what objects were displayed where in the exhibition space but a full analysis of case contents and layout would go beyond the limits of this work.



Picture 4.2. Small display cases (Ballymoney)



Picture 4.3. Small display cases (Ballymoney)

### 3 Visitor Feedback

The diversity in venues, objects and layout trialled by the exhibition suggests a diversity of experiences for visitors. Visitor feedback contributed to a better understanding of who the exhibition attracted and their experiences of it. It helps to point out strengths and weaknesses of the exhibition.

#### 3.1 Visitor numbers

The success of the exhibition can first be evaluated through the number of visitors it attracted. Visitor numbers were monitored in different ways in the various venues. In the First Derry Presbyterian Church and St Mary's College in Belfast, close monitoring was possible as Healing Through Remembering volunteers were in attendance – likewise in Ballymoney, where Murray Bell was present in Bell architects' office. In Clones Library and the Spectrum Centre, only estimations are available. In Clones, the library staff estimated that all who entered the building had a look at the exhibition. There is a possibility of repeat visitors, although not necessarily of repeat viewings. The staff in the Spectrum Centre gave a guestimate of forty people going into the café everyday, with around a quarter on repeat visits. The table below shows the visitor numbers per venue, in relation to the duration of the exhibition.

	Duration in days	Visitor numbers (rounded)	Average number per day	Numbers monitored by
First Derry Presbyterian Church	18	600	33	HTR invigilators
Bell architects', Ballymoney	30	60	2	Murray Bell in office
Clones Library	17	2000	118	Library staff
Strule Arts Centre, Omagh	11	300 (e)	27	Front-of-house staff
Spectrum Centre, Shankill Rd, Belfast	7	210-80 (e)	30	Front-of-house staff
St Mary's College, Falls Rd, Belfast	9	300	33	HTR invigilators

Table 4.2. Visitor numbers (e=estimate)

Clearly, Clones Library was the most popular venue although there is no breakdown between single and repeat visits and between visits to the library and viewings of the exhibition. Ballymoney clearly shows a disappointing result, achieving the lowest visitor number while hosting the exhibition for the longest period. The cause might be the nature of the venue – visitors had to press a buzzer to make their way to the exhibition on the first floor of the building – but also the lack of clear signage to the exhibition - the pavement stand was tampered with when left on the narrow footpath so only a poster on the door signalled the exhibition. Moreover, the local museum's curator commented on a lack of interest in cultural events around the conflict, notably due to the perception that Ballymoney had not been affected by it as much as other areas had (White Hamilton, 2012c). The exhibition was shared over two sites in Belfast, but the figures do not say how many of the St Mary's visitors went to the Spectrum Centre, and vice-versa. A walking Connection Trail was organised to connect both sites, leaving at 2pm every day from each site and led by a Healing Through Remembering facilitator. Overall, forty-two people used the trail opportunity to visit the two parts of the exhibition (HTR, 2012b). Others did it of their own accord, but cannot be numbered here. Apart from the extremes of Clones and Ballymoney, the average number of visitors per day in the other venues is around thirty, which does not seem to advantage one venue or location over another and suggests similar levels of interest in the exhibition.



### 3.2 Visitor profile

Visitor numbers, along with visitor profile, allow for a first assessment of the exhibition. Visitor profile can be accessed by processing the personal data given by visitors at the back of the evaluation sheets (Appendix 2-4: 48-50). Items included place of residence, age group, gender, how visitors found out about the exhibition and whether they were on their own or accompanied. People were also given the opportunity to leave their personal contact details to be added to Healing Through Remembering's mailing list. The table gathering the information is presented in appendix (Appendix 8: 59), but with a sample of less than 60 responses per questions for all five venues, no generalisation could possibly be reliably made on the profile of visitors.

However, several facts may be commented upon. First of all, it is to be noted that while international visitors – from England, the USA, Austria, Germany and Sri Lanka, as well as from Brazil, Palestine and Uganda from the comment tags – did see the exhibition, it mainly attracted local visitors, which was its main target audience and the reason for the exhibition being a travelling one. Moreover, all age groups were represented rather evenly among respondents, except for the 17-26 age group. It is difficult to draw a conclusion as to the interest of that age group as they may well have chosen to write a comment tag instead, thereby not volunteering personal information. Word of mouth was the main source of information about the exhibition, as well as other organisations than Healing Through Remembering – including Derry City Council, Féile an Phobail and WAVE. This shows that the exhibition was not only for Healing Through Remembering supporters and that people talked about the exhibition to friends and relatives, enhancing it as a social experience. This is confirmed, finally, by the fact that most visitors were accompanied by friends and family on the day, while the second largest group had a more introspective experience by visiting on their own.

### 3.3 Visitors' opinion of the exhibition

The variety of feedback available, as explained in introduction, lends itself uneasily to quantitative evaluation. Rather, visitors were offered a range of ways to express their opinion on the exhibition and relate their own experience of it. I have chosen to distinguish here between what visitors say about the concept of the exhibition and their own experience. The first reason for this choice is the conceptual frame of reference (Black, 2005: 191) and curatorial specificities of the exhibition, as summarised in the introductory panel (Picture 4.4). It seems relevant to analyse what visitors made of it and whether they embraced the concept of a multiple perspective approach to the conflict. The second reason is that the data available is wide and suggests different ways for visitors to experience the exhibition.



Picture 4.4. Introductory panel (St Mary's College, Belfast)

Visitor feedback on the exhibition was overwhelmingly positive. Although the feedback from invigilators shows that a couple of visitors made comments that that part of history should be left in the past and not commemorated, none of those who left written feedback expressed that view. Evaluation sheets show a massive endorsement of the fact that "the exhibition creates a space in which diverse experiences of the conflict can be heard", with 73 out of 79 respondents answering yes to the first question asked. Analysing the

adjectives and comments passed on the exhibition – leaving out specific objects for the moment – helps to draw the visitors’ general impression of the exhibition. For a more practical reading, the 165 comments have been regrouped into categories, as follows:

- “Balanced/Inclusive”: good representation of all sides
- “Great”: general praise of the exhibition
- “Interesting”
- “Informative”
- “Moving”
- “Memory-stirring”
- “Not great”
- “One-sided”
- “Powerful”: strong impact of the exhibition, terms like “haunting”, “eye-opener”, “important”.
- “Positive”
- “Sad”
- “Space for reflection”
- “Thought-provoking”
- “Well-curated”: good presentation/display

Word clouds are a suitable format to our study as it offers a visual representation of data which is more practical than a quantitative table given the data and the possibility of multiple feedback forms per visitor. Figure 4.2 shows the visitors’ impressions of the exhibition – the bigger the word, the most commonly mentioned the impression.



Figure 4.2. Visitors’ impressions of the exhibition

Generic impressions were the most common, as shown by the size of the word “Great”. That the exhibition was interesting, balanced and brought back memories was then most likely to be underlined. Visitors then noted the exhibition was well-curated and thought-provoking. Fewer visitors commented on the exhibition being powerful, moving or informative, possibly because such impressions could be related to the previous categories. Allowing “space for reflection” is quite an elaborate comment to make and was therefore not often expressed although, as mentioned before, most visitors agreed that the exhibition did create such a space. More negative feedback occurred in a few cases, with a small number of visitors finding the exhibition sad, one-sided or not great. Looking at the comments in context, it appears that only the last two categories refer to visitors who clearly did not enjoy the exhibition. Visitors who found the exhibition one-sided included one who disagreed with the use of “security forces” to describe the army and the police, deeming it a politically-charged description (OEv9); another objected to the contents of the Radio Free Belfast which they considered biased against someone they obviously knew and regretted that an alternative view was not provided (OEv4); a third considered the exhibition “only shows one side of the conflict” without elaborating further (CT21). Finally, the only visitor who found the exhibition “Not great” was a schoolchild who explained: “I don’t really like history and stuff. I did not like it that much” (CT18).

