

Orangeism



Myth and Reality

by Peter Berresford Ellis

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Orangeism: Myth and Reality

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In February, 1796, John Claudius Beresford, the Commissioner for Revenue in the Irish Parliament, whom Lord-Lieutenant Fitzwilliam once described as 'virtually king of Ireland', gathered a few like-minded friends in his town house in Sackville Street (now O'Connell Street). Beresford's house, in the 19th Century was to become the Sackville Street Club, a centre of the Ulster Ascendancy peers. At that meeting Beresford and his friends formed an Orange Lodge. Within six months this lodge became the Grand Lodge of Ireland, the headquarters of the Orange Order, and Beresford was its Grand Master. It is, perhaps, appropriate that, two hundred years later, someone with a distant ancestry connection to John Beresford, should speak in Dublin on the bicentennial of the Order in an attempt to disentangle the myth and reality of the creation of that movement.

The Grand Lodge of the Order remained here, in Dublin, until 1922. The Orange Hall in Parnell Square was gutted during the Civil War when Free State troops stormed it. Many documents were destroyed, others were packed in a wooden crate and sent to Belfast where they reposed in the vaults of the Bank of Ulster, untouched, and almost forgotten, for forty years.

It should be made clear at the start, that when we talk of the Orange Order we are not speaking of a movement whose philosophies have been cast in stone from the moment of its creation. Its attitudes and intentions have changed over the years. Initially it was an exclusive Anglican organisation, firstly an anti-unionist movement and only subsequently a pro-unionist force. Today, if we are to believe the claim of the Reverend Martin Smythe, it is simply the organiser of 'Europe's largest folk-festival'. Of course, one has to be pretty credulous to believe that! Whatever the Orange Order was or is, one aspect has remained fundamental to it – it is a sectarian movement which is virulently aggressive anti-Catholic.

Perhaps it will not surprise you that my interpretation of the historical dynamic behind the creation of the Orange Order is the interpretation shared by James Connolly, Tom Jackson and Desmond Greaves. This can be summed up thus:

The Orange Order was formed by members of the Ascendancy landlord class as a reaction to the growing populist peasant and working class movements of both Catholics and Dissenters. Notably, a reaction against the United Irish movement which was led by a cross-section

of the Irish intelligentsia. Desmond Greaves called the Orange Order 'a terrorist organisation' in the true meaning of the term.

That interpretation, interestingly enough, has been one that has been generally accepted by all except modern day Orange historians. Even the 19th Century liberal unionist historian William Lecky accepted it. Only in the 1970s has the interpretation been challenged with any degree of subtlety by Dr A. T. Q. Stewart, now retired from Queen's

University, Belfast, whose work, has been praised from the pulpit by Ian Paisley. Stewart's work has been followed by the new neo-colonialist school of historians, so wrongly called 'revisionists', who have asserted Stewart's speculations into a tablet of stone.

I will come to Dr Stewart's theories shortly and hope to convince you why the interpretation that Connolly and Greaves maintain is still a valid one.

The first thing to bear in mind is that the Ascendancy was solely an Anglican Ascendancy and no dissenting Protestants were considered part of it.

To understand this we have to cut through many layers of mythology and particularly we have to deal with the myth

of the Battle of the Boyne.

The Boyne was not the most significant battle of the Williamite conquest of Ireland – Aughrim and the ending of the siege of Limerick a year later, in 1691, were the more important events. And far from William's victory bringing in a period of 'civil and religious liberty', for both dissenting Protestants as well as Catholics it brought in over a century of loss of rights which had already been secured – on paper, at least, in Acts 13 and 15 of James II's Dublin Parliament in 1689. Those Acts guaranteed freedom of religious worship and allowed each religious community to support its own churches and ministers.

Following the victory of William of Orange, whose conquest, incidentally, was supported – financially and politically by Pope Innocent XI under the League of Augsburg – the only religious sect allowed freedom of worship in Ireland was the Anglican Established Church. The Penal Laws enacted against the Catholic religion were also enacted against all dissenting groups, not the least the Presbyterians. The Presbyterians of Ulster had long been considered 'troublemakers' by the English Establishment.

Under William's laws Presbyterian ministers were liable to three months in jail for delivering a sermon and a fine of £100 for performing divine service. By an Act of 1704 all

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Presbyterians were excluded from holding any office in the law, army, navy, customs and excise and even municipal employment. In 1713 a further Act made Presbyterian schoolmasters liable to three months imprisonment if they were found teaching. Intermarriage between Presbyterians and Anglicans was declared an illegal act. Couples found to have been married by Presbyterian ministers were jailed and or brought into an Anglican parish church and condemned, before the congregation, as guilty of the sin of fornication. The so-called 'religious liberty' won by William of Orange was the cause of a quarter of a million Ulster Presbyterians migrating to the New World colonies between the years 1717-1776 alone. The 1719 Act of Toleration for Protestant dissenters only eased the plight of a few rich landowners. It did not halt the flood of ordinary Dissenters seeking religious freedom in other lands.

