

Evaluation of LibrariesNI Tour of Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict Exhibition



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Transformed by
the Conflict**





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An Roinn Gnóthaí
Eachtracha agus Trádála
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Evaluation report on Everyday Objects Exhibition in LibrariesNI

Evaluation of LibrariesNI tour of Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict Exhibition



1. Background to Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict Exhibition

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The Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict Exhibition (EOE) was the brainchild of the Living Memorial Museum group, one of the five sub-groups within Healing Through Remembering (HTR). Looking at museums as a possible mechanism for dealing with the past, the group's work involved researching what artefacts related to the conflict were available in public and private collections in Britain and Ireland. HTR published an Artefacts Audit in 2008¹, which identified nearly half a million conflict-related artefacts available in 79 private and public collections. The group also launched a Call for Ideas for a Living Memorial Museum in 2004, reported on the consultation in 2007², and visited numerous conflict-related museums across Britain, Ireland and Europe. EOE was the final stage of this initial work. It started off as a pilot exhibition in HTR's offices in 2011 before touring six venues across Northern Ireland and the border counties in the spring-summer of 2012. In its initial travelling format, the Exhibition displayed about fifty objects selected by collectors identified by the artefacts audit. Originally intended to be shown for six months, the Exhibition has been kept on display at the request of lenders and visitors.

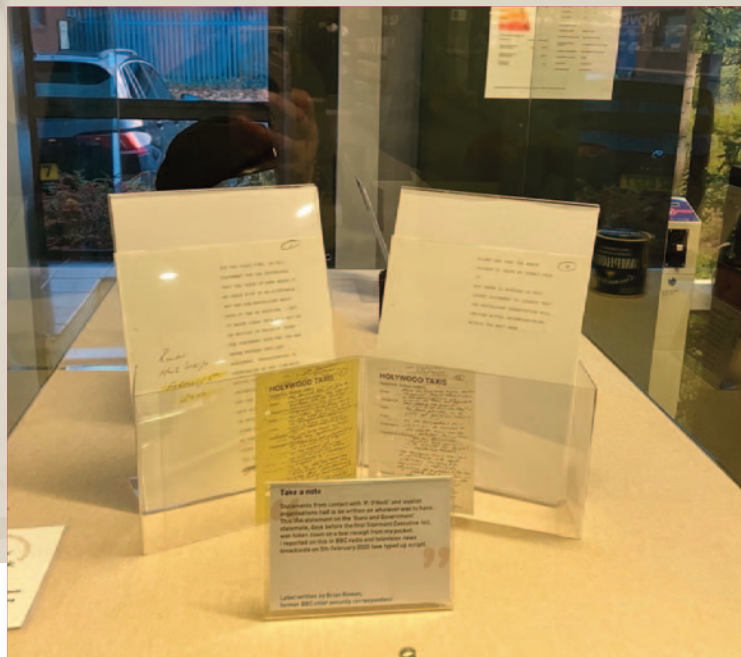
After that initial tour, the Exhibition was shown in 12 more venues between 2012 and 2022³. The format was adapted to venues, as well as time and staff constraints, with content shown in display cases (generally four cases containing four to six objects on average) and/or boards (each board showing one object and its accompanying label). The display cases were complemented with a 16-minute film on a loop showing old news clips (but never from incidents where anyone was seriously injured or killed) interspersed with short films of people presenting an everyday object. This short film was shown in the venues that could accommodate it. The selection of objects changed along the years, depending on their availability. New objects were added as they were offered and some were returned to their owners.

Two of EOE's initial aims were to "inform the debate on a Living Memorial Museum and dealing with the past" and "to act as a catalyst to help open up a platform in which diverse voices and experiences of the conflict can be heard" (text of pilot exhibition). In a context

¹ *Artefacts Audit*, 2008. <http://healingthroughremembering.org/resources/reports/living-memorial-museum-reports/>

² *Without Walls: Open Call for Ideas*, 2007. <http://healingthroughremembering.org/resources/reports/living-memorial-museum-reports/>

³ See list of venues here <https://healingthroughremembering.org/eoe-when-where/>



with no agreed narrative of the conflict, the variety of objects and their backgrounds provide multiple narratives of the conflict to facilitate dialogue and reflection about the past, present and future of Northern Ireland. The choice of “everyday objects” that visitors can easily relate to was deliberate to facilitate dialogue. In the same vein and to maximise outreach, priority was given to non-museum venues to display the Exhibition. The idea came out of the Call for Ideas for a Living Memorial Museum of the conflict, where some respondents felt the world of museums was largely unfamiliar and sometimes mistrusted. The Exhibition therefore travelled to meet the visitor in venues that were familiar to them and their community. The choice of both ordinary/familiar objects and venues was a way to engage more directly with local communities, thereby possibly attracting non-visitors of museums. Teaming up with LibrariesNI in 2022-23 followed the same logic.

Take a note, one of the new items for EOE in LibrariesNI tour

Over the years, venues have included community centres, arts centres, churches, empty shop units, offices (architect’s, NGOs, Department of Justice), as well as some museum spaces. Who visits the Exhibition depends on the type of venue where it’s shown, with international visitors more likely to go to an arts centre, a museum space or into a church, while people with a specific interest in the conflict/conflict resolution were the natural audience when the Exhibition was displayed in NGO offices. In many cases, visitors “bumped” into the Exhibition while visiting a venue.

Another specificity of the Exhibition is that it is co-curated by HTR and the artefact owners: the latter choose the object they want to lend and the phrasing of the corresponding labels, while the former provide guidelines as to the choice of objects and labels. Restrictions applied to the choice of objects are in relation to their size, the security risk they might entail and the sensitive nature of what they display (for instance, photographs and videos were not to show dead or injured people). Guidelines on labels provide for a maximum length and ensure against offensive wording. HTR retains curatorial control in the grouping of objects, the choice of venue and the wording of the introductory panel.

Finally, the Exhibition includes a feedback table/area and feedback is left on display for other visitors to read, thereby becoming part of the Exhibition. The main type of feedback



Milk bottle used as a petrol bomb



consists in luggage tags on which visitors are prompted to leave their thoughts and comments. Tags can then be

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pinned up to the wall or the feedback structure. Depending on venues, separate feedback forms were left for visitors to fill in: these included questions and space to leave contact details. Those forms were not greatly used in the LibrariesNI network largely due to space constraints but also because, in a post-pandemic context, it was felt they involved more contamination risk than tags.

2. EOE on tour in LibrariesNI

After EOE toured a variety of venues over ten years and as it was on display in the Department of Justice in Stormont, LibrariesNI offered to host it in their network as a travelling exhibition. HTR was keen on the idea and discussion ensued over a period of time about practicalities and availability of appropriate spaces. Local libraries are neutral, safe and trusted places within the community. Displaying EOE in local libraries was a way to bring the debate about the legacy of the past closer to the community. It was also about reaching out to a different type of visitors who wouldn't necessarily visit the type of venues where the Exhibition had toured previously – for a variety of reasons, including because they felt unfamiliar or uncomfortable going to them. The project met with several of LibrariesNI corporate goals or strategic actions, including “provide access to heritage resources and services to the widest possible audience”, “promote access to information, information literacy and support children and adults to become more informed citizens” and “provide a shared safe social space for cultural and creative engagement, where individuals and communities can explore different cultural traditions and backgrounds”⁴.