More specific comments on the exhibition included remarks on the visual aspect of the exhibition, with the use of pallets as stands for display cases being praised several times (DT11, DT13, DT26, BMT14). The choice of venue was commented upon mainly in Ballymoney, a sign that the venue was more unusual and therefore more remarkable than the other ones. One visitor enjoyed the everydayness of the venue, commenting it added “an extra poignancy” (BMT7) while another remarked that the choice of an architect’s office resonated with the purpose of the exhibition as “architecture is about building and redesigning and conserving. The exhibition is about objects and memories to move on in the future. Buildings can also be used in a similar way” (BMT15). One visitor mentioned they would have liked to see the exhibition in a more public and accessible space, like the town’s civic centre (BMEv9). In other locations, the choice of venues was either not commented upon or embraced positively – the use of two venues in Belfast in particular generated positive feedback.

Fifteen feedback forms or tags express visitor’s gratitude for the exhibition and openly thanked or congratulated the organisers for putting it up, clearly a sign of their appreciation. Eight expressed a wish that the exhibition would expand and either travel further afield across the British Isles (CEv1, OEv10, OEv11, BFT1), be organised on a yearly basis in Northern Ireland (DT38) or made into a permanent exhibition (OT11, BFT13, BFT 20).

This first layer of analysis shows most visitors understood and embraced the multiple perspective approach of the exhibition. They recognised its utility and power, for younger generations and for outsiders who did not live through the conflict, but above all for society at large. In the words of the first visitor in Derry~Londonderry: “Delighted to have been the first visitor to the exhibition. Fantastic. May it bear much fruit, for the future of our people” (DLDT9).

This last comment shows the different elements available in visitor feedback – in this case a mixture of appraisal, emotion and reflection – the last two being triggered by the exhibition and constituting part of the visitor’s experience. Using the empirical framework set out by Pekarik, Doering and Karns to explore satisfying experiences in the Smithsonian museums (Pekarik, Doering, Karns, 1999), the feedback will now be analysed to define the visitors’ experiences of the exhibition.

### 3.4 Visitor feedback and personal experiences

The framework used to analyse the data was defined in the late 1990s through interviews with visitors about the experiences they expected to find in museums and exhibitions of the Smithsonian Institution. The empirical research resulted in a list of fourteen different satisfying experiences, regrouped into four strands, namely social, cognitive, object and introspective experiences.

#### 3.4.1 Social experiences

Looking for a social experience when visiting a museum or exhibition can mean either spending time with friends and family or seeing one’s children learn things (Pekarik, Doering, Karns, 1999: 159). As mentioned in the visitor profile section, most visitors saw the exhibition with friends or families, probably exchanging views and impressions on it. This is true also of the organised groups and workshop participants. It can even be

argued that the social dimension started even before people visited the exhibition since most respondents found out about it through word of mouth or organisations they were connected with. It certainly continued after the exhibition, when people recommended it to their friends and families. This does not appear as such in the feedback by visitors but it was noted by invigilators that visitors said they would either return with relatives or friends or recommend the exhibition to them (HTR, 2012a). The trail connecting the two sites of the exhibition in Belfast added to the social dimension of the exhibition for the visitors who took it with a Healing Through Remembering facilitator. One trail participant commented on the whole experience: “Eye-opening, interesting and engaging. Enjoyable speaking to other tour members of their experiences and thoughts. Very inclusive and broad” (HTR, 2012b).

Some visitors attended with children and some of the feedback ponders on how to inform the younger generations about the conflict, thereby mixing social and introspective experiences. One visitor reflected: “My six-year-old was full of questions. Where does one start? Such a complex story – but one that needs to be told” (OT10). An invigilator in Derry~Londonderry reported similar behaviour from a child and intention from the parent: “One man brought his son in hopes of passing on knowledge about the conflict, to ensure a peaceful future – his son asked: ‘is there more?’” (HTR, 2012a). The link between social and introspective experiences is clear in the following response to the question “How did the exhibition make you feel?”, by a man accompanied by his son, possibly the visitor referred to in the previous quote: “Glad that my son is not living through what I myself had to live through” (DLDEv17).

Schoolchildren visiting in groups also enjoyed a pleasant social experience, as shown by feedback seemingly unrelated to the exhibition but suggesting they had a good time with their friends: “Michael is cool” (CT19); “Andrew is cool” (CT20); “Katelyn ♥ Lilly” (CT28, last names withdrawn). In the case of that school group and another in Derry~Londonderry, social experience was mixed with cognitive and object experiences as children were teamed to write feedback on objects.

### 3.4.2 Cognitive experiences

Cognitive experiences as defined in the mentioned research are more about interpretation than the objects themselves. As a result, visitors looking forward to such experiences pay particular attention to contextualisation and labels. They enjoy the intellectual dimension of the experience which allows them to learn new information or enrich their own understanding (Pekarik, Doering, Karns, 1999: 157-8). This type of experience was tested by the third question of the evaluation sheet: “Did you learn anything new from this exhibition?” and also appears in the comment tags, as shown by the many who found the exhibition “interesting” or “informative”, as shown in Figure 4.2.

What people said they had learnt was both generic and specific. It ranged from a better general understanding of the conflict – some going as far as saying they understood “the real situation” (DLDEv15) – to learning about the role of women (BMEv9; DLDEv19). Yet most of the cognitive experiences were less about specific facts and events than broad interpretations or reinterpretations of the past. The exhibition was called an “eye-opener” by several visitors as it allowed people to get a sense of perspective and realize different traditions were affected by the conflict. This is exemplified by comments such as “both sides went through the same” (BSEv3), “all sides have a story to tell” (DLDEv14), “obviously when linked to one side of the community you only get to see and hear that side – the exhibition exposes both sides” (OEv7). Beyond communities and traditions, respondents also insisted on the experiences of groups, such as families and victims, and of individuals. They felt the exhibition showed a little known side of history – that of “the people” (BFEv3). A visitor commented that the human dimension of the conflict was often “forgotten by official and media narratives” (DLDT25). Another agreed the exhibition “adds the personal aspect to a history that affected a lot of people and doesn’t always get told” (BMT5).

Historical consciousness was also revealed in comments stressing the relevance, or absence thereof, of the past to the present and the future. One visitor wrote he had learnt “how the past can relate to the future” (DLDEv13) while another remarked “this is all history now” (CEv1). The difference in perspective may have had something to do with the profile of the two visitors – the former a man from Derry~Londonderry aged between 56-65, the latter a woman from Monaghan aged between 26-35. These two comments give us a taste of the generational and geographical gap in perception of the conflict. This aspect will be further explored in the section below.

### 3.4.3 Object experiences

Object experiences encompass a range of ways of engaging with the material culture of an exhibition. Visitors enjoy seeing the “real thing” or rare/uncommon/valuable things, being moved by beauty or thinking what it would be like to own such things. Finally, some like to engage with objects to continue their professional development (Pekarik, Doering, Karns, 1999: 157). All these experiences are represented to some extent in the visitor feedback.

Although visitors were not specifically asked to mention their favourite objects, the feedback points out some star objects. There was hardly any negative comment on the contents, apart from the visitor objecting to the tape recording of Radio Free Belfast – but not to the object itself. Only one child commented that she “did not like the explosive doll – people like children would die especially people who like dolls could lift it – very sad! Ali” (DLDT62) while referring to the postcard called “Plastic bullet – the result” (Picture 4.5). While the child did not understand the nature of the object, it had a strong impact on her as an uncommon thing and allowed her to grasp the message anyway.



Picture 4.5. “Plastic bullet – the result” postcard.

The two objects that were most often quoted in visitor feedback were the ‘Veil’ sculpture by Rita Duffy and the Relatives for Justice quilt (Pictures 4.6, 4.7, 4.8). Interestingly, they were the two biggest pieces of the exhibition, which may suggest that their sheer size overwhelmed visitors. However, this was not the case, as suggested by feedback about other objects.

