IMAGES IN CONFLICT : VISUAL

IMAGERY AND THE TROUBLES IN

NORTHERN IRELAND (1968 - 1981)

BELINDA LOFTUS

Ph.D

1982

Volume II

CHAPTER 4: ORANGE

The Ulster village in which I live is a peaceful, mixed community. Yet
the visual signs and symbols of opposed political allegiances are
endlessly apparent there. The Union Jack flies over the police station.
Shamrock is worn on St Patrick's Day. Orangemen process through the
street in summer, and their arch spans the main road for a week or two in
July. At times of tension loyalist and republican youths vie with each
other to decorate local walls with the Irish tricolour or the British
Union Jack, and paint the kerbstones red, white and blue or green, white
and orange.

Why this plethora of signs and symbols which has no parallel in the
rest of the United Kingdom or south of the Irish border? How did specific
flags and banners, badges and emblems come to be so important in Northern
Ireland? What are their precise functions? Do they exert a general
influence on imagery and perception in the province?·

Such questions are difficult to answer because traditional political
imagery in Northern Ireland is multiple, complex, pervasive and ambiguous.
Therefore my discussion of it will be spread over two chapters. In this
chapter I will analyse the signs and symbols of the province's Protestant
community. My first step will be to break down the imagery associated
with a typical Orange procession into its constituent elements. After
comparing and contrasting these signs and symbols with those used in the
earliest Orange processions I will then discuss in some detail their
individual historical evolution, in the sections on Sashes and ribbons,
Biblical imagery, Fragmented symbolism, Freemasonry and Orangeism,
Swords and secrecy, Arches, Drums, Orange lilies and Heraldry. Having

completed this historical analysis of individual emblems associated with

Orange processions, I will sum up what it has revealed both about those

emblems, and about the methodology employed, before discussing the

symbolic meanings of the processions in their entirety and their functions

in the political development of the area now known as Northern Ireland.

This lengthy historical analysis I feel to be necessary for two

reasons. In the first place serious historical studies of Orange

symbolism are virtually non-existent, so I cannot refer the reader to a

previously recorded body of information in support of my discussion of

its usage since 1968.[1] In the second place it is impossible to

understand the contemporary role of traditional signs and symbols in the

Northern Ireland's Protestant community without first knowing how they

have been shaped by their role in a series of historical actions and how

they link with other elements in that community's visual heritage.

Finally I will examine the functions of Orange imagery since the

beginning of the present troubles in two sections, titled Orange

processional imagery since 1968 and The wider impact of Orange Symbolism.

---

1. R.M Sibbett's Orangeism in Ireland and throughout the Empire (Henderson, Belfast, 2 vols, 1914-15), contains a certain amount of straight-forward historical information on Orange displays, but gives little indication of its sources; Sybil Baker's "Orange and Green, Belfast, 1832-1912" in The Victorian City (ed H.J Dyos and Michael Wolff, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973, vol 2, pp. 789-814) provides a well-documented summary of processions and riots in nineteenth century Belfast; ATQ Stewart's The Narrow Ground (Faber, 1977), includes stimulating comments on the historical genesis of certain patterns of behaviour in the Protestant community but tends to ignore the wider context; Frank Wright in "Protestant ideology and politics in Ulster" (Archives Europeenes de Sociologie, vol 14 no 2, 1973, pp. 213-280) deals very effectively/the strong religious content of Orangeism and suggests the importance of the games-playing element in orange-green conflict; and Peter Gibbon in The Origins of Ulster Unionism (Manchester University Press, 1975) indicates a more complex relationship between the symbolism and social groupings of Ulster Protestantism at various points in time, notably at the inception of the Orange Order and the Ulster Unionist Convention of 1912. However none of these works have Orange symbolism as their main focus and sadly the late Aiken McClelland failed to complete his long-awaited book on Orange regalia before his recent death.

It will be my argument that not only has such imagery been employed in a direct, overt, political fashion, but that it has also had a less obvious but equally important effect on the way the present troubles are seen by a very wide range of people in the province. I will end with some brief Conclusions, before turning, in the following chapter, to an analysis of the political signs and symbols of Northern Ireland's Catholic community.

The Twelfth Parade (ill 65)

Northern Ireland's political signs and symbols are most readily apparent in the ritual processions made by both communities. There can be few in England and Ireland during the past decade who have not seen an orange or green parade, on the television, or in the newspaper, or passing through the streets where they live. Yet even to those involved in such a parade the meaning of all the noise and colour and pageantry is generally obscure. The symbolism involved is multiple. That very multiplicity is significant, but breaking it down into its component elements is a first step to understanding it. What then does the spectator see at a major Orange procession such as the Twelfth of July parade in Belfast?

The first figures to come into view are not Orangemen but revivalist preachers, generally vested with black plastic waistcoats lettered in large white capitals with scriptural texts. The general tenor of these is gloomy - repent, for the wages of sin is death and the end of the world is at hand. Behind these figures the procession proper is headed by an Orangeman carrying an open Bible on a cushion. He is followed by the various lodges, in apparently endless succession. Each lodge is headed by its officials, often bearing such tools of office as mallets and rule-books. (They are sometimes preceded by one or more bannerettes if the lodge is a wealthy one). Then comes a large banner. This is followed by

65. Orange Order procession/12th July 1979/Belfast/
    Photo:Pacemaker Press.

66. **Swordbearer in Orange Order procession/12th July 1981/
Belfast/Photo: Belfast Telegraph.**

67. "Orange Lil"/12th July 1981/Belfast/Photo: Belfast
    Telegraph.

a band, which is generally part of the lodge, sometimes hired. Its
members may play flutes and drums, bagpipes, accordions or silver or
brass instruments. Their tunes are varied too, for no attempt is made to
co-ordinate a single theme for the whole procession or any sizeable
section of it. Behind the band walk the rest of the lodge members, two
by two with the width of the road between them. Amongst them, generally
at their rear, there may be two men carrying drawn swords or pikes (ill 66).

Dress varies from lodge to lodge but usually consists of a bowler
hat, formal suit, and orange collarette (ill 66). The latter is
frequently decorated with metal emblems. White gloves are often worn.
A few lodges wear sashes rather than collarettes. Within each lodge a
degree of uniformity is to be found. Many of the band members are women
or girls. Each band wears its own distinctive uniform which may be
anything from full highland costume to matching jerseys and berets. Their
garb proclaims their allegiance to Britain, to Ulster and to the Orange
order. Orange, purple, red and blue are the favoured colours and King
William or red hand emblems are often featured on drums or jerseys.
Collarettes are worn by the band-players who are also lodge members.
Bands are often preceded by a young boy or girl acting as a drum major,
tossing a staff painted with red, white and blue stripes. A few middle-
aged women can generally be seen accompanying the procession, dressed
entirely in costumes made from Union Jacks and waving Union Jack parasols
(ill 67). Other by-standers wave Union Jacks or Ulster flags. Flowers
are much in evidence. Banners and drums are frequently decked with
orange lilies and sweet williams, while some lodges sport carnations
pinned to their lapels, or tucked jauntily into their bowlers.

Early Orange processions

Can one explain the significance of these various signs and symbols by tracing their past history? Certainly many of the elements of today's parades are virtually unchanged from the time of the earliest Orange demonstrations. The papers of Lord Gosford, then Governor of County Armagh, give us much information about the symbolism employed in them. In a letter dated 10 July 1796 and addressed to Edward Cooke, Under-Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant at Dublin Castle, he comments on the Orangemen's preparations, saying that they had already "gone to considerable expense in banners, orange ribbons, etc".[1] Then, in a subsequent letter dated 13 July, addressed to Lord Lieutenant Camden himself, Gosford describes what he saw taking place the previous day.

"My Lord I have the honour to acquaint Your Excellency that the meeting of the Orangemen took place yesterday in different parts of this County; one party consisting of thirty companies with banners, flags, etc, after parading through Portadown, Loughgall and Richhill came towards this place. They halted about half a mile from my house and sent on a 'courier' to enquire whether I had any objection to their paying me a visit and allowing them to march through part of my demesne.

My answer of course was that if they were sober and orderly I could have no objection to comply with their request. They accordingly came here about five o'clock in the evening marching in regular files by two and two with orange cockades, unarmed, and by companies which were distinguished by numbers upon their flags. The party had one drum and

---

1. Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (hereafter PRONI) Belfast, D1606/1/185B, reproduced in PRONI, The United Irishmen, HMSO, Belfast, 1974, facsimile 66.

each company had a fife and two or three men in front with painted wands in their hands who acted as commanders. They posted two men at each side of my gate with drawn swords to prevent any persons coming in but their own body. The devices on the flags were chiefly portraits of King William with mottoes alluding to his establishment of the Protestant religion, and on the reverse side of some of them I perceived a portrait of his present Majesty with the Crown placed before him, motto God Save the King...

The number who paraded through my place amounted, I should imagine to about 1,500. I have had no particular account as yet from the other side of the County except that similar bodies paraded there and all ended quietly."[1]

Gosford was not the only witness who recorded the Orange parades of this year. A French traveller who was in Co Armagh on 12 July 1796 stated that

"Between Tandragee and Armagh I met a company of Orangemen as they're called, wearing orange cockages, and some of them having ties of the same colour."[2]

In 1797 a further Co Armagh Orange parade took place in Lurgan on 12 July. It was at this demonstration that Colonel Blacker's hunter was displayed, carrying William III's horse furniture (see above, p.89ff). The description by his son also mentions that there was "all manner of music".[3] In the same year there was the first celebration of the Twelfth of July by the Orange Order in Belfast. According to the account given

---

1. PRONI D1606/1/188. Part of this letter is quoted in Richard Broad et al, The Troubles, Thames/Futura, 1981, pp 56-7.
2. Quoted in Aiken McClelland, "The Orange Tradition", in The Twelfth Programme, Belfast, 1975, p. 30.
3. Blacker MS autobiography, Armagh County Museum, quoted in W.H. Wolsey, Orangeism in Portadown District, Portadown Times, 1935, p. 5.

by the Belfast News Letter on 14 July, between 6,000 and 7,000 Orangemen met at an early hour at their various rendezvous and marched through the streets, with music playing, drums beating and colours flying. The favourite device on the flags was William III on horseback. All the marchers wore orange or blue cockades or ribbons, "on many of which were imprinted A Crown and under it, God Save the King and Constitution - on others - A Crown and Harp, and under, The Glorious and Immortal Memory of King William." The reporter was particularly struck by the numerous groups of girls who had come from distant parts of the country to join in the parade.[1]

There are elements in these parades which differ significantly from the symbolism of today. The costumes worn by Orangemen have changed and they no longer sport orange cockades (which we now call rosettes). But much is very similar. The whole manner of processing in regular files continues unchanged, as does the custom of carrying numbered flags depicting William III, the use of painted wands, the guarding of the procession from intruders by men with drawn swords and the marchers' accompaniment by bands with drums and fifes supplying "all manner of music".

Sashes and ribbons

By looking at both the symbols which have disappeared and those which remain it is possible to learn something about the original meanings attached to some items of Orange imagery. Caution is necessary however, as becomes clear if we look at the complex history of Orange ribbons and sashes.

There are two great temptations for anyone studying the history of an image or symbol. One is to assume that such a history will proceed

---

4. See also Sibbett, op cit, vol 2, pp. 20-21.

in a straight line of descent. The second is to discuss the complex

meanings and functions of the image at a particular point in time but to

funk the analysis of its location within the historical process.

The first approach is the one commonly adopted by traditional and

amateur historians. Its particular appeal to the latter is often that

of establishing the venerable antiquity of a tradition. Thus it is a

common legend amongst members of the Orange Order that the sash, which

was universally worn by them before the advent of the more convenient

collarette, was adopted from the uniform of the Williamite forces during

their Irish campaign.

The military use of sashes or scarves is certainly well-recorded.

During the English Civil War of the mid-seventeenth century, with both

sides wearing the same coloured coats, it was necessary to have some

distinguishing badge, and scarves were often used for this purpose. At

Edgehill for instance, the Royalists wore white scarves while Essex's

army had orange.[1] From then until the time when the Orange Order was

established at the end of the eighteenth century such scarves or sashes

were common items of military apparel, being generally worn by officers.

Sometimes they were tied over the shoulder in the style later adopted by

Orangemen and sometimes they were wound round the waist.[2]

1. C.P Lawson, A history of the uniforms of the British Army from the
    beginnings to 1760, Davies, vol 1, 1940, p. 10.
2. Ibid, passim and R.M Barnes, Military uniforms of Britain and the
    Empire, Seeley Services, 1960, p. 32 and p. 62. However there
    appears to be no foundation for the romantic legend (recorded by
    Jack Loudan in "Origin of the Big Drum", Belfast Telegraph, n.d,
    in Ulster Museum presscuttings book, vol 8, p. 86) that the sash
    was a particularly prestigious piece of military equipment, as it
    was used for carrying the wounded, and a man who had used his sash
    many times in this way often received promotion.

The wearing of Orange sashes by both William III and his troops is also well documented. It is recorded that the King wore "an orange colour sash" on 28 June 1690 during his advance to the Battle of the Boyne,[1] and in 1691 a drawing of the uniform of the Dutch Guards who accompanied William shows the officers wearing orange sashes.[2]

However there is no evidence that sashes were used in the earliest Orange processions and the ribbons and cockades (rosettes) which were favoured by the marchers relate to political practice rather than military traditions. It was a general late eighteenth century habit to signal political affiliation by displaying such emblems, and the wearing of orange and blue cockades and ribbons in Ireland at this time was not confined to semi-military events like the Volunteer commemorations of the Battle of the Boyne in Dublin in the 1770s.[3] These loyalist favours were also widely-marketed by Dublin and Belfast merchants during the 1783 elections, and in 1798 they were worn by jurymen, judges and militia to display their political allegiance.[4]

Moreover when sashes were gradually introduced by the Orange Order in the early years of the nineteenth century, the inspiration seems to have come from elsewhere than military tradition. Thus on 3 November 1803 the Armagh District agreed to provide aprons decorated with the image of King William for the use of all their members in processions, and to impose a fine of 13d on every Master failing to appear at quarterly meetings in their robes of sash and apron. And in 1809 the Orangemen in Portadown District agreed that at every Orange funeral lodge-masters

---

1. The Diary of Gedeon Bonnivert, Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, vol 30 (c) 1912-13 , p. 337ff, quoted in G.A. Hayes-McCoy, A History of Irish Flags, Academic Press, Dublin, 1 979, p. 43 note 4.
2. Lawson, op cit, p. 40.
3. See above, Ch 2.
4. Belfast Mercury, vol 1 no 2, 5 Aug 1783, p. 1; vol 1 no 4, 12 Aug 1783, p. 3 and vol 1 no 5, 15 Aug 1783, p.4, and Thomas Pakenham, The Year of Liberty, Panther, 1972, p. 73 and p. 78.

should be dressed with hat, scarf and sash.[1] Wearing aprons with sashes

and attending funerals in garb of this kind was part of masonic or

friendly society practices, not military tradition.[2] Visual confirmation

of the possible influence of freemasonry and friendly societies on Orange

sash-wearing also seems to be provided by the two sashed and top-hatted

figures who appear on an 1822 Orange jug in Armagh County Museum,

accompanied by the motto "Let Brotherly Love Continue". This image must

be treated with caution however, for by this time the Orange Order was an

object of government suspicion and its lodges often sought respectability

by adopting the guise of friendly societies.

Indeed the possibility of some influence of military Williamite

traditions on the adoption of the sash cannot be totally discounted. They

may have inspired the newly-formed Orangemen when they dressed the Dublin

statue of William III with an orange sash during their celebrations of

12 July and 4 November.[3] And in the early years of the nineteenth century

members of the aristocracy and gentry, whose ancestors had often fought

in the Williamite campaigns, and who themselves were frequently military

men, were becoming involved in the Orange Order.

The influence of these military gentry on other items of early

Orange regalia is certainly well documented. While there was by no means

a direct overlap of regular army and volunteer troops with the Orange

Order,[4] there is evidence that local army officers and Volunteer leaders

allowed the early Orangemen to borrow their flags and banners and

encouraged them to produce similar emblems of their own.

---

1. Wolsey, op cit, p. 4 and p. 6.
2. On the friendly societies' use of such emblems see P.H.J.H Gosden, The friendly societies in England 1815-1875, Manchester University Press, 1961, p. 121.
3. See above, Ch 2, p.
4. See Padraig O'Snodaigh, "Notes on the Volunteer, Militia, Yeomanry and Orangemen of County Monaghan,", in Clogher Record, Clogher, Silver Jubilee Edition, 1977, pp. 142-166.

"In 1792, the owner of the Loughgall estate, Lieutenant-Colonel

Robert Camden Cope, raised a troop of Volunteers, and his daughter,

making a flag of silk, on which she embroidered the Royal Arms, presented

it to the men. When the Orangemen, soon after their Orders had been

instituted, proposed to commemorate the anniversary of the Battle of the

Boyne, this flag was given to Mr Sloan, and, carried at the head of Lodge

No 161. it formed an attractive object in the premier procession."[1]

Others were moved to emulation.