A. Practical organisation

EOE embarked on a 13-month tour of the LibrariesNI network in April 2022. 25 libraries hosted versions of the Exhibition until the end of May 2023, with the following schedule:

⁴ LibrariesNI Annual Report and Accounts, 2021-22. <https://www.librariesni.org.uk/media/sn2nexzv/libraries-ni-annual-report-and-accounts-2021-22.pdf>

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Library	County	Dates	On display
1. Bangor	Down	1 April - 14 April 2022	cases
2. Killyleagh	Down	23 April - 2 May 2022	boards
3. Ballymena	Antrim	22 April - 27 May 2022	boards
4. Antrim	Antrim	1 April - 13 May 2022 (object swap 14 April)	cases
5. Dungannon	Tyrone	28 April - 1 July 2022 (board swap 25 May)	boards
6. Castlewellan	Down	2 May - 25 May 2022 3 August - 28 September (board swap 7 Sept)	boards
7. Enniskillen	Fermanagh	4 May - 23 June 2022 (object swap 13 May)	cases
8. Portadown	Armagh	30 May - 1 July 2022	boards
9. Derry Central	Londonderry/Derry	27 May - 31 August 2022 (object swap 29 June and 29 July)	cases
10. Carrickfergus	Antrim	29 June - 30 August 2022 (object swap 30 July)	cases
11. Banbridge	Down	1 July - 2 August 2022	boards
12. Newcastle	Down	3 August - 30 August 2022	boards
13. Richhill	Armagh	9 August - 30 August 2022	boards
14. Dungiven	Londonderry/Derry	31 August - 30 September 2022	boards
15. Kilkeel	Down	7 September - 1 October 2022	boards
16. Ormeau	Down (Belfast)	2 September - 29 September 2022	boards
17. Colin Glen	Antrim (Belfast)	5 September - 28 October 2022 (object swap 29 September)	cases
18. Lurgan	Armagh	1-27 October 2022	boards
19. Lisburn	Antrim	3 October - 27 October 2022	boards
20. Strabane	Tyrone	31 August - 28 October 2022 (object swap 30 September)	cases
21. Brownlow	Armagh	30 November 2022 - 7 January 2023	boards
22. Whiterock	Antrim (Belfast)	1 November 2022 - 10 January 2023	cases
23. Newry	Armagh/Down	12 January 2023 - 8 March 2023	cases and boards
24. Armagh	Armagh	9 March - 30 May 2023	cases
25. Tullycarnet	Down (Belfast)	9 March - 30 May 2023	cases



Case and board display in Newry

HTR worked in close partnership with LibrariesNI throughout the 13 months, initially with central management, then with local librarians and their teams. LibrariesNI offered all libraries of its network (96 libraries in total) the opportunity to host the Exhibition, then selected which libraries had the capacity to host either a case or board version of the Exhibition. Not all libraries who had expressed an interest were able to host the Exhibition because of space and/or hanging system constraints or because of time constraints (e.g. refurbishment underway or lack of large lift for cases to be displayed on upper floors). Unfortunately, the selection process resulted in a geographical imbalance, with only six libraries in the western counties of Londonderry/Derry, Tyrone and Fermanagh, and 19 in the eastern counties of Antrim, Down and Armagh.

Planning and organising the tour involved a high degree of flexibility and coordination, as the Exhibition was tailored to each of the 25 venues. The content of the Exhibition was adapted to the specificities of the libraries in terms of number of boards and/or cases. The on-loop DVD was optional in the case version of the Exhibition. Most of the libraries that displayed cases had space for two only: only Whiterock and Newry could take all four cases at once. In the other libraries, item swaps were organised halfway through the period of display so that visitors could see all the items. The same was done with boards in libraries when possible: Castlewellan Library, for instance, was able to host three different sets of boards over two separate periods. The content of the Exhibition was organised into three sets of boards and various sets of objects for two cases so that the Exhibition could be displayed in several venues at once. The largest version of the Exhibition was displayed in Newry Central Library which took on four cases, the on-loop DVD and 20 boards. The period of display was adapted to space availability in each venue and varied from two weeks to three months.

Set-up and take-down of the Exhibition was carried out by one or two members of a team consisting of HTR's Director and a number of consultants. It involved preliminary visits to libraries – generally carried out by HTR's Director – to meet the staff and introduce EOE, check the exhibition space, hanging systems where in use, access to the building, etc., to help decide on the layout and content of the Exhibition. The Exhibition was set up in a further visit, with various members of the team transporting the boards or artefacts on site in storage boxes. Regular visits were then made to check on the displays and the feedback, restock tags, pens, leaflets and generally liaise with library staff. A specialised



Board display in Castlewellan



Case display in Antrim

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design set up company – the same one since EOE first started in 2012 - was used to move cases between venues and set them up on site.

The Exhibition was hosted in the main library space, on walls in peripheral spaces (corridors for instance) or in a separate exhibition room, depending on the library. The permanent features included the introductory panel and the feedback area, while the number of boards and content of cases could vary. Leaflets about the Exhibition were left for visitors to take.

B. Events

In some libraries, events were organised in connection with the Exhibition, either as stand-alone events or with existing groups within the library schedule, thereby attracting different audiences. Talks were given by HTR's Director, often with people who had items on display. Talks started a few months into the tour as the venues which hosted the Exhibition in the early months had put their events programme on hold following the pandemic and were easing into the gathering of groups of people.

List of events:

- Carrickfergus (26 July 2022): HTR's Director and an intern, as part of the Knit and Natter group. Turnout: about 12 women, along with a few of the library staff.
- Derry (1 September 2022): HTR's Director. Topic of the week talk. Turnout: 14.
- Whiterock (9 December 2022): HTR's Director HTR and Brian Rowan, who had an object on display. Turnout: 23.
- Newry (6 March 2023): HTR's Director and Brian Rowan, Laurence McKeown and Lee Lavis, who all had items on display. Turnout: 12.
- Armagh (21 March 2023): HTR's Director and Laurence McKeown and Lee Lavis. The library displayed some of its own conflict-related material on the occasion. Turnout: 17.
- Tullycarnet (20 April 2023): HTR's Director and Alex Bunting, who had an item on display. Introduction of the Exhibition before the monthly Yarnspinners Storytelling event held in the library. Turnout: 36.

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Event in Newry



Talk in Tullycarnet

At least two international groups visited the Exhibition. A group from the European Sites of Conscience Network with people from the UK, Italy and Spain visited it in June 2022 when it was on display in Derry Central Library. The group was part of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, a “global network of historic sites, museums and memory initiatives that connects past struggles to today’s movements for human rights” of which HTR is a member⁵. A group from the Transformative Memory Network visited EOE in Colin Glen Library in October 2022. The Transformative Memory Network is a Canada-based collective of artists, academics and activists working in the aftermaths of mass violence to promote social justice. The group that day included people from Colombia, Uganda, Indonesia and Canada⁶.

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C. Social media

EOE set-ups and moves from one venue to another, as well as related events were promoted on social media, mainly through HTR and EOE Twitter accounts⁷. LibrariesNI were tagged in EOE tweets and occasionally retweeted some.

Other people, some associated to HTR, also tweeted about the Exhibition. For instance:

Dominic Bryan, Professor of Anthropology at QUB

<https://twitter.com/Domsball/status/1513384607705702400>



⁵ <https://www.sitesofconscience.org/>

⁶ After touring LibrariesNI, EOE was displayed in the foyer of the new University of Ulster building on York Street (block BC), from 7 June to 11 July 2023. Visitors to the Exhibition included two international groups – one of them a human rights group from East Africa looking at how to deal with legacy of conflict, the other with delegates from Argentina, Indonesia and Algeria looking at the role of arts in peace-building.

⁷ <https://twitter.com/HTRInfo> and <https://twitter.com/EOExhibition>

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Dominic Bryan
@Domsball

The @EOExhibition is one of the most imaginative ways of looking at difficult aspects of our past. It reflects so well on its creators that after all these years it is still travelling places. If you've never seen it, find some time.

