



Belfast is a lively and exciting city known for its music, night life and university.

But it was once famous for something which made headlines around the world. Years of conflict known as the Troubles left thousands dead.

One community, who are mostly Protestant Christians, wanted Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom. The other community, who are mostly Catholic Christians, wanted it to join up with the Irish Republic. People on the extremes of both sides used violence.

Fortunately, those days are over. But these murals are a reminder of the past. They can be found all over Belfast, painted on walls and houses.

The art showed support for one side or the other and symbolised a divided community. But now many murals are being preserved as an important part of the city's history. I've come to meet Tim McCarthy.

**Amandeep:** Hi there, Tim. Hello, thanks so much for meeting me.

He has studied the murals and what they can tell us about the history of conflict here.

**Amandeep:** Tim, can you tell me about images like this?

**Tim:** Images like this are very common in working class areas in Northern Ireland.

**Amandeep:** And what does it tell us about the history of the area?

**Tim:** Well, this particular community will have felt as if they were under pressure from the other community and therefore it contains a lot of defensive, militaristic kind of imagery.

**Amandeep:** And what about images from the other community?

**Tim:** You will find similar imagery, but the symbolism is very slightly different - a different use of colour but the content will be very similar.

**Amandeep:** And what is Belfast city like now?

**Tim:** Belfast is very different in the last few years. We've had a lot of investment, everyone feels better, feels more relaxed and a lot of the murals that are going up actually reflect this.

New murals are appearing in the city. Many people feel these new images are more appropriate for a community which wants to leave the violent past behind.

People have been working hard to achieve a lasting peace in Northern Ireland. Many projects try to bring both sides closer together. Here at the Conway Community Centre, Tim is helping young people develop their skills and produce new artworks.

**Young Woman:** In Northern Ireland it's very important for there to be an arts scene. Because instead of violence, instead of expressing yourself through alcohol or drugs, you can turn to the arts scene. It's safe and it's a good form of expression.

**Young Man 1:** I think street art is important for any city because it gives the city a kind of character.

**Young Man 2:** Without art in a country it would be very dull.

Tim gave me a lesson in his style of street art.

**Amandeep:** Tim, how significant is the street art scene in Belfast today?

**Tim:** Well, it is quite small, but it's growing all the time with the help of the internet obviously, people can see what's happening globally and they want a little piece of that on their doorstep.

There is a saying that art reflects society. People here are glad that the new art murals reflect a more prosperous and peaceful Northern Ireland.