There are signs that even members of today's Orange Order are trying to come face to face with this paradox. George Patton, the current executive officer of the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland today admits of the Boyne: '... it wasn't even a Protestant victory because William's army had a large number of Roman Catholics in it.' But he declares: 'It was really a victory for the people because it put us on the road to parliamentary democracy... that's what we celebrate.' Well, there's a concept that is arguable, but for another time.

There is no need for me to point out that Irish Catholics were, of course, suffering in a similar fashion. Unfortunately the Penal Laws and Catholic suffering have become synonymous in many people's minds which has further entrenched the Orange myth.

This loss of religious and civil rights for both Catholic and Dissenter caused the 18th Century to be one of continuous unrest in Ireland. The spring of revolution was, significantly, to be in Ulster. Dissenting Ulstermen rose in the 1760s against the Anglican landowning classes, they wore an oak leaf in their hats and were named Hearts of Oak or Oakboys. They appeared in Armagh, Derry and Fermanagh. The triggering point for the attacks which started in 1763 was as a backlash to the oppressive road corvées; the obligation to perform gratuitous labour, in this case the maintenance of the roads, by non-landowning Dissenters for the Anglican landowners. Resistance to exactions, rack rents and oppressive tithes followed. In 1771 another organisation, the Hearts of Steel, a Presbyterian organisation, swooped down on the Anglican landowners, burning their crops and maiming cattle.

Perhaps one should clarify what life was like for the poor Irish – Catholic, Dissenter and even poor Anglican – living in 18th Century Ireland. Because of the laws of William of Orange, his Ascendancy landowners governed the country with a brutal feudalism and corrupt aristocratic power. They lived on great estates, enjoying their wealth and exercising over the peasantry and workers total control. The tyranny and rapacity of the colonial landlords in Ireland was more than equal with the brutality of the French aristocrats of the ancien regime prior to 1789. Arthur Young in his Tour of

Ireland points out that the grand seigneur of the Irish estate could even demand – and did – that wives and daughters of his workers and peasantry be sent to his bed. If any refused to obey his lord then he would be horse-whipped, have his bones broken or worse... he could be hanged.

Mostly the great estates were economically mismanaged. In 1740 alone, 400,000 Irishmen, women and children, died of malnutrition and attendant diseases in a famine due to economic mismanagement. And Dissenters not just Catholics suffered under such conditions.

In the American colonies, it was the exiled Ulster Presbyterians who remembered the conditions of Ireland and who spearheaded the fight for independence in 1776. These Ulstermen provided 19 American revolutionary generals; five were prominent signatories to the Declaration of Independence; four served in Washington's revolutionary cabinet and one was chair of the committee which drafted the American Constitution. Three of the first governors of the thirteen newly independent states were Ulster

Presbyterians and, as we know, the children of these Ulster Presbyterians subsequently provided no less than ten American presidents.

It was these same Ulster Presbyterians who brought the spirit of the creed of the Rights of Man and republicanism back to Ireland.

Against this background Irish Catholic and Dissenters began to unite in the first major Irish egalitarian republican movement – the United Irishmen. The idea of Catholics and Dissenters joining forces against the Anglican Establishment and thereby the English colonial power in Ireland – was anaethma to the Ascendancy. The Anglican Archbishop of Armagh, Hugh Boulter, wrote: 'The worst of

this is that it stands to unite Protestant and Papist, and whenever that happens, goodbye to the English interest in Ireland forever.'

It was a period of danger for the English colonial administration in Ireland. With the American War of Independence going on, many regiments of the English garrison were withdrawn to be sent to the New World. The landowning aristocracy began to form Volunteer Corps in 1778. Dissenters were encouraged to join these militias, ostensibly to defend the country from outside aggression. The act debarring dissenting Protestants from becoming army officers was abolished in 1780. But the Establishment distrusted many of these units, especially those raised in Ulster among the Presbyterians. The militias became political debating societies. The question of reform was the popular topic and Henry Grattan used the Volunteers as a lever to secure the repeal of Poyning's Law and the Declaratory Act of 1719, making the Dublin Parliament subservient to Westminster. The Volunteers disbanded although many, such as those in Antrim and Down, joined the new United Irish movement.