‘Veil’ is a sculpture made of six doors from the women’s prison in Armagh. Using the spyholes, visitors can discover glass drops inside the chamber, against a background of red paint (picture 4.7). The glass drops symbolise the tears shed by women during the conflict and the salt on the floor inside and around the sculpture completes the idea. The colour red represents the participation of women in the dirty protest in the late 1970s and the menstrual blood they smeared on their cell walls. All these elements were mentioned on the label, written by the Wolverhampton Gallery which owns the piece.

Yet the experience people had with this piece was less about facts or aesthetics than emotions. Some were touched by the beauty, originality or realism of the piece, while not always connecting it with the conflict. This is exemplified by comments such as “I think the prison doors are cool because it has a red glow” (BMT12) or “I thought that the prison doors were very good because the tears looked very realistic” (DLDT29). Most comments on ‘Veil’ were about its evocative power. It was particularly understood and picked on by children (as suggested by the handwriting on certain tags) who liked the piece because – or even if – it was “sad”, or “cool” or, in one instance “pretty cool but a bit miserable” (DLDT23). It generated a sense of empathy by making them think about the women crying (DLDT7), the separation of families (DLDT60) or the tough life of prisoners (DLDT15).



Picture 4.6. 'Veil' by Rita Duffy (Derry~Londonderry)



Picture 4.7. inside 'Veil'

The Relatives for Justice quilt was the second most mentioned object in the feedback (Picture 4.8). It is a patchwork of squares made by relatives of people who died in the conflict to commemorate the lives of their lost ones. Again visitors appreciated its aesthetic value, commenting on its design and colours, and also noted it as a moving and evocative piece. This is exemplified by comments such as "We like the quilt because it is remembering the dead and it tells a lot about the people that have died and it is very colourful. Ruth + Megan" (CT47) or "Relatives for Justice quilt. We really liked it because it is so pretty and so thoughtful. We're glad it was made!! Laura and Lauren" (CT51).



Picture 4.8. Relatives for Justice Quilt (Derry~Londonderry).

The third most mentioned object was the milk bottle used as a petrol bomb (Picture 4.9). This offers an interesting example of geographical and generational gap in knowledge and perception of the conflict as it was only mentioned by children, in Clones, the only venue outside Northern Ireland. There on a school visit, local pupils were encouraged to pick their favourite object and explain why they liked it. The milk bottle used as a petrol bomb was fascinating to several of these children because it was real and they had presumably not seen one before. Yet they dissociated the realness of the object from the realness of the conflict they hadn't lived through and which possibly affected their families less directly than in Northern Ireland. This suggests a limitation of the power of objects to convey meaning where there is little or no previous knowledge, thereby confirming the importance of personal context – prior knowledge, interests and beliefs – in learning in museums (Falk and Dierking, 2000). Some comments revealed misconceptions about the nature of the conflict – between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (CT17) rather than in and about Northern Ireland. Others did not acknowledge it, referring instead to the power of the petrol bomb as if in an action film or video game: “Petrol bomb. It was interesting because of the way they put it in a glass bottle and how deadly it is. It could kill lots of people. They were very smart to think of it. Shane + Jack” (CT54); “Milk bottle petrol bomb. Genius! I'm going home to make a few now! 'BOOM! BANG!' Eoghan and Maitiu” (CT49). It can also be assumed that the school outing situation, age group and peer pressure also favoured such response among a small group of children. Gender did not seem to be an issue however, as three girls under 16 noted they had learnt about bombs in their evaluation sheets (CEv2-4).



Picture 4.9. Milk bottle used as a petrol bomb (2 from right in the display case, Clones).

Among the other objects mentioned, few were photographs or reproductions, possibly because 3D objects are more “real”. The Orange preserve, riot helmet, binlid, defaced coins and prison art pieces were all mentioned a few times, as well as the sponger badge, dove for peace and taxi images – the latter arguably a “large” piece since it was a series of twelve drawings. Several visitors commented on the creativity of people (DLDEv12, DLDT56, CT38) and related to the humour of certain pieces – “Behind the barricades” record, sponger badge or defaced posters – as a survival element during the conflict (DLDEv19).

Broadly speaking, objects took on two functions in visitor’s comments: they were a reminder of what had happened and a trigger of memories. As such, it is no surprise that in all venues, there were requests for more local objects, closer to people’s personal and social backgrounds (CT22, DLDEv4).

#### 3.4.4 Introspective experiences

Objects as memory-triggers link in with the last type of visitor experience analysed here. Introspective experiences are to do with feelings and reflections often triggered by objects (Pekarik, Doering, Karns, 1999: 158-9). Some of the comments already quoted were partly introspective, an indication that all four categories usually overlap.

That the exhibition brought back memories was mentioned on twenty-nine feedback tags or evaluations sheets. Memories were deemed “good”, “bad”, “sad”, “crazy”, “scary” or “insane” and the triggering object not always specified. Other visitors took the opportunity of the feedback to actually tell amusing or poignant anecdotes whose memories were triggered by exhibition. A former employee of the “bin office” in Belfast Corporation told how inspectors were despatched to decide whether binlids had been accidentally or purposely damaged and therefore could be replaced or not (BFT19). A former primary school teacher remembered “a P1 child drawing a picture of one man in a boat because ‘All the people are shouting ‘One man, one boat’” (OT7). A former resident in Belfast recalled “lying in bed at night as a teenager listening to the bin lids and knowing that someone was being ‘lifted’ by the security forces” (OT3). Likewise, a Belfast resident recalled: “Bin lids. Bullet holes in walls. Army. We used to count the bullet holes in our walls in the 1970s. I remember bin lids being used and army sitting on guard in our garden” (BST9).

The affective impact of the exhibition on visitors is also visible in the words they chose to describe how they felt after the visit. The mixture of feelings is summarized in Figure 4.3.

Sadness was the main emotion, but it was counterbalanced, often in the same comment, by more positive feelings like happy or glad. While upset that a violent past had taken place, people were also relieved that it was over and hopeful about the future. There was also a form of amazement or disbelief about what people had gone through. To the question “How did the exhibition make you feel?” one visitor answered: “Makes me feel? Still trying to figure out why everything happened as it did” (DLDEv7).



Figure 4.3. Emotions after the exhibition

Introspective comments made by visitors reflect on the past, the present and the future, thereby stressing, when taken together, the transition from conflict to post-conflict. The exhibition triggered for some memories of destruction and losses, while others remembered and wondered at how people coped through it. An interesting comment reflects on the notion of normality:

**I feel the exhibition just encapsulated the diversity of the media that was used to make the conflict “normal” as if we carried on normally, when really it was abnormal. That’s why it’s difficult now to embrace the transition out of conflict because we’re not conditioned to recognise “normality”. (OEv7).**

Comments about the present show a sense of pride and relief as to how far society has come along. Some consider the transitional process is yet underway: “Glad we are coming out of the Troubles” (BFEv10); “Thank God we are learning to know each other and to live in peace” (BFEv12). While relief and optimism are commonly expressed, some visitors were also wary that the story be told and not forgotten, especially by the younger generations (OEv10; OT6). The same mixture of hope and caution is present in comments about the future, with people expressing optimism in a peaceful future (OEv1; OT17) and taking a strong stand that “the dark days” should/can never happen again (CT24; CT37; OT9).



Not all visitors were able or willing to leave positive comments. Some, showing resentment at past events or continued representations, suggested a reinforced single-identity approach: "This exhibition shows the extent of destruction caused by the Troubles – all in vain!" (BMT16); "Good exhibition. However we need to remember those protestant families forced to move from the city side of Londonderry" (DLDT20); "I think the protestants shouldn't be blamed every time there is trouble. There should be peace not war!!!" (BST3); "How little some people had to suffer in comparison (especially in Whitehall)" (BFEv1). Conversely, other visitors acknowledged efforts at mutual understanding and conciliation. Reverend Latimer from Derry First Presbyterian Church was praised twice for his cross-community work: "Nice to see this supported by the Rev. Latimer and his congregation. Important to understand our past to live a full future" (DLDT24); "Came here today with my son and was made very welcome by David who showed us around the church. This minister is doing good work. A Roman Catholic" (DLDT47).