"Immediately the news reached Lieutenant Sinclair, Master of No 2,

Derryscollop, he proposed that his lodge also should procure colours, and

the matter was brought before the members at their first meeting. Among

the visitors on that night were some of the officers from Charlemont Fort,

and one of them, Major Dalton, threw five guineas on the table as part of

the purchase money. This flag contributed an additional attraction in

the premier procession."[2]

These may have been isolated instances. However close contact

between soldiers and Orangemen continued for they marched together in the

late 1790's, fought together during the 1798 rebellion, and paraded

victoriously together for several years afterwards. Thus in 1797 the

Monaghan Militia joined the Orangemen for their Twelfth of July

celebrations in Belfast,[3] while in 1801 the Armagh Regiment of Militia,

many of whom had taken part in the Battle of the Diamond, were associated

with the Royal Irish Artillery and the civilian lodges of Coleraine in a

1. Wolsey, op cit, p. 2.
2. T.G.F Paterson, "The County Armagh Volunteers", Ulster Journal of
    Archaeology, 3rd Series, vol 4, 1941, pp. 105-6.
3. Sibbett, op cit, vol 23, p. 20.

massive demonstration on 13 July.[1] And when the Orangemen sought to

acquire regalia they could turn to women who had embroidered flags for

the Volunteers[2], and the merchants in Belfast and Dublin who had

advertised in the 1770s and 1780s their ability to paint drums and

colours, and engrave buttons and medals for the newly-formed regiments.

Clearly there was every opportunity for the Orangemen to adopt

sash-wearing practices from the army - but there remains no firm evidence

of any direct link between orange sash-wearing and the military,

Williamite traditions.

Biblical imagery

The Bible, which is carried at the head of the present Twelfth of July

procession and which features so often on Orange banners, accompanied by

the sword and sceptre (ill 68), or handed by Queen Victoria to her black

subject, seems, like the sash, to have been an image available to the

Orange Order at the time of its inception, but only incorporated in its

symbolism at a later date when particular social forces brought it to the

fore.

The association between royalty and the Bible so apparent in

today's Orange parades dates back to the days of the English Reformation.

The monarch's position as head of the English Church was repeatedly

stressed in the visual images of that period. On the title-page of the

first printed English bible in 1535 (ill 69), the King hands the Holy

Book to his kneeling bishops in a gesture very similar to that of

---

1. Ibid, p. 99. This was possibly a reaction by the officers to the
    discovery of a large number of United Irishmen in the ranks of the
    regiment in May of the same year. See O'Snodaigh, op cit, pp. 156-7.
2. Or they could convert the Volunteer colour to their own use. As late
    as 1830 "King William on horseback" was painted over the royal arms
    on a Volunteer flag for use in an orange procession (Pilip Ó Mórdha,
    "Some Notes on Monaghan History (1692-1866)", Clogher Record, 1976,
    p. 47.)
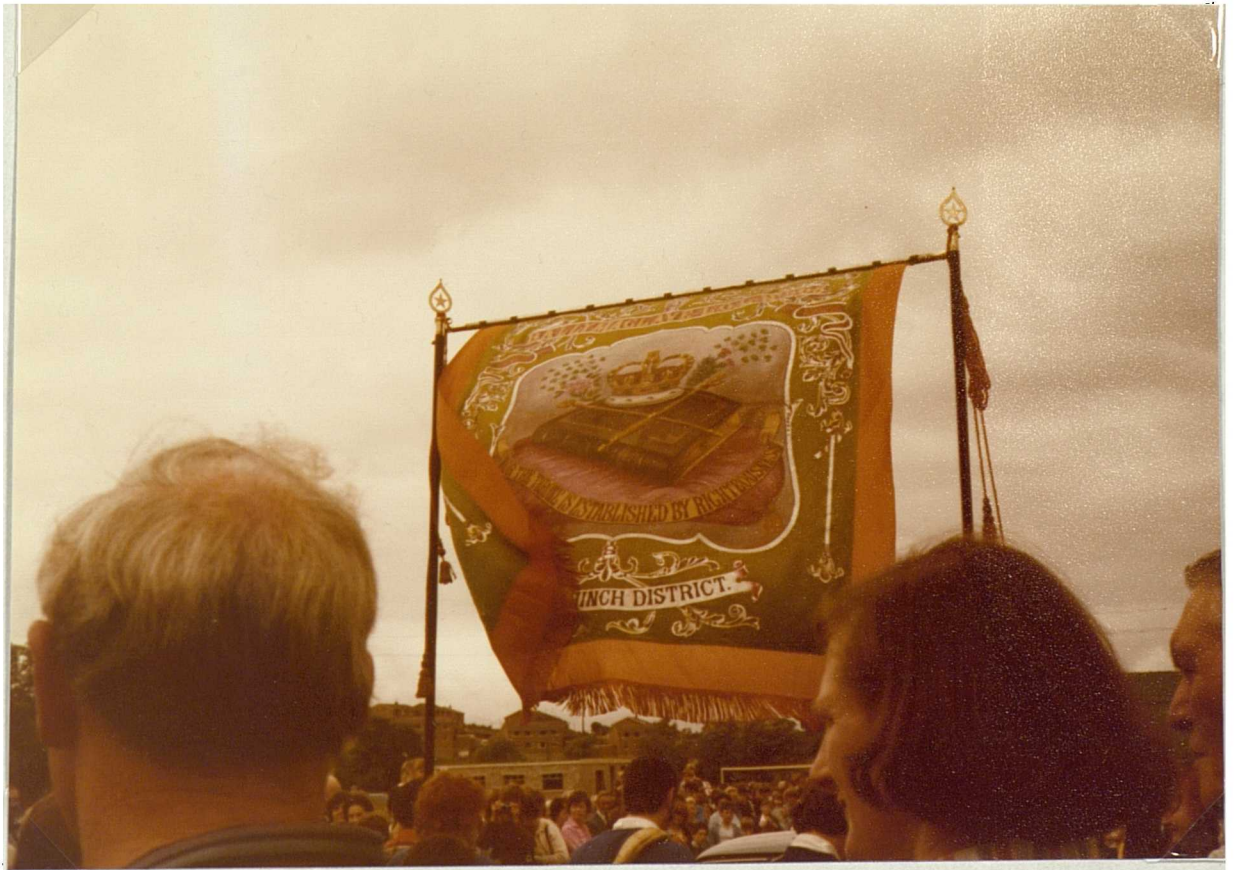
68. Orange Order/Crown and Bible banner/12th July 1981/
oil paints on silk/approximately 96 x 72 ins (244
x 183 cms)/Ballynahinch, Co Down/Photo: B. Loftus.
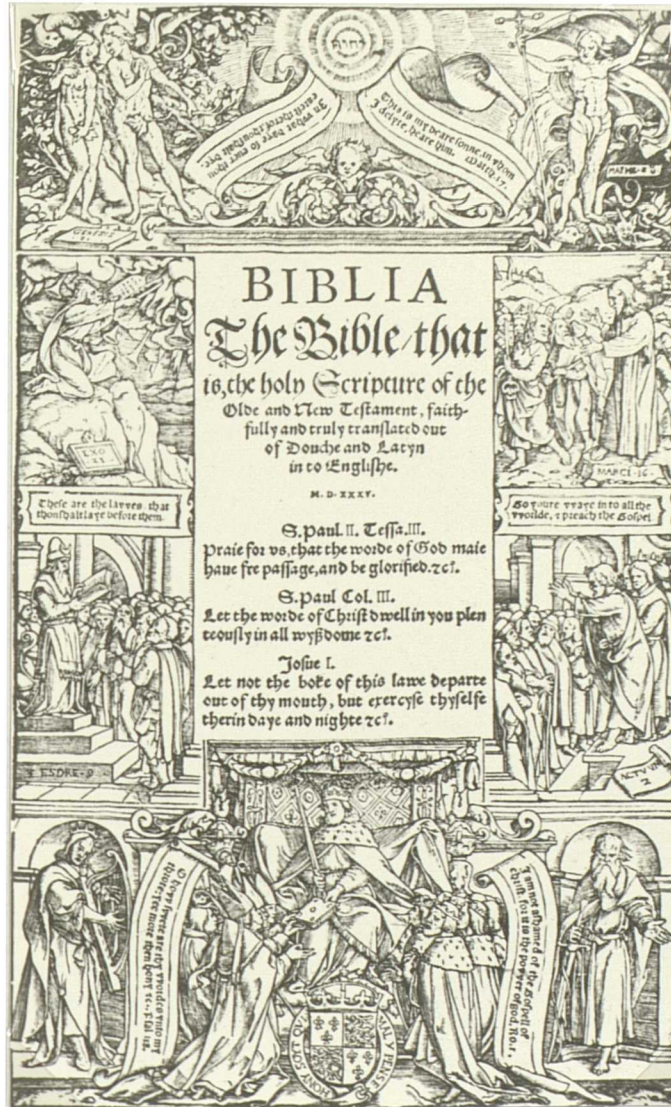
69. Hans Holbein/Title-page of first printed English
    Bible (Coverdale's Translation)/1535/wood-engraving/
    12 x 7⁵/8 ins (30.5 x 19.5 cm)/British Museum.

70. T. Jones Barker/Queen Victoria presenting a Bible to
    a native prince in the Audience Chamber at Windsor/ca
    1860/oil on canvas/66 x 84^{1}/8 ins (167.7 x 213.8 cms)/
    National Portrait Gallery/postcard:NPG.

Victoria in Thomas Jones Barker's painting some three centuries later
(ill 70), and there are numerous representations of Elizabeth I
accompanied by the Bible, resting on a cushion, with the sword of Justice
laid across it.[1] Various plays and public pageants of this period also
represented Elizabeth receiving the English Bible from the figure of
Truth.[2]

It is debatable whether this Reformation propaganda imagery had
much effect on popular consciousness in Ulster in the period before the
establishment of the Orange Order. The early vernacular Bibles were
frequently chained in churches in England.[3] But was this custom
continued in Plantation Ulster? And if so who had access to these Bibles
and gazed on their illustrations? The Angels and Bible was a sign which
appeared outside several eighteenth-century booksellers in Belfast. But
would this have had much significance for the tenant-farmers and weavers
of Counties Armagh and Tyrone who formed the Orange Order in 1795?
Ulster weavers we know, were highly literate,[4] but would they have come
to Belfast to buy books rather than rely on travelling pedlars?[5] Or
would Protestant devotion to the Bible have been sufficient in itself to
prompt its use as an image, without recourse to any visual precedents?

It is my belief that the image of the Bible was incorporated
in Orange symbolism at a much later date, during the period of religious
revivalism in the 1830s and 1840s already described.[6] Certainly glowing

---

1. Frances Yates, Astraea, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975, p. 59 ills 8a
   and 8b. The 1535 Bible was brought out under the patronage of
   Thomas Cromwell, at that time Henry VIII's vice-regent in all
   ecclesiastical matters, and the title-page for it was produced by
   Hans Holbein, then in his employment. See Roy Strong, The
   Elizabethan Image, Tate Gallery, 1969, p. 12, no 6.
2. David M. Bergeron, English Civic Pageantry 1558-1642, Edward Arnold,
   1971, p. 20.
3. Yates, op cit, p. 43, note 3, and Henry J. Cowell, The Four Chained
   Books, Protestant Truth Society, 1938, p. 23.
4. John Hewitt, Rhyming Weavers, Blackstaff, Belfast, 1974, especially
   pp. 29-34.
5. Or would they have had access to bookshops closer to home?
6.

bibles were frequently featured in the cheap tracts printed in Northern

Ireland at this time. (A typical example is the Presbyterian Penny

Magazine; Or Protestant Missionary Revivalist (1835), on whose cover the

refulgent Bible is flanked by a man and a woman eagerly consulting their

own copies of the Word. This publication was widely available, for it

proclaimed itself as "sold by George Phillips, Magill & Co, Belfast; Miss

Pye, Derry; also by various booksellers in town and country).[1] And

although a member of the Select Committee inquiring into Orange lodges in

1835 implied that Orangemen had adopted the practice of marching with

Bible and sword from the Freemasons[2] the first certain occasion known to

me when the Bible was carried in an Orange parade is the procession in

Lisburn in August 1845, at the front of which walked "a man bearing a

large Bible tied up with Orange and purple ribbons."[3] The featuring of

the Bible from this period would also tie in with the diversion of

Orangemen's energies to religious demonstrations which took place as a

result of the bans on Orange parades as such during the 1820s and

1. This publication is in the Linen Hall Library, Belfast. Also in the
    Linen Hall Library is a somewhat earlier example of a Belfast-
    printed tract bearing a glowing bible, Good News from a Far Country,
    Belfast Religious Tract Society, no 15, 1816.
2. Report from the Select Committee appointed to inquire into Orange
    Lodges, Associations and Societies in Ireland, Parl Papers, 1835
    (hereafter 1835 Report), vol 15, para 5944.
3. The Nation, Dublin, 23 August 1845, p. 742. In 1852 a Bible and
    Cushion was donated to Anahoe Royal Black Preceptory by Sir William
    Verner. Their letter of thanks is copied into their minute book
    under the date 9 Feb 1852. This can be found in PRONI D2108/4.

1830s,[1] and with the increasing emphasis on Anglican and Presbyterian

unity in the face of Catholic aspirations.

It is important to stress that this massive reinvestment in their

religion by Protestant Ulstermen in the mid-nineteenth century was

without parallel in the rest of Britain. Religious revivalism certainly

made an impact on other parts of the nation during this period but was

never so all-pervading as in the north of Ireland. The contrast is most

striking in the cities. Whereas in rapidly-expanding Belfast religious

observance remained very high indeed, in the great industrial cities on

the mainland the newly urbanised working classes rapidly abandoned such

practices in favour of secular pursuits.[2]

There is no doubt at all that from this period the Bible figured

very prominently in Orange emblems. By the end of the nineteenth century

it was enshrined on Orange banners in a scene titled The Secret of

England's Greatness, closely based on Thomas Jones Barker's painting of

Queen Victoria handing the sacred volume to a negro prince (ill 70); in a

---

1. /op cit p. 790. A significant comment both for its content and
   Baker,
   context was the description of an Orange lodge marching to church
   given by its Master to the 1857 riots Commission: "We went arm-in-
   arm and each man carried the Word of God in his hand". Evidence of
   Thomas Ward, given in the Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry
   into the...riots in Belfast in July and September 1857, Parl Papers,
   1857,   Cmd 2309, (hereafter 1857 Report)
   vol 26, para 8755. Many witnesses testifying to the parliamentary
   commissioners in 1857 implied the Orangemen were using their Bibles
   as hiding-places for their sashes, which they were forbidden to
   display in public. The overlap between Orange Order and religious
   demonstrations during this period is further underlined by a
   witness's description of the Orangemen processing over Dolly's Brae
   in 1849 as having "flags, colours, drums, Bibles, blunderbusses and
   placards, as if preparing for a pic-nic." (Major Wilkinson, evidence
   noted by Mr. Berwick, in Papers relating to an Investigation into the
   Occurrence at Dolly's Brae, 12 July 1849, Parl Papers, 1850 (1143)
   (hereafter Dolly's Brae Report), p. 14. Pic-nic was a term frequently
   used to describe the religious excursions much in vogue in Ulster in
   the second half of the nineteenth century.
2. K.S. Inglis, "Patterns of Religious Worship in 1851," Journal of
   Ecclesiastical History, vol 11, 1960, pp 74-86.

superb early twentieth century photograph of the Young Men's Christian

Total Abstinence Loyal Orange Lodge No 747 it lies open on the table in

front of the lodge members;[1] and in 1951 an onlooker recorded the

presence at the head of the Twelfth parade of the preachers of the Word,

with their reminder then as now, that the wages of sin is death.[2]
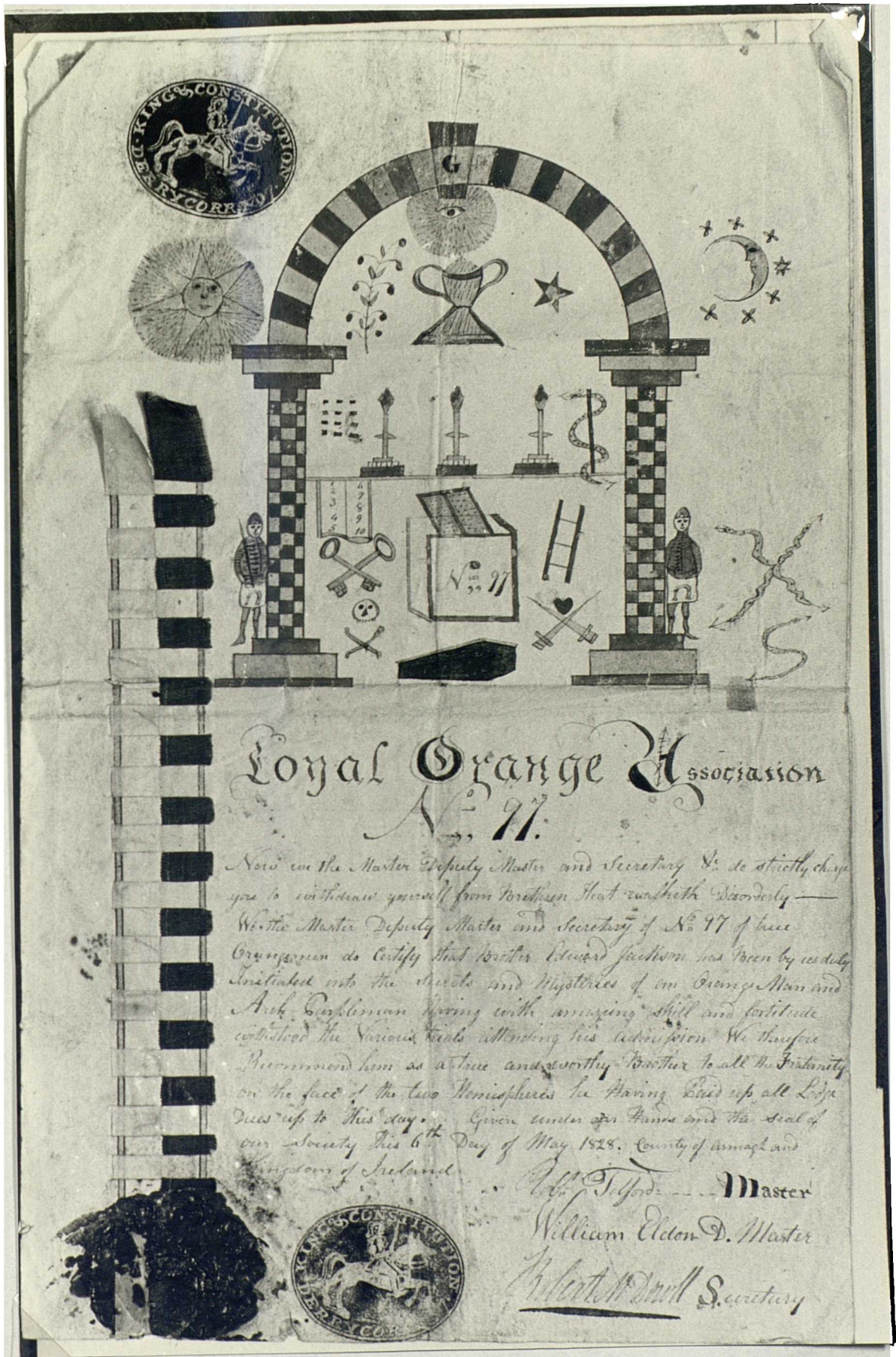