George Grenville, the Marquess of Buckingham, sent to serve as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in 1782, clarified the matter of Government intention to counter the growing

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unity between Dissenters and Catholics. He stated: 'I cannot help feeling a very great anxiety that such measures may be taken as may effectually counteract the union between Catholics and Dissenters at which the latter are evidently aiming. There is no evil I would not prophesy if that union takes place.'

It is interesting that Lord Buckingham indicates that it was the dissenting Protestants who were spearheading a political union with the Catholics. It is true that the Establishment had already sought to defuse the situation in 1780 by repealing the Test Act which debarred all dissenting Protestants from office in law, government and military. But that was not enough. A regium donum, or 'royal gift', was brought in allowing £50 per annum to Presbyterian ministers who swore loyalty to the crown and influenced their flocks likewise. It did not work. Lord Downshire, one of the great Ulster landowning aristocrats, called for its withdrawal. 'The Presbyterian ministers are unquestionably the great encouragers and promoters of sedition,' he said.

Lord Buckingham's other 'effective measures' soon emerged. Anglican landowners in 1782 encouraged the formation of groups among their Protestant tenants which made dawn raids on isolated Catholic households, claiming that they were enforcing the Penal Laws forbidding Catholics to keep firearms. The dawn raids earned these groups the title – Peep o' Day Boys. As protection against these raids, the Catholics formed groups called The Defenders. This phenomenon was mainly a northern one.

Agrarian guerrilla warfare was the order of the day. But against this, the very thing that Anglican Establishment feared most was happening – the United Irishmen had come into being in 1791 with its egalitarian programme and its organisation uniting all religions in a powerful national and social revolutionary movement.

The 'liberal', if we can use this word, wing of the Anglican Establishment had begun to realise that their power base was too narrow to keep down the rising tide of revolution. Buckingham had pointed out the problem and he also began to further ease the restrictions against Dissenters imposed by the original Penal Laws.

But William Wentworth, the 2nd Earl Fitzwilliam, succeeded Buckingham as Lord Lieutenant. He had a different set of priorities. He embarked, with the aid of Henry Grattan, who now dominated the Irish Commons, to moderate the restrictive laws against Catholics as well. The Penal Laws against Catholics had, in fact, been eased as and when the establishment needed Catholic support. When, for example, Irish recruits were needed as cannon fodder for the British Army, then, as a sop to encourage such recruiting, the 1771 Bogland Act allowed Catholics to secure leases of up to 50 acres of 'unprofitable' land for 61 years. A new loyalty oath, had been framed in 1774 in order that Catholics could feel morally able to take it and which then allowed them to take indefinite leases on their 'unprofitable' land under the Relief Act of 1778. Another Relief Act in

1782 allowed Catholics to buy, sell, bequeath and mortgage freeholds on the same terms as Protestants. While the Penal Laws against Catholics and Dissenters were slowly vanishing, debilities certainly remained, such as Catholic exclusion from entering the professions and from voting.

But the lessening of the Penal Laws, however slight, alarmed the right wing of the Anglican establishment. The Ascendancy was now split into two main camps. Those who realised that more concessions would have to be made to prevent revolution and those of the right opposed to any concessions whatsoever.

Lord Clare and John Beresford had clashed immediately with Lord Fitzwilliam over his liberal policies and the viceroy removed them from office. Lord Clare had connections at the English court and went straightaway to work on George III's Anglican Protestant religious mania. This resulted in Fitzwilliam being recalled and Lord Clare and Beresford being reestablished in power in Dublin.

The creation of a new movement, at this stage, presented an ideal tool to these Ascendancy grandees.

The Orange Order, as is well known, came into existence on September 21, 1795, in Armagh, following a series of clashes between Catholics and Protestants, particularly the 'Battle of the Diamond' or 'Running Monday'. In Orange mythology we have the cottage of a farmer-weaver, Daniel Winter, being attacked by Defenders with Winter and his sons holding off the 'barbaric Catholic horde' in grand Biblical style. Thereafter, feeling the need to defend themselves – because (and I quote the words of Winter's descendant, Hilda Winter, who runs the Orange shrine there today) 'because they only wanted to live in peace with their neighbours', Winter and his compatriots formed a secret, oath-bound society, subscribing their names in blood to the declaration of aims of the first Orange Society.

Let us leave folklore and attempt to find the reality. Why did the Orange Society of Armagh prove to have any staying power? After all, there had been Orange Societies formed before and they had all vanished. What was special about the Orange Society of Armagh?