Finally, although the exhibition was mostly targeted at the local population, international visitors also enjoyed satisfying experiences when visiting it. They embraced the concept of the exhibition, were moved, learned and related to objects like other visitors. The exhibition struck a particular chord with international visitors from conflict areas, who left well-wishing words: "Great things need time to happen! But when it does happen, it's worth it ... worth all the waiting and pain. Love from Palestine!" (DLDT34); "Peace will prevail one day! Abi, Uganda" (DLDT67).

Analysis of the feedback for the 'Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict' exhibition shows that it provided a variety of satisfying experiences to its visitors. Their supportive comments convey a sense of appreciation of the multiple-perspective approach chosen by Healing Through Remembering to represent the conflict. The "everyday" angle also provided more opportunity for personal engagement and identification with objects or situations, therefore prompting memories and reflection. If anything, the feedback to the exhibition shows the will of people not to forget the past. Some seem ready to address it by telling their own stories or listening to others'. Some are still reluctant to do so. The feedback also reveals stark generational and geographical gaps in knowledge and perception of the conflict, thereby stressing the need for more cross-community, cross-generation and cross-border activities. While not always successful in attracting high numbers of visitors in all venues, the 'Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict' exhibition was successful in providing informative, thought-provoking and balanced displays in a space where people could remember, reflect and share in a spirit of mutual respect.

## Chapter 5 Conclusion

This dissertation set out to cover three objectives in order to reach its general aim of assessing the contribution made by the 'Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict' exhibition to addressing the legacy of conflict in Northern Ireland in museums and exhibitions. The first objective was to provide better knowledge about Healing Through Remembering and its role in the debate on dealing with the past in Northern Ireland. This needed to be covered to establish the legitimacy of the organisation in bringing forward an exhibition addressing the legacy of the recent conflict. Chapters 2 and 3 showed Healing Through Remembering has been a central and well-respected actor in the debate in the last decade and that its Living Memorial Museum Sub Group has reflected thoroughly on the form and contents such a museum might take. The exhibition was a legitimate and solidly-researched endeavour – consequently, it may have valid lessons to bring to the museum world.

The second objective involved a reflection on museums' practices in representing a contested past. This was done in Chapter 2 by reflecting on how museums in Northern Ireland have engaged in dealing with the past. The chapter highlighted some shortcomings and a general sense of unease in representing the conflict. The "Conflict: The Irish at War" exhibition, held in the Ulster Museum from 2003 to 2006, certainly displayed the best practices according to current research (Black, 2005; SGS, 2011 and website), by involving the community in the designing process (Parkhill, 2008), offering multiple perspectives on the topic and encouraging visitor participation. While retaining curatorial control of the interpretation, the museum treated its visitors as "guests", according to Doering's categories (Doering, 1999), by bringing visitors they offered the "knowledge and perspectives of their professional staff" through educational and outreach activities (75-77). Such increased engagement with visitors, although increasingly expected from museums, was not an easy transition for the Ulster Museum, especially in the context of a divided society, as explained by the curator of the exhibition:

**In the context of a divided society, where not only is the history contested but has also been subject to selective remembrance and understanding to the extent that history itself has been a constant contribution to community division, it is no surprise to find that the museum curator is increasingly expected to be a "hands-on" mediator between that history and the society he served. How comfortable we are with this imposition will depend on the extent to which we feel that curatorial integrity remains respected. (Parkhill, 2008: 30).**

The 'Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict' exhibition deliberately experimented with a series of curatorial specificities that differed from conventional museum practices. The analysis of visitor feedback, presented in Chapter 4, helped to partly assess such specificities. For instance, visitor numbers seem to suggest that non-museum venues can attract visitors only insofar as they are well rooted in the community. Apart from the general lack of interest in events about the recent conflict, the low figures in Ballymoney may be explained by the difficulty of access to the venue and its possibly lower profile in the community than other civic spaces. Attracting non-museum goers to exhibition requires a level of trust and ease between venue and participants that did not seem to exist in that case. The other curatorial choices were more successful in drawing appreciation from visitors. In a post-conflict but still divided society, the choice of a multiple-perspective approach struck a chord with visitors, possibly because it mirrored a general aspiration for parity of esteem for various traditions. Representing multiple viewpoints has also been identified as a principle of interpretation favouring visitor participation, as "visitors feel they too have the right to develop and talk about their own ideas" (Black, 2005: 142). The exhibition thus used one mechanism that is relevant both to address conflict and to engage visitors. The same could be argued of the deliberate limited authority displayed in the exhibition by the organising body and the choice of an everyday topic, to which most visitors can relate. As underlined by Doering:

**The museums and exhibitions visitors find most satisfying are those that resonate with their entrance narratives and confirm and enrich their existing view of the world (Doering, 1999: 81).**

Whether such new practices are transferable to the existing museum world is debatable. It is worth noting that the most engaging practices in recent representation of the conflict in Northern Ireland have been used in temporary exhibitions rather than permanent ones. That more leeway for unconventional practices seems to occur in temporary projects may say something as to the difficult responsiveness of museums. Moreover, temporary exhibitions have the triple advantage of being less costly than a complete overhaul of the permanent exhibition; of being rapidly dispensable in case of negative feedback; and of providing novelty, thereby encouraging repeat visits. Even if experimental practices have been shown to be beneficial in

challenging the mindsets of both visitors and the museum community (Brown, 2011), they do not go without difficulties when used in museums and may trigger angry or outraged reactions – something that most people and institutions would rather avoid. Most research on developing visitor engagement in museums recommends closer collaboration with communities, especially as the development of new technologies encourages a more participatory culture where anyone can express their opinion, thus weakening traditional sources of authority (Stein, 2012). Bernadette Lynch shows that in practice however, such partnerships may prove inefficient as they stray into passivity on the community's side, retaining authority on the museum's side, generally "manipulating the illusion of consensus" (2011: 146). Reflecting on ethical principles to avoid such pitfall, she recommends to allow space for "creative conflict" to occur in museums (154). This may be an attractive idea – and indeed one tested by twelve museums and galleries across the UK to reflect on their practices (157) – but it might be a step too far for established museums in a society where conflict is only too recent and where all policies and museum mission statements are geared towards sharing and inclusion. Further research on the ground and comparisons with other post-conflict societies would be needed to see if such great aspirations of museums as "incubators for social change" (Cameron, 2005: 229) may be envisaged in the specific situation of Northern Ireland. Some minor changes to existing practices may, however, bear some fruit. Relinquishing curatorial authority through the adoption of multi-perspective interpretation in historical exhibitions does not mean the museum is deprived of its expertise, simply that it acknowledges the diversity of experiences. Likewise, establishing dedicated community galleries in museums, where community groups can display their work, may be a way to reduce the gap in trust between museums and parts of the community. Although such exhibitions do take place within outreach projects, having a designated gallery for communities to take symbolic ownership of temporarily, as is the case, for instance, in the People's History Museum in Manchester (PHM website), would send out a strong signal of openness and innovation on the part of museums.

The final objective of this project was to give insight into visitors' perception of the conflict and the debate on remembrance and forgetting by assessing the feedback on their experiences. The analysing framework used allowed to distinguish between four types of experiences. Interestingly, the exhibition generated more introspective experiences than cognitive ones. These findings are in correlation with those of the researchers in the Smithsonian Institution, who observed that cognitive experiences were never prominently expected or effective in any feedback from any type of museums – art, history, natural history, craft, or zoo – and that introspective experiences were prominent at history museums (Pekarik, Doering, Karns, 1999: 162). True to its planned outcomes, the 'Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict' exhibition served as a catalyst for memories and reflection. The feedback showed ambivalent feelings about the past, present and future but also a strong stand that the stories of the conflict should be told and not forgotten. The feedback also supplied insight into a generational gap in perception and knowledge about the conflict, the continuation of myths or the creation of new ones – like the fact the conflict was between the North and South of Ireland. Such findings call for an urgent need for educational initiatives about the conflict. A recent report commissioned by the Community Relations Council showed that museum visits have limited influence on young people's knowledge and understanding of the past – largely informed by the primary circle of socialisation consisting of family, relatives and friends, as well as formal education and the media, their knowledge was found to be sketchy and largely influenced by their community background (CRC, 2010: 5, 64). Having more exhibitions and educational programmes on the conflict may increase the museums' influence on and improve historical consciousness in younger generations.

