

The Prisons Memory Archive

A Case Study in Filmed Memory of
Conflict

Edited by

Jolene Mairs Dyer

Ulster University

Conor McCafferty

Queen's University Belfast

Cahal McLaughlin

Queen's University Belfast

Series in Contemporary History



VERNON PRESS

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www.vernonpress.com

In the Americas:
Vernon Press
1000 N West Street, Suite 1200
Wilmington, Delaware, 19801
United States

In the rest of the world:
Vernon Press
C/Sancti Espiritu 17,
Malaga, 29006
Spain

Series in Contemporary History

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022936677

ISBN: 978-1-64889-440-4

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*Dedicated to those who contributed to the PMA recordings
and have since passed away. We hope to honour your
memory. Thank you.*

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List of abbreviations

AG	Advisory Group (of the Prisons Memory Archive)
CRC	Community Relations Council
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund (now the National Lottery Heritage Fund)
IRA	Irish Republican Army
INLA	Irish National Liberation Army
LVF	Loyalist Volunteer Force
MLK	Maze and Long Kesh (Prison)
NCCL	National Council for Civil Liberties (now Liberty)
NLHF	National Lottery Heritage Fund
OU	Open University
PMA	Prisons Memory Archive
PRONI	Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
QUB	Queen's University Belfast
RHC	Red Hand Commando
TNA	The National Archives
TTT	Time to Think (archival project by the Open University)
UDA	Ulster Defence Association
UFF	Ulster Freedom Fighters
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force

Readers may also find useful a glossary of terms based on PMA recordings – see <https://www.prisonmemoryarchive.com/glossary/>

List of contributors

Laura Aguiar is Community Engagement Officer and Creative Producer at the Nerve Centre. Through projects such as Making the Future, Rural Voices and CollabArchive, she has been responsible for connecting with communities to make public history and archive heritage more accessible and engaging through creative projects. She is a multimedia content creator and educator with over 10 years of experience in designing and delivering programmes and courses in the education, heritage and arts sectors in Ireland. She is also co-founder and co-director of the Rathmullan Film Festival and has taught at Queen's University Belfast and University College Cork. She holds a BA in Journalism (Fumece University), MA in Media and Communication (Stockholm University), and a PhD in Film Studies (Queen's University Belfast).

Lorraine Dennis has worked for the PMA, in both a paid and voluntary capacity since its inception. Committed to the ethical practice of participant engagement to effect sustainable societal change, Lorraine has worked in the field across academic, government and voluntary sectors experiencing all that is good, and bad, in participatory practice.

Amanda Dunsmore is a visual artist whose art practice employs art processes that explore representations of societal transformation through portraiture. She works with video, sound, photography and installation. Her portraits evolve through long periods of research and the work is presented as a series of extensive socio-political/historical art projects. Central to Dunsmore's art practice is an exploration of potential future memory in society, the accumulative legacy of portraiture in archiving history and the long-term value of socio-political art making.

Sarah Feinstein has over twenty years' experience working in the cultural sector. In the United States, Sarah has worked with policy institutions such as the National Endowment for the Arts and in collections management at the Smithsonian. She is currently a Teaching Fellow at the School of Performance and Cultural Industries at the University of Leeds, where she is also the Programme Leader for the Master's in Audience Engagement and Participation.

Rosie Hickey received a PhD in Architecture from Queen's University Belfast in 2017. From 2020 she has been a member of Historic Buildings Council. Her research interests lie in the intersection of memory, place and identity. Over the

last ten years, she has brought these interests into a variety of roles and heritage projects which have involved research, exhibition curation, community work, education and outreach. She was Outreach and Communications Officer at the Prisons Memory Archive from July 2019 to August 2020. She is currently Heritage Officer at the Strand Arts Centre, Belfast.

Kate Keane was Project Archivist with the 'Visual Voices of the Prisons Memory Archive' project from 2017 to 2020, having previously worked in a number of other archival and specialist library settings. With a BA (Hons.) in Irish Studies (Trinity College Dublin), and an MA in Cultural Heritage and Museum Studies (Ulster University), her wider research interests include exploring the role of archives, museums, and libraries in societies emerging from conflict. She has recently completed an MA in Archives and Records Management at University College Dublin (2020-2021).

