

Introduction

Contributions to this special issue of *Irish Historical Studies* come under the dedicated theme of 'Ireland and the British Empire–Commonwealth'. The papers originate from a workshop entitled 'Ireland and empire' that took place at the University of Leeds in March 2005. One of the key objectives behind the organisation of this workshop was to bring together specialists in British, Irish and imperial and Commonwealth history with an interest in the wide-ranging debates linked to the issue of 'Ireland and empire'. At the workshop, the papers presented a range of topics within the context of literature and the arts; agriculture and industry; metropolitan politics and diplomacy. The overarching theme was the 'Irish experience' within an 'interconnected British world' during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Within this special issue, the contributors have reflected upon Ireland's entanglement within the Empire–Commonwealth, and, by extension, the history of the British Isles. The body of literature relating to the history of Ireland's relationship with the British Empire from the early to the modern period has increased steadily over the past decade. New types of writing have emerged within this interdisciplinary field, combined with often-controversial scholarly debates. The most recent historiography considered within the articles that appear in this special issue is underpinned by the eternal question of Ireland's (and also Northern Ireland's) place within the British Empire–Commonwealth, and the challenge of identifying the *character* of that association.

This special edition of *Irish Historical Studies* presents revised versions of the majority of papers from the 'Ireland and empire' workshop alongside additional papers that cover a wider range of topics.

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