As a conclusion, although an exhibition set up by an organisation from the voluntary sector cannot be strictly compared to an exhibition displayed in a museum, the feedback for the 'Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict' exhibition certainly displays appreciation of some of its curatorial choices, namely the multiple-perspective approach and the very value of having been put together. Feedback showed strong support for dealing with the past initiatives on the ground as well as the need for education about the conflict. As such, the exhibition and the feedback it generated offer a case in point for the development of a community-focused Living Memorial Museum of the conflict and for the opportunity to act on the hope and optimism that exist for the future, as well as the determination that the journey travelled away from conflict can only be walked one way.

## Bibliography

### 1 Feedback on the “Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict” exhibition

Visitor feedback is referenced according to the venue, form of feedback (T for Tag, Ev for Evaluation sheet) and a number.

Venue codes are DLD (Derry~Londonderry), BM (Ballymoney, Bell Architects), C (Clones, Library), O (Omagh, Strule Arts Centre), BS (Belfast Shankill Rd, Spectrum Centre), BF (Belfast Falls Rd, St Mary's College)

#### Other feedback:

Healing Through Remembering (HTR). 2012a. “Feedback collated by invigilators of ‘Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict’ exhibition”.

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### 2 Healing Through Remembering Corporate papers (unpublished)

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**Appendix 1 – Feedback distribution and referencing**

	Feedback tags	Evaluation sheets
First Derry Presbyterian Church	DLDT 1-69	DLDEv 1-20
Bell architects', Ballymoney	BMT 1-19	BMEv 1-9
Clones Library	CT 1-61	CEv 1-7
Strule Arts Centre, Omagh	OT 1-18	OEv 1-14
Spectrum Centre, Shankill Rd, Belfast	BST 1-11	BSEv 1-5
St Mary's College, Falls Rd, Belfast	BFT 1-21	BFev 1-19
<b>Total</b>	<b>199 tags</b>	<b>74 evaluation sheets</b>

Appendix 2 – Evaluation sheet – front page used in Derry~Londonderry, Ballymoney, Clones and Omagh



'Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict' exhibition evaluation

1. Do you think the exhibition creates a space in which diverse experiences of the conflict can be heard?

Yes

No

2. How did this exhibition make you feel?

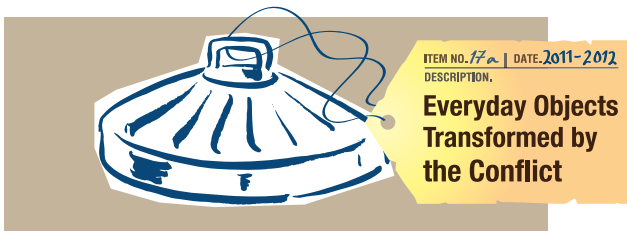
3. Did you learn anything new from this exhibition? If yes, please state.

Yes

No

4. We welcome your comments on any aspect of your visit to this exhibition

Appendix 3 – Evaluation sheet – front page used in Belfast



'Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict' exhibition evaluation

1. Do you think the exhibition creates a space in which diverse experiences of the conflict can be heard?

Yes

No

2. How did this exhibition make you feel?

3. Did you learn anything new from this exhibition? If yes, please state.

Yes

No

4. The exhibition is shared between St Mary's College, Fall's Rd and Spectrum Centre, Shankill Rd, have you/ do you intend to visit both venues?

Yes

No

**Appendix 4 – Evaluation sheet – back page**

About you

1. What is your postcode/ County/ Country of Residence \_\_\_\_\_

2. Age group:

- Under 16
- 17-25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56-65
- over 66

3. Gender:

- Female
- Male

4. How did you find out about the exhibition?

- Healing Through Remembering Website
- Direct mailing from Healing Through Remembering
- Other website, if other website please state which \_\_\_\_\_
- Word of mouth
- Passing by
- Newspapers/ Radio/ TV, please state \_\_\_\_\_
- Leaflets/ posters
- Other, please state \_\_\_\_\_

5. Who is with you today?

- On my own
- With friends or family
- Organised group
- Other, please state \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire. If you would like be included in the exhibition's mailing list please leave contact details here:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 5 – Ethno-political profile of venue areas.**

*Appendix 5a: Population of town/city by community background or religion. (2001 census for Northern Ireland, 2006 census for Eire).*

	Protestant community background or religion	Catholic community background or religion
Derry~Londonderry	19,4%	79,1%
Ballymoney	79,8%	17,3%
Clones	N/A <sup>7</sup>	92,2%
Omagh	29,5%	68,2%
Belfast	48,6%	47,2%

*Appendix 5b: Political composition of local councils<sup>8</sup>*

	Derry City Council	Ballymoney Borough Council	Clones Town Council	Omagh District Council	Belfast City Council
Alliance Party					6
DUP	5	9		3	15
PUP					2
TUV		1			
SDLP	14	1		3	8
SF	10	2	3	10	16
UUP	1	1		3	3
Independent		2	2	2	1
Fianna Fail		2			
Fine Gael		2			

<sup>7</sup> N/A: the data does not dissociate between religions other than Catholicism.  
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<http://www.monaghan.ie/contentv3/towncouncils/clonestowncouncil/clonestowncouncillors/>  
[http://www.omagh.gov.uk/local\\_councillors/](http://www.omagh.gov.uk/local_councillors/) <http://minutes.belfastcity.gov.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx?FN=PARTY&VW=LIST&PIC=0>