Fragmented symbolism

Orange Order imagery is not only full of representations of the Bible; it

is also replete with a strange array of emblems drawn from it. The full

repertoire of these can be seen displayed in the Orange Arch (ill 71),

sold in print and postcard form since early in this century, and

ultimately deriving from the handmade and printed membership certificates

employed by all branches of the Orange Order since the early nineteenth

century (ill 72). Varying selections of these symbols can also be seen

on the banners (ill 78), sashes and collarettes (ill 73) employed by the

Orangemen and their brethren in the Royal Black Preceptory and the

Apprentice Boys.[3]

Before considering how and why these symbols became so firmly

embedded in Orange imagery it is worth discussing the reasons for the

---

1. In the Linen Hall Library, Belfast.
2. Walter R. Grey, "Remembering the Orangemen Marching", The Bell,
   Dublin, vol 17 no 9, Dec 1 951, pp. 46-8. This is the earliest
   reference that I have seen to the presence of street preachers at
   the head of the Twelfth parade. It seems unlikely they started
   to attend Orange parades before the First World War as there is no
   record of them in the fairly numerous photos of such events taken
   prior to 1914. However the photographic eye is very selective. I
   have seen no record of these figures in the press photographs of
   recent parades.
3. The Royal Black Preceptory is organised on similar lines to the Orange
   Order, but stresses Old Testament rather than Williamite traditions,
   and is generally regarded as requiring higher standards of its
   members. The Apprentice Boys are also similar to the Orangemen but
   commemorate particularly the loyal apprentices who shut the gates of
   Derry against the forces of James II in the siege of 1688.

THE ORANGE ARCH

Orange Institution Re-constituted in Ireland in 1795.
Black Institution founded in 1797.

THIS WE WILL MAINTAIN

71. Postcard of the Orange Arch/1981/first issued ca 1900/
photo-gravure / published by William Johnston/, Belfast.

72. Handpainted Orange certificate/1828/pen and
    coloured wash/11½ x 7¼ ins (29.2 x 18.5 cms)
    Armagh County Museum 15-62/Photo: Bill Kirk

73. Orangemen at demonstration outside Belfast
City Hall/15 March 1980/Photo: B. Loftus

peculiarly fragmented way in which they are employed in it. As so often with the signs of Protestant Ulster, it is necessary to go back to the profound changes in belief and culture which took place in Western Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These changes shattered the medieval world view in which biblical imagery had been part of a unified allegorical conception of the meaning of life.

"For the Elizabethans this great framework no longer existed as a single unity: it had not completely vanished but it had broken up, leaving fragments of the old allegorical ways of thinking still present in men's minds, but present only as fragments and not co-ordinated."[1]

The most important agents in this process of symbolic dislocation were the supporters of the Reformation, with their distrust of all the imagery, rituals and superstitious fables which had become part of the Catholic religion, and their emphasis on a return to the literal words of the vernacular Bible.

Almost as important however in this enormous change in the handling of Biblical symbolism, were the new visual practices of the Renaissance, particularly the Renaissance as known in Northern Europe. There the classical motifs favoured by the Italians were widely disseminated in emblem-books, which illustrated and explained the new imagery. Book illustrations, prints, architectural decorations, state pageantry, embroidery, jewels, all drew on their visual repertoire. Moreover the isolated but powerful symbols of the emblematic way of seeing proved highly congenial to both the secular and religious propagandists of this period, and were rapidly incorporated in their prints, medals and book-illustrations.

---

1. Rosemary Freeman, <u>English Emblem Books</u>, Chatto and Windus, 1948,
   p. 20.

Fortuitously, the techniques employed in the production of the objects featuring emblematic imagery encouraged a further fragmentation of vision. Nearly all these objects involved some form of engraving or shallow-carving. In other words their visual emphasis was on line rather than tone, and it is tone which is important in achieving the relationship of objects in a unified space. It is not impossible to achieve tone in an engraving by cross-hatching so the underlying reason for the fragmentation of symbols at this time should be attributed to habit or attitude rather than to technical limitations. Nonetheless, line does encourage a disjointed and somewhat stiff vision of reality, in which dark and light are eternally contrasted, rather than merging into one another.

The net result of these developments in religion, culture and visual technique was an all-pervasive way of seeing in Northern Europe in which classical and biblical symbols were either totally fragmented or tied together by superficial patterning,[1] or related by an awkward, strongly literal didacticism. (Thus concepts like "all flesh is grass" or "the sword of God's wrath hangs over our heads" would be clumsily illustrated with their strict visual equivalents.)[2]

It is not possible to determine exactly how this way of seeing was absorbed into the symbolism of the Orange Order. Certainly it reached Ireland fairly swiftly, influencing not only aristocratic objects like tomb sculptures,[3] but also items which would have been familiar to the lowlier classes from which the first Orangemen were drawn, such as cheap printed chapbooks (ill 74). Moreover it is important to remember that a number of the Dutch medals celebrating William III's victories in

---

1. See F. Saxl and R. Wittkower, British Art and the Mediterranean,
      Oxford University Press, 1948, Sections 39, 40, 41 & 45.
2. Freeman, op cit, p. 62.
3. See Peter Harbison, Homan Potterton and Jeanne Sheehy, Irish art and
      architecture, Thames & Hudson,1979, ill 119.

using a Pigeon, 4.	*adsuefaciens* Columbam, 4.
to fetch meat	petere Escam
out of his Ear.	ex aure sua.
His Followers	*Assecla* ejus
refrain themselves	abstinent se
from Wine ;	à Vino ;
are circumcised,	circumciduntur,
have many Wives :	sunt Poiygami :
build Chapels, 5.	exstruunt Sacella, 5.
from the Steeples *whereof,*	de quorum Turr culis,
they are called to Holy Service	convocantur ad sacra
not by Bells,	non a Campanis,
but by a Priest, 6.	sed a Sacerdote, 6.
they wash themselves often, 7.	sæpius se abluunt, 7.
they deny the Holy Trinity :	negant S.S. Trinitatem;
they honour Christ,	Christum honorant,
not as the Son of God,	non ut Dei Filium,
but as a great Prophet,	sed ut magnum Prophetam,
yet less than Mahomet ;	minorem tamen Mahomete ;
they call their Law,	Legem suam vocant
the Alcoran.	Alcoran.

God's Providence.   CLI.   *Providentia Dei.*

Mens States | Humanæ Sortes

74. God's Providence/ill on p.194 of John Amos Comenius's
Visible World translated into English by Charles Hoole,
S. Leacroft, 1777/wood-engraving/actual size/Queen's
University Library, Belfast.

Ireland used emblematic imagery.[1]

However, as we shall see, it was almost certainly through the medium of esoteric freemasonry that the fragmented, emblematic vision was transmitted to the Orangemen. This is significant, because from such freemasonry they derived in addition a strong interest in passing through a progression of grades, each with their own symbol of achievement. And this interest was further reinforced when Orangeism became a means of Protestant control of the similarly grade-oriented industries of mid-nineteenth century Belfast. When we look therefore at the array of symbols on the Orange Arch or on a sash or banner we should see in their fragmentation a mode of vision derived from the iconoclasm of the Reformation, reinforced by the visual practices of the northern Renaissance, transmitted through the grade-obsessed esoteric freemasons and strengthened by the Orange Order's identification with minutely structured craft industries.

Freemasonry and Orangeism

The biblical symbols in the Orange Arch (ill 71) are characterised not only by their fragmented display but also by their association with a particular section of the Bible, the story of the journey of the children of Israel to the Promised land. Moreover Orange emphasis on these particular emblems is apparent from the earliest days of the Order's existence (ill 77). Why is this so?

The obvious answer is that these groups of biblical symbols were adopted by the Orange Order from Irish freemasonry. The Order's historians record a number of contacts between masons and the early Orangemen. According to them, amongst the men who gathered together in James Sloan's house in 1795, after the Battle of the Diamond, to set up

1. These medals do not appear to have been very widely known in Ireland however (information provided by Robert Heslip of the Ulster Museum).

the first Orange Lodge, there were a number of Masons.[1] They also record

that when, in 1796, meetings were held to give the new movement a more

efficient organisation, the house in Portadown where they took place

belonged to a Freemason, John Templeton, and was used for Masonic Lodge

meetings.[2] Moreover the association of the two organisations continued

long beyond these initial stages, for throughout the history of the

Orange Order a number of its members have been Freemasons as well.[3]

Less immediately obvious, but of more eventual interest and

significance, are the reasons why the members of the Orange Order chose

to emphasise not the better-known symbolism of what is called craft

Masonry, but the more esoteric signs of the rarer, higher grades, to

which they gave their own particular emphasis. To a certain extent this

was due to the nature of Freemasonry in Ireland. Speculative Freemasonry

in its current form as a fraternal and charitable organisation, sharing a

body of semi-secret ritual, seems to have appeared in Ireland in the 1720s.[4]

From the descriptions of the masons' St John's Day processions at this

time[5] it is clear that in these early days the movement was both urban

and urbane, openly displaying the emblems of its ritual. And these

emblems, with their emphasis on the tools of working masons, the rebuilding

of Solomon's temple and the symbols of enlightenment, related entirely

to craft Masonry, that is the three stages of initiation to which most

---

1. Sibbett, _op cit_, vol I, p. 230.
2. _Ibid_, vol I, p. 234 and II, p. 164.
3. See below, p. 248.
4. J.H Lepper and P. Crosslé _History of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Ireland_, Dublin, 1925, vol 1, pp 52-3. As these authors point out, no official records of Irish Masonry survive from the period prior to 1760, so knowledge of this early period is drawn from external sources.
5. _Ibid_, p. 72 and pp 76-7.

Masons are admitted, and which many believe to contain all that is

essential to their organisation.

Some feeling for the nature of craft masonry symbolism can be

obtained from a broadsheet engraved by the Belfast artist John Barr round

about 1830 (ill 75).[1] Although certain images in it, such as the all-

seeing eye of God and the Bible handed from a cloud, are derived from

the fierce use of emblematic symbolism by Reformation propagandists, its

own message is far gentler. Most of its emblems relate either to the

eighteenth century concept of enlightenment[2] or to the tools and

activities of working stone-masons.[3] It employs therefore a very direct

kind of symbolism which has brought into common usage such phrases as

"on the level" or "all square", and this practical, working daily-life

---

1. The printer-publisher alliance of T. Mairs and Simms & M'Intyre is
   dateable to the early nineteenth century and Barr has been
   tentatively identified with a teacher of the same name at the
   National School in Kent Street, which cannot have been established
   before 1831.
2. The Sun represents the Glory of the Lord, the Moon and Seven Stars
   the bestowal of light on the brethren, the Bible the standard of
   truth and justice, and the checkerboard beneath the mason's feet,
   with its alternation of dark and light, the variety of Creation and
   the uncertainty of human life, indicating to the Freemason the need
   for humility, unity and brotherly love. (These interpretations are
   derived from James Dewar, The Unlocked Secret, Freemasonry Examined,
   William Kimber, 1966, p. 53 and p. 55; Walton Hannah, Darkness
   Visible, A Revelation and Interpretation of Freemasonry, Augustine
   Press, 1952, p. 107 and Irish Glass, catalogue of the ROSC 71
   exhibition, held at the City Art Gallery, Limerick, 1971, p. 24.
   I have used the readings best fitted to the context but they should
   not be regarded as final or exclusive of other meanings.)
3. The trowel represents cemented friendship among the members; the plumb
   rule justness and uprightness of life and actions; the level
   equality; the twenty-four inch rule or gauge the twenty-four hours
   of the day; the gavel or mallet the force of the conscience, which
   should keep down all vain and unbecoming thoughts; the compasses the
   need to keep in due bounds with all mankind, and the square morality.
   (Irish Glass, loc cit; Dewar, op cit, p. 137, p. 144 and Hannah,
   op cit, pp. 100, 106 and 113.)

75. John Barr/The Royal Arch-Mason/ca 1830/wood-engraving/
20½ x 16³/4 ins (52.1 x 41.9 cms)/Printed by T. Mairs
and published by Simms & McIntyre, Belfast/Linen Hall
Library, Belfast/Photo:

emphasis is reflected in the construction and style of the broadsheet.

It is not merely a catalogue of emblems for, like a number of Irish

masonic images of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century[1], it

centres on the figure of the mason himself, a neat and robust Belfast

citizen of the period. The bunch of tools which he carries suspended

from ribbons may have a certain rococo elegance but they are very similar

to the designs to be found on the trade-cards of working stone-masons in

the eighteenth century.[2] The archway in which he stands may represent

the arch of Heaven and be built of components which all have their

special masonic significance,[3] yet it is let into a very real brick wall

and bears more than a passing resemblance to the doorways of the late

eighteenth century houses which can be still found in Donegall Street,

where the broadsheet was printed, and near which its designer seems to

have lived and worked. And the verses printed at the bottom of the sheet

make it probable that it is related to a public acting-out of Masonic

sentiments in Belfast, one of the many theatrical benefits which are

known to have been held there, and at which popular singers performed

such ballads.[4]

However long before this print was made many Irish Freemasons had

moved from the fairly simple, realistic symbolism of the craft degrees,

to the obscure complexities of higher grades. This was not a step

sanctioned by the Grand Lodge in Dublin, which refused to recognise any

---

1. Lepper and Crosslé, op cit, ills opposite p. 60 and p. 206 and
   between pp. 272-3.
2. See the example illustrated in Katherine A Esdaile, English Church
   Monuments 1510 to 1840, Batsford, 1946, p. 72.
3. The two columns which support the arch may symbolize the two pillars
   at the entrance of King Solomon's Temple, Boaz and Jachin, jointly
   signifying established strength, the keystone in its centre may
   stand for the great Geometer, the three steps which lead to it may
   be those of Faith, Hope and Charity. (Dewar, op cit, p. 58.)
4. Lepper and Crosslé, op cit, pp. 104-5.

degrees but craft. From 1731 the Grand Lodge attempted to establish a fairly uniform practice by issuing warrants to lodges throughout Ireland. But there were an increasing number which preferred to go their own way as unwarranted, 'clandestine', or 'hedge' masons, practising a bewildering variety of higher degree ritual, and even warranted lodges seem to have added to the basic craft symbolism. This seems to have been especially true in the North.[1]

Various reasons for this can be put forward. Particularly in country areas, sheer distance from Dublin and poor communications, whether by road or by the written or printed word, encouraged local variety. The increasingly embittered political and sectarian activity in Ulster in the 1780s and the 1790s led both Catholics and Protestants to use Freemasonry as a cover for their activities, or as a model for their associations. In both cases they tended to pursue ever more esoteric and secret signs as a means both of concealment and of closely engaging the loyalty of members. Dr William Drennan, later one of the founding members of the United Irishmen, wrote to his friend, the Rev William Bruce, in August 1785, that he thought the best way to achieve a "constitutional conspiracy" would be by

"the segregation of the sincere and sanguine reformers from the rest into a holy and as it were religious brotherhood, knit together by some awful formality, by the solemnity of abjuration, by something mysterious in its manner, like the freemason society, which would serve to stimulate the curiosity of others and gratify our own pride."[2]

It seems likely that similar motives prompted the early Orangemen

---

1. _Ibid_, pp. 94-5 and p. 252.
2. PRONI, D553/45, reproduced in PRONI, _op cit_, facsimile no 61.

to turn to esoteric freemasonry for their rituals and symbolism. But how exactly these symbols were transmitted from the Masons to the Orangemen is not yet clear.

