



CSC Evaluation and Monitoring Programme

## Impact in history research

Kevin James



**Professor Kevin James** was a Commonwealth PhD Scholar at the University of Edinburgh's Department of Economic and Social History from 1997-2000. Since completing his PhD, he has pursued an academic career at the University of Guelph, Canada; his primary research interests are British and Irish history, migration and tourism. In addition to research and teaching, he has engaged in the university's community outreach activities, working with media organisations in Canada and the UK. He has also maintained strong research links with the UK and formed an international working group on tourism history. In addition, he has contributed to the study of the historical relationship between Scotland and Ireland as part of a project funded by the governments of the UK and the Republic of Ireland, following the Good Friday Agreement.

### PhD research

Kevin was a history postgraduate student at McGill University when he applied for the Commonwealth Scholarship for PhD study at the University of Edinburgh. He was researching Irish immigrants in nineteenth century Montreal and additionally working as a research assistant on the government-funded Metropolis Project which was studying immigrant communities in Canadian urban centres. In the course of his work he had been in contact with researchers at the University of Edinburgh and was particularly motivated to study in the UK in order to be close to the historic records and sources that he was researching and also to familiarise himself with the UK academic environment.

Kevin's PhD examined the remnants of Scottish migration settlements in northeast Ulster. He contributed to teaching in the department, and his duties included leading tutorials and grading student assignments, which he noted as critical training for his academic career. Kevin was also encouraged by his supervisor to attend a number of conferences and he was able to link with academics across the UK. His PhD research was subsequently published as a book and over the course of his career he has extended his research to examine travel and tourism history in Scotland, England, Wales and Ireland in the nineteenth century.

### Knowledge and skills

Kevin identified statistical training and the application of statistical methods to history research as one of the key skills that he developed while on his PhD. He benefitted greatly from working in an environment which recognised the validity of quantitative research techniques, stating that this approach was different to the teaching of history in Canada at the time and his statistical skills were therefore an important factor in securing a tenure-track employment towards the end of the PhD, as the skills-set he had developed was highly valued in Canada.

At the University of Guelph, Kevin utilised these skills to lead the historical research methods training for undergraduate students. His department identified the development of students' numeracy skills as an important teaching objective and Kevin noted that due to his training at Edinburgh he felt confident in teaching these methods and approaches.

Kevin reflected that developing knowledge of academic networks in the UK and an understanding of the region were key advantages of having been based in the UK while researching migration in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and this has allowed him to liaise with colleagues with greater confidence. He noted that the knowledge of assessment structures and assignment requirements in the UK have greatly benefitted him, as he is able to advise the large number of students at his university who are participating in exchange programmes with the UK.

***The Commonwealth award and the credibility of having been in the UK were critical to the beginning of my career and being offered a job. [My time in the UK] deeply informed my research through the local knowledge that I had obtained, the specific training I received, and the scholarly networks to which I was introduced.***

### **International collaborations**

Kevin has maintained links with many of the academics and research teams he met whilst on his PhD and noted that one of the key contacts and mentors in his career over the last fourteen years has been an academic he was introduced at a conference by his PhD supervisor. A lecturer at the University of Stirling at the time, over the years he has reviewed draft publications and contributed to Kevin's work, and this collaboration continued after his retirement.

In 2006 Kevin brought together academics from the UK and Canada to form a Tourism History working group at the University of Guelph. He noted that his personal contact and knowledge of his UK colleagues' research expertise were important factors that enabled him to form this group, and research collaborations through the group can be attributed to the intellectual networks that he was a part of whilst in the UK.

### **Wider impact**

Kevin was involved in a research project with the University of Ulster, initiated in the wake of the Northern Ireland peace process, to examine the interconnected histories of Scotland and Ulster. Following the Good Friday Agreement, the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland governments jointly funded the project to examine the evolution of Ulster-Scots' identity and the historical experience of Scots in Ulster. An important aim of the project was to attempt to create a better sense of their historical identity in order to help illuminate their contemporary position in Northern Irish society.

Kevin's involvement in the project included advising post-doctoral fellows about the interconnected histories of Scotland and Ulster and public outreach activities in Canada and Northern Ireland. The research findings from the project were disseminated through a number of public out-reach events, including conferences, workshops, lectures, and publications. Reflecting on the wider impact of the work Kevin noted that the research assisted in developing a deeper understanding of the roots of conflict and the resolution of conflict through the lens of history, which shed light on the evolution of community identities. He noted: "I think we enabled government to consider the Scottish settler community and its descendants as real

stakeholders in Northern Irish society, Northern Irish culture and the Northern Irish economy".

In addition to his research and teaching responsibilities at the University of Guelph, Kevin has also been heavily involved in the University's community outreach work, particularly with the Scottish-Canadian community. He noted that his credibility in this work was enhanced by his understanding of and familiarity with Scotland and its culture, society and geography, which allowed him to connect with the community.

Kevin has also been involved in media work, including television productions in both Canada and Scotland, related to his research on tourism and travel history. He described this part of his work as service to the broader public and he speaks to a range of audiences, for example seniors clubs, and organisations in order to bring history to as wide an audience as possible.

### **More about Kevin's work**

[www.uoguelph.ca/history/history-kevin-james](http://www.uoguelph.ca/history/history-kevin-james)

The CSC is not responsible for the content of external internet sites.

### **Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the UK**

Woburn House  
20-24 Tavistock Square  
London WC1H 9HF  
UK  
[evaluation@cscuk.org.uk](mailto:evaluation@cscuk.org.uk)  
[bit.ly/cscuk-evaluation](http://bit.ly/cscuk-evaluation)