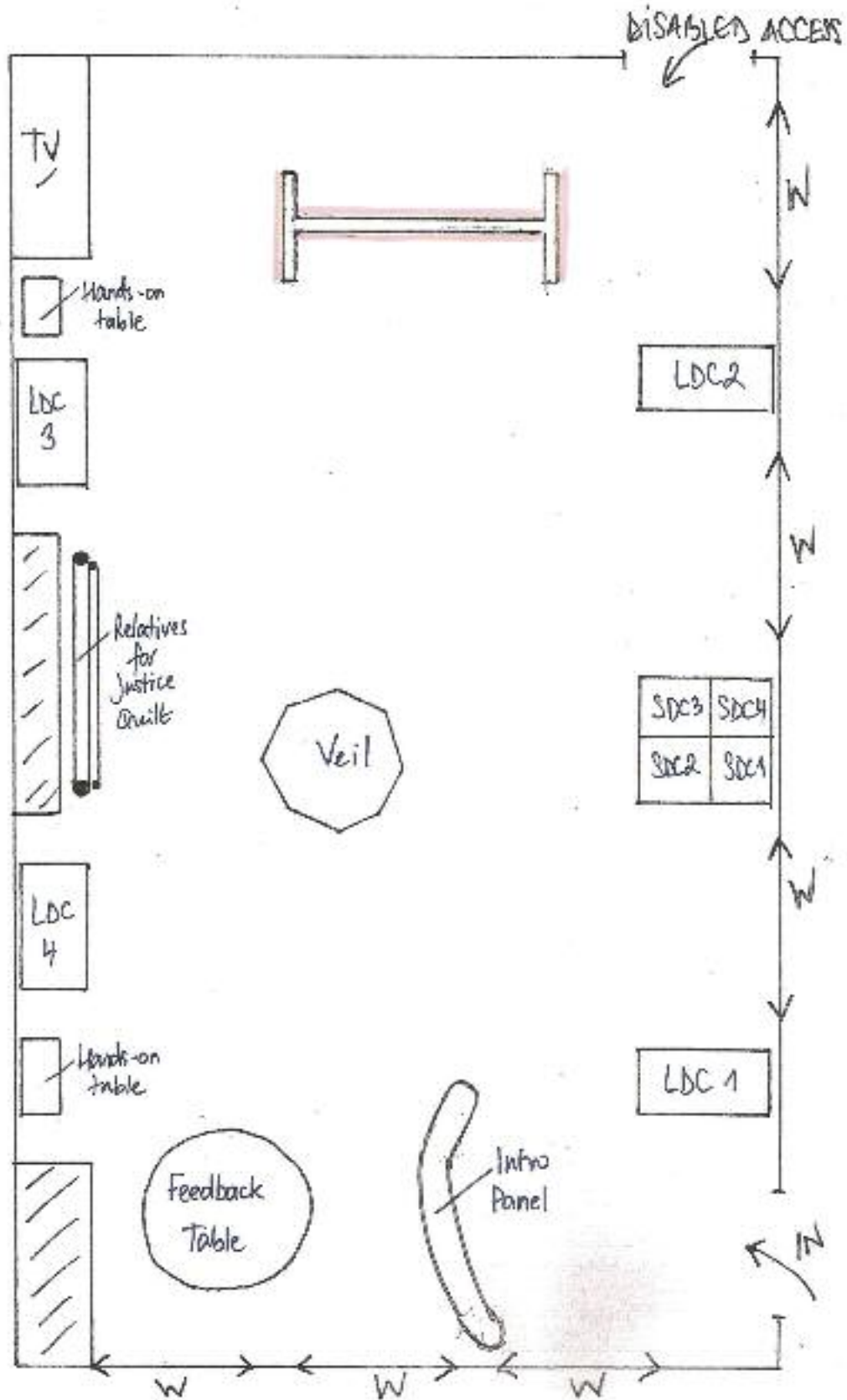




Appendix 7a – Floorplan for the First Derry Presbyterian Church, Derry~Londonderry.

SDC: Small Display Case  
 LDC: Large Display Case

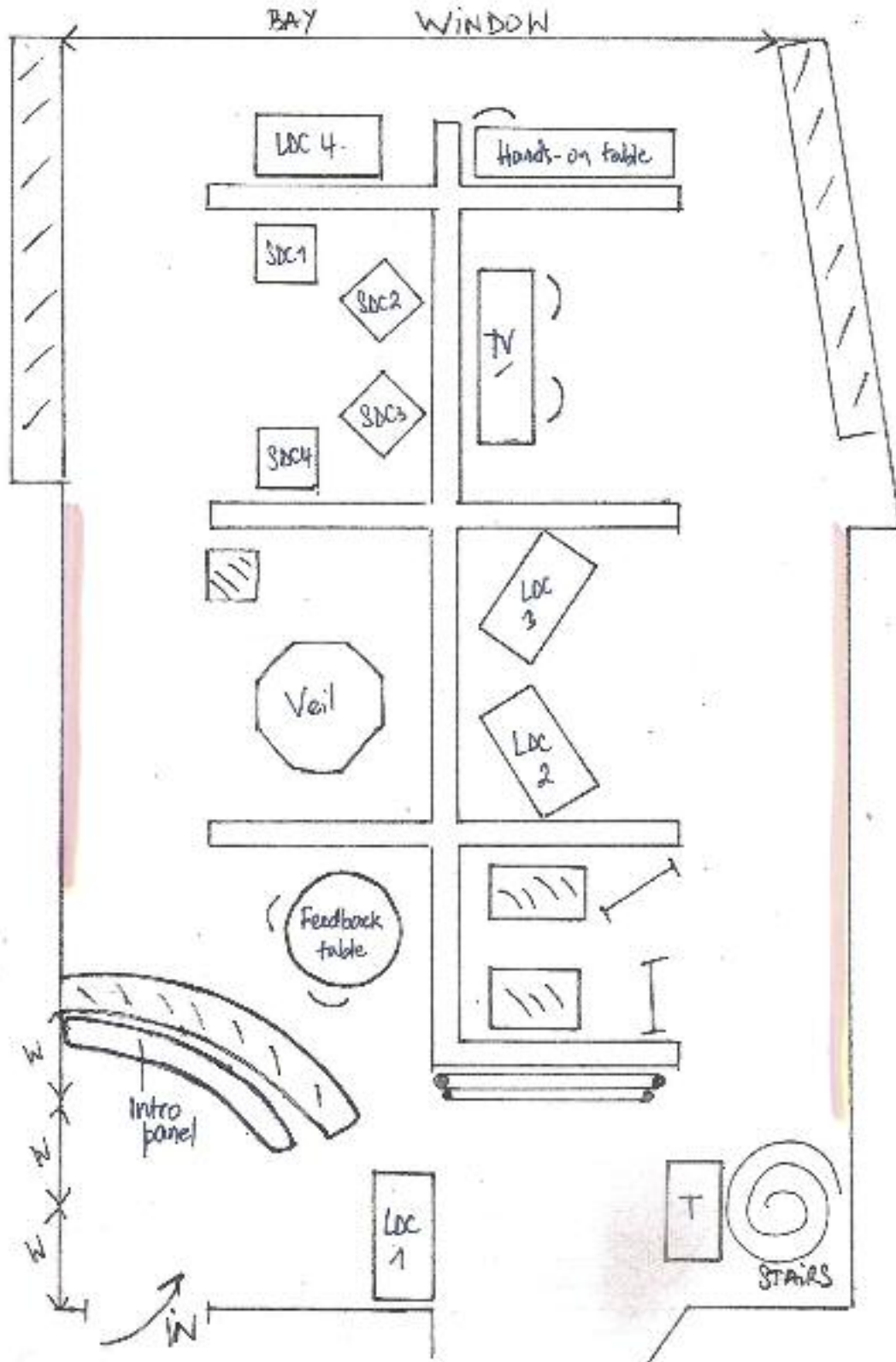
Hands-on table: objects left out for visitors to touch.  
 Highlighted area: hanging pictures