There is a respectable body of thought which believes that a line of descent can be traced from a particular higher grade of Masonry, the Knights of Malta, via the Royal Black Preceptory, which works the higher grades of Orangeism, into the Orange Order.[1] However further analysis is hampered by the refusal of the Royal Black Preceptory to make its records open to students, or to publish an "official" history.

Given this embargo on vital evidence about the links between institutions it seems valid to turn to such masonic images as we know to have been in use in the immediate area in which the Orange Order was formed. These seem to indicate a possible progression from the workings of military lodges at Charlemont Fort on the borders of counties Armagh and Tyrone, to those of non-military local masonic lodges and then to some branches of early Orangeism.

In the standard history of Irish free-masonry there is an illustration of the 'floor-cloth' or painted wallchart of emblems, which belonged to Masonic Lodge no 205 (ill 76). This lodge was originally warranted on 7 Feb 1749-50 for the 35th Foot. However by 1769 the members of the lodge were all local men from the village of Moy just over the river from Charlemont Fort. It seems reasonable to assume therefore that the 35th Foot were stationed at the Fort some time between 1749 and 1769, and left their floorcloth or wallchart behind them, enabling the

1. This is the belief of Orangeism's official historian, R.M. Sibbett (op cit, vol 2, pp. 160-1) and of their leading recent researcher, the late Aiken McClelland. (See his article "The Origin of the Imperial Grand Black Chapter of the British Commonwealth" in Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, Dublin, vol 98, 1968, pp. 191-5.)
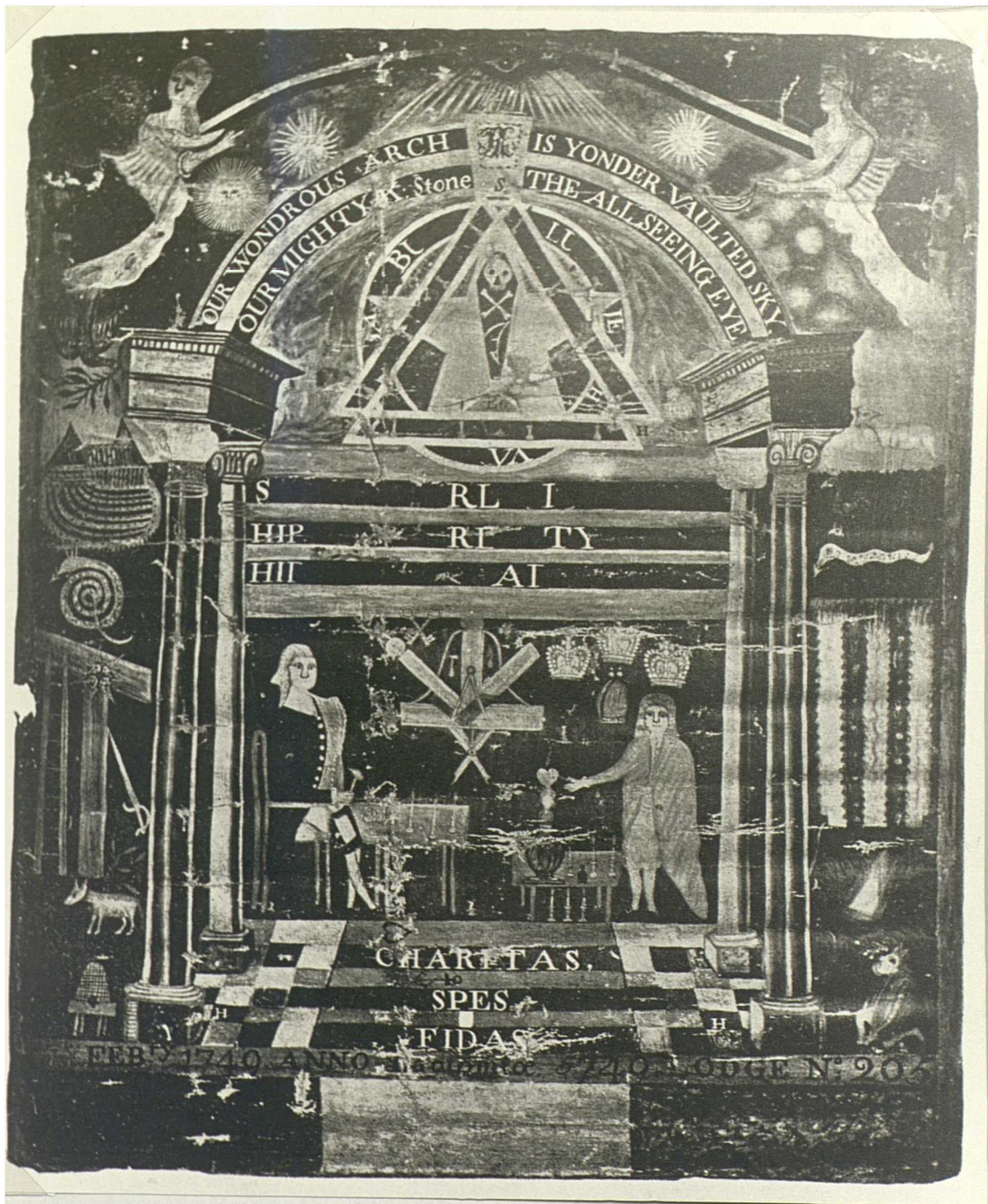
76. Floor cloth of Masonic Lodge no 205/ca 1749/ill between
    pp 248 and 249 of J.H. Lepper and P. Crossle, History
    of the Grand Lodge of Free & Accepted Masons of Ireland,
    Dublin, 1925, vol I.

lodge to be taken over by the Moy men. A second, slightly later wallchart, used by one of the numerous non-military lodges in the area is also illustrated. It is clearly based on the soldiers' design.

The imagery on these cloths falls into three main categories. There are traditional emblems of mortality - the skull and crossbones, coffin and scythe; the biblical signs of salvation - the snake (Aaron's rod), Noah's ark and Moses before the burning bush; and the 'heraldry of the cross' associated with the crusading knights who fought in the Holy Land - the Lamb of God and the sword piercing the heart of Jesus on the cross. Virtually all these symbols can be found again in the earliest known chart of Orange emblems, the folding picture made in 1798 for the Loyal Orange Boyne Society of Armagh, an organisation which by that time was merging with the Orange Order (ill 77).[1]

The likelihood of this kind of chain of transmission is increased by the recorded evidence of contacts between locally-stationed regiments and the early Orangemen.[2] And it is easy to see how these symbols would have found echoes in the real-life existence of inhabitants of the Armagh-Tyrone border area; thus the emblems of mortality, particularly that common tomb-stone motif, the skull and crossbones, would have related closely to experience of wakes, and the crusading-knights imagery would have had a strong appeal both to the soldiers at Charlemont, and to the increasingly military groups of local inhabitants being formed in the area.

It seems plain however that the early Orangemen had a special fondness for the biblical symbols associated with the story of the

1. Sibbett, op cit, vol 1, pp. 152-3.
2. See above, p.227ff, and Sibbett, op cit, vol 1, pp 264-5.
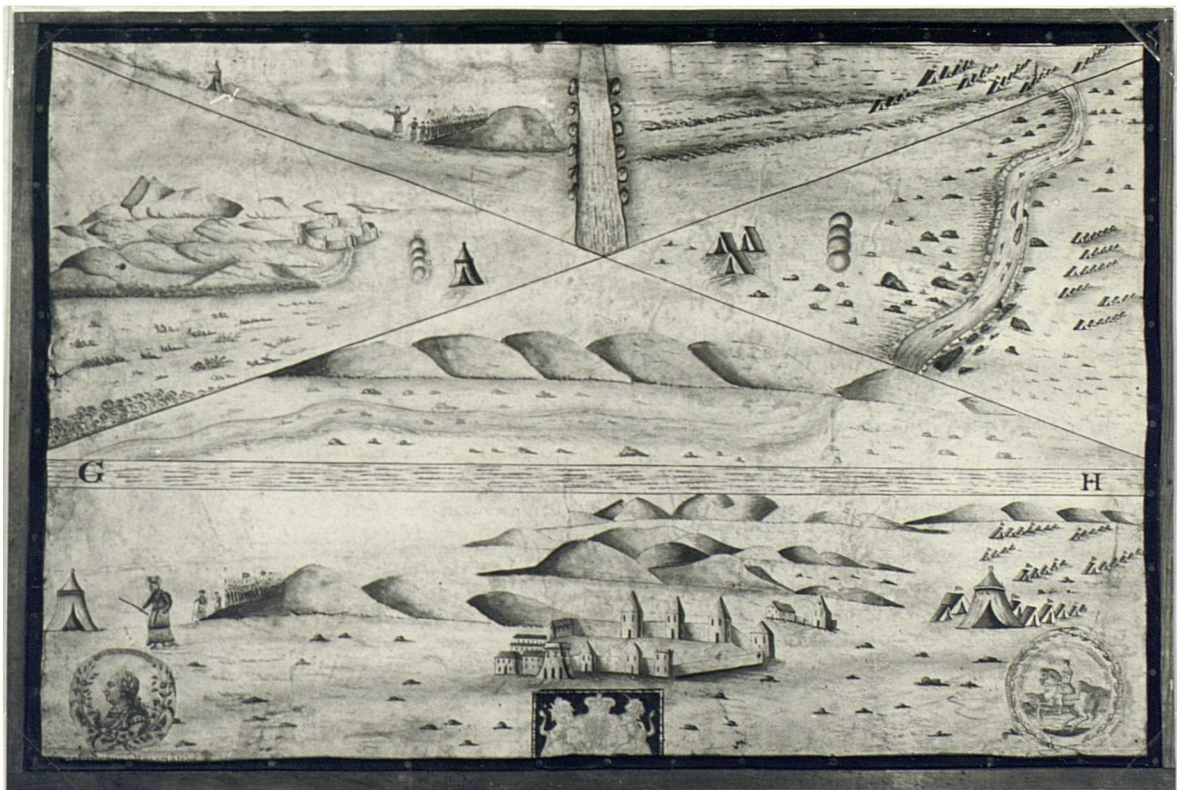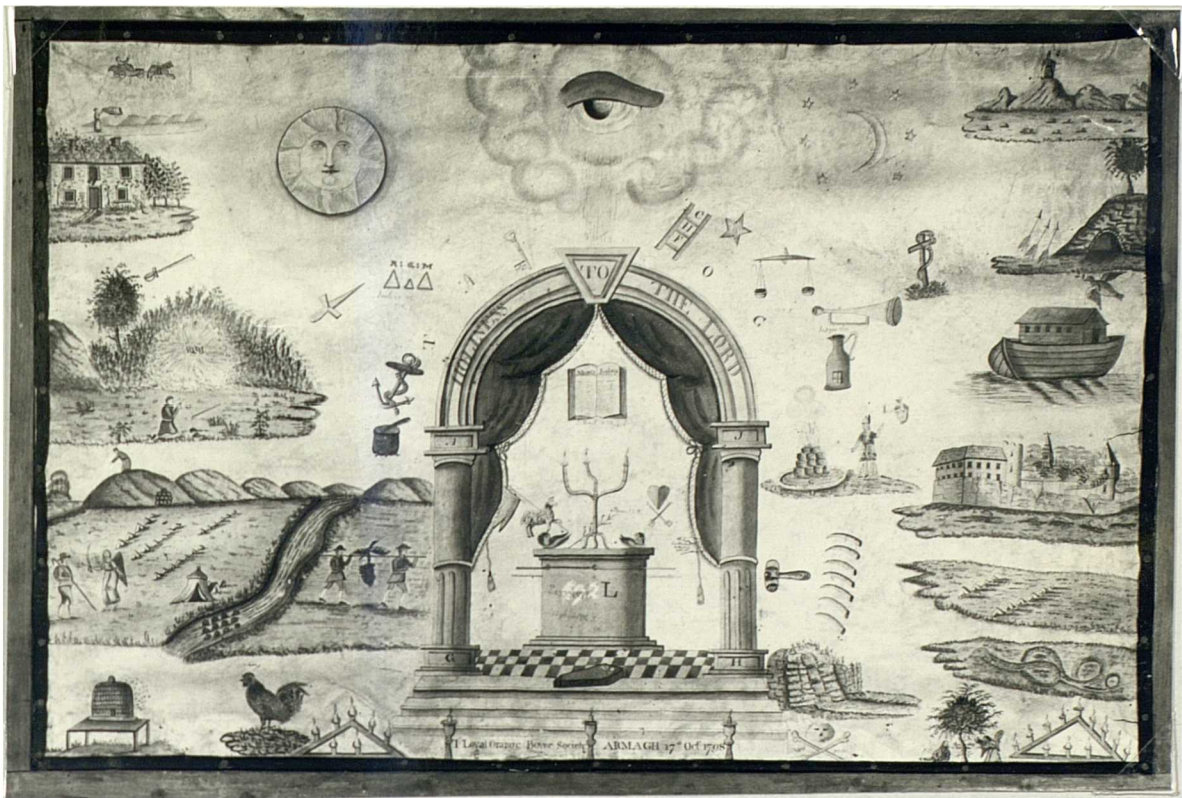
77. Tracing board of the Loyal Orange Boyne Society,
    Armagh, 17th Oct 1798/watercolour on parchment
    in folding wooden case/46 x 32 x 1 ins (106.2 x
    81.2 x 2.5 cms)/Armagh County Museum/Photo: Bill
    Kirk

Israelites' migration from Egypt to the Promised Land. Moses at the burning bush being called to be Israel's deliverer from bondage; the hand in the cloud symbolising God's appearance to him on later occasions; the Ark of the Covenant which contained the tablets engraved with the ten commandments presented to him on Mount Sinai, carried by the Israelites during their wanderings; the seven candles which adorned it; the men carrying grapes seen by Israelite spys in the Land of Canaan promised to them; the twelve stones taken by the twelve tribes of Israel from the middle of the Jordan as a memorial of their crossing the river; the house of Rahab the harlot, with the scarlet cord marking it out to be spared by Joshua's troops at the taking of Jericho, as a reward for her assistance to his spies; the three tents representing the two and a half Israelite tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh which settled the portion of Canaan lying east of the Jordan; the cooking pot, trumpet and lantern, representative of the subterfuge used by Gideon's reduced forces to defeat the Midianites and Amalekites – all these symbols are included in the Loyal Orange Boyne Society picture and identified by the relevant scriptural references (ill 77).

These were images which were generally familiar to Protestant bible-readers of the period, and indeed several of them were illustrated in the 1560 Geneva or Breeches Bible, which remained for generations the standard English household Bible, until it was replaced by the Authorized or King James version. But although many proletarian organisations in Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries identified themselves with the Children of Israel, only the Orangemen seem to have appropriated the symbols of their story in such a whole-hearted fashion. Various pieces of evidence make plain that these Protestant weavers and tenant farmers on the borders of counties Armagh and Tyrone saw themselves

as the beleaguered tribes of Israel, settled in a land which had been

allotted to them by divine will but which still resisted their presence.

In the first place there is the Loyal Orange Boyne Society picture.

While in the top half of it the symbols of the Exodus predominate, in

the lower section there are various encampments in hilly landscapes, with

rivers running through them. Below these again are the royal coat of

arms and two images of William III, one based on the Dublin statue and

the other on the classical bust familiar from coins and medals. The

visual message seems to be that the Williamite conquest was equivalent

to the final establishment of the Children of Israel in their Promised

Land.[1] In the second place such an interpretation of the images in this

folding picture appears to be confirmed by the pass-words chosen by the

Orangemen for use during the Order's early years. These were described

in the very interesting evidence given to the Select Committee of the

House of Lords in 1825 by the Reverend Holt Waring, who had been a member

of the Order since 1798.

"The scheme and system of the first that was instituted, held

reference to the exit of the Children of Israel from Egypt. It was merely

intended as a private or mysterious selection of signs or questions, by

which they should know each other, which became absolutely necessary by

certain circumstances which had occurred in the county of Armagh

previously; and in order that they should know each other for their

future protection, they instituted a sort of catechism, question and

answer, signs by which they might know each other; and the first was a

question; 'From whence came you? From the house of bondage. - Whither do

you go? To the promised land. - How do you expect to get there? By the

---

1. The map is reminiscent of the map of the Israelite wanderings
        contained in the Geneva Bible.

benefit of a password. - Have you that password? I have. - Will you give it me? I will divide it with a brother.' Then the password was M-i-g-d-o-1, being the name of a town at which the Israelites first encamped. It was contrived by persons of the lowest description, just as a sort of freemasonry among themselves."[1]

New exchanges were devised at least five times during the next thirty years. They included references to the Ark of the Covenant, the rod of Aaron, Reuben, Gad and Manasseh, the Sun and Moon, the remnant of the Children of Israel, the Lamb of God, the Light of the Gospel and the prophet Isaias, all of which were to remain important elements in the symbolism of the Orange Order.[2]

The Reverend Waring agreed that these passwords "...might be so construed, as being a contest between the people of the true religion, supposed to be under persecution from those of a worse religion, as the Israelites were supposed to be persecuted by the heathens, and protecting themselves from them."[3]

To this day the Exodus symbols are preserved in images like the banners of the Royal Black Preceptory (ill 78) and the Orange Arch (ill 71), and to this day there are numerous British Israelites amongst the Protestant community in Northern Ireland, whether within or without the Orange Order. Yet during the major part of the century following its foundation the Orange Order was subject to tight central control from

---

1. The Reverend Holt Waring, 22 April 1825, in Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee of the House of Lords appointed to inquire into the State of Ireland (hereafter 1825 Select Committee), 1825 (521) vol 9, p. 334.
2. McClelland, op cit, pp. 192-3.
3. Waring, loc cit. Waring's comments on the meanings attributed to Exodus symbolism by the early Orangemen appears to be confirmed by the usage of biblical passages in the rituals of introduction into the two grades of Orangeism recorded in the 1835 Report, vol 15, Appendix, pp 70-71.