Laney Lenox is an anthropologist and anarchist theorist living in Berlin, Germany. Her research employs the anarchist ethos of consensus building and applies it to garner more nuanced and inclusive understandings of contentious pasts. The chapter she contributed is part of her doctoral research, which further developed existing theory about why transitional justice mechanisms are limited in their potential to deliver meaningful societal transformation through understanding the potential of non-linear memorial practices.

Jolene Mairs Dyer PhD is a Lecturer in Media Production at Ulster University. She edited material from the PMA to create *Unseen Women: Stories from Armagh Gaol*, a 26-minute documentary and multi-screen gallery installation shown at Belfast Exposed in June 2011. Her most recent work, *Women's Vision from Across the Barricades* (2015) and *Women's Vision in Transition* (2020), used collaborative photography to explore socio-economic issues affecting women living in interface areas of north Belfast. She is the Director of Belfast Feminist Film School.

Jenny Meegan was an Open University tutor in Armagh Gaol (1983-5), the Compounds/Cages (1983-6) and the H Blocks (1983-2000). She tutored students who studied Social Science Level 1 courses and Geography and was also an academic counsellor for Open University students in the H Blocks. She has been involved with the Prisons Memory Archive since her interviews in Armagh Gaol and Maze Long Kesh, has co-chaired the PMA Management Group and currently co-chairs the Advisory Group with Joanna McMinn.

Conor McCafferty has worked in research, management and creative roles in academia and arts and heritage organisations. He holds a PhD from Queen's

University Belfast – his research and professional interests revolve around archival collections in the arts and architecture, and public engagement and outreach through digital media. Conor was Project Manager of the 'Visual Voices of the Prisons Memory Archive' project at Queen's University from 2019-21 and is now a member of the PMA Advisory Group.

Sarah McDonagh is a postdoctoral researcher at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Sarah's doctoral research explored the audio description of the PMA video tours for primarily blind and partially sighted people in Northern Ireland. Using the PMA video tours as her example, Sarah's research explored the ethics of audio description, reflecting on the process of describing politically sensitive material, with the scope of her analysis expanding onto issues of language, identity, and representation in the context of Northern Ireland.

Laurence McKeown is a former political prisoner (1976-1992). During that time, he took part in the protests for the return of political status and spent 70 days on hunger strike in 1981. Upon his release, Laurence completed a doctoral study at Queen's University Belfast and is now an author, filmmaker, and playwright.

Cahal McLaughlin is the Chair of Film Studies at Queen's University Belfast and director of the Prisons Memory Archive. He has produced films from the archive and written about the PMA for *Memory Studies* and *Oral History Review*. His most recent film is *Right Now I Want to Scream: Police and Army Killings in Rio – the Brazil Haiti Connection* (2020) www.itstayswithyou.com

Joanna McMinn worked in Long Kesh from 1986-1992, teaching women's studies, both as a formal OU course, and also as an informal evening class. In 2005, Joanna participated in *Inside Stories – Memories from the Maze and Long Kesh*, along with another teacher. This led to becoming involved with the Prisons Memory Archive, firstly on its Management Group, then in the Visual Voices project, and currently on the PMA Advisory Group.

Kevin McSorley was the editor during the 'Visual Voices of the Prisons Memory Archive' project and is currently a Film Studies PhD candidate at Queen's University Belfast. He has an MA in Documentary Practice, is an award-winning filmmaker and has a background in journalism and broadcast television.

William Mitchell is the Project Director for Action for Community Transformation – The ACT Initiative, supporting the transformation of those categorised as former

combatants. He has been a senior mediator with Northern Ireland Alternatives, a community-based restorative justice project. Having been incarcerated for 13 years as a political prisoner, he has considerable experience in engaging 'hard to reach' groups, working to develop techniques of adaptive leadership. William has a Dip. HE in Informal and Community Education, a 1st Class Honours Degree in Youth & Community Work, a post-graduate certificate with distinction in Restorative Practices, a Level 4 teaching certificate in the Lifelong Learning sector and is a PhD from Ulster University.

Melania Terrazas is a Senior Lecturer in English Studies at the University of La Rioja, Spain. She is Head of the Centre of Irish Studies BANNA/BOND (EFACIS). She guest-edited a special issue on 'Gender Issues in Contemporary Irish Literature' (Vol. 13:2, 2018) for *Estudios Irlandeses Journal* and edited *Trauma and Identity in Contemporary Irish Culture* for Peter Lang, 2020.

Elizabeth Woodcraft was a barrister practising in chambers in London, from 1980-2014. She is now a writer.

