

Bad Bridget and the role of women in the polices of Developing the Narrative at the Ulster American Folk Park

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ABSTRACT

The Ulster American Folk Park strives to give a diverse range of perspectives on the story of migration from Ulster to North America, from the 18th century to the early 20th century. However, issues concerning indigenous peoples, slavery, urbanism and women were largely ignored until lately. In the Developing the Narrative approach National Museums NI have sought to bring a more” inclusive approach to the exploration of our past, reflecting and representing multiple perspectives, which can open minds and promote respect and empathy.....and without them our understanding of this history is incomplete.”

The *Bad Bridget* exhibition and project (podcasts and book – *Bad Bridget, Crime, Mayhem and the Lives of Irish Emigrant Women*, Elaine Farrell and Leanne Mc Cormick, 2023, Penguin) seeks to put women to the fore of this narrative. However ironically, it concerns women who found themselves in trouble with the law.

The *Bad Bridget* exhibition examines the experiences of Irish women who migrated to urban centres in North America such as New York, Boston and Toronto between 1838 and 1918, and found themselves in trouble with the authorities as they struggled to survive. For much of the nineteenth century, Irish-born migrants were the biggest group in American prisons, and there were disproportionate numbers of Irish girls and women in the justice system, court, and prison. *Bad Bridget* has provided us with a platform to reveal this previously unexplored aspect of the Irish migration story at the museum, contrary to the “American Dream.”

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Dr. Liam Campbell is Director of the Mellon Centre for Migration Studies based at the Ulster American Folk Park. He previously had senior roles in both television and heritage organisations. Liam has published and lectured widely on heritage and environmental issues, especially Ireland, Scotland and America. Holding undergraduate degrees from NUI Maynooth and master’s degrees from both Queens University Belfast and Ulster University, he completed his PhD at Ulster University in 2011. He is a visiting lecturer at East Tennessee State University where he spent a year as Basler Chair for Integration of the Arts and Sciences in 2018.