Dublin, which discouraged the use of such higher grade symbolism, and frequent government bans on any kind of public display. How then were these elaborate traditions preserved?

It is important to emphasise that the nineteenth century Orangemen seized what opportunities they could to challenge the bans on party processions, and acquired suitable regalia for such parades, sporadic though they were. Thus there are still in existence at least one banner and drum which, according to strong tradition, were carried in the procession which led to the Battle of Dolly's Brae in 1849.[1] However the complex biblical symbolism of the Exodus story was not featured on these items. The banner bears a simple image of William III and the drum the royal coat of arms with the sun, moon and seven stars. This simplicity appears to be characteristic of all the few pieces of Orange regalia produced for public display between the first imposition of the ban on party processions in 1832 and its final lifting in 1872.

However, while public regalia remained scanty and simple in design, private emblems adorned with the full range of Orange symbols continued to be produced throughout this period. Indeed one may surmise that the very ban on public displays encouraged the perpetuation of underground, secretive, esoteric workings, as did the use of Orangeism as one of the means of protecting Protestant dominance of Belfast's fast growing craft industries. Certainly it is clear that the higher grades of Orangeism continued to be worked by the Royal Black Preceptory, and that the symbols associated with them were kept in view in such private and domestic objects as certificates, pieces of pottery,[2] sashes, aprons

1. The banner was made for Benraw Orange Lodge. There is a photograph of it in the Mourne Observer, 3 Aug. 1962./ On the drum, see below, p. 270.
   p. 3.
2. See for example the early nineteenth century transfer-printed mugs and jugs discussed above, p. 5.

and table-centres.

Indeed it is important to emphasise that the Orange imagery of this period was very much part of everyday life at work and in the home. Some of the pottery objects decorated with Orange symbols are believed to have been single pieces made for their own use by Orange employees in local workshops.[1] And before the building of a large number of Orange halls in the late nineteenth century, lodges met in private homes,[2] where much of their regalia was made, preserved, repaired and copied, often by the women of the house.

Some feeling for this process of preservation and transmission can be obtained from the history of two sets of embroidered Royal Black Preceptory banners. The first set was made by a Mrs McQuiggan in the Lisburn area, between about 1907 and the beginning of the Second World War. The second set consists of approximate copies of some of these banners made by Mrs Grattan, a farmer's wife from Loughbrickland, in the mid 1970s (ill 78). Significantly Mrs McQuiggan's banners started life as pieces of domestic regalia, for the first ones were originally made as table-centres and then converted into banners. (She also made sashes and aprons for her husband and for a number of other male relatives and friends). Her work was skilful and painstaking, and she would insist that Robinson & Cleavers, Belfast's most important department store, should import for her silks of the quality she required. However Mrs McQuiggan was illiterate and her designs were drawn out by her husband

---

1. Such as the Sidney Stewart bowl in the Ulster Folk Museum, which is believed to have been made by its owner in the Castle Espie pottery near Comber in the second half of the nineteenth century.
2. Indeed the main room in the house in which I now live was used within living memory for meetings of the local lodge, as well as dances and boxing-matches.
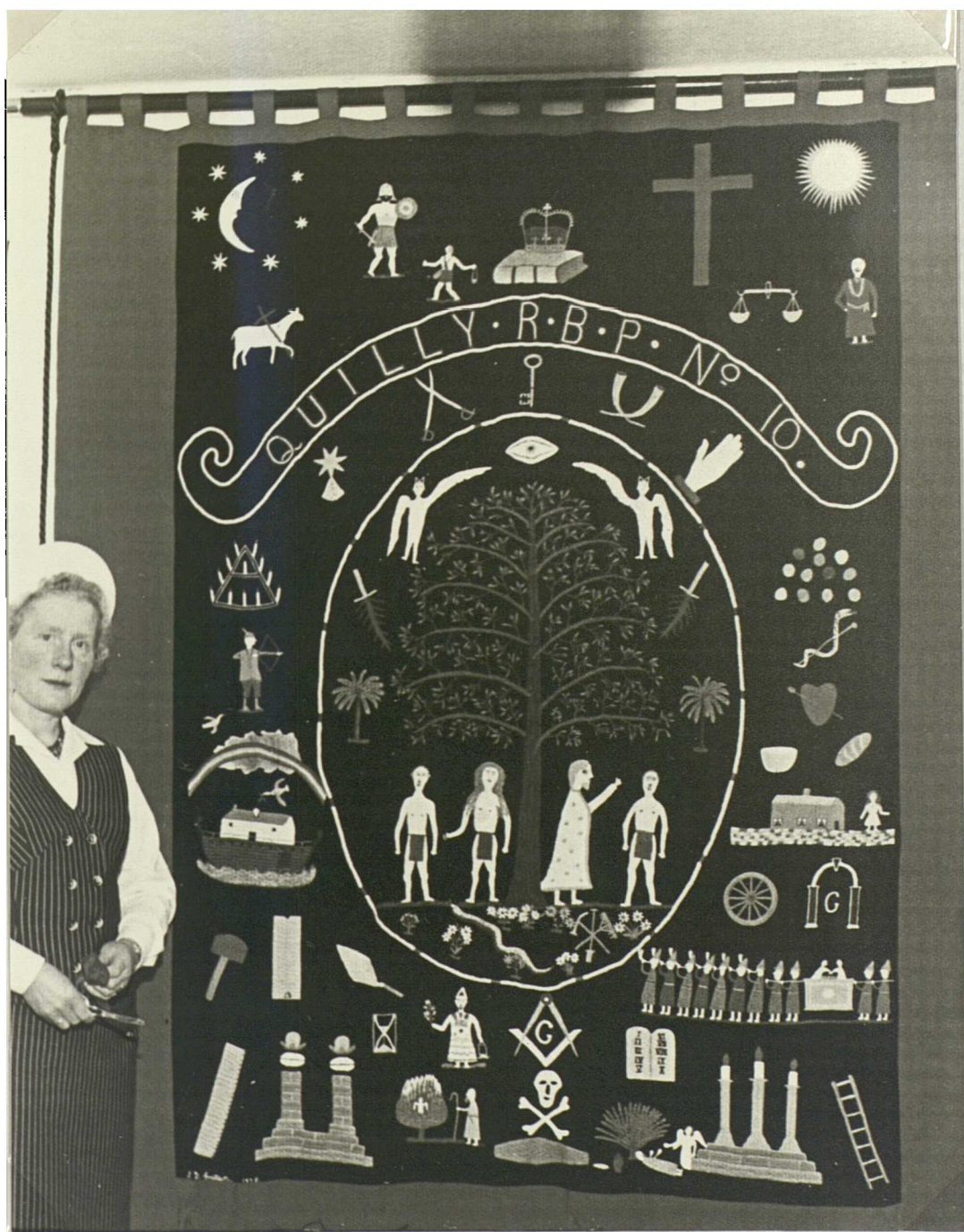
78. Mrs Grattan and her banner for Quilly Royal
     Black Preceptory Lodge no 10/1975/embroidered
     with cotton on Trevira/approximately 72 x
     48 ins (183 x 122 cms)
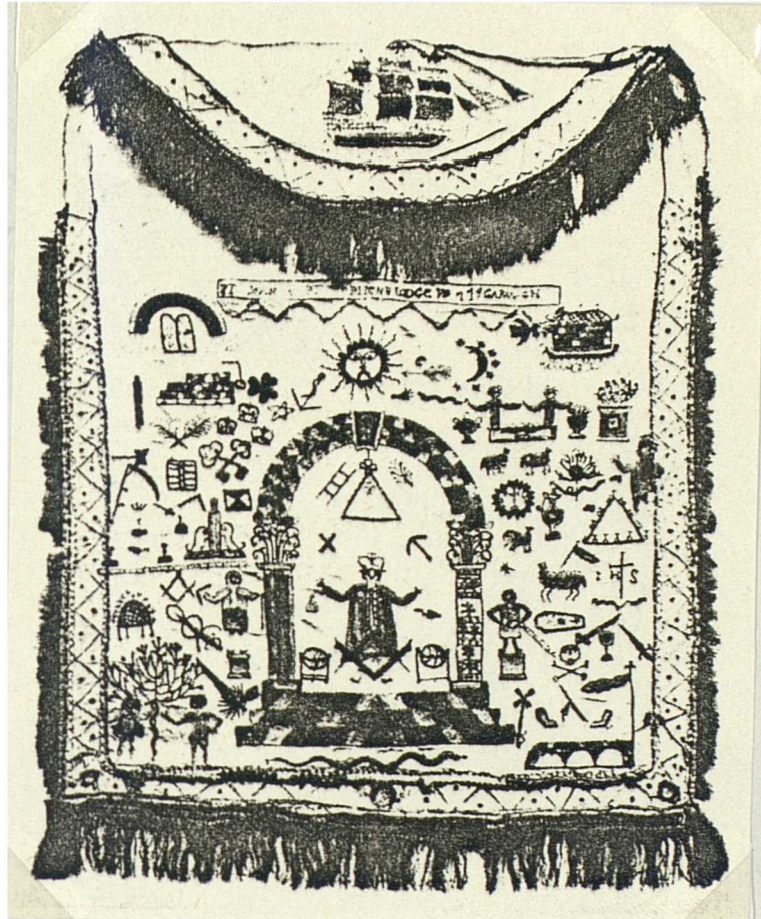
79. Embroidered apron made for St John & St Stephen's
    Masonic Lodge, Garvagh, Co Derry/ca 1795/ill on p.149
    of Samuel Leighton, History of Freemasonry in the
    Province of Antrim, Wm Brown, Belfast, 1938.
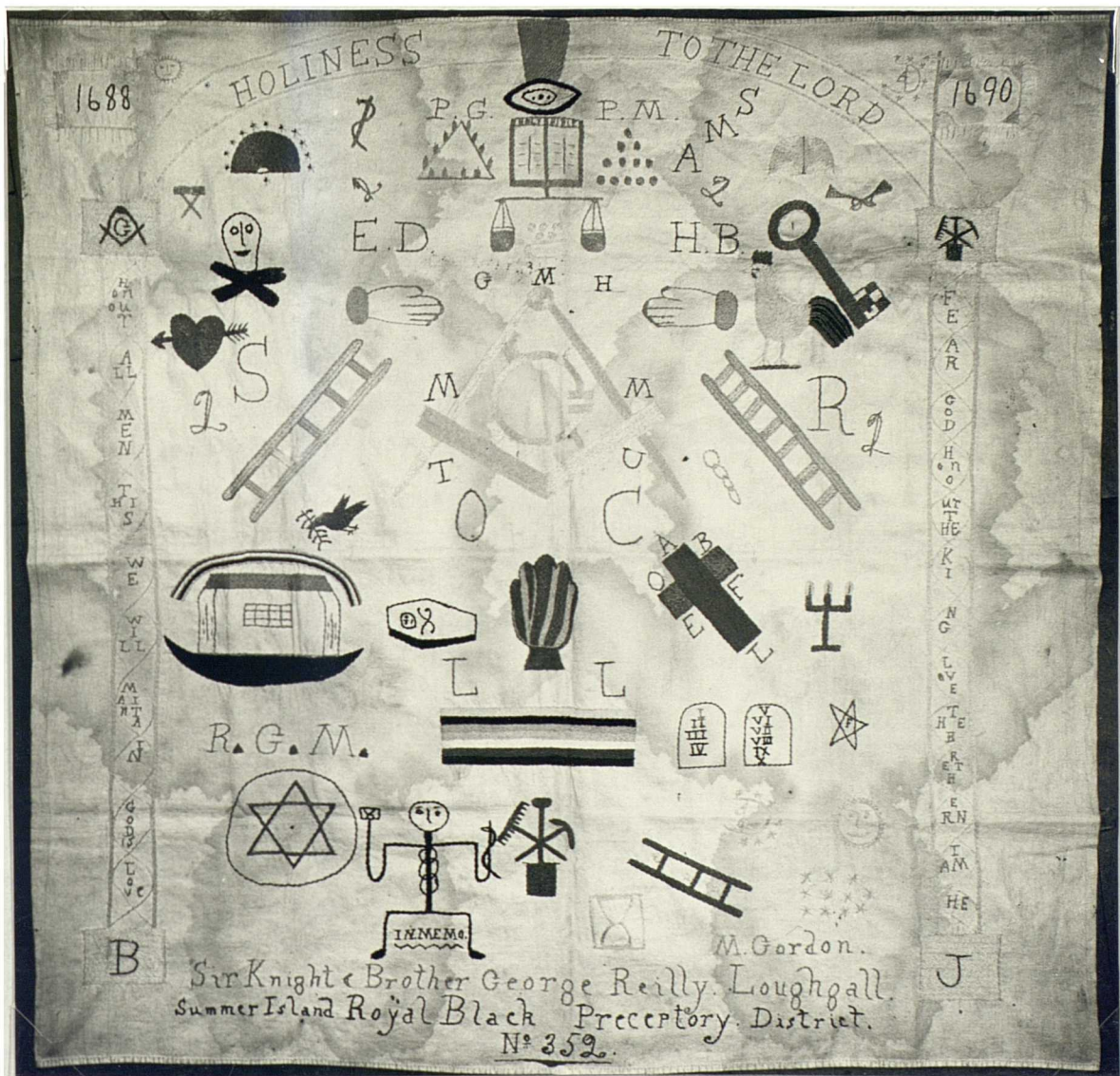
80. M. Gordon/Embroidered hanky made for George
Reilly of Loughgall, member no 352/coloured
silks on linen/30 x 30 ins (76.2 x 76.2 cms)/
Armagh County Museum/Photo: Bill Kirk

who, with typical Orange caution, told her only as much as she needed to know about the symbols in them. He himself had started life as a farm-labourer, but by the time the banners were made he was working in the drying-loft of the Hillsborough Linen Company. There, on the days when the manager was away, he drew out the designs with the assistance of the winding-master. What sources they turned to we do not know. However it is certain that McQuiggan had progressed from the Masons to the Orange Order and finally to the Black Preceptory. It is tempting therefore to see in his designs some continuing influence of esoteric freemasonry, possibly even of the late eighteenth century embroidered masonic aprons which were still in existence in Northern Ireland in the early years of this century (ill 79). However he may have turned to the less organised displays of symbols found in such later Orange and Black embroidered emblems as the George Reilly handkerchief, which is believed to date from 1860 (ill 80).[1]

When Mrs Grattan came to make her copies of the McQuiggan banners in the mid-1970s she appears to have had a far freer hand and to have been considerably more knowledgeable about the symbols involved, for she readily interpreted them to me.[2] The Black Preceptory told her it was no longer necessary to adhere to the Order's five traditional colours and she omitted or altered several symbols in order to make the design clearer and easier to understand. Although she continually referred back to an old chart of Royal Black Preceptory symbols, and listened to her family's opinions about the colours she should choose for the individual emblems, her chief concern remained with visual rather than symbolic truth.

---

1. My information on Mrs McQuiggan is derived from a conversation with her son Levi on 13 August 1981.
2. Conversation on 5 July 1975.

It was Rahab's wall which gave her most problems. She unpicked it three times before she succeeded in making it look like a real Ulster stone wall.

The story of how these banners were made and copied provides a clear insight into the way the complex Children of Israel symbolism associated with the higher grades of Orangeism has been visually preserved. But it is important to remember that the perpetuation of these visual symbols also depends on an unseen tradition of interpretation and meaning. To a certain extent this is kept going by repeated working of the higher grades of Orangeism and Freemasonry, which involve instruction on the meaning of their associated symbols for those admitted to them. But that instruction in turn must depend on a certain minimum of relearning and reconsideration by those responsible for it, if it is not simply to become a meaningless rote, easily subject to corruption and decay. It is necessary therefore to consider what can have been the sources available for that small but essential process of refreshment of meaning.

When I visited an Orange lodge in the neighbourhood of my present home to inquire from its members why their processions remain so important to them, the secretary reinforced his message to me by handing me a leaflet on the history of Orangeism[1] and a Protestant Truth Society tract on the importance of the Bible in the reformed tradition.[2] Given all we know about the strong involvement of Orangeism with the defence of Protestantism in Northern Ireland, it seems reasonable to consider the earlier equivalents of that tract which Orangemen may have studied in

---

1. Rev M.W. Dewar, "Why Orangeism?", Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland, 1970.
2. Bishop J.C. Ryle, What do we owe to the Reformation? Protestant Truth Society, 1954.

order to expound to themselves the meaning of their rituals and symbols.