Everyday Objects @EOExhibition · Apr 10, 2022

Thanks to @LibrariesNI for hosting the main @EOExhibition across two library sites. Two cases are in Antrim library for the months of April and May.



7:13 AM · Apr 11, 2022

3 Retweets 10 Likes

Margaret Middleton (freelance curator)

"Saw this small but powerful exhibit in Antrim yesterday: "Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict" by @HTRinfo"

1st tweet of a thread including pictures of the Exhibition

<https://twitter.com/magmidd/status/1517513115553996800>

Elizabeth Crooke, Professor of Museums Studies and director of the MA in Cultural Heritage and Museums Studies, Ulster University

<https://twitter.com/MuseumStudiesUU/status/1517760144205139968>

Specific events were also commented on. For instance:

Brian Rowan, former BBC Security correspondent, lent objects to the Exhibition and spoke at two events:

Derry, object lent: <https://twitter.com/BrianPJRowan/status/1554117137370857474>

Whiterock, object lent: <https://twitter.com/BrianPJRowan/status/1595122791484862464>

Whiterock event <https://twitter.com/BrianPJRowan/status/1599482449200746497>

<https://twitter.com/BrianPJRowan/status/1601338441102655488>

Newry event: <https://twitter.com/BrianPJRowan/status/1631924269910196224>

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Brian Rowan
@BrianPJRowan

I'll be at Newry City Library Monday morning at 11 - chatting about the @EOExhibition and reading from Living with Ghosts. Hope to see you there. @HTRinfo You can register here eventbrite.co.uk/e/everyday-obj...



8:47 AM · Mar 4, 2023 · 4,513 Views

11 Retweets 21 Likes

Thread



Brian Rowan
@BrianPJRowan

#livingwithghosts

@EOExhibition

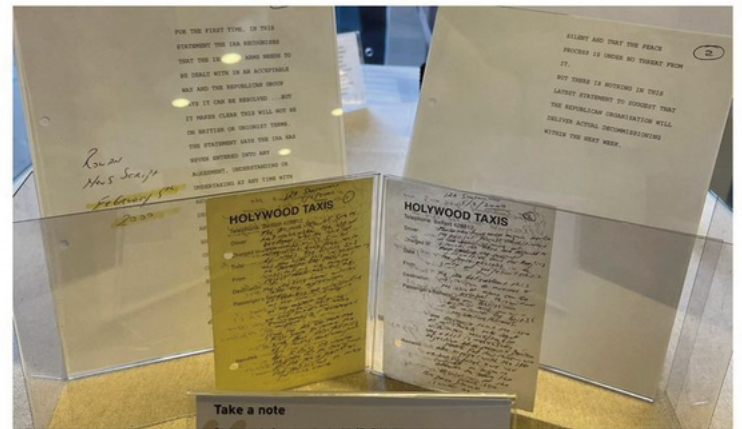
Thanks to Whiterock Library for today's event - chatting with

@TurnerCate

Had a go at reading some of Val's words from the book - got there, but just about.

Thanks to all for support.

Pics from Ciaran and @SarahJankowitz



11:10 PM · Dec 9, 2022

4 Retweets 13 Likes

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Heritage&MuseumStudies@Ulster #keepsafe
@MuseumStudiesUU

Great to see this important exhibition touring again. recommend to
#MAmuseumsUU @UlsterUni



Everyday Objects @EOExhibition · Apr 22, 2022

The first of our travelling poster exhibitions is now up in the @BallymenaLib for the next few weeks! Many thanks to the library staff and @LibrariesNI for hosting. Watch this space to see where the other exhibitions will go...



8:59 AM · Apr 23, 2022

1 Retweet 4 Likes

John McCabe about the event in Newry

“Attended a thought provoking @EOExhibition and conversation #Newry @LibrariesNI with the panel @BrianPJRowan (Barney) former BBC NI Security Correspondent, Kate Turner, Director, Healing Through Remembering, Laurence McKeown former IRA prisoner & Lee Lavis former British Soldier”

<https://twitter.com/johnmccabe1948/status/1632775349099429893>

Dawn Purvis, Chair of HTR, advertising the event in Armagh:

“Some good conversations take place around this exhibition @HTRinfo”

<https://twitter.com/dawnpurvis/status/1637799509794209792>

Finally, in the run-up to the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, the Exhibition was given media coverage on RTÉ, with a focus on Alex Bunting’s story:

“Taxi driver Alex Bunting lost a leg when an IRA bomb exploded under his taxi in 1991. The blast blew a box of loose change he kept under his seat up through his legs and torso. The coins now form part of an exhibition of ordinary items, made extraordinary by the conflict #GFA25”

<https://twitter.com/rtenews/status/1644225996114255872>



Feedback area in Antrim



Feedback area in Whiterock

3. Feedback on EOE

Formal feedback about the Exhibition came in two forms: that left by visitors on feedback tags while the Exhibition was on tour, and that given by library staff who responded to a specifically designed questionnaire circulated at the end of the LibrariesNI tour. Informal feedback was gathered by members of the EOE team on visits to venues. This section focuses on formal feedback from visitors and the following one mixes both formal and informal feedback from library staff.

A. Visitor feedback

The inclusion of a feedback area in the Exhibition has been a curatorial specificity of EOE since it was first designed. The feedback area in LibrariesNI generally consisted in a tree-like structure set on a table, with pens and tags at hand and a general prompt for visitors to encourage them to share their thoughts or comments and hang them on the structure. Feedback tags were left on for the duration of the display, so that visitors could read each other's comments. Members of the EOE team made regular visits to resupply the feedback areas as needed, check the written tags and remove any that might cause offence to either visitors or to the host venue.

Altogether, 316 feedback tags were collected in the 25 libraries where EOE was displayed (see sample pictures p. 20). The number of tags in each venue ranged from 0 to 47. Providing a quantitative interpretation of feedback for EOE isn't an easy task given the multiple factors at play – duration of display, location of display within the venue, visitor footfall, whether group visits or specific events took place, how much the area was affected by the conflict, etc. While the presence of feedback expresses an interest in the Exhibition, the absence of it doesn't necessarily suggest lack of interest or disapproval. Some factual evidence can be noted:

- The number of tags left can't be strictly correlated to the duration of the Exhibition. The highest number of tags (47) was left in Whiterock library, which hosted the full four cases version of the Exhibition for two months and a half, but the second-highest number of tags (39) was left in Bangor library, which hosted two cases for two weeks only.

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- The number of tags left can't be strictly correlated to events in connection with the Exhibition. For instance, an event was organised in Armagh but only three tags were returned. Only 23 tags were returned from Newry, which hosted the largest version of the Exhibition and organised a well-attended event in connection with it.

About 60% of the feedback was about the Exhibition. Just under a fifth was about people's connection with the library or books (overwhelmingly positive, with many tags written by children). The rest of the tags often seemed to have been written by children and were more random, often some including just a name, drawings/doodles or personal statements ("I wish I met Garfield or Scoobydoo"; "I want to feel happy. I am sad because I lost my dog"; "Keep er lit").

