

Does Irish History have a Future?

I.

Four decades ago, Robin Dudley Edwards published 'An Agenda for Irish History, 1978–2018', laying down various prescriptions for younger historians which, he indicated, they would ignore at their peril. These included:

- (1) Reinterpretation of Irish history in European context by 2000 and global context (paying particular attention to China) by 2018. Edwards hoped that by 2000 'it would be taken for granted that historical schools would offer programmes in the history of Russia, of India, of China and of the third world'.
- (2) Recognition of historians as 'prophets', whose 'role in society' would be 'far more decisive than that of their predecessors'.
- (3) An integrated assessment of all 'sources from the beginning of history to the present time', embracing archaeological, anthropological, and literary materials.
- (4) 'Personal inspection' of original manuscripts rather than reliance on copies.
- (5) Preservation of personal independence: 'The historian must do his own thing. ... only in a limited way should the historian involve himself in collective activities lest the result appears to be "the agreed lie".'
- (6) Appeals to governments and administrators to 'establish professional archivists' and to create an adequate 'public service in information retrieval', perhaps through 'a computer link to university archival centres'. This would enable undergraduates to have 'some personal opportunity to appreciate [archival] material'.

II.

This far-sighted agenda raises two broad issues for the rising generation of Irish historians. First, to what extent have Irish historians achieved what Edwards considered essential for the survival of the profession? Second, what prescriptions would it be reasonable and desirable to propose for the future of Irish historical practice over the next four decades, assuming (as Edwards posited) that 'mankind has successfully avoided the danger of destroying all life upon earth'. To explore both issues, the Irish Historical Society will convene a special symposium in the Trinity Research Hub, to be held at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, 17 April 2018. Four 'younger' historians will be invited to offer their views on the two issues in presentations of 15 minutes, to be followed by an open discussion.

III.

In order to ensure that the four contributions are both provocative and diverse, all specialists in Irish history who have received a doctorate in Irish history within the past four years are invited to submit proposals for inclusion to the president of the Irish Historical Society at david.fitzpatrick@tcd.ie. These should not exceed one page, including name, address, when and where the doctorate was conferred, and what position the applicant currently holds. Potential contributors should indicate briefly how the recommended principles will help to shape their own future research. The deadline for submissions by email is 31 January 2018. The chosen speakers will receive a small honorarium.