Certainly there have been numerous explanations of biblical symbolism available to the Northern Ireland Orangemen since the establishment of their Order. Most of the early interpretations were applied to the imagery of the book of the Bible known variously as the Apocalypse or Revelations, but much of its symbolism and meaning is a reprise of that to be found in the Exodus story. As in England[1] the violent imagery of the Apocalypse was applied to political events at the end of the eighteenth century. Thus in the Belfast News Letter for 9 November 1798 a long letter represented events in France as fulfilling the prophecies of the Apocalypse. And in 1818 that observant traveller John Gamble recorded the contemporary delight taken by Ulstermen in calculating the date of the millenium from the book's prophecies.[2] Such interpretations were later given wider currency in The Mystero-Hermeneusis: Being an Explanation of the Prophetic Symbols of the Apocalypse.[3] This volume was prepared by a local Presbyterian minister and published in Belfast. It supplied detailed explanations of such favourite Orange and Black symbols as the seven-branched candlestick, the sword of the word, the Lamb of God, the scales, the seven trumpets and the death's head and crossbones. The latter was described as the emblem of Popery's "bloody spirit of persecution."[4] The book's frequent attacks on the Catholic rebels of 1641, praise of the Williamite revolution of 1688 and opposition

---

1. See E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, Penguin, 1968, pp. 127-130.
2. John Gamble, Views of society and manners in the North of Ireland, in a series of letters written in the year 1818, Longman, 1819, p. 146.
3. By the Rev W Kennedy McKay, Presbyterian Minister of Portglenone, published by William McComb and Henry Greer, Belfast, 1836, vol 1. I have been unable to trace any second volume.
4. Ibid, p. 157.

to Daniel O'Connell must have given it extra appeal for Orange readers.[1]

Towards the end of the century two further publications may have

provided Orangemen with additional confirmation of their esoteric biblical

imagery. One was the immensely popular print of The Broad and Narrow Way.[2]

Both it and the commentary which accompany it concentrate on imagery of

travel and pilgrimage, but it also provides explanations of such emblems

as the snake, the rock, the tablets, the rainbow, the scales, the Lamb

and the all-seeing eye.

The popular impact in Protestant Northern Ireland of this print and

the very similar The Pilgrim's Way, appears to have been very considerable.

In a community where churches are traditionally bare and other imagery

generally lacking, they have been hung on the walls of endless homes.[3]

Alongside them there can have been little else save perhaps King William

III, a portrait of the monarch, an illuminated religious text, the

fervently praying maiden of My Faith Looks up to Thee (ill 36), a

masonic or trade union or Orange certificate, or the Orange Arch

(ill 71).[4]

In 1891 more learned commentary on the symbols familiar to Orangemen

was provided by the heraldic actist John Vinycomb in his presidential

address to the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club on 17 November. This was

easily available to anyone interested, for Vinycomb's lecture was published

in the Northern Whig on 20 November 1891 and subsequently reprinted. Its

1. The perpetuation of this strand of apocalyptic imagery amongst Ulster
    Protestants in this period must however be seen in the context of
    its more general abandonment in favour of appeals to rationality.
    See David W. Miller, "Presbyterianism and 'Modernization' in Ulster",
    Past and Present, Oxford, no 80, Aug 1978, pp 66-90.
2. See below, p. 555 and ill 176.
3. See Robert Harbinson (Bryans), Up Spake the Cabin Boy, Faber, 1961 p.140.
4. For references to these other images see Robert Harbinson (Bryans), Song
    of Erne, Faber, 1960 p. 86 & p. 236, and No Surrender, Faber, 1966, p.
    60 & p.136. The few exceptions to this traditional array of images
    conformed very much to their mode, cf the passage from Forrest Reid's
    Peter Waring, quoted in John Wilson Foster, Forces and Themes in
    Ulster Fiction, Gill & Macmillan, 1974, p. 144.

discourse, like that of the earlier Mystero-Hermeneusis, may appear too complex and detailed to hold much appeal for many Orangemen. It must be remembered however that the interpretations of biblical imagery in such publications would often have been retransmitted to members of the various Orange organisations by the teachings of their clergymen, whether in their Sunday sermons or by virtue of their membership of the local lodge. And the Orangemen's willingness to conduct sophisticated research on the meaning of their symbols should not be under-estimated. In the lodge room of the Apprentice Boys Hall in Derry there are a series of painted bannerettes of the symbols of the twelve tribes of Israel. These were supplied by a local artist in the 1950s, after consulting with a Jewish museum in Israel.

It is my belief that the Exodus symbolism features so prominently in Orange imagery because it was made available at the time of the Order's foundation in bible-illustrations and the emblems of esoteric freemasonry; because it could be appropriated to a succession of political situations in which the Orangemen found themselves; because it was preserved in the privacy of their homes; and because its continued usage and interpretation was supported by a persistent body of written and oral information supplied principally by Northern Ireland's Protestant religions. In this context divisions between "folk art", politics, religion, the home and the workplace become virtually meaningless abstractions imposed by blinkered observers. People live their lives as a whole and this has to be remembered when analysing the symbols and rituals employed by them. This will become further apparent from taking a closer look at some of the individual symbols associated with Orange processions.

Swords and secrecy

In Orange processions, as already noted, one can often see drawn swords carried by the two last members of the lodge (ill 66). And in the Orange Arch (ill 7 1) swords appear no less than four times. There is a sword piercing a heart, a flaming sword, crossed swords and a sword waved by an angel. What is the significance of all this?

Question an Orangeman on this subject and he will become remarkably vague and evasive. Three replies to queries about the meaning of Orange swords will serve to illustrate this. When he was questioned by the 1825 Parliamentary Inquiry as to whether Orangemen carried arms in their processions, Colonel Verner, himself an Orangeman, stated that he heard instances of the master or the secretary having carried a sword from the rank he held.[1] When in 1979 I asked a supplier of Orange regalia, and member of the Royal Black Preceptory, the meaning of the Orangemen's use of swords, he replied vaguely that they were carried principally for dress reasons. And when in 1981 I asked a member of the Apprentice Boys what their sword in the heart symbol meant he said

"Ah, that's the dagger to the heart. It's to do with preserving secrets. There's the handshake for friendship, but there's enmity, the dagger to the heart if you reveal... But I'm a bit vague about that..."

What seems to be in action here is not only the Orangeman's traditional reluctance to reveal the secrets of his rituals and symbols, but an additional association of swords themselves with the very concept of secrecy.

A little more light can be shed on this subject if one looks at the way swords have been displayed in a number of Orange images and in the

---

1.   1825 Select Committee, p. 330.

Masonic and biblical traditions on which they draw. Thus in the masonic floor-cloth from Moy which has been suggested as a possible influence on early Orange imagery, a sword is shown piercing the heart of Christ on the Cross (ill 76); in Mrs Grattan's Royal Black Preceptory banners two angels are shown closely adjacent to the flaming swords used by them to drive Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Paradise (ill 78); in the Mystero-Hermeneusis the Reverend McKay talks of the sword of the word issuing from the mouth of the Lord in the Apocalypse;[1] and crossed swords are interpreted variously, as simple emblems of contention[2] or, in masonic imagery, of the continual warfare between the powers of good and evil.

And finally one can study the usage of swords by Orangemen in their processions, and on other occasions, to assess the various kinds of ritual emphasis placed on them. At that first Orange procession observed by Lord Gosford in 1796 the sword-carriers prevented any persons from coming in to the gate of his demesne apart from their own members. To this day this is what they (or in less affluent lodges, two pikemen) continue to do: they close the ranks of their lodge from intruders while they process and they bar the way to outsiders as their lodge marches into "the field" which forms the goal of their procession. The derivation of this practice is rightly indicated in the Nation's account of the Orange demonstration at Enniskillen in August 1845, where these gentlemen are described as tylers.[3] Tylers are the masons who are posted outside

---

1. McKay, op cit, p. 39.
2. John Vinycomb, "Symbolism", Northern Whig, Belfast, 1891, p. 9.
3. The Nation, Dublin, 16 August 1845, p. 725. The minute books of two Royal Black Preceptory Lodges preserved in PRONI (D2108/3 and D2108/4) contain numerous records of payments to tylers for attending lodge meetings from the 1850s onwards.

the door during lodge proceedings to keep out intruders. They do not only appear in Orange processions. They can also be seen in some of the early nineteenth century handpainted Orange certificates in Armagh County Museum, where they are shown flanking the Orange Arch (ill 72).

If these various meanings attached to sword-symbols in Orange imagery and rituals are summarised it will be clear that they centre on the concepts of secrecy, exclusion and contention, in other words they are all basically about differentiation. The Orangeman is a man for whom the world is sharply divided into good and evil.

This is an important insight, but it is only if we go a step further and relate Orange sword symbols to wider popular traditions that it becomes possible to understand what one might term their overtones, or the non-specific but powerful meanings they carry with them. For the secrecy symbolism of swords and hearts long antedates the development of either orangeism or freemasonry. It forms part of a general tradition of popular imagery of relevance to both orange and green symbolism. Until more thorough research is carried out, the history of this tradition must remain tentative, but its apparent progress in Northern Ireland would seem to indicate a devious, twisting development.

Our starting-point is the Moy floorcloth (ill 7 6) with the sword piercing the heart of Christ on the cross. This type of symbolism goes back to the medieval "heraldry of the cross" in which Christ's passion was recalled by a formal array of the instruments which caused his suffering. At the Reformation there seems to have been a split in Protestant and Catholic handling of these traditional symbols. Catholics continued to use the heraldry of the cross, including the pierced heart, on objects like tombstones and the "penal crosses" produced in Ireland

in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[1] They also made

increasing use of the heart by itself, often flaming or wreathed with

thorns, as a symbol of counter-Reformation fervour, particularly in

association with the cult of the Sacret Heart. This image, which was

frequently featured in Catholic emblem-books of the counter-Reformation

period,[2] was soon adopted in Ireland. In 1641 the Catholic Confederation

of Kilkenny was established as a counterpart to the Irish parliament, from

which Catholics were excluded. Its seal bore the flaming heart, together

with the emblems of dove, crown and cross (ill 81).[3] And the

virtually ubiquitous display of images of the Sacred Heart in Irish

Catholic homes today seems to go back to at least the mid-nineteenth

century when a broadsheet of this image was part of the repertoire of

Belfast printers (ill 82).[4] Catholic heart and swords imagery in the

post-Reformation period was therefore laying an emphasis on the connection

between love, suffering and devotion implied in Christ's crucifixion.

Meanwhile Protestants seem at first to have avoided direct

reference to heart and sword imagery, probably because of its Catholic

associations. There are stray indications however that Protestants never

entirely abandoned this symbolic tradition. Various forms of swearing

by God's wounds are known to have been current from at least the

fourteenth century. These oaths were originally solemn religious

guarantees, strongly associated with vowing to go on crusade to the Holy

---

1. Ada K. Longfield, Some Irish Churchyard Sculpture, Gifford and Craven,
      Ballycotton, Co. Cork, 1974, pp. 34 and A.T. Lucas, "Penal Crosses",
      Co Louth Archaeological Journal vol 13 no 2, 1954, pp. 151-2.
2. Freeman, op cit, p. 134.
3. Hayes-McCoy, op cit, p. 49.
4. The flaming heart is traditionally a symbol of charity and has been
      associated with both Christ and St Augustine. Catholic devotion to
      the Sacred Heart originated from a vision experienced by a French
      nun, Marguerite Marie Alacoque (1647-1690). Pope Clement XII
      approved the devotion in France in 1758 and it was officially
      extended to the whole church by Pope Pius IX in 1856.

81. Seal of the Catholic Confederacy/1642-1652/ill on p.
    49 of G.A. Hayes-McCoy, <u>A History of Irish Flags</u>
    <u>from earliest times</u>, Academy Press, Dublin, 1979.

Thy Sacred Heart, O Jesus, I adore—
Grant that I may love thee more and more.

82. Detail from a Sacred Heart broadsheet/mid 19th century/
hand-coloured wood-engraving/9 x 8 ins (22.9 x 20.3
cms)/Belfast/Queen's University Library, Belfast/Photo:
Maire Concannon.

83. Tombstone of James Kennedy, d 1726/1981/Clogher Cathe-
dral graveyard/Photo: B. Loftus.

Land. They continued to be used in the post-Reformation period, but

gradually slipped down the scale of solemnity, until in the eighteenth

century "cross my heart and swear to die" became one of the chief ritual

oaths used by schoolchildren.[1] This argues the use of the oath in wider

circles than those of the small Catholic community in England during

this period. And in Northern Ireland daggers and hearts continued to

appear in the heraldry employed on seventeenth and early eighteenth

century tombstones commemorating Protestant planters. (ill 83).[2] To

sum up: Protestants in the post-Reformation period continued to use

heart and swords imagery with some association with the Crucifixion, but

in a more tentative fashion that their Catholic contemporaries. Moreover

they chose to emphasise not so much the themes of love, devotion and

suffering but those of awe, legitimacy and mortality.

The planter tombstones perpetuated another emblem associated with

the heraldry of the cross which, like swords and hearts, was to form

part of the symbolism of dreadful secrecy later adopted by the Orange

Order. The skull and crossbones were traditionally represented in

medieval imagery at the foot of Christ's crucifix. This was in part a

reference to the location of the crucifixion at Golgotha, "the place of

the skull",[3] and in part to the legend that the cross rested upon the

skull and bones of Adam, suggesting that through the cross all men may

rise to eternal life.[4] This kind of representation was continued in

---

1. Oxford English Dictionary; Iona and Peter Opie, The Lore and
     Language of Schoolchildren, Paladin, 1977, pp. 142-5; and Eric
     Partridge, A Dictionary of Catch Phrases, Routledge & Kegan Paul,
     1977, p. 39.
2. From which they appear to have been partially absorbed into the imagery
     of Catholic eighteenth century tombstones. See Finbar McCormick, "A
     Group of Eighteenth Century Clogher Headstones" Clogher Record, 1976,
     pp. 5-16.
3. Matthew ch 27 v. 32.
4. I Corinthians ch 15 v. 45.

post-Reformation Catholic imagery in Ireland. It was commonplace on

Catholic tombstones of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century[1]

and can be seen also in an early nineteenth century broadsheet of the

crucifixion, printed by Smyth of Belfast and obviously intended for

Catholic buyers.[2] There the skull has a snake, traditional symbol of

life, struggling through it.

In Protestant imagery however the skull and crossbones was detached

from this specific, hopeful, religious context to become part of a

vocabulary of images reminding man of his mortality, a theme which became

an obsession in the seventeenth century. For the most part the

reformers saw death as a gateway to an age-long sleep, rather than to

purgatory or paradise. Therefore they believed that at death the body

crumbled away, and the soul slept till the trumpets which should proclaim

the day of judgement. Thus it was difficult to think of one's friends in

any form save that of a mouldering corpse. With this thought before their

eyes, they moralised on the shortness of human life, and the ugly

fragments of the body which alone survived death.

Not surprisingly therefore the skull and crossbones became a

universal feature on both the grand memorials and the lowlier tombstones

erected in memory of Ulster's Protestant planters.[3]

In the century that followed the symbolism of hearts and swords,

skulls and crossbones was frequently revived in the popular imagery

associated with secret societies, or would-be secret societies, and

always with their Protestant meaning of oaths of secrecy and fear of

1. Leask, op cit, pp. 27-8.
2. In the library of Queen's University, Belfast.
3. Homan Potterton, Irish Church Monuments, 1570-1880, Ulster
      Architectural Heritage Society, Belfast, 1975, p. 8 and Helen
      Hickey, Images of Stone, Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 1976, pp
      97-103

mortality. In the eighteenth century some esoteric masons, like those who used the Moy floorcloth, identified themselves with such crusading orders as the Knights of Malta or the Templars, and revived the heraldry of the cross meanings of such emblems. Others made fresh combinations of them to emphasise the awe and secrecy of their operation. (Thus the ritual of the "Elect of Fifteen" is reputed to include a death's head pierced by a dagger.)[1] Even the gentler rites of the craft masons employed the emblems of mortality in the ceremony of introduction to the third and final degree.[2] All these usages were immensely popular in Ireland.[3]

At the end of the nineteenth century these images were much in vogue again, judging by their prevalence in the repertoire of tattooists who began to ply their craft during this period (ill 84). The designs illustrated are some of those currently used by the Belfast tattooist Johnny Venus, but their long-term currency is confirmed by Hans Ebenstein who, in Pierced Hearts and True Love,[4] describes them as having been favoured by criminals for many decades. As before, these images symbolised dreadful secrets. Their popularity and this association were finally confirmed for the youth of the western world when the winged death's head was adopted as the symbol of the Hell's Angels, first in America, and then, from the late 1960s, in Britain.[5]

When we look therefore at the swords carried in Orange processions (ill   66) or featured in the Orange Arch (ill   7 1) we are seeing

---

1. A.E. Waite, A new encyclopedia of freemasonry, Rider, 1921, vol 1, p.231
2. Hannah, op cit, p. 131.
3. This is confirmed by the masonic regalia preserved in the museum in the Masonic Hall in Rosemary Street in Belfast. I am grateful to the curator, Mr. Dennison, for showing me these items.
4. Derek Verschoyle, 1953, p. 34.
5. Jamie Mandelkau, Buttons: the making of a President, Sphere, 1971, p. 76 and p. 81.
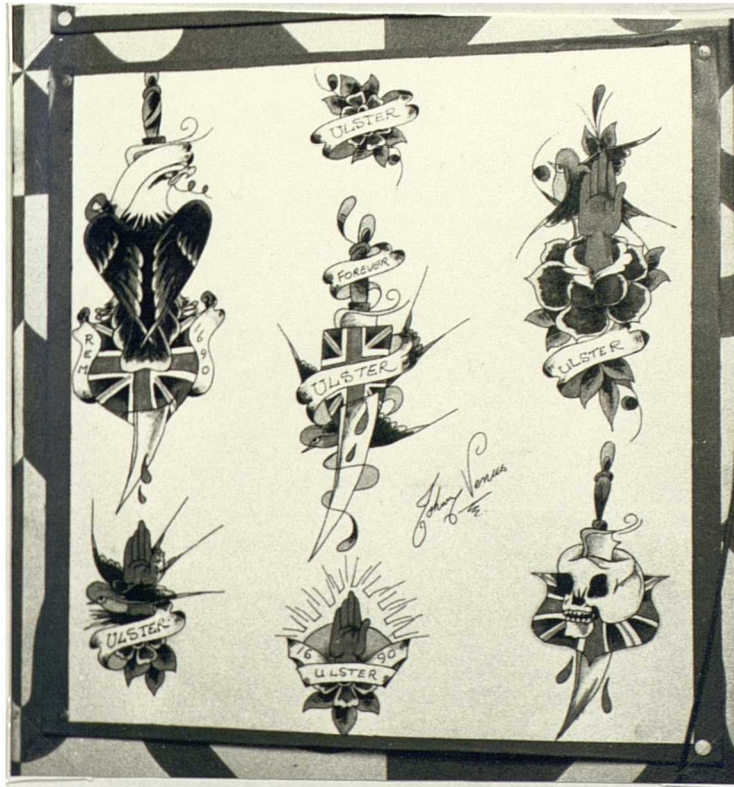
84. Chart of tattoo designs/1980/Johnny Venus tattoo studio,
Donegall Pass, Belfast/Photo: B. Loftus.

symbols whose precise significance to Orangemen is endorsed and extended by their other roles in wider traditions of popular imagery. They carry with them clusters of meanings.