Many of the tags about libraries were about people's love of reading (including children's) and general appreciation of the place, staff and services offered. They give credit to libraries as trusted safe places in the community, playing an invaluable part in people's everyday lives and contributing to societal wellbeing. Here is a sample of such feedback:

- "I love the library's books. I've been coming here since I was a baby."
- "Thank you for our library."
- "A lovely quiet place. Lovely professional staff. Very welcoming."
- "As a deaf person, I found the staff extremely helpful, welcoming and professional. It is a very relaxing place to do some studying. Thank you Department of Communities for providing a lovely space for the public (+ pink heart)"
- "Come with my grandson on a Thursday. He is 2 yrs old. Loves books. Staff amazing."
- "When you need a place to be happy, come here." (child's handwriting)
- "Today has been bad but reading will always help."
- "Libraries are one of the few public spaces where you're allowed to exist without the expectation of spending any money. Long live our libraries!"
- "STOP FUNDING WAR (MINISTRY OF DEFENCE) AND FUND LIBRARIES INSTEAD!"
- "I met the love of my life here."



Example of a feedback tag

Four types of satisfying and often overlapping visitor experiences – social, cognitive, object-related and introspective – have been identified in research⁸ and appear in the feedback about the Exhibition. The presence of the Exhibition in libraries was itself part of a social experience within the local community. Indeed, the partnership between EOE and libraries was commented on positively several times:

- “Love that the exhibition is in a library – palaces for the people!”
- “Thought-provoking + great to have in local library – enlightening experience!”
- “At last an exhibition in libraries that is actually of interest and relatable.”
- “An amazing way to remember the history of our country. Free and accessible adds to the awe. <3”

EOE was also a shared social experience for some groups of visitors leaving comments on several tags (notably international visitors). The variety of feedback, including that unrelated to the Exhibition, shows visitors wanted to share some of the experience. The talks organised in connection with the Exhibition also contributed to making the experience a shared one, with people being exposed to different views and possibly expressing their own. Feedback from the libraries themselves provide more examples of social experiences (see below, pp. 23-26).

The general impression about the Exhibition is very positive, with visitors underlining its informative aspect (cognitive or object-related experience), how it stirs emotions or triggers reflection about the past (introspective experience). For instance:

- “This is fantastic. So many little details you wouldn’t have learnt about otherwise.”
- “Moving and informative exhibition. Really brings the past to life. Thank you for putting this on.”
- “Thoughtful stuff.”
- “Super display.”
- “Very moving.”
- “Both funny + moving!”
- “Insightful.”

⁸ Andrew Pekarik, Zahava Doering and David Karns, “Exploring Satisfying Experiences in Museums”, *Curator*, 42.2 (1999), pp. 152-173.

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- "Very thought-provoking exhibition! Good to look and learn more about the past."
 - "Really enjoyed the display. Learnt a lot."
 - "History. Perfectly captured."

Negative comments were very few (eight out of 316) and objected to the presence of the Exhibition in libraries and to its perceived bleakness, purpose or bias. They were sometimes directly challenged by other tags left (see below, pp. 18-19). Negative comments include:

- "Depressing exhibition - no need for it in the library" (includes drawing of a face)
- "What is the point of remembering something negative like this exhibition."
- "Too much one sided. Hard to forgive or forget."

Several visitors noticed and were appreciative of the curatorial choices made. The choice of everyday objects was embraced as it made the Exhibition more relatable and opened multiple personal perspectives on the past. Comments include:

- "Great idea. The object becomes a revealer of stories. It's easiest to tell the story of an object than your own."
- "Interesting to see objects that are part of the everyday as ways of remembering the past."
- "Interesting approach to history to explore it through everyday objects. It also makes history feel more present because the objects aren't ancient."
- "Very interesting to see how every-day objects can be used for powerful symbolism."
- "Fascinating everyday items from both sides of the conflict."
- "Very interesting with the different perspectives! A curious thing to see a conflict through objects."
- "So important to hear people's lived experience through the objects that represent their stories, builds understanding + encourages empathy. We all have a story to tell."

The multiple narrative approach was explicitly noticed in one comment which welcomed the balance of the display:

- "I love seeing so many voices and everyone is given the same space to speak. June 2022."



Some objects or stories stood out, and are mentioned once or several times, like the bus tickets, Alex Bunting's story, the legitimate target t-shirt, the Christmas cards, as well as objects related to communication in jail (tennis ball, book disguised as *Les Misérables*). In some cases, the focus on the object led to an introspective experience, triggering reflection about the past. For instance:

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- "Thought-provoking. The bus ticket in particular stands out. The normalisation of horror."
- "I hadn't heard of the platform shoe used for bullets. Creativity twisted for destructive means. How sad and wasteful."

Several visitors commented about the educational value of the Exhibition, either for themselves as part of their cognitive experience, or for generations who hadn't lived through the conflict.

- "I lived through this & with living in locally wasn't aware of a lot of this."
- "Growing up in the 70's I find this exhibition very informative – looking forward to the new pieces arriving. Thank you."
- "As a young person (17) I found this eye opening. Showed things I hadn't thought about. Great way to learn my history."
- "I never lived through the Troubles but ohh my how sad from my grannies stories. This film brings it all to life."
- "A value plan. Teach the children about where they come from."
- "Good idea to teach young people of Ireland correct way of life not to make same mistakes of past."

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Introspective experiences were commonly reported in feedback. In some cases, the Exhibition served as a trigger for personal memories, sometimes with a form of retrospective perplexity about the past. Comments include:

- "Brought back memories - emotional now. Precious peace."
- "Very interesting + memory jogging."
- "Normally, exhibitions like this are remote, distant showpieces. The items displayed here, on the other hand, were real memories."
- "Fabulous exhibition. Eye catching and shocking - immediately threw me back into the past - living in Belfast as a student in the 1970s."
- "I hope we never go back! Good memories - punk bands. Bad memories - fear."
- "Not having a dad."
- "Remembering my dad, who was killed in a bomb explosion. 1976."
- "And I lived through this."
- "An interesting exhibition. These simple objects reminded me of growing up during the troubles ... being searched entering shops was normal!!"
- "Memories of a time when we all wondered is this really happening."

Other comments were also reflective on the past without specific personal memories being mentioned. They express a mixture of disbelief as to what happened, relief as to how far Northern Irish society has come along and both hope and caution about the future. Some show empathy for other people's grief or express a sense common humanity. For instance:

- "The bad old days."
- "If the Troubles happen again :-{"
- "Thought provoking reminder of a past which I pray will not be the future of the next generation."
- "A wonderful powerful exhibition, thought-provoking and quite sad seeing reminders of hardship, fear, how did we ever come through it. GRMA."
- "A very interesting and powerful exhibition. Sad to see the hurt still there, especially the lady who lost her son. We've come a long way but still a long way to go."
- "This impacted on me so much how do so many families suffered but yet brought communities together from all over. M."
- "Great exhibition that recognizes all those affected by 'our past'. Poignant reminder of never return ..."
- "We can't change the past, hopes for the future to move on."

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In other cases, introspection led to inspirational quotes being left as feedback, as a form of advice for the future. For instance:

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- “Don't walk in shadows!”
- “You are not your mistakes.”
- “Thank God for Peace & Reconciliation.”
- “Past (crossed out) + X beside it. Future with tick beside it.”
- “Unity, Neighbours, Integration, Together, You bet!
(first letters in green: U-N-I-T-Y)”
- “Ban bonfires.”
- “Ar aghaidh le chéile.” (forward together)

The tags that could be identified as feedback from international visitors show the same type of cognitive and introspective experiences. Some of them express empathy for the people of Northern Ireland or see EOE as a possible template for other countries with difficult pasts. Comments include:

- “Incredibly interesting exhibition - very helpful in learning about the smaller stories in a big conflict. Thanks! From Denmark.”
- “Incredible to see how the conflict can be seen in even the smallest parts of life. It truly affects everything and is such a big part of people's life. From Denmark”
- “So good that you are living peacefully now! Take care. (from Peru)”
- “Esperanza (hope) from Colombia.”
- “It's so great to know the lost are acknowledged, from Uganda.”
- “So important work to heal memories of violence. Such an inspiration for other countries which are trying to deal with their past. Well done!!”