Armagh was equally divided in population between Catholics and Protestants and the scene of years of sporadic fighting between the Peep o' Day Boys and the Defenders. Significantly, the county had a high proportion of Anglicans in the population, these were mainly the landowners and richer tenant farmers and they were in the centre of the county. To the south the majority of the county's population was Catholic while in the north they were Presbyterian. The real power, the actual ownership of the land, was under the control of a small group of Ascendancy landlords like Arthur Acheson, the Earl of Gosford, whose estates covered much of southern Armagh; the Corrys of Derrymore, the Richardsons of Bessbrook, the Ensors of Ardress and so on. Isaac Corry of Derrymore became Irish Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1798 and Surveyor-General of Crown Lands in 1799.

The poorer tenant farmers and weavers of Armagh were

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divided between Catholics and Dissenters. Rivalry as to who would succeed in obtaining the leases of hovels and rough ground to work was usually the cause of violence which became sectarian. This violence had significantly diminished with the rise of the United Irish. But during Fitzwilliam's viceroyship, the Peep o' Day boys became active again in direct response to what they perceived as a threat from his liberal policies towards Catholics. Clare and Beresford had, as part of their campaign to destabilise Viceroy Fitzwilliam, circulated rumours that the Viceroy was going to hand over the entire country to a Catholic government. They pointed to the fact that some Catholics had been allowed to vote in 1793, this being limited to forty shilling freeholders, being holders of a lease for life on a house or property deemed to be worth forty-shillings a year. This was the lowest wealth qualification by which one could vote. The reality was that there were not too many such Catholic freeholders. And, of course, Catholics were still debarred from taking a seat in parliament.

As a point of interest, when the Emancipation Act of 1829 allowed Catholics to sit in parliament, the franchise qualification was raised from forty shillings to ten pounds. Thereby the electorate, which had stood at 230,000 voters in a population of seven million people, was reduced to 14,000 voters. This hardly warrants O'Connell's title 'Liberator' – but that's another story.

Returning to the easing of the Penal Laws, in 1793 came the establishment of the first Catholic college for higher education in Carlow and, in early 1795, Maynooth College was founded in Kildare. To many Protestants, these events were proof of the truth of Clare and Beresford's black propaganda.

In 1795 the gentry of Armagh ordered magistrates to search all Catholic homes for seditious literature as a means of flexing their muscles against the United Irish movement. The Peep o' Day Boys began burning and looting Catholic homes. Defender organisations tried to beat off attacks and any successful defence by the Defenders was claimed as a 'Papist outrage' with magistrates calling for tougher action against Catholics.

A series of pogroms began in Armagh with Catholics burnt from their homesteads by Peep o' Day gangs which spread panic though Catholic Ireland. The pogroms culminated in the clash at the Diamond near Loughgall, in the northern part of the country, in September, 1795.

In the aftermath of this, a meeting at James Sloan's inn at Loughgall, consisting of magistrates, squires and squireens and Anglican parsons, formed a new movement to maintain the Protestant Ascendancy. Among those attending were Isaac Corry the Member of Parliament for Newry and a wealthy Armagh landowner; Lord Blayney another wealthy landowner; Henry Chichester, a cousin of Lord Donegall; Thomas Verner of Church Hill, a brother-in-law to Lord Donegall; and Thomas Stoker, the land-agent of Robert Lampart, the 7th Earl of Cavan. Donegall and Cavan were close friends of John Beresford.

Importantly, also attending was Captain John Gifford of the Royal Dublin Militia. He was a close friend of Captain William Beresford, nephew to John. A few days after the meeting, in September, 1795, Gifford wrote to his friend Willie Beresford, that he had founded a society at Loughgall which for 'a generation would curb both Pope and Popery in Ireland'. Gifford actually did frame the first Orange Order oath. William Beresford communicated the news to his uncle. The leaders of the Ascendancy were involved from the first.

Now John Lucius Beresford, while a member of the Dublin parliament for Waterford (the county where his modern day descendent, John Beresford, the 8th Marquess of Waterford, still resides on the family estates at Curraghmore, Portlaw) had his main landholding at Walworth, Co. Derry. He was, therefore, an Ulster grandee with his finger on the pulse of local politics. Beresford soon persuaded Lord Clare, now Lord Chancellor of Ireland again, following Fitzwilliam's departure, John

Foster, the Speaker of the Irish Parliament, and Francis Annesley, that the Orange Order could become a movement to disrupt and destroy the United Irish movement and maintain Ascendancy oligarchy.

Here is the real birth of the Orange Order. Here is why the Armagh Orange Order of 1795 prospered. As the Unionist historian, William Lecky, observed: 'Several considerable county gentlemen in Ulster – placed themselves at the head of their tenantry and began to organise them into societies.'

