

Irreplaceable Troubles collection to be digitised

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Unique holdings of the internationally renowned Northern Ireland Political Collection (NIPC) held in Belfast's Linen Hall Library are set to be conserved and digitally published after receiving initial support for a £374,300 bid to the HLF.

The Linen Hall Library's NIPC consists of over 350,000 items, including printed material relating to Northern Irish politics and society, featuring the activities and opinions of groups ranging from paramilitaries to government to social pressure groups.

The areas to be digitised were chosen for their rich cultural history and include political posters from 1966 to 2014 numbering over 6,000, and the collection of political periodicals covering the same time period.

Not only will the digitisation allow instant access to selected rare pieces – it will also help protect its more fragile items, ensuring all content is conserved indefinitely.

The periodicals include runs of over 2,750 titles from political parties, security forces, paramilitary groups as well as socialist, fascist, feminist and anarchist organisations. Titles include the *An Phoblacht*, *Protestant Telegraph*, *Women Behind the Wire*, *The American Gael*, and many more.

The NIPC is the only collection of its kind in the world. No other institution in a localised conflict has systematically collected material from all sides since the beginning of the conflict. Much of the material is irreplaceable and many of the pieces are held by the NIPC alone.

It was started in 1968 when the then librarian, Jimmy Vitty, was handed a civil rights leaflet in a city centre restaurant. Since then the archive has grown to include all manner of printed materials and ephemera including leaflets, Christmas cards, stickers, smuggled communications, and even politically branded children's bibs.

Paul Mullan, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Northern Ireland, said: "This is an exciting project not just for the Linen Hall Library but for Northern Ireland, as more people will be able to access large portions of this collection from such an important period in our history. The collection brings together material from such a diverse range of sources that it provides an invaluable resource that gives a truly unique insight into a difficult and contested heritage."

Julie Andrews, Director of Linen Hall, said: "We are constantly striving to make our invaluable collections available to as wide an audience as possible. The grant from the HLF will make it possible for people all over the world to view this rare and incomparable resource."

John Killen, Librarian at Linen Hall, said: "This will be a tremendous boon to researchers and the public in general who wish to understand the nuances of social and political life in Northern Ireland. Digitising also ensures sustainability as we move into a new age of information gathering and publishing."

Alongside the ambitious digitisation project, the library will organise a number of exhibitions, a schools outreach project, and an intergenerational reminiscence project asking members of local community groups to record their memories of significant events during the Troubles stimulated by material from NIPC, with the results recorded in an oral archive.

More details about the collection and the library can be found on the [official website](#).

Notes to Editors

Development funding of £28,200 has been awarded to help the library progress their plans. Once the project has been further developed they will be submitting a second-round application to secure the full grant amount of £374,300.

Further Information

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