Finally, visitor feedback offer insight into different views about dealing with the past and the legacy of conflict, with EOE serving as a catalyst for such reflection. Views vary on the matter, as illustrated by the following:



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- “Very poignant and heartbreaking stories of a past we are constantly told to forget and draw a line. We all have our narratives of a bloody past, my past defines me as the person I am today.”
- “In order to build a better future, it is necessary to look at the past. No matter how difficult the past is, it is the stepping stones that builds a path to our future.”
- “A emotive display - but is it useful to brood on the conflict? Does this only highlight our differences further? ...”
- “Don't think about the future or the past think now and carry on!”
- “Time to move forward not looking back.”
- “Moving forward is the best way :-)”

In one specific venue, as previously mentioned, reflection about dealing with the past seems to have turned into a conversation between visitors via the comments they left. Bangor library was the first venue to host the Exhibition (two cases), in the first two weeks of April 2022. It returned 39 feedback tags, making it the venue with the second highest number of tags, which is quite surprising given the relatively short period of the display. Many of the tags give a clear sense that visitors read the tags hanging on the feedback structure before responding to them with their own. The comments can read as a conversation among members of the community in a shared, safe space. They cover most of the above-mentioned categories, mixing social, cognitive and introspective experiences. Comments include:

- “Excellent exhibition. We need to know about our past.”
- “A very thought-provoking exhibition”
- “Really insightful exhibition”
- “Time to move on from the past.”
- “Learn from the past - or risk repeating its iniquities! Closing your eyes, while it might feel as if it saved you grief does not allow wounds to heal - the infection brews beneath the scab.”
- “We need to remember. Yes it's depressing in part but as current politics show, it isn't all over either”
- “No thank you. This exhibition is depressing and dispiriting.”
- “Hate and hurt still exist until we all forgive and live in the now. Back of tag: and yes I lost an uncle who was shot by an organisation.”

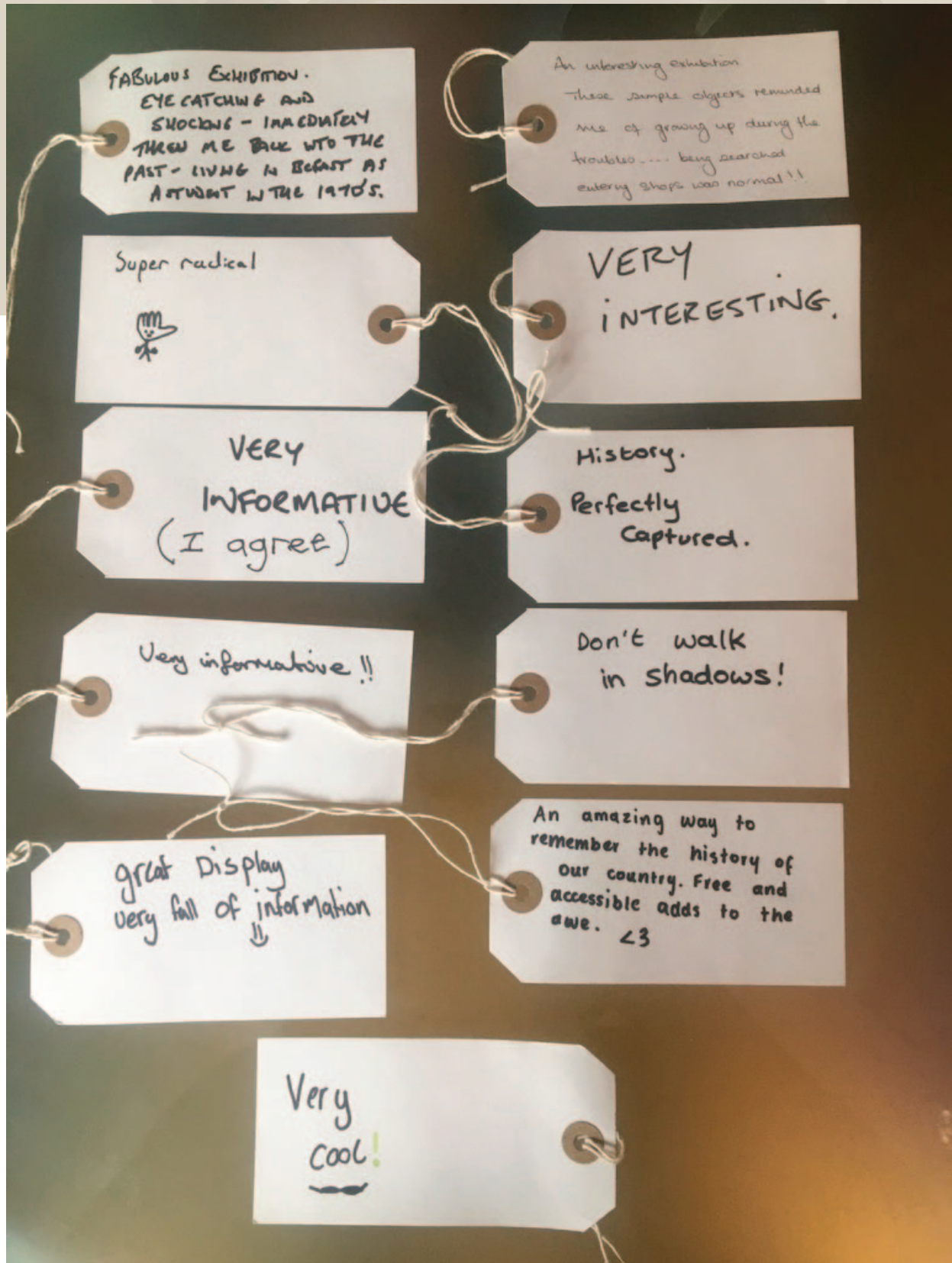


- “Haunting evocative. The mixed marriage story put things in perspective, in particular comparing the 1970s to today in N. Ireland. Thankfully things have moved on for the better.”
- “Depressing exhibition - no need for it in the library” (includes drawing of a face)
- “It can be hard to face the difficulties, but unairing this I feel sometimes releases” + “TRUST” and “VOICE” in capital letters written on each side of the text
- “Leave the past in the past - it cannot be changed lets focus on a brighter future.”
- “Move on for Gods sake!!”
- “People need to chill.”
- “和平” (Peace in Chinese)
- “:-) looking forward together as one the greater good for all.”

The 316 tags collected in the 25 local libraries over the 13 months that EOE toured the LibrariesNI network complement another 638 gathered in 18 venues between 2012 and 2022. While the initial 2012 tour was officially evaluated⁹, the very heterogeneous contexts in which the Exhibition was displayed in the next 12 venues – in terms of content, type of venue, duration of display, visitor numbers and project-funding – hasn’t allowed for a satisfactory overall evaluation, even if all the feedback was recorded and monitored. The partnership with LibrariesNI provides a second occasion for formal evaluation. Despite the relative consistency of what was shown in the 25 libraries, we have seen that EOE was tailor-made for each venue and that, again, the variety of factors influencing the production of feedback makes it difficult to produce convincing quantitative conclusions. Things are different from a qualitative point of view since the framework used in 2012 can be used again to evaluate visitors’ experiences and their views about dealing with the past.