From its inception, the Order became an oath-bound secret society, organised on the Masonic model. Many of the chief Ascendancy figures, like Beresford

himself, were members of the Masonic Lodges and so it came naturally to the architects of the Orange Order to repeat that model. Confined to a male membership, with a minimum age of 18 years old, the Order has remained exclusively male. From the late 19th Century there have been women's lodges but existing only as separate support organisations for the male lodges. Curiously, there is a feminist struggle in the Orange Order today with activists like Ann Smyth trying to persuade her brethren to accept women as full and equal members of the Order.

The Order found natural support in the English royal family, having, at one time, two royal princes as Imperial Grand Masters and Grand Masters. For example, the Duke of York, second eldest son of George III and brother of George IV, became Grand Master of the Orange Lodges established in England, Scotland and Wales. His brother, the Duke of Cumberland, became Imperial Grand Master. A Report of the Committee of Secrecy of the Irish House of Lords, in 1799, claims 1 Duke, 7 bishops, 31 Earls, 27 Viscounts, 34 barons and 362 baronets to be leading members of the Order.

Therefore the Orange Order enters Irish history as a High Tory conservative, sectarian and counter-revolutionary force – an élitist group organised and governed by the gentry,

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utilising farmers and yeomen of the Anglican faith, as a terrorist counterpoise to the United Irish movement then striving to unite Catholic and Protestant in a common reformist and national cause. Dissenters were excluded from its ranks, it is important to emphasise this.

It was P. Gibbon, in 1972, in an article in *Economy and Society*, who argued that the origins of the Orange Order depended more on local factors than on the national situation in Ireland. This theme was taken up a few years later by Professor Stewart. The theory is that some of the 'lower orders' (I quote Professor Stewart's words) of Presbyterians in Armagh were members of the first lodges. Neither Gibbon nor Stewart can, however, contradict the overwhelming evidence that the Order was, for its first four decades exclusively Anglican, nor that Presbyterians were supportive of the United Irish movement. Indeed, the Presbyterians of Antrim and Down flocked into the republican United Irish almost to a man. But to support the modern mythology of the Orange Order today, Gibbon and Stewart have to attempt to place poor Presbyterians in the Order at its foundation as a means of symbolism. And to counteract the obvious evidence that William of Orange was not a Dissenter's icon before the mid-19th Century, some reasons had to be found as to why Presbyterians in Armagh would help create or even join what was an exclusive Anglican movement which was as much their enemy as it was an enemy to the Catholics. In an attempt to find a rationale for this, Professor Stewart maintains, like Gibbon, that local issues outweighed the ideological distinctions of revolution and counter-revolution.

Professor Stewart claims that the Orange Order was first founded by Presbyterian peasants in Armagh as a result of rural vendettas between Catholics and Protestants but then, once founded, he does have to concede that the Ascendancy landlords took over the leadership of the movement which then spread throughout Ireland. Professor Stewart has had to accept that the Orange Order immediately became a tool of the Ascendancy landlord interest who then used it as a tool of their class interests.

Professor Stewart disputes the argument that the Anglican Ascendancy deliberately fomented the quarrels between Dissenters and Catholics, in a classic demonstration of the policy of 'divide and rule'. He says: 'There is actually very little evidence that this was so, and some evidence that the official attitude was quite the reverse.'

I think he may well be hoping that, as a secret, oath-bound society, not much documentation survives and that of the Grand Lodge had hopefully gone up in smoke in 1922.

The 'very little evidence', in fact, is substantial enough and when Professor Stewart tries to show the reverse he appears on dangerously thin ice. Indeed, Colonel Charles Knox of Dungannon, one of Co Tyrone's biggest landowner, who was incidentally Grand Master of the Orange Lodges of Derry, Tyrone and Fermanagh, wrote in March, 1797:

'I hope to increase the animosity between Orangemen and United Irishmen.' He was writing to General Gerard Lake, commander-in-chief of the Army in Ulster who inspected the first Orange parades in Belfast, Lurgan and Lisburn in 1796. There are many such clear statements of intent in Ascendancy correspondence at the time which Professor Stewart is ignoring. Under Secretary Edward Cooke's correspondence contains several references to encouraging sectarian strife between Orangemen and United Irishmen. This is a recurring theme in letters from many prominent aristocratic landlords.

And when Professor Stewart cites, in support of his contention, that Lord Gosford, governor of Armagh, was strenuously opposed to the Orange Order, he has to admit the paradox that Lord Gosford allowed the Order to train and parade openly on his estates at Markethill. Professor Stewart makes the rather feeble excuse that Lord Gosford allowed this as 'an attempt perhaps to strengthen the hand of Orange leaders in controlling the rank and file'.