54 **Appendix 7b – Floorplan for Bell Architects’, Ballymoney**

SDC: Small Display Case  
LDC: Large Display Case

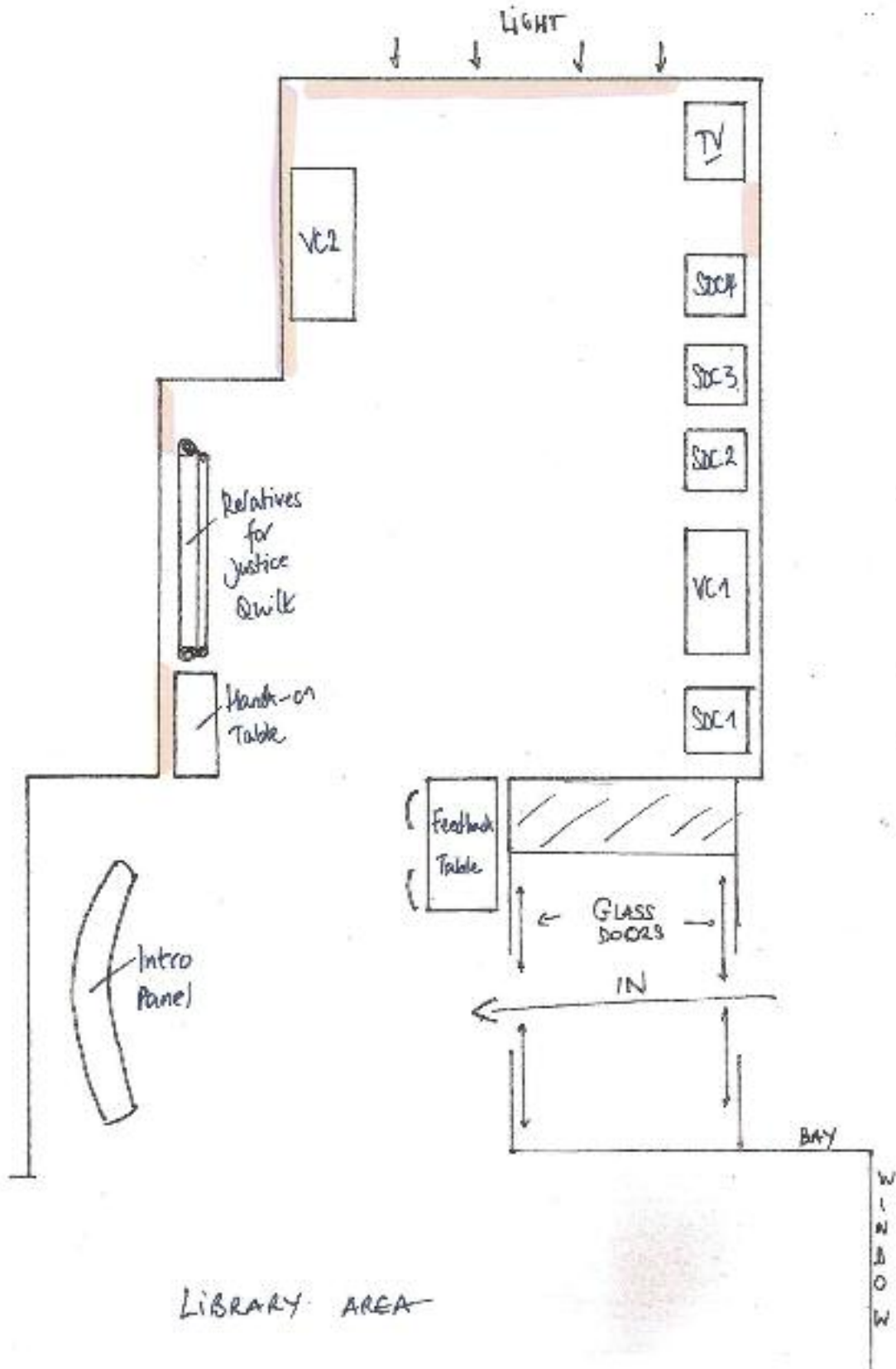
T: Table  
Highlighted area: hanging pictures



Appendix 7c - Floorplan for Clones Library

SDC: Small Display Case

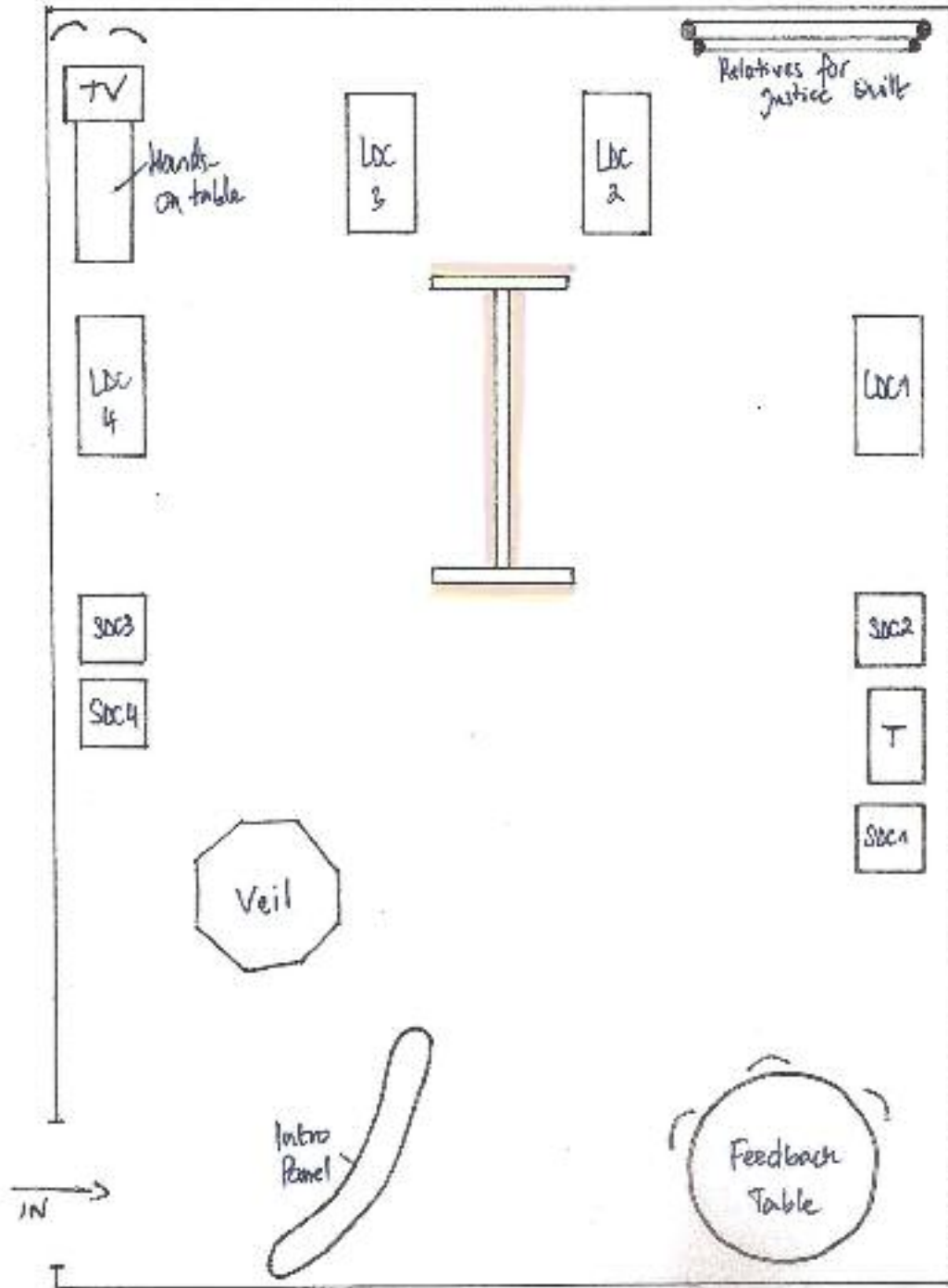
VC: Venue Case



56 Appendix 7d – Floorplan for the Strule Arts Centre, Omagh

SDC: Small Display Case  
LDC: Large Display Case

Hands-on table: objects left out for visitors to touch.  
Highlighted area: hanging pictures  
T: Table