Compared to the 2012 formal evaluation of visitor feedback, two things have changed: separate evaluation forms with specific questions were not used this time and the prompt for feedback tags was changed to a shorter text and a more general invitation, mostly due to space constraints in the feedback area. While visitors in 2012 were prompted 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”, those in 2022-23 were prompted to “please write your thoughts or comments on a luggage tag and hang it on

⁹ See *Evaluation of Response to 'Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict' Exhibition and Summary of EOE Responses and Feedback* <http://healingthroughremembering.org/resources/reports/living-memorial-museum-reports/>.



Sample of feedback tags



the tree.” This more general prompt may have led to a smaller proportion of comments directly connected to EOE, or to feedback being less focused, but it was a way of engaging visitors with the Exhibition by increasing a sense of safety and trust towards it.

B. Feedback from library staff

Regular contact and check-up visits allowed HTR to gather first-hand informal feedback from libraries (staff and sometimes visitors on site) and to rapidly settle any glitch with the Exhibition, for instance minor technical issues with the DVD-player (cables and headphones had to be provided). The first-hand feedback was mostly positive, as the author of this evaluation personally experienced when she helped with object swaps in Carrickfergus and Derry in August 2022, and with take-down in Whiterock and set-up in Newry in January 2023. Some visitors thanked the team on site and some library staff made a point of visiting other versions of the Exhibition in libraries nearby. The staff were interested in reading the feedback about the Exhibition but also touched by the support and trust they received from readers’ feedback. One library reported they had removed a few offensive tags from the feedback area, without specifying whether they were in connection with EOE or simply rude. In one venue, one regular reader complained about the noise from the TV set and the distress the film caused them. HTR’s Director met with the reader, in compliance with the organisation’s duty of care, liaised with library branch staff and LibrariesNI staff and then removed the TV set.

A more formal questionnaire was designed and sent to librarians, asking them about estimated footfall for the Exhibition, how the Exhibition was perceived by both visitors and the staff, what they thought about the interaction with HTR and if they had any suggestions about how things could be done differently or about possible developments for EOE.

By the end of May 2023, nine libraries had returned the questionnaire. Based on their answers only, an estimated 4,000 people (conservative estimate) visited the Exhibition in those nine venues only. Extrapolating on these figures, and taking into consideration that some venues which had the Exhibition for long periods didn’t return the questionnaire, a conservative estimate of the number of people who saw the Exhibition would be around 10,000 people.

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Board display in Lisburn

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The table below shows the returns from libraries about the number of people who saw the Exhibition:

Library	Dates	On display	EOE visitors
1. Ballymena	22 April – 27 May 2022	boards	approx. 75
2. Castlewellan	2 May – 25 May 2022 August – 28 September (board swap 7 Sept)	boards boards	over 1,000
3. Derry Central	27 May – 31 August 2022 (object swap 29 June and 29 July)	cases	982
4. Banbridge	1 July – 2 August 2022	boards	60
5. Dungiven	31 August – 30 September 2022	boards	<10
6. Lisburn	3 October – 27 October 2022	boards	approx. 200
7. Newry	12 January 2023 – 8 March 2023	cases and boards	a minimum of 1,200
8. Armagh	9 March – 30 May 2023	cases	203
9. Tullycarnet	9 March – 30 May 2023	cases	300

Several factors may explain the variance in numbers. What can be observed is that the case version of the Exhibition – usually by nature in a larger venue – attracted more visitors than the board version, except for Castlewellan where the period of display was longer. The period of display was also an obvious factor – the shorter the time, the fewer visitors – apart from Lisburn library which hosted the Exhibition for under a month but returned the same figures as Armagh, which had two cases for three months. The location of the Exhibition within the library is also to be considered: while the cases were always displayed in the main area of the library, the boards were sometimes displayed in more peripheral areas, like corridors, meeting rooms, or areas with limited coming and going, which tended to attract fewer visitors. This was the case in Banbridge and Dungiven.



Conversely, the display in Lisburn Library was in the stairwell, meaning visitors could not see it: this may explain the high number of tags left. An onsite observation of how visitors interacted with the physicality of the Exhibition would have provided more insight but unfortunately, it couldn't be organised for this evaluation, given the time, human resources and financial constraints.

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A final boosting factor relates to the events organised in connection with EOE, as shown by the figures for the four libraries concerned here – Derry, Newry, Armagh and Tullycarnet – which took the opportunity of the Exhibition to create connections within their programmes of events or with their collections. Derry Central Library reported that they had other activities tying in with the Exhibition, such as family history groups and heritage queries, some of which took place in the area where EOE was displayed. Such activities attracted visitors to have a look at it and reflect about it, even if it wasn't their main reason for visiting the library that day. Likewise, HTR's Director introduced EOE to the YarnSpinners group in Tullycarnet before an evening of ancient Welsh tales. Armagh Heritage Library displayed some of its own conflict-related material for visitors and people who attended the event organised in connection with EOE.

The formal feedback from libraries about how visitors and staff perceived the Exhibition confirms the overall positive impression from visitors in terms of content, layout and innovative approach. It also gives extra insight about visitors' interaction with the Exhibition, stressing its role as a catalyst for conversations which we imagine took place between visitors on site, or with friends and families after their visit. The educational potential of the Exhibition for younger generations is also noted, as well as its capacity to release (sometimes painful) emotions and memories. Comments include:

- "People commented that it was an attractive exhibition."
- "Thought provoking and interesting. All positive comments."
- "Comments: Very interesting; Well presented; Something different."
- "It was received positively in all aspects, but especially with its neutral tone."
- "Comments on the design and use of pallets, described as 'street-like' and suitable to display everyday objects."
- "One lady said 'cor, it's for the real. It's all so real'. Another lady said 'this is great. The glass is immaculate.' A gentleman commented on how much information was on display in the cabinet."

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- “Women would often sit and reflect on the histories of conflict in NI. A few members would chat amongst themselves. I heard one lady say the monuments held a special place in her heart. In some cases there would be great emotion shown.”
- “Favourably – opened up discussions.”
- “It allowed people to reminisce.”
- “What is a learning experience for some, can cause others pain and bring back painful memories, which have maybe taken years to deal with.”
- “Public opinion thought it was very well put together and the actual display was eye-catching. For some younger viewers learning some of the hidden meanings associated with the period which were explained in the exhibit proved very educational and informative. However, it upset some of the older generation (especially those who lost loved ones in the Troubles) as it brought back unwanted memories of a horrible period and flared up emotions they struggled with.”
- “A good taking point and well received by older members of the public, who found it very interesting and brought back a lot of memories.”

Feedback from libraries also stress how the staff were interested in EOE and thought the choice of venue relevant, as EOE complemented the library’s service to their communities. The staff experienced the same social, cognitive and reflective experiences as the other visitors, as suggested by the following comments:

- “I felt it was pitched just right.”
- “I felt it was very compassionate.”
- “Staff were very interested and everyone felt it was appropriate and relevant.”
- “Yes we enjoyed the Exhibition on display. It was great to see a great array of customers come into our library and reflect on the pieces.”
- “Everyday objects in context – easy to relate to. Complemented our collection of books/periodicals contemporary to objects/on topic of ‘Troubles’ and memory/remembrance.”
- “We have an excellent space for exhibitions so the display looked good and customers thought it thought-provoking and interesting. We hold a large selection of Irish Interest non-fiction so this fit in well in our library.”
- “We were very happy to host the exhibition and also thought the panels were very well done.”





One library highlighted the tension – already present in the visitor feedback but not as clearly articulated – between the difficulty of remembering the conflict for those who had lived through it and the necessity to educate younger generations about it, and came up with a suggestion to accommodate both positions/groups:

- “Being honest, for some of the team it stirred up unwanted negative emotions although they accepted the next generation has to learn and avoid the mistakes made in the past. With this in mind, rather than being placed in a totally open venue for all to see it was considered that the display should possibly be contained in an area where public made an informed choice to go and view it, thereby being aware of possibly being upset by the display’s content rather than come across the display and be totally unprepared.
Possibly a warning that some of the content could be upsetting thereby giving people a choice: 1. View and be prepared to be upset/shocked etc (or) 2. Decline to view.”