Arches (ill 85)

Like so many of the Orangemen's emblems, the arches erected by them during the summer marching season derive originally from mainstream European culture but have gradually acquired their own symbolic intonations as the result of local political and economic developments in Northern Ireland. When first employed in the early years of the nineteenth century, these structures recalled the triumphal arches of classical antiquity in their location along a processional route and the later, less formal arches used for a variety of British celebrations in their construction from flowers and ribbons. While these traditions never entirely disappeared, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards the Orangemen's arches were increasingly used as combative definers of sectarian territory and demonstrations of industrial pride and skill.

In the Roman period both permanent and temporary triumphal arches were used to honour a victorious commander or emperor. The practice was revived in the Italian Renaissance and reached England in the sixteenth century. These Renaissance arches were no longer used solely for victorious soldiers but also in pageants, shows and official receptions. On all these occasions the arches, like their classical predecessors, adorned a processional route and those moving under them were supposed to participate in the virtues and qualities represented in the emblems decorating them.[1] Indeed most of these early structures were highly

---

1. A point made in Bergeron, op cit.

85. Orange Arch/1973/Dee St. Belfast/Photo: Arts Council
    of Northern Ireland.

elaborate classical edifices covered with emblematic figures and symbols.
Often their themes and imagery were provided by leading dramatists and
artists of the day.[1] But some were simpler, more vernacular affairs.
On the day of Queen Elizabeth's departure from Norwich in August 1578

"the streets towards saint Benets gate were hanged, from one side
to the other, with cords made of hearbs and floures, with garlands,
coronets, pictures, rich cloths, and a thousant devises."[2]

This kind of less formal arch, often involving floral decorations,
and still adorning a processional route, seems to have been generally
adopted in Britain for a variety of purposes. By the eighteenth and early
nineteenth centuries such edifices were being used for events like the
arrival of a local landowner[3] or friendly society celebrations. Thus on
the annual feast day of a Monmouth lodge of the Independent Odd Fellows
in 1828 three floral arches adorned the route of their procession.[4] The
possible influence of local traditions on the arches constructed by the
Orangemen of Northern Ireland cannot be totally discounted, for at the
time of the Order's foundation the Roman Catholic population in Ulster
were in the habit of using floral wreaths in their celebration of St John's
Eve, a feast very close in date to the anniversary of the Battle of the
Boyne, which the Orangemen were to commemorate with their arches and
processions.[5] Nevertheless the Orange arch of which we have the earliest
detailed account appears to lie squarely within the British tradition.

1. Ibid, passim.
2. Holinshed, quoted in Bergeron, op cit, p. 43.
3. Robert W. Malcolmson, Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850,
   Cambridge, 1973, p. 65.
4. Gosden, op cit, p. 126.
5. J. Byrne, in his An impartial account of the late disturbances in the
   County of Armagh (Dublin, 1792, p. 65) records that in 1789 he saw a
   number of Catholics celebrating St John's Eve at Drumbanacher, near
   Ballymore in Co Armagh in the following fashion, which he asserts was
   traditional: "men, women and children were present on this occasion:
   dancing with fidlers, pipers and a large garland of flowers." See also
   the letter from Rev Edward Hudson to Lord Charlemont, 11 July 1789,
   Charlemont MSS, Historical Manuscripts Commission, vol 2, 1894, p. 102.

It was observed at Tandragee on 12 July 1812 by John Gamble, on his travels through Northern Ireland. He observed that

"There was much of fancy... in the decoration of a lofty arch, which was thrown across the entire street, The Orange was gracefully blended with oak leaves, laurels and roses. Bits of gilded paper, suited to the solemnity, were interwoven with the flowers."[1]

The stylistic resemblance of this construction to previous ceremonial arches is marked, and the function of Orange arches during this period seems to have been an extension of existing ritual practice, for there is some evidence that they were particularly favoured in the towns along the route of William III's progress through Northern Ireland. The Reverend Henry Cooke, in his evidence to the Committee of Lords in 1825 recalled passing through a number of arches on his way to Belfast in July 1824, on a journey which took him through Dromore, one of the towns along "King William's way".[2]

By the mid-nineteenth century however the function of Orange arches appears to have changed. For an Orange function at Lisburn in 1845 a number of arches were erected. At the north-eastern entrance to the town was one:

"it was composed of orange lilies and ever green and decorated with orange and purple ribbons. This arch was flanked with banners, and surmounted by an equestrian figure of King William the Third. To the centre was attached the following inscription: 'Welcome Watson, honoured and beloved - No Surrender.'"

1. J. Gamble, A View of Society and Manners in the North of Ireland in the Summer and Autumn of 1812, C. Cradock and W. Joy, 1813, pp. 35-6. According to Sibbett, op cit, vol 2, p. 99, arches spanning the streets formed part of the Orange celebrations in Coleraine on 13 July 1801, but he gives no description of their construction.
2. 1825 Select Committee, p. 210.

A second was erected at the entrance on the opposite side of the town and a third was placed on the platform for the meeting. This was

"decorated with shavings dyed in colours purple and orange, with, we suppose, an accidental intermixture of green, and from the top of this floated a Union Jack, and the motto 'No Surrender.'"[1]

Some aspects of these constructions, such as the abundant use of flowers, are familiar, but others are new. These arches no longer merely span the street, but mark out the limits of the town. They carry combative slogans and the materials used in their construction are more sophisticated. Besides forming part of general Orange celebrations they are beginning to be used as definers of Protestant territory and displays of Protestant craft and skill.

Precisely when and how Orange arches came to have a territorial function is a subject requiring detailed research. The evidence at present available to me suggests that the use of arches to define territory was closely linked to the increased sectarian head-counting, struggle for industrial dominance and territorial jostling of the mid-nineteenth century, especially in Belfast. The reports on the Orange lodges in 1835 and those on the Belfast riots of 1857 and 1886 are particularly revealing. In 1835 severe rioting was caused by the raising of rival orange and green arches at the junction of Sandy Row and the Pound, in the vicinity of Saltwater Bridge, and a woman was killed by one of the shots fired by the military who were attempting to quell the rioters.[2] In 1857 the commissioners conducting the inquiry described the Orange arches erected

---

1. The Nation, Dublin, 23 August 1845, p. 742.
2. 1835 Report, vol 16, p. 132 and Belfast News Letter, 14 & 17 July 1835.

on 13 July as "indications of the preparations for war and a display of the colours belonging to the Sandy Row encampment".[1] Their comment has to be read with some caution for they demonstrated throughout their inquiry a tendency to impatiently dismiss the ritual practices of both Catholics and Protestants as mindless sectarian tomfoolery. However there is some significance in the fact recorded by the commissioners that whereas the Twelfth parade passed off quietly, it was on 13 July that the riots began. This indication that Belfast's arches may have been by this time strongly combative symbols is endorsed by the very interesting evidence on the subject supplied to the commissioners, with some reluctance, by William Tracy, then Belfast's Resident Magistrate. He was at the time being cross-examined by Mr O'Rorke,

"354. Mr O'Rorke: There is a bridge in Sandy Row? - Yes.

355. Has it not been the custom for the Orangemen to erect arches over that bridge? - They say they have erected arches, but I do not know that they do.

356. Is not that bridge understood to be the exclusive property of the Orangemen? - I am not aware.

357. Are there not a great many Catholics employed in Tea-lane mill? - Yes.

358. And the Catholics living in Pound-street must cross this bridge in going to their employment in the mill? - Yes.

359. Mr Commissioner Smythe: What is the name of this bridge?

360. Mr O'Rorke: Salt-water Bridge; it crosses the Blackstaff. Have not the Catholic workers been beaten, over and over again, while going to their work at that mill? - I believe they have; the matter has been represented to me by Mr Grimshaw.

1. 1857 Report, vol 26, p. 4.

361. You have convicted some of the parties? - Yes.

362. Mr Commissioner Lynch: These occurrences have taken place, then, during the month of July? - I understand the question to apply to July.

363. Can you not go further back than July? - I think I have heard complaints on former occasions. I cannot charge my memory as to the number; but my impression is, that complaints were made in former years.

364. Did you ever hear of complaints, in former years, except on July anniversaries? - I do not recollect. I cannot answer that I have heard of frequent instances of disagreement.

365. Have you judicial knowledge that there is a combination among the Protestant workers to exclude the Roman Catholic workers from this establishment? - I had an instance of it, the other day, in a case that was brought before me, where a girl had been assaulted, by a number of females, and the reason of the assault was, that she was a Roman Catholic. She was assaulted by fifty or sixty. The assailants were Protestants. She was only able to prosecute one of the parties.

366. The owner of the mill, Mr Boyd, was examined? - He was.

367. Did he not give it, as his opinion, that the assault on the poor girl was the result of a combination to exclude Roman Catholics? - Yes; and evidence was given to that effect.

368. Mr Commissioner Lynch: When did this case occur? - I think on Tuesday or Wednesday last. There was a conviction; and a person was sent to gaol for two months.[1]

The association here between arches, territory and industrial exclusion is very clear.

---

1. 1857 Report, vol 26, pp 28-9.

By 1886 the territorial role of Orange arches appears to have become even stronger and more clearly recognised. According to various witnesses the arches were by this time deliberately used as territorial taunts, being positioned at such notorious sectarian interfaces as Carrick Hill, and guarded from an early hour against any form of interference, whether by the Catholic neighbours or the police.[1]

In both these years the majority of Orange arches as in the 1835 report were described as consisting of little more than a string across the road with orange lilies attached to it.[2] But there seems little doubt that during this period the use of arches to display industrial craft and skill, already apparent in the Lisburn celebrations of 1845, was continuing to develop. Thus in Enniskillen in 1845 there were two arches of "Orange stuff, with a border of deep blue, each decorated with a statue of King William, a large gilt cross, and the inscriptions 'Enniskillen', 'Derry', 'Aughrim' and 'The Boyne'."[3]   In Aughnacloy in 1848

"The street exhibited two tastefully decorated arches, of gigantic proportions, and one opposite the church, constructed of iron and surmounted by a crown, elicited high encomiums from the spectators."[4]

And in Belfast in 1886 one witness reported wearily that "the arches are in every quarter of town. They collect money for them, and of course they will have King William crossing the Boyne upon them and all those heroes."[5]

---

1. Report of the Belfast Riots Commission--- 1887, Cmd 4925, (hereafter 1887 Report), vol 18, paras 5759, 8264-6 and 8899-8899a.
2. 1835 Report, vol 16, para 5669 and vol 17 pp 209-210; 1857 Report, p. 4 and 1887 Report para 8899a.
3. The Nation, Dublin, 16 Aug 1845, p. 725.
4. Tyrone Constitution, 14 July 1848.
5. 1887 Report, para 8267.

Orange arches were becoming more elaborate and the materials and techniques used for their construction were increasingly those familiar to employees in the province's developing industries of linen, ship-building and engineering. (Pride in industries can also be seen in the decorations provided for royal visits to Belfast in 1885 and 1903. On each occasion, amongst the old-style flags and swags there was a linen arch, displaying the products and tools of the trade).[1]

By the end of the nineteenth century a standard formula became established in Belfast and Derry. Photographs taken in the early years of this century show numerous arches in these cities, all made from fabric and woodshavings, with suspended emblems and slogans (ill 86). This pattern was remarkably popular. Even isolated farmhouses occasionally adopted it (ill 87) and it survived the years of unemployment in the 1920s and 1930s.[2] Indeed the late Aiken McClelland believed that during this period the skilled craftsmen of the Protestant community kept their hands in by constructing arches of trellis-work while the women used their abilities in making and sewing the decorations, bannerettes, rosettes, streamers, emblems, paper garlands and flowers.

"A Union Jack hung from every house, and masses of bunting criss-crossed the street from upper windows; crowns and mystical triangles; crescent moons each with seven stars, and flaming suns with faces; the burning bush and David's sling and five stones; red, white and blue