A note on the text

In this volume, readers will find scholarly research based on the Prisons Memory Archive project from a variety of fields, alongside a range of personal reflections. Some PMA participants have contributed chapters, and their biographical information is included in the list of contributors. Several more participants provided personal reflections on their involvement with the PMA. These reflections are interspersed between chapters, and we have allowed the backgrounds of these participants to emerge from their narrative, in the hope that readers will encounter their story with curiosity and without preconceptions.

Interpretations of the conflict can be as contested as the origins of the conflict itself – as editors, we preferred to allow various phrases and titles to be used by different authors in this publication. One example is the name of the region itself, sometimes referred to as Northern Ireland, N. Ireland, NI, the North of Ireland, the Six Counties, or Ulster. Similarly, the male prison was initially called Long Kesh Detention Centre before becoming officially known as HMP (Her Majesty's Prison) Maze; in common parlance, the entire complex is often referred to as simply Long Kesh or The Maze. During the early internment period between 1971-76, the Nissen huts that already stood on the Long Kesh site were enclosed within structures referred to by prisoners as Cages and by the authorities as Compounds, whilst the H-Block structures, built in 1976, were referred to sometimes as simply the Blocks. In the years since the prison's closure, Maze Long Kesh is sometimes used to describe the entire site.

Prologue: Reflection on Material and Memory at Long Kesh / Maze prison

Laura McAtackney

Aarhus University

I was born in Belfast in 1977. The civil conflict in the North of Ireland, colloquially called 'the Troubles', provided the backdrop, and sometimes the foreground, of my childhood and early adulthood. I was 17 when the first substantive paramilitary cease-fires occurred in 1994 and 21 when the Good Friday Agreement was signed. The referendum to confirm it was one of the first elections I voted in. I have spent most of my adult life thinking, and writing, about the conflict and how it has fluctuated in shaping, intruding into, and receding from the still ongoing peace process. As a contemporary archaeologist the main focus of my research has been on the material nature of conflict and peace, especially how the materiality of conflict has fared between the two states. I have noted how material remains have been inconsistently removed, transitioned and sometimes remained but forgotten about. Following Laurent Olivier, I am especially interested in what 'material memory' (2011) of the past can tell us about the past through the lens of the present. For a long time, Long Kesh / Maze has been central to my thinking through the relationship between conflict and peace due to its prominence during the conflict, the political negotiations over its future and my attempts to deal with the material presences and absences associated with it.

From a very early point in the peace process it became apparent that 'the road to normalization' (Irish News, 2005) - as the media liked to optimistically refer to the early days of the peace process - involved eradicating prominent material traces associated with the conflict. It became apparent that this was not as straightforward a process as one would assume. While no one would claim to enjoy living with the often-monumental architecture and infrastructure associated with violence - the heavily militarized army bases, police stations, ring of steel protecting Belfast City Hall etc. - there was also a palpable reluctance to see all these prominent aspects of our previous lives simply disappear. Seven years after the Good Friday Agreement was signed, Liam Clarke argued: 'some of Ulster's vanishing fortresses are now regarded with

something approaching nostalgia' (2005, 2). The use of 'nostalgia' is poignant because the transition between conflict and peace has been a difficult and protracted process that is as much to do with memory of the past as looking forward to a different future. The lack of resolution regarding what happened in the past has more often involved official forgetting and not dealing with the past in preference to stoking controversy and contention. This approach has had material consequences. Sites such as Long Kesh / Maze - which have long, complex and entangled relationships with the conflict - have become contentious and evidence the consequence of collective memory retaining the sectarian divisions associated with the conflict. Such a situation has not only ensured a lack of open discussion about what the Troubles was, it has also facilitated partial memories, and even nostalgia, as these 'castles of the North' deplete in number without transparent consultation or public access. As the political representatives of the so-called 'two communities' have become more dominant, and the peace process has been shaken by political crises, there has been little space or incentive to contemplate the complexities and nuances of the conflict that could be anchored in such a place.