Library staff were satisfied with the interaction with EOE on site and between visits, as suggested by the following comments:

- “Very happy to host and the staff who put the boards up were excellent.”
- “Very well. Very organised. No issues.”
- “Cate was always in contact and we arranged the open discussion despite a couple of date clashes and it was very well attended/received.”
- “The engagement was fine, we were informed of dates well in advance and the organisers set it up and took it down on time.”

A few suggestions were made as to possible developments of the Exhibition, essentially in terms of venues and partnerships. Educational and cultural venues were quoted several times, stressing EOE’s potential as an educational tool for all age groups, both in formal and informal learning contexts. Comments include:

- “Continue to add new content to the exhibition where possible.”
- “Venues – schools and local history groups”
- “It could be displayed in other libraries, perhaps?”



Case display and on-loop DVD in Tullycarnet

- “I would suggest perhaps local theatres as a lady was chatting about musical pieces she could play in tandem with the Exhibition. A gentleman felt it would be a great asset to local Universities.”
- “Possible venues: secondary schools (‘Troubles’ on history curriculum)”
- “If we were to hold the exhibition again here, then I would want to hold an event alongside it – perhaps something from NI digital archive?”

Although the formal feedback from library staff was limited, it was in line with the general informal feedback picked up on site by members of the EOE team. The partnership between LibrariesNI and HTR served both organisations’ purposes and added to the value of both the library and the Exhibition as places of informal learning. EOE brought relatable heritage and novelty to the libraries, while the libraries provided a safe space for people to learn about various stories and backgrounds and reflect about them. In the vast majority of cases, the trust and respect expressed by people for their local library seems to have permeated throughout the Exhibition.



4. Evaluation of EOE's contribution and impact

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EOE has drawn mostly positive and supportive feedback over the years, by providing a variety of satisfying experiences to visitors who largely endorsed its curatorial specificities. Its multi-narrative approach and the deliberate choice of everyday objects were embraced in feedback as facilitating a better understanding of the past by giving access to different, sometimes unfamiliar stories, and by making the past more relatable. These two curatorial specificities allow for either the reactivation of, or identification with an experience and, as stories are passed on in the form of objects and memories from collectors to visitors, they lead visitors to feel empathy, including for stories from unknown or different backgrounds to their own. Studies have shown that visitors tend to better enjoy exhibitions dealing with themes they already know about, exhibitions “that resonate with their entrance narratives and confirm and enrich their existing view of the world”¹⁰. EOE's curatorial specificities thankfully moved beyond this view, by providing relatable stories, including to visitors who had no active memory of the conflict. A third specificity, the collaborative dimension – whether in the co-curation or in the inclusion of visitor feedback into the Exhibition – is also an essential part of EOE's originality and success, as it embodies the founding principles of the 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, namely parity of esteem, mutual respect and equality. It also helps forge a multi-perspective collective memory when a single shared narrative of the conflict in or about Northern Ireland is missing. Finally, it allows visitors to claim agency, which studies in transitional justice say can lead to personal, interpersonal and societal healing for people who have been victimised¹¹. From that point of view, EOE's objective of acting as “a catalyst to help open up a platform in which diverse voices and experiences of the conflict can be heard” has been fully met.

EOE's contribution to defining a thoughtful/ethical representation of the past has permeated through other mainstream exhibitions, in particular the recently opened “Troubles and Beyond” gallery in the Ulster Museum. The Museum consulted several community groups and practitioners as part of the redesigning process of its Troubles Gallery: in 2016, HTR's Director presented EOE during a seminar day entitled ‘Difficult Objects’, which “aimed to explore the sensitivities involved in interpreting conflict, whether

¹⁰ Zahava Doering, “Strangers, Guests or Clients? Visitor Experiences in Museums”, *Curator* 42.2 (1999), p. 81.

¹¹ Mina Rauschenbach, Julia Viebach, Stephan Parmentier (eds), *Localising Memory in Transitional Justice: The Dynamics and Informal Practices of Memorialisation after Mass Violence and Dictatorship*, London: Routledge, 2022.



there are any objects too emotive or controversial to display and the mechanisms for presenting difficult objects in a balanced and ethical way”¹². The new gallery opened in 2018 and now presents an object-based, multi-perspective exhibition, where some of the objects have come from the community and where feedback is included in the exhibition, thereby following many of EOE’s good practices. HTR is publicly acknowledged in the gallery for its support and contribution, and the gallery’s curator commonly refers to HTR as one of the Ulster Museum’s “critical friends”.

Another objective of EOE was to “inform the debate on a Living Memorial Museum and dealing with the past”. The feedback collected in local libraries doesn’t really address the question of whether the conflict should be represented in a museum. Indeed, most visitors who commented on the location were happy to have it locally, thereby endorsing the travelling/temporary nature of the Exhibition, with two comments from the same library – probably from an adult and a child visiting the Exhibition together – comparing it to a “mini-museum”. Similarly, the feedback from library staff suggested other places of learning and culture as possible venues for the Exhibition, but the idea of it becoming a permanent display wasn’t mentioned. This may be due to the fact that temporary exhibitions are commonplace in libraries and that the contrast between libraries and museums as exhibition spaces is lesser than that between museums and other venues where EOE was displayed over the years. Indeed, feedback from previous venues addressed the question of the representation of conflict in museums in connection with EOE. For instance:

- “Very interesting objects. Would be good to have a permanent museum with more objects on display.”
- “More honest and inclusive museums like this are what is needed.”
- “In a field which is full of artefact scarce museums, this exhibition takes a bold step towards creating dialogue. I look forward to watching it develop over the years.”
- “More exhibits please. Full museum in permanent location would be great.”

¹² Karen Logan, *The Troubles and Beyond – Curating Conflict*, NMNI, 2021, p.57. https://www.sitesofconscience.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/211440-Troubles-Beyond-Curating-Conflict-Book_WEB.pdf



The refurbished “Troubles and Beyond” gallery in the Ulster Museum has met some, if not all of the expectations expressed here¹³, and even though questions about the further development of the gallery in the allotted space are already being raised, there is currently no viable plan for a memorial museum of the conflict. In fact, thoughtful representation of the past in museums and non-museum venues does exist in Northern Ireland without a single place having to be devoted to it. Indeed, EOE and a variety of other exhibitions, including some single-identity ones, weave together a multi-perspective narrative of the conflict, giving priority to visitor engagement, interpretation and the respectful coexistence of different narratives over location, building and collection. In 2020, National Museums NI (Ulster Museum), the Bloody Sunday Trust/Museum of Free Derry and HTR were the founding members of the Conflict and Legacy Interpretative Network (CLIN), which aims “to create a network of heritage organisations addressing conflict and legacy issues, with the purpose of nurturing a range of views and perspectives on the recent conflict to create greater understanding and inform the debate on legacy and reconciliation”¹⁴. At the time of writing, the network has 15 members (museums, collections, exhibitors and other heritage organisations), including two in the Republic of Ireland.