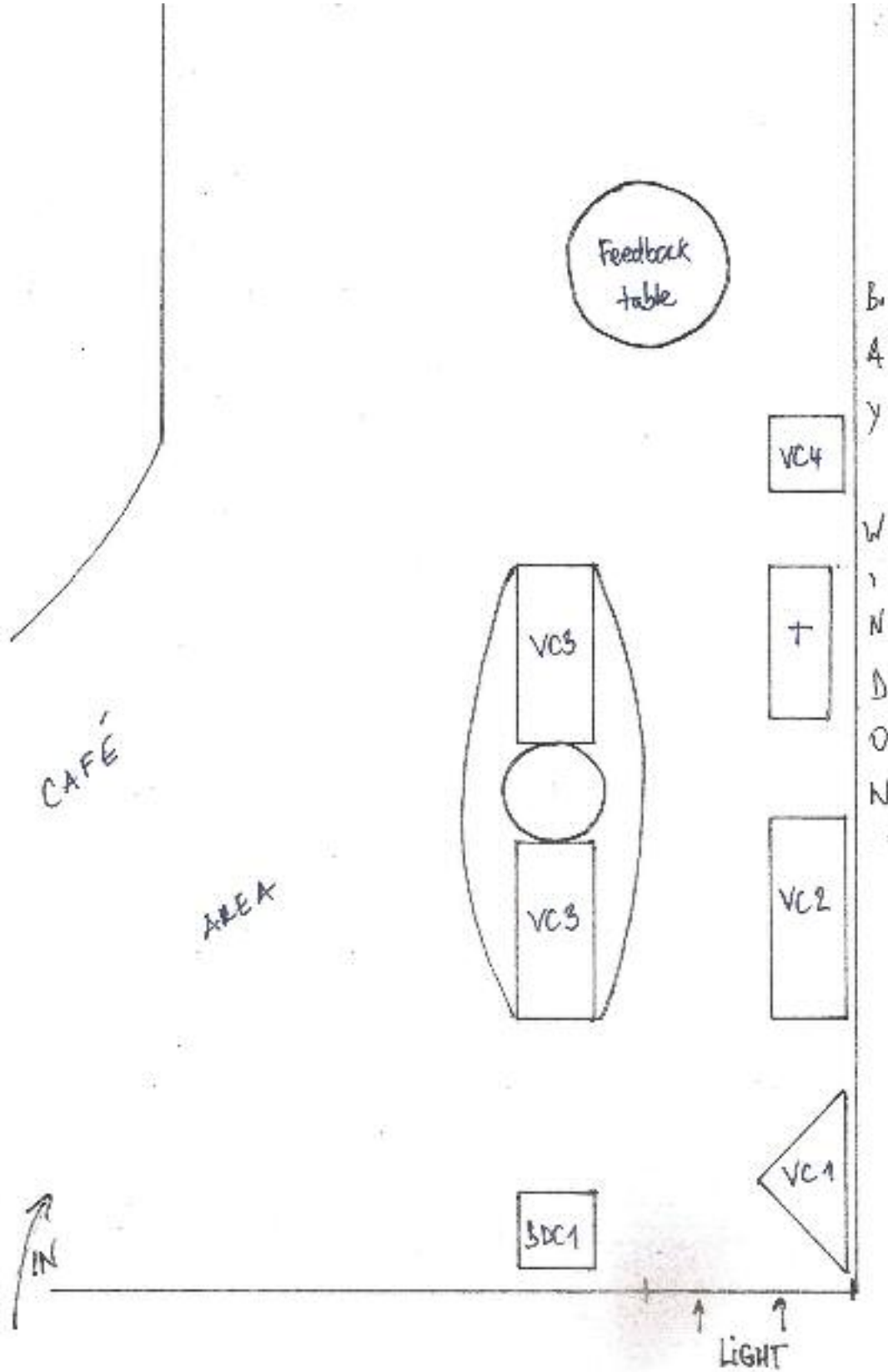


Appendix 7e – Floorplan for the Spectrum Centre, Shankill Rd, Belfast

SDC: Small Display Case

T: Table

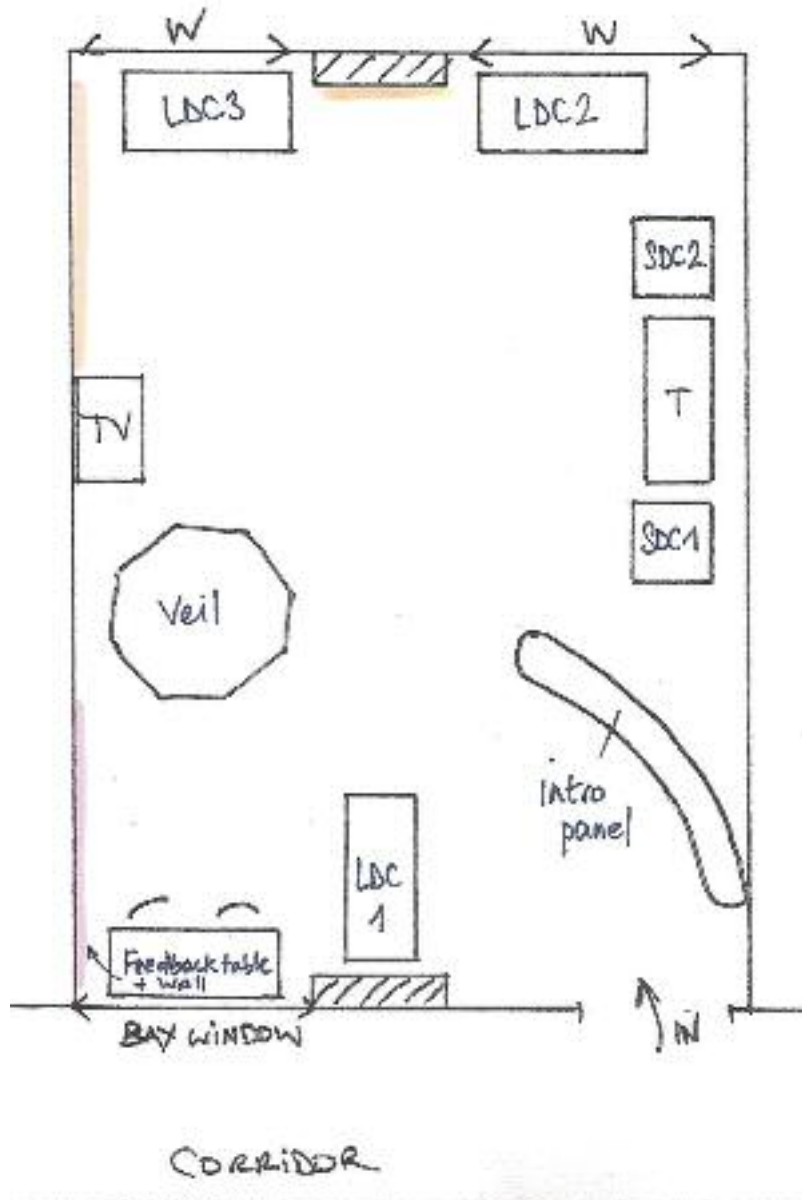
VC: Venue Case



58 Appendix 7f – Floorplan for St Mary’s College, Falls Rd, Belfast

SDC: Small Display Case  
LDC: Large Display Case

T: Table  
Highlighted area: hanging pictures



Appendix 8 – Visitor profile quantitative table

QA	Visitor profile, evaluation items	First Duty Practitioner Check (25 responses)	Ball Architects' Refinery (11 responses)	Class Library (7 responses)	Strachans Centre Outhouse (11 responses)	Spencer Centre, Sharncliffe Rd, Ilkley (12 responses)	St Mary's Catholic, Park Rd, Ilkley (20 responses)	TOTAL 77 responses
	Place of residence (answered)	16	3	6	10	4	11	56
	Local village	16	3	6	10	4	8	44
	Marblehead (over 100 miles from venue)	2	2		1	1	1	5
	Belief in life or life-like or spiritual	1	1		1	1	1	2
	Trigged	1	1		1	1	1	2
	Commercial Purpose		1		1		1	2
	HSX	3			1		1	3
	Part of the visit	1						1
QA	Age Group (answered)	17	7	6	10	4	12	56
	Under 15	3	2	2	1	1	1	9
	17 - 24	1			1		1	2
	25 - 34	2	3	1	1		2	10
	35 - 44	3			1	1	1	6
	45 - 54	1	1		1	1	1	5
	55 - 64	3	1	1	1		2	7
	over 65	3	2	1	1	1	1	9
QA	Gender (answered)	17	3	6	10	3	10	56
	Female	11	1	5	6	3	4	26
	Male	5	2	1	4	2	6	25
QA	How did you find out about the exhibition? (answered)	27	7	3	11	5	12	65
	Walking Through Remembrance weeks	1	1		1	1	1	5
	Direct Mailings from 'Walking Through Remembrance'	1	1					2
	Other website, if other website please note which	1						1
	Word of Mouth	6	5	5	6	1	6	34
	Group By	1		2	2			5
	Memoranda/Leaflet, please state	3			1		1	5
	Local Council	1	1	1	1		1	5
	Other, please state	3	1	1	1	1	1	10
QA	Who is with you today? (answered)	27	3	6	10	1	10	56
	Self only	2	1	1	4		4	12
	With family or by	21	2	5	6	2	2	33
	Organised group	3						3
	Other, please state	1						1
QA	Forward details to (name, address, if necessary and telephone)	7	3	3	4	1	4	22



**NOTES**

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### **Contact Details**

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