The Ascendancy documentation of their involvement in governing the Orange Order in its inception is clear. The Beresford correspondence, some of which was actually published in the mid-19th Century, is full of interesting materials.

If, then, the original Orange Order was an Ascendancy secret society brought into being to maintain their position, how did it change to the movement we recognise today?

Events overtook the Order. The United Irish uprising took place. Its suppression was bloody. However, the near success of the uprising caused alarm in England. A hostile independent Ireland would threaten the very centre of the empire. And the Ascendancy administration were also

coming into conflict with English imperial policy as well. Henry Grattan had made great advances for legislative independence for the Irish parliament. In April/May of 1782 the English parliament had conceded the parliamentary independence of the Dublin colonial parliament. But a truly independent Ireland, even if it were governed by the Ascendancy, could not be tolerated by England.

The Dublin parliament, we have to remind ourselves, was representative only of the Ascendancy, the Anglicans. The vast majority of the Irish nation had no vote. Only 200,000 out of a population of 7 millions could vote. No Catholics were represented. And even two-thirds of those seats available in the parliament were held at the nomination of patrons for whoever could pay the most money. No Dissenters were allowed to sit in the upper house.

Viscount Castlereagh, one of the great landowning Stewarts of Ulster, was appointed chief secretary for Ireland and was responsible for the suppression of the 1798 uprising. Castlereagh now became responsible for the English Government's proposal to incorporate the colonial parliament into a new United Kingdom state, as Scotland had been so incorporated in 1707. In this proposal England had returned to one originally put forward in 1759, a

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proposal then rejected by the Ascendancy aristocrats with the vehement support of the colonial merchants and traders. Only when George II died in 1760 was the policy to attempt a union of Ireland and Britain withdrawn.

The right-wing of the Ascendancy saw Castlereagh's new proposal for a union as a threat to their power and privilege and the Orange Order became vehemently anti-unionist. The Ascendancy in Ireland did not want to be ruled by Westminster; they did not want their feudal power bases eroded by policies over which they had no control.

At first the concept of union was no threat. In practical terms, the 300 seats of the Dublin parliament contained 216 which were at the nomination of large, landowning aristocrats. This meant that it required only four of the same landowning Ascendancy aristocrats to instruct their placemen how to vote for them in order to command a majority in the parliament. Indeed, it required only the Duke of Leinster and the Earl of Shannon to announce their wishes to sway most members of the parliament.

The first attempt to pass an Act of Union in the Irish Parliament in 1799 was therefore easily rejected. Lecky, the Unionist historian, points out that there is no record of a single Orange Lodge favouring the Union. There were nineteen leaders of the Order in senior positions in the Dublin parliament and seventeen voted against the Union.

As Grand Master of the Orange Order, Beresford, for example, must have bemused survivors of the United Irish when he seemed to support their position on independence by declaring that the Union with England would 'see the destruction of the country'. He went on: 'Proud of the name of Irishman, I hope never to... see my country governed by laws exacted by a parliament over which she can have no control... (the proposed Union was) a measure so destructive of their commerce and prosperity, and so humiliating to their pride as a nation.'

The English parliament and its agents now set out in earnest to secure a majority for the Union during the period between 1799 and 1800. Its methods were simple. To circumvent the power of the aristocrats, the government were to make an immediate appeal to the mainly middle-class Dublin House of Commons – an appeal based on the greatest dynamic of the human condition – greed. They would have to offer more rewarding inducements to the members than the Ascendancy could offer.

Out of the 300 members of the colonial parliament in Dublin, 84 'rotten borough' members were paid-off; 72 held positions ultimately controlled by the English administration and were open to 'pressure'; and 28 others were simply given peerages – the 28 new Irish peerages were just for starters – in fact, by 1806 Pitt had created a total of 77 new Irish peers as the price of the Union. Pitt's immediate bill for bribes to push the Union through was just over one and a quarter million pounds (a substantial sum in 1800) – thus securing a majority of 43 votes; 158 votes in favour of Union to 115 votes against.

A fascinating paradox in today's perspective is that while the Orange Order was against the Union the Catholic hierarchy was not. Castlereagh had persuaded the Irish Catholic bourgeoisie that after the Union the Penal Laws would be dropped and Catholics would be allowed to stand for parliament. Catholic clergy might even be subsidised by the state and Catholics allowed into law and the armed forces. It is true that such ideas were mooted but George III's religious mania proved insurmountable, as doubtless Castlereagh and his colleagues knew it would, and so such radical proposals were quickly dropped after the Union.