Nowhere has this ambivalence been more notable than with the elevation of Long Kesh / Maze prison to 'an icon of the Troubles' during the early years of the peace process. Due to its long and entangled connection to the conflict - it opened in the early years in response to the need to hold large numbers of interned and convicted men and closed in its aftermath in 2001 - the prison increasingly came to represent the 'memory wars' notable in the post-Good Friday Agreement period (McGrattan, 2012) to the extent that it has been interpreted as 'a sum zero heritage site' (Graham and McDowell, 2007, 364). As the early glow of the peace process faded, and heated debates about the nature of the conflict and the past in general became more combative, Long Kesh / Maze became a touchstone for how we remembered the Troubles. Its retention became synonymous with a victory for those prisoners most associated with it - Republicans - and likewise its destruction was considered a win for Unionists who feared the site would become a sacred shrine to the 1981 Hunger Strikes (McAtackney, 2014, 240). In the end, a sort of unhappy compromise was achieved with most of the site demolished excepting a representative sample of structures - including the hospital associated with the Hunger Strikes - and it largely remains closed to the public to this day (except when the Royal Agricultural Society have their annual show in May).

My own connection to Long Kesh / Maze - and subsequently the Prisons Memory Archive - was due to my academic interest in what the material remains of the closed and increasingly contested site could tell us about (1) how it functioned in the past and (2) what it meant in the present. This research was primarily carried out between 2004 and 2008 during the course of a Ph.D.,

which I completed at the University of Bristol having been funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council. The fact this research was funded by an English-based funding body and was completed at an English institution was not incidental. Whereas my research seemed interesting, timely, and novel to a largely detached English audience it proved almost impossible to do based in a Northern Irish institution as there was absolutely no interest in completing such a politically-engaged archaeology project. Indeed, I had very little idea how political this research would become when I was originally funded in the summer of 2004. My original plan was to examine and record some of the 300+ standing buildings that still occupied the site, but I was refused access to the site from its custodian – the Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) – in late 2004 (despite being told it would be forthcoming when applying for the Ph.D.). From that time onwards, my Ph.D. had to diverge from being solely focused on extant standing remains on the site and rather I started to explore the inaccessibility of the material remains, the politics of the past, and the circulation of material culture from Long Kesh / Maze in wider society. In many ways this change of focus made for a more challenging project but it also created more interesting research angles and inspired my future research on Northern Ireland to be much more aware of the political nature of material remains.

In 2005 and 2006 I started to reach out to a variety of people who had some type of connection to the site, be that as former prisoners, prison officers, or visitors. Indeed, there could have been many more stakeholders included in my study if it had followed a more expansive approach, such as that taken by the Prisons Memory Archive. The Strategic Investment Board in 2012 asserted that the site had 'about 33' different narrative threads associated with the site, which ensured that it had the potential to develop multivocal interpretations of the site's past (McKee, 2012). While these narratives have not been explored further as part of an official heritage brand or product, it indicates just how interconnected Long Kesh / Maze was with Northern Irish society. Part of my inclination to limit my interviews to former prisoners, prison officers and visitors was due to the difficulties in balancing the willingness of those very different stakeholders to engage in the process of examining the material world of Long Kesh / Maze. While I tried to work through official organisations, unofficial contacts and crowdsourcing, it was noticeably difficult to make contacts with those who had more ambiguous or difficult relationships with the site in the present, especially ex-prison officers and Loyalist ex-prisoners. In the end, I only managed to interview one ex-prison officer, through a serendipitous family connection, and two Loyalist ex-prisoners, through them contacting me after seeing a recorded talk I had given on YouTube. I was also aware that I did not have the time or the focus to expend too much energy

trying to find people to talk to about the site as the focus of the Ph.D. was on archaeology – effectively on the stuff, rather than on people.

Most of the interviews I conducted were with people in their own homes or offices, these interviews often revolved around people talking with me about the objects they had from Long Kesh / Maze – many decorated leather wallets or handkerchiefs, but sometimes extremely accomplished wooden harps and Celtic crosses were presented - or providing anecdotes about their memories and experiences of Long Kesh / Maze. On only one occasion, I was able to gain access to the site to conduct what I have subsequently called ‘site-responsive oral testimonies’ (McAtackney, 2022), which was effectively walking around the site with ex-prisoners while they told me about their experiences. I was able to access the site due to the Republican ex-prisoner group Coiste na-Iarchimí arranging it through their connections with elected Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) who were ex-prisoners and were therefore officially permitted to access Long Kesh / Maze. I visited the site with three ex-prisoners and amazingly I was not aware of the work that Cahal McLaughlin was attempting at the same site but the similarities between our approaches are notable. For both of us, we were keen to allow the participants to be led by what they wished to speak about. For the Prisons Memory Archive this has been articulated as ‘life storytelling’ (this volume, 14), whereas for my archaeological project the aim was for people to respond to their reconnection with the material nature of the site. In practice, the ethos, if not the theorized method, was remarkably similar.