The feedback gathered during EOE’s tour of the LibrariesNI network also underlines its contribution to the debate about dealing with the legacy of the past. In the last decades, a worldwide “memory boom” has seen the prominence and significance of memory rise across academia and society¹⁵, with the duty to remember as its corollary. This phenomenon is all the more significant in post-conflict societies, including Northern Ireland, where the duty to remember is deeply ingrained, although not always acted upon. Over the years, feedback about EOE has shown a “lest we forget” attitude from most visitors, regardless of whether they have a living memory of conflict or not. The opposite opinion, that a line should be drawn under the past for society to move on, was very rarely expressed in the early feedback but appeared a few times in the feedback gathered in local libraries, as illustrated by some of the above-mentioned examples. Altogether, the feedback from 2022-23 was less optimistic about the future than that collected in 2012.

¹³ “The Troubles and Beyond evaluation summary” <https://cms.nationalmuseumsni.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/NMNI-Troubles-and-beyond-A5-LR.pdf>

¹⁴ Conflict and Legacy Interpretative Network website <https://conflictlegacy.org/>

¹⁵ Silke Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 14-19.



Case display in Whiterock

Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, Northern Ireland is still segregated, notably in housing and education. Mental health issues are above the UK average, and include transgenerational trauma. The region has been further disrupted in the last few years with the suspension of Stormont from 2017 to 2020 and since February 2022, as well as by the uncertainties linked to Brexit, the pandemic, and the cost-of-living crisis. In this unstable, fragmented context, other more “bread-and-butter” issues linked to the health system, education and infrastructure may have taken priority over the legacy of the past for some. Younger generations without a direct experience of the conflict may see the duty to remember as burdensome or less imperative. Yet the issue is still key for many, as the largely unanimous rejection of the controversial Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill by victims’ groups and political parties suggests.

Feedback collected in local libraries, for instance in Bangor, shows that the debate about the past is still animated. This may also be due to the connection visitors to the Exhibition have to their local library. Institutionally-speaking, libraries, archives and museums are often referred to in the same breath (LAM) as places of informal learning whose role is to preserve, mediate and transform information/collections often linked to memory and heritage. From a user’s point of view however, people’s connection to libraries isn’t the same as to museums and archives: it is more intimate, as libraries are by essence local, familiar places within the community, nearly an extension of the home for some readers who may have preferred visiting times and seating arrangements. The most-recent customer survey carried out by LibrariesNI shows that 96% of customers had used the library service in the 12 months prior to the survey, with 46% having used it at least once a week and that 97% were satisfied or very satisfied with the overall experience of their last visit to a library¹⁶. Although the figures are for 2019 and the pandemic may have

¹⁶ *Executive Summary. Libraries NI Customer Survey 2019.* <https://www.librariesni.org.uk/media/q1bj1v3s/customer-survey-executive-summary.pdf>

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Feedback area in Armagh

when it was displayed in other venues such as empty shop units, offices, or museum spaces. In the latter venues, visitors chose to come into a venue they may not have been familiar with and engage with the Exhibition. In local libraries, the Exhibition was brought to them, in a trusted space which some customers feel they own. This may have been challenging for some and led to the idea that libraries – but what was meant was probably “their” library – weren’t the appropriate space for such topics to be raised. On the other hand, because libraries are trusted spaces and all about giving access to multiple narratives on bookshelves and allow readers to enrich or challenge their own perceptions, visitors may have been inclined to engage with the Exhibition positively and endorse its multi-perspective approach. The LibrariesNI 2019 Customer survey also mentioned that 30% of their regular customers said the library was a safe place to meet friends and/or new people, 37% had socialised more with others by using the library service and 32% had met new people¹⁷. The social connections libraries allow for in the community link in with the social experience of visitors, possibly prompting people to leave more intimate feedback than in spaces they are less emotionally engaged with, as if talking to friends or neighbours.

Over the years, EOE has been successful in providing informative, thought-provoking and ethical displays in spaces where people could remember, reflect and share about the past. Its contribution to promote the expression, understanding and acceptance of multiple voices is clear from the feedback received. It could be further enhanced in several ways. One would be by bringing it to a broader audience, for instance by organising talks or events with artefact owners more often, now the restrictions linked to the pandemic are over. Tying in the talks and events with the local experience of the conflict and/or with local cultural practitioners or community groups would make them all the more relatable. New audiences could also be met by bringing EOE to areas it has rarely toured. There is

¹⁷ Executive Summary. Libraries NI Customer Survey 2019. <https://www.librariesni.org.uk/media/q1bj1v3s/customer-survey-executive-summary.pdf>



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a limited number of hosting venues in the rural areas in the western counties of Northern Ireland, where EOE has been shown in only four venues since 2012: the Strule Arts Centre in Omagh (Co. Tyrone) in 2012, then in local libraries in Strabane (Co. Londonderry/Derry), Enniskillen (Co. Fermanagh) and Dungannon (Co. Tyrone) in 2022. Likewise, the border counties were also directly affected by the conflict, but EOE was only displayed in Clones Library (Co. Monaghan) in 2012 and in Louth County Museum in Dundalk in 2013 – leaving out Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim and Cavan. As well as this geographical gap, there is also scope for EOE to bridge a generational gap by reaching out to younger audiences. The educational value of the Exhibition for younger generations is frequently mentioned in the feedback, and some suggested schools as potential new venues. This would be in perfect keeping with the statutory requirements for the History curriculum at Key Stage 3 which include¹⁸:

- “Investigate how history has been selectively interpreted to create stereotypical perceptions and to justify views and actions, for example, the Troubles, slavery, apartheid, Arab/Israeli conflict etc.” – Mutual Understanding (as part of Objective 1: Developing pupils as Individuals)
- “Investigate the long and short term causes and consequences of the partition of Ireland and how it has influenced Northern Ireland today including key events and turning points.” – Citizenship (as part of Objective 2: Developing pupils as Contributors to Society)

Reaching out to younger generations could be done in workshops thanks to newly developed educational resources using EOE as a starting point for discussion. The resources have been designed to be adapted to engage with adult groups, which means workshops could be facilitated by teachers or organisations willing to use EOE as an entry point into learning and reflecting about the past, regardless of the type of venue where EOE is displayed. A further suggestion came from a visitor, again stressing the relevance of objects to make stories more relatable: “Interesting exhibition, one could maybe wish to 'interact' more with the objects, maybe physically by doing small tasks”.

¹⁸ Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment, *Statutory Requirements for History at Key Stage 3*
<https://ccea.org.uk/downloads/docs/ccea-asset/Curriculum/Statutory%20Requirements%20for%20History%20at%20Key%20Stage%203.pdf>



A final remark would be to point out that HTR's work has always been about creating ethical tools and practices to deal with the legacy of the past and, rather than carrying them out fully, disseminating them to enable other people. Over the years, EOE has proven to be such an example of permeating good practices in representing, interpreting and reflecting on the conflict. Its recent tour of the LibrariesNI network has taken this idea of dissemination to another level, by engaging with local audiences in their trusted shared spaces. Just as reconciliation is "a voluntary act and cannot be imposed"¹⁹, so is trust, especially in post-conflict societies where trauma (including trans-generational trauma) is still prevalent. We have seen how the trust people put in their local libraries permeated throughout the Exhibition, leading to more intimate feedback than in other venues. EOE has been described by leading academics as an "imaginative" and "important" exhibition (see above, p. 8 and p. 10). For many, from various backgrounds in Northern Ireland and beyond, it is a valued tool which should continue to engage with new audiences in new venues and locations. Its value lies in enabling as many as possible to learn and reflect about the past so that they can in turn – having gained more built up self-confidence and empathy – foster mutual trust across the community.

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¹⁹ Grainne Kelly and Brandon Hamber, *A Working Definition of Reconciliation*. Democratic Dialogue, 2004.
https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/76832671/Paper_A_Working_Definition_of_Reconciliation_HAMBER_KELLY_2004.pdf



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Evaluation of LibrariesNI Tour of Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict Exhibition