From January, 1801, Ireland became part of the United Kingdom sending 100 members to the English Commons and 28 peers to the Lords in London. As Under Secretary Edward Cooke wrote to Prime Minister Pitt with great satisfaction: 'By giving the Irish a hundred members in an assembly of six hundred and fifty they will be impotent to operate upon that assembly, but it will be invested with Irish assent to its authority.'

A general mobilisation of the Order against the Union was avoided mainly due to the threat of the implementation of the Insurrection Act of 1796

What had happened to the Orange Order opposition? During the year leading to the second debate on the Union, many of the Orange Order leaders had received financial bribes and titles. The Grand Lodge itself had adopted a neutralist policy of discouraging discussion of the Union at their meetings. A few leaders like Isaac Corry of Derrymore, had been persuaded to become principal spokesmen for the Union. But even their influence was unable to prevent the Ulster Orange Lodges expressing their antagonism to the Union. In fact, all the Orange Lodges of the nine Ulster counties organised a meeting and issued the declaration that the proposed Union would bring 'inevitable ruin to the peace, prosperity and happiness of Ireland'.

Three of Dublin's Lodges also passed a resolution: 'We consider the extinction of our separate legislature as the extinction of the Irish nation.' However, a general mobilisation of the Order against the Union was avoided mainly due to the threat of the implementation of the Insurrection Act of 1796 which had not only suppressed the United Irishmen, but, with the Convention Act of 1793, peaceful gatherings of protesters was made virtually impossible.

Several of the Orange leaders basked in their newly bestowed titles. Foster became Lord Oriel, Lord Clare had received a second English title and Annesley became an earl. Beresford's son became the marquis of Waterford – the fact that Beresford himself did not receive a title was indicative of his continued anti-Unionist stance. Beresford resigned as Grand Master and Lord Donegall's brother-in-law succeeded.

To give an idea of what was involved in average bribes, I can give a quick sample of some payments to members of the Dublin parliament – J. Bingham was made Lord Clanmorris and given a £24,000 pay off; Charles Coote became Lord Castlecoote, given £7,500 and command of a regiment; J. Toler was made a peer and Chief Justice; G. Joycelyn was given a colonelcy and his brother was

parliamentary inquiry, ordered by Prime Minister Lord Melbourne. It was suggested that there was an Orange conspiracy to set up a Regency under the Imperial Grand Master of the Order (elected in Dublin in 1828 as Grand Master of Ireland as well), His Royal Highness, Ernest Augustus, the Duke of Cumberland. Victoria, as heir-apparent to William IV, was only 17 years old at this time – she would be 18 when she came to the throne. Several of the aristocracy, especial the Ascendancy in Ireland, felt the firm hand of an elder male king was needed. Cumberland was certainly a ‘serious contender’ and in 1837 became King of Hanover.

A Select Committee of the House of Commons found that the Orange Order was still led by ‘men of high rank in England, Ireland and Scotland’. Among those named in this affair was His Grace, the Duke of Gordon, one of the largest landowners of Moray, Deputy Grand Master for Scotland. Victoria never forgave the Orange Order for involvement in the conspiracy to deny her succession to the throne and even in the 1840s she was objecting to the appointment of any known Orangemen in positions of authority in Ireland.

Maybe this suppression was the ‘kick-start’ the Order needed to change direction. For this was the point where most of the aristocrat Anglican leaders ‘bailed out’ of the Order and made their peace with the Imperial Government and Saxe-Coburg-Gotha dynasty of Victoria and Albert who now ruled in England. Though, of course, not all did so. Lord Rodan was still Grand Master of the Order in 1837. But the general removal of the aristocracy away from the leadership of the Order opened it up to a more proletarian Orange movement.

Within a few years the Presbyterians had become the dominant force in the Order, their radical and democratic traditions were quickly subverted in the cause of High Toryism.

The fortunes of the Orange Order rose and fell in direct relationship to the rise and fall of the Irish national liberation movements. In 1865 the Orange Order had 1,600 lodges in Ireland and a membership of 150,000. Documents have revealed that some 30 or more British army regiments had their own lodges. But once the ‘Fenian threat’ had been dealt with, the Order lost membership and influence again.

They once again revived as a reaction to the ‘Home Rule’ movement, especially in the 1880s when Lord Randolph Churchill began to cynically fuel their aims and membership by inflammatory speeches, playing the ‘Orange Card’, as he put it. The support of Churchill and the Tories made the Orange Order respectable again and prominent Tories, Ascendancy aristocrats who had previously dissociated themselves from the Order over the Cumberland affair, now felt able to rejoin it. Lord Enniskillen became Grand Master. Lord Erne was to succeed him.