But there were a number of differences in our approaches. My only attempt to complete the ‘site-responsive’ oral testimonies was with a group of three ex-prisoners and the dynamics of the three was obviously a significant factor in how they moved around the site and talked about it. This was particularly the case as only one of the three spent any time in what was known by ex-prisoners as ‘the Cages’, which was the internment camp part of the site that utilized and expanded on the original Nissen huts from World War 2 (these were largely replaced from the mid-1970s but they did remain operational until 1988 [McAtackney, 2014, 19]). Amongst the three, there was a clear reverence given to the perspectives and insights of the man who had spent significant periods of his life, from the 1970s to 1990s, as an internee and prisoner at Long Kesh / Maze in comparison to the other two who had only been there for a shorter time in the 1990s. Another difference in our approaches was that I used only an oral recording device – with a small microphone discreetly attached to my jacket – as I did not have access to a video recorder and I did not want an obtrusive recording device to possibly affect the responses. Rather, I photographed some of the spaces and objects that the ex-prisoners mentioned as we moved around the site so I could connect their testimonies to a visual

afterwards. I found after a short amount of time that the men simply forgot they were being recorded and started to really explore the site – including two walking off so they could make a circuit of the prison yard, as they would have frequently done whilst forced occupants of the site. Another aspect of the dynamics I found particularly interesting was their different post-closure familiarity with the site. Since the prison closed in 2001, two of the men had been back the site – indeed both had been a number of times – but one had not returned since his release until that day. This familiarity revealed itself in their different reactions to how the site had changed and / or stayed the same. Akin to the Prisons Memory Archive recordings, there were many fascinating insights from that convoluted hour we spent exploring the prison together with our OFMDFM guide.

My own experiences with the Prisons Memory Archive are multi-layered as I have used and listened to the material from this important resource in my own research, Cahal McLaughlin has very generously provided access to his significant archive of photographs from the period around the demolition of the majority of the site, and most significantly, I have also been a participant. In late 2007, I was invited by Cahal to record my own responses to the site as of researcher of Long Kesh / Maze. Initially, I had agreed as I wanted to see the site again as I was in the final months of my Ph.D., but over time I have realized that this experience has deeply impacted me as a researcher. Being the subject of such a creative process made me reflect on my own responses and practices as a researcher of memory. I did not have an especially personal connection with Long Kesh / Maze, but I have very specific memories of the process of completing my contribution that have helped me reflect on completing memory research and indeed the complexity of memory. In many respects, I remember my introduction to the site – the signing of consent forms, discussions of what would happen, leaving my dad to be brought on a short tour by the PMA team – better than the recording itself. I have strong sensory memories of trying to take in as much as I could of the site while being conscious of being recorded and trying to verbally articulate what I was thinking and how I was reacting. I remember that some parts of the site looked different to me since my last visit, which was probably due to my memory skewing rather than any material changes having been made in the interim. I also remember being aware that there were a small number of parallel oral histories being recorded on the site at the same time as me, which was abruptly confirmed when an ex-prison officer approached me as we were in the same vicinity because he thought he remembered me as a nurse working at the site when it was operational.

Over time, I realize that my thoughts about Long Kesh / Maze have changed and at times I have felt a discomfort about open access to some of my more

naïve and wide-eyed ideas about the prison in 2007. I've also reflected on whether my thoughts on Long Kesh / Maze are really that important, in comparison to most other participants' more intimate connections, and whether they deserve to even be there. This process of reflection has led me to better understand how and why some interviewees decide to remove their consent for recordings, as there can be a jolt when one realizes that our memories are constantly evolving. More broadly it has made me think about the changeability of memory, how contextual it is and how our memories of places in the past are constantly being reconstructed in the moving moment of the present. These thoughts are not a critique of the Prisons Memory Archive, rather, they have made me consider how important it was in revealing so many different perspectives on this important site from a particular point in time. Now that the majority of the site has been demolished such an archive could never be completed again. I also consider how much times have changed, the generosity of spirit towards others' experiences of the conflict has further shrunk and the hierarchies of victimhood are more entrenched. From my perspective, the Prisons Memory Archive is truly a unique resource in accessing reflections not only on such a seminal site but also on where we stood in the first decade of the peace process.

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