In the years between 1922-1969 the Orange Order dominated the political life of the Six County statelet.¹ Today James Molyneaux, the leader of the Unionist Party, is still Sovereign Grand Master of the Royal Black degree

of the Order.²

Let us not be misled by those who maintain we are seeing a liberalisation of Unionist politics away from the Orange Order. Seven of the Nine Ulster Unionist MPs are prominent members of the Order. The other parties, such as the Democratic Unionist Party, incline towards the more extreme bodies such as the Apprentice Boys and the Black Perceptory. Ian Paisley is an member of the Independent Orange Order as well. The Independent Orange Order was formed in 1903 in Belfast by Thomas Sloan as a more liberal movement. In fact, one of the founders of the Independent Orange Order, Robert Lindsay Crawford (1868-1945), editor of the Ulster Guardian, wrote the Magheramorne manifesto, calling on Irish Protestants and Catholics to unite in the cause of Irish self-government. Forced to leave Ulster in 1910 he moved to support the Irish Republic in 1919 and founded the Protestant Friends of Irish Freedom. Now, even Sloan and Crawford’s Independent Orange Order, has been subverted to Paisley extremism.

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Today we are asked to believe that the Orange Order has now changed into some folkloric institution, content to bang drums, wear sashes and uphold the traditions of a ‘Protestant culture’, whatever one may mean by this. We are told by Orange Order grandees like Rev Martyn Smythe that, I quote. ‘it is not an anti-Catholic body – there is nothing provocative about it’. We are told that the July marches are just a big folk festival.³ Yet I think it would be hard to find any member of the nationalist community to agree with the Deputy Grand Chaplain of the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland, Reverend Brian Kennaway, when he says ‘that the best friend a Roman Catholic has is the truly devout Orangeman.’

Catholics finding gangs of Orangemen marching down their streets banging their drums and screaming: ‘Kill all Fenian bastards!’ and ‘Fuck the Pope!’, will find it hard to reconcile this proclaimed ‘friendship’!

To put it succinctly, the Orange marches, which have always been purposely routed through Catholic areas, are symbolic of a dog marking its territory. The message is not folkloric; it is one which states that ‘we are the conquerors, you are the conquered’. The message is deeply sectarian and if there is to be any hope for the future of Ireland, that sectarianism must change. But how can it be changed?

For this historian, there is a sadness that a people can be so utterly manipulated by a misunderstanding of history. Instead of being shown the reality of a common past, the Protestants of Ulster have been deliberately subverted into believing a mythological history. Their view of William of Orange and the Boyne Water is a dream of a world which never existed. The worse thing is that, lacking the knowledge of the realities of the common past shared with their fellow Irishmen and women, they are still disputing the realities of the present.

Most people are more willing to believe the simple myths of folklore rather than the grey complexities of historical reality. And that is the problem we are faced with today.

Notes

1 By the mid 1960s the Orange Order boasted a membership of 200,000 in the North; every Unionist politician was a member. All middle and senior civil service posts went to Orange Order members, not just in the Belfast bureaucracy but in local county government offices. No job of sensitivity or importance could be held by anyone not in the Order. It was simply not possible to advance up the political and, to some extent, the economic ladder in the Six Counties Establishment without being a member. Even someone hailed as 'progressive' and 'liberal' such as Captain Terence O'Neill (Prime Minister, 1963-69) had to trot out in his orange sash and make the obligatory anti-Catholic speeches when it was required. The first Prime Minister of the six counties (1921-40), Sir James Craig, later Lord Craigavon, had in April, 1934, openly declared to his supporters: 'I have always said that I am an Orangeman first and a politician and a member of this parliament afterwards... All I boast is that we have a Protestant parliament and a Protestant state.' Thus the rights of a third of the population was dismissed.

2 A few days after this lecture James Molyneaux announced his retirement as leader of the Ulster Unionist Party. On September 8, 1995, David Trimble, MP for the Upper Bann, was elected leader by the 800 strong Ulster Unionist Council. Trimble is also a hardline prominent member of the Orange Order often seen leading provocative demonstrations and haranguing any opposition.

3 The events at Drumcree in July, 1996, almost a year after this lecture was given, have incontrovertibly demonstrated the harsh reality of Orangeism. It has also shown that the RUC remains a biased and sectarian force which prefers to fall back on its traditional role of attacking the Nationalist population rather than standing up to threats from the community from which it draws its membership – that of Unionist Orangemen.

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