---

1. There are photographs by Robert J. Welch of both sides of the 1885 arch. One of these is reproduced in Brian Mercer Walker, Faces of the Past, Appletree Press, Belfast, 1974, p. 57. The arch erected in July 1903 for the visit of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra was recorded in a photographic postcard by the Belfast firm of Walton.
2. For other photos of early twentieth century arches see PRONI Cab 2/2, Bundle 17 and D1668; and the Radio Times Hulton Picture Library photograph of an Orange procession passing below a Belfast arch in 1920, reproduced in The Irish Question, Schools Council, Holmes McDougall, Edinburgh, 1977, p. 43.
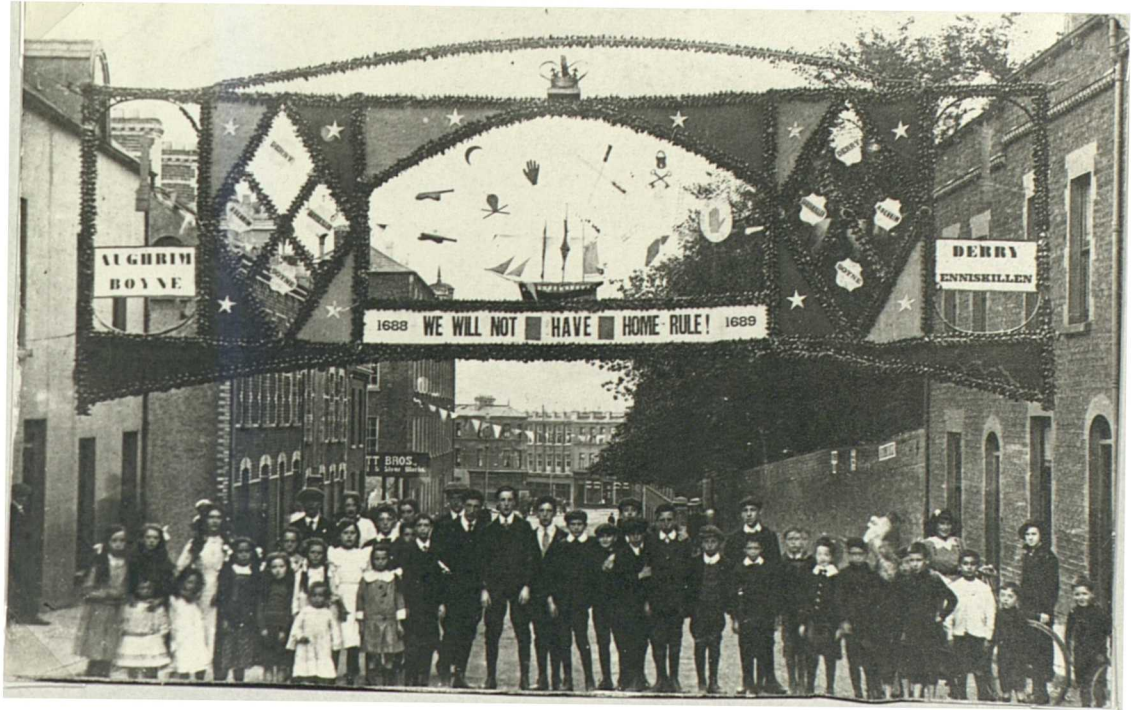
86. Orange Arch/ca 1912/Derry
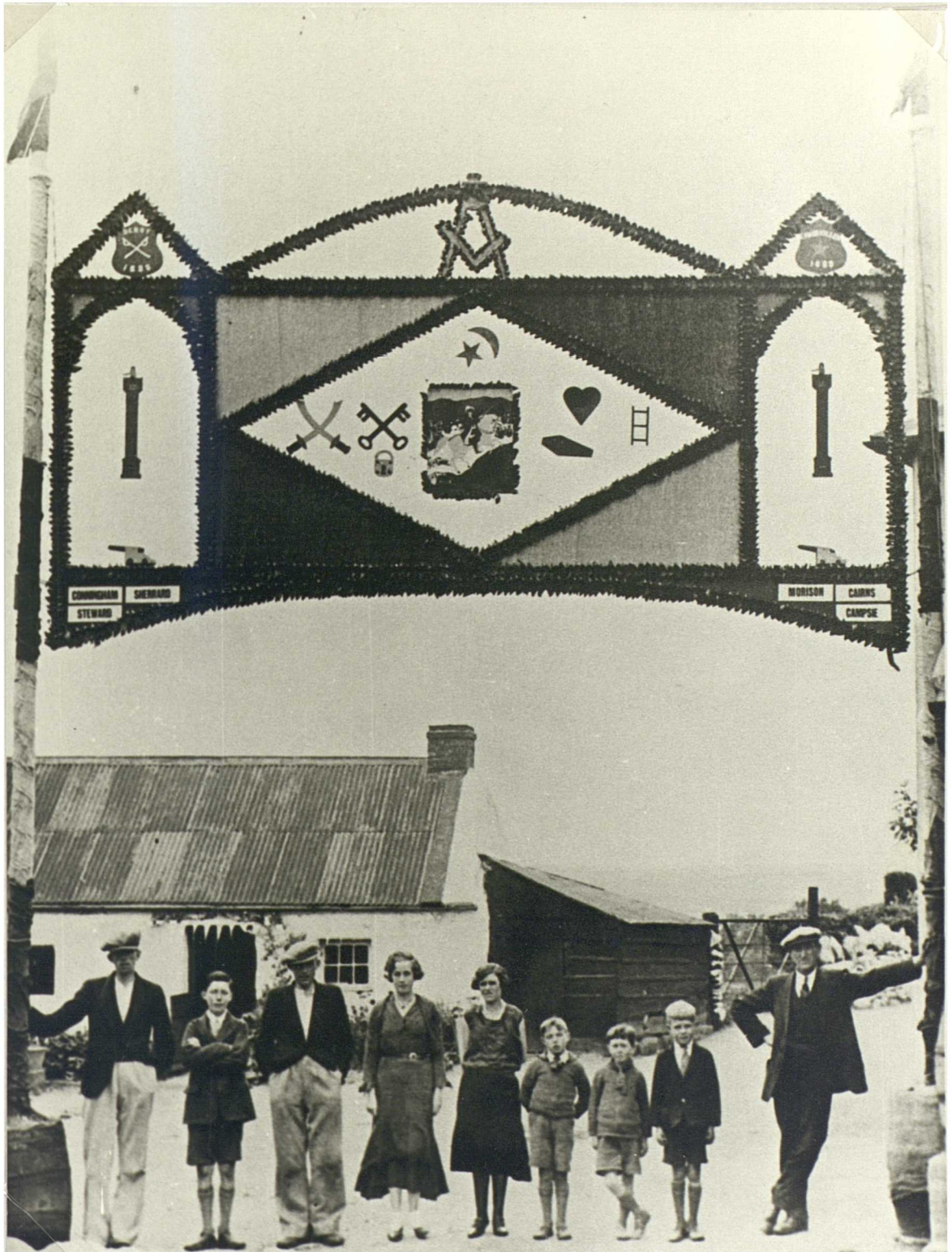
87. Orange Arch/ca 1930/Co Derry

rosettes bloomed in a profuse garden of paper and linen.

Each street vied with the next in the splendour of the main piece, its triumphal arch. Spanning between two houses, bedizened with orange and purple streamers, the arch was studded with pictures of British royalty."[1]

Other fashions came and went. In Portadown in the 1930s the inhabitants of Mourne View Street made their arch in the style of contemporary cinema architecture;[2] and in Belfast in the same period the residents of Malvern Street off the Shankill Road outdid all contenders by covering their houses with a miniature version of the Blackpool illuminations.[3] But the old patterns remained in use. They could be seen in Belfast's Brown Street until at least the early 1960s[4] while in the countryside they were still occasionally to be found a decade later.

The traditions incorporated in the Orangemen's arches are those of procession, triumph, celebration, defence of living and working space, pride in achievement and rivalry with one's fellows. In their imagery and use they keep alive successive layers of cultural, political and economic history.

1. Harbinson, No Surrender, p. 123.
2. Recorded in a slide made by the late Aiken McClelland, now in the possession of his family.
3. Thomas Farr, "I Remember ... Bygone 12th, North, South, East and West", The Twelfth Programme, Grand Orange Lodge, Belfast, 1975, p. 27.
4. Illustrated Broad et al, op cit, p. 126. These decorations were reported still in use in "King William murals dying out but Orange arches increasing in Belfast", News Letter, Belfast, 9 July 1963, p. 7.

Drums

Very occasionally you may still see some of the enormous drums called
lambegs being carried in Orange processions (ill   88). These drums are
peculiar to Northern Ireland, where they are principally carried by the
Orangemen, and occasionally by their Catholic counterparts, the Ancient
Order of Hibernians.[1] In order to understand their significance it is
necessary to analyse not only their history but the different ways in
which they have been used and the wider meanings of the symbolism
associated with them.

If you consult an Orangeman about the history of the lambeg he will
probably offer you one of three theories. The most popular is that these
drums were brought to Ulster from Holland by Duke Schomberg's troops
during the Williamite campaign in Ireland in 1688-90.[2] Some drummers
however believe lambegs were first used at the Battle of the Diamond in
1795, which led to the formation of the Orange Order. And a third theory
is that propounded by William Hewitt, the Belfast drum-maker. He claims
that his grandfather made the first true lambeg drum in 1870. It was an
early shell drum, made from a single oak board instead of the staves
previously used, and supposedly acquired its name because it was first
played in 1871 at an Orange demonstration in Lambeg, Co. Down.

Fionnuala Scullion, in her authoritative article on the lambeg
drum,[3] demonstrates that while there is no evidence that William III's

---

1. See below, p. 390, p. 534 and ill 169.
2. Some retailers of this tradition add that the drums were imported to
   frighten the horses of the Jacobite troops. See Jack Loudan,
   "Origin of the Big Drum", Belfast Telegraph, n.d. in the Ulster
   Museum press-cuttings, vol 8, p. 86.
3. Fionnuala Scullion, "History and Origins of the Lambeg Drum",
   Ulster Folklife, Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, Holywood, Co
   Down, vol 27, 1981, pp. 19-38.

88. Lambeg drum at Orange demonstration
    outside Belfast City Hall/15 March 1980/
    Photo: B. Loftus

troops used lambegs as such during their Irish campaign, there are indications that they brought with them some larger drums than those then used by English troops. It remains an open question whether these drums could have led to the development of the lambegs. As Ms Scullion rightly says, the drums used with fifes in early Orange processions, from the time of the parade observed by Lord Gosford in 1796,[1] seem all to have been the side or snare-drums long played with fifes by the British foot regiments.[2] Since her article was published however, some historians in Northern Ireland have been turning up references to lambegs in the 1820s.[3] Certainly the evidence for the existence of lambeg-style drums by the mid-nineteenth century is fairly convincing. There is still in existence a drum made in 1849 by Walsh of Dromore, which is very similar in construction to the present-day lambeg although slightly smaller.[4] And in the report on the Belfast riots of 1857 there are statements by two separate witnesses that they heard, and in one case saw, a drum variously described as "enormous", "large", and "huge", being played in and near to Sandy Row on the nights of 11 and 12 July.[5] However

1. See above, pp. 222-3.
2. Scullion, op cit, p. 23.
3. Personal communications from Fionnuala Scullion and Garry Hastings, April 1982.
4. Scullion, op cit, p. 20 and fig 2; and "Lambeg Drum was made in year of Dolly's Brae", Mourne Observer, 19 July 1979, p. 9. According to this article there is an earlier drum by Walsh of Dromore in the National Museum in Dublin, but the Museum has been unable to locate it.
5. 1857 Report. Evidence of Harris Bindon, Sub-Inspector of the Belfast Constabulary, paras 1381-7 and evidence of Chief Constable Green, paras 2015-2046 and 2085-2091. The evidence is confused but appears to refer to the same drum in each case. Harris Bindon, who had not previously been in Belfast at the time of the Twelfth celebrations, appears to have been particularly struck by the drum's size, whereas Constable Green, with a long tradition of service in the city, seems to have found it less remarkable. However his distinctly off-hand replies on the subject may well have been due to his obvious antagonism to his cross-examination by Mr O'Rorke, who was appearing on behalf of a Catholic who claimed considerable damage was done to his property during the riots.

it is undoubtedly from the 1870s onwards that the carrying of outsize

drums by Orangemen, both in processions and in smaller drumming parties,

becomes a subject of frequent comment by observers, although there is no

indication that these drums were actually called lambegs until the early

twentieth century.[1]

Discussion of the origins of the lambegs does little to shed light

on why they have been used by Orangemen. For an answer to this question

it is more profitable to look at how they have been used, and the contexts

in which they have been employed. In order to do this it is simplest to

look first at the role of lambegs in processions and then at some of the

other ways they have been employed.

It is tempting to surmise that the Walsh drum of 1849 was used in

the Battle of Dolly's Brae that year. Certainly the witnesses of that

affray recorded that the Orangemen were "drumming away" on their march

out to Lord Annesley's estate and on their return by the disputed route,

and that they had subsequently to be prevented by the local magistrate

from drumming through Rathfriland on the day after the battle, when they

had hoped to hold a sham fight on the town racecourse.[2] Clearly the

authorities deemed such drumming was offensive. Indeed, the occasion

alone would have rendered it so, but if lambeg-style drums were used in

these provocative marches they would undoubtedly have added to the

challenge offered by them. Anyone who has heard lambegs will testify to

the unnerving nature of the sound emitted by them. It must be remembered

that much of their present volume and wild speed derives from the canes

---

1. Scullion, op cit, p. 21 and p. 23.
2. Dolly's Brae Report, evidence of Henry Dalrymple White, Major of the
    6th Enniskillen Dragoons, p. 14, of Thomas Scott, magistrate of
    County Down, p. 21 and of Captain George Cubitt, p. 22. On sham
    fights see above, p. 92ff.

now used to play them, which were only introduced at the end of the
nineteenth century. Moreover their reminder of primitive forces may have
been less disturbing to the mid-nineteenth century Ulsterman than to his
semi-modernised descendant. But it must equally be recalled that in the
mid-nineteenth century such drums would have met no competition from the
din of the internal combustion engine, or, except in certain areas of
Belfast, the baffling effect of high-rise buildings.[1]

Apart from using drums in processions, Orangemen have traditionally
employed them in small drumming parties. This practice was clearly well-
established by the 1830s for there are frequent references in the 1835
Report to the beating of drums by small groups of men on summer nights in
the marching season, and to the annoyance this caused, both to Roman
Catholics and to Protestants not involved in the Orange Order. One
witness testifying to the commissions in 1835 provided a very interesting
account of what he saw as the two main functions of such drumming-parties.

"7966. Will you describe what is a drum-beating party? — There is a drum
and fife playing along the road for the purpose of assembling the
Orangemen, we suppose, or the boys in their neighbourhood, as they call
themselves; they then proceed to their Orange lodge and do whatever is
to be done at the lodge; I suppose the lodge is then broken up, and then
they beat home again; and when one lodge goes to visit another they all
assemble with drums, very often two or three together will assemble on
the roads and parade there.

---

1. There is a specific reference to the possible effect of "immense
   buildings" on the sound of the large drum beaten on 11 July 1857
   in 1857 Report, paras 2088-2091.

7967. Is "Orange Lodge" painted upon the drum? - Yes, and the number of the lodge.

7968. Give an account of the tunes they play and the manner in which it tends to disturb the public peace, in your opinion? - The way in which it affects the public peace is this: if a Catholic or a liberal Protestant, or a Presbyterian who is liberal, has become obnoxious to any members of the lodge, the men assemble, and give him a drumming, as it is called, which is to assemble before his house, and do not let him sleep all night; and if he attempts to come out, all they do is to aggravate him to the utmost extent, so as to get a legal excuse for committing some outrage upon him.

7969. To make him strike them? - To get the first blow struck, and then, when that is struck, it is a justification afterwards to the magistrates and to jurors, whereby the parties are dealt with according to the first blow which is struck.

7970. That is to say they have impunity? - Yes."[1]

That, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, Orangemen increasingly used drums in marches and in drumming-parties, for political, rather than local challenges, is made clear by both the 1857 Report and by the evidence of a marked increase in drumming activity in the 1870s. In the Report it is recorded that for a number of years groups of Belfast Orangemen, forbidden by the Party Processions Act to celebrate the Twelfth of July with a parade, had signalled their discontent with this state of affairs by substituting for a full procession "drumming-parties" who toured the

---

1. 1835 Report, vol 17, pp 116-117.

streets in the fortnight or ten days or so prior to the anniversary of the

Battle of the Boyne.[1] And in the 1870s lambegs were clearly associated

with increasingly militant Orangeism. After the Party Processions Act was

lifted in 1872 they were regularly used in the parades with which

Orangemen celebrated their freedom to walk and opposed the growing

movement for Home Rule in Ireland. The increase in their volume by

switching from drumsticks to canes took place at the very time when that

opposition rose to a crescendo. And at least one loyalist observer saw

in their continued use in night-time drumming-parties an association with

militant Protestant industrial pride.

"The energy expanded in drumming between midnight and noon day was

very great in amount. Estimated in shipbuilding activity it would have

riveted an Atlantic liner with a margin, not inconsiderable, for boilers

and repairs."[2]

Ironically however the increasingly militant use of the lambegs

speeded the decline in their association with Orange processions. Accounts

of how they fitted into the late nineteenth century parades vary. The

general opinion seems to be that each lodge was headed by its lambeg or

lambegs and that the normal combination was a pair of lambegs with a fife.

Carrying a drum of forty pounds or so and keeping up the drumming for a

march of five or six miles on a hot summer's day was clearly a tiring

business, particularly when the same process had to be repeated on the

march back later in the day. The arduous nature of this task was

increased by the switch to canes instead of drum sticks, for they play

---

1. Ibid, paras 1088-1094.
2. Belfast NewsLetter, 13 July 1886, quoted in Scullion, op cit, p. 24.

faster as well as louder, encouraging marchers to step out quicker. This was a process also encouraged by the growing adoption of brass bands by the Orangemen in the late nineteenth century. From the early 1900s therefore, the cumbersome lambegs became an increasingly rare feature in the faster-moving parades.[1]

However the big drums have continued to be used as instruments of challenge in both the public and private symbolism of Northern Ireland's Protestant community. Their public role has been that of a political symbol for the Protestant Ulsterman's fierce commitment to the union with Britain. In the early years of the century Orange drummers appeared on loyalist postcards opposing Home Rule;[2] the Prince of Wales was offered a lambeg to play on his visit to the province in 1932; and the drums were beaten for King George VI, his Queen and the Princess Elizabeth, when they came to Northern Ireland in 1945.[3]

The more private role of lambeg drums as instruments of challenge and counter-challenge has lain in the drumming-matches first recorded at the beginning of this century. Like loyalist wall-paintings, these drumming-matches are an interesting example of practices which have the appearance of folk traditions but in fact owe their origin to technical developments. In this case the technical developments were the refinement of the lambeg as an instrument by both makers and players, and its speedy obsolescence as a feature of Orange processions. Men who took a pride in the drums they made and played, turned then to pitting one

---

1. Scullion, op cit, pp. 23-4.
2. In the Ulster Museum, Belfast.
3. "The Prince plays big drum", Belfast News Letter, 17 Nov 1932, p. 8, and "Arrival of the Royal Visitors", Belfast News Letter, 18 July 1945, p. 5.

against another in contests which show strong links with such traditional

Irish sports as horse-racing or faction fighting. In their early years

these drumming-matches were informal occasions, arranged at short notice,

with great local rivalry, many bets laid, much drink taken, and frequent

disputes. Since the 1950s their conduct has been regularised by the

formation of three drumming associations, but the basic concept underlying

each match has remained much the same. All the drummers perform at the

same time, though each of them plays his own rhythm. Gradually the

poorer players are eliminated until a winner is left. This process of

elimination is now made by the decision of the judges, whereas formerly

the players eliminated each other in "stick-ins" or marathon sessions,

in which the winner was the man who managed to keep up his own rhythmic

challenge to the end, without faltering.[1]

In these contests can be seen the same kind of simultaneous

individuality that has been already noted as such a strong feature of the

music played in Orange parades. And the same symbolic message is

conveyed by the imagery painted on the lambeg drums. The mid-nineteenth

century lambegs made by Walsh of Dromore carry the royal coat of arms

and little else except the symbols of the sun, moon and stars. They are

clearly in the tradition of military drums and may well have been

painted by local tradesmen who practised various forms of heraldic

decoration.[2] By the end of the nineteenth century however, lambegs were

being adorned with the single figures or symbols familiar today. Portraits

---

1. Scullion, op cit, pp. 25-7.
2. Thus, in the Belfast News Letter for 9 Oct 1798, early Orangemen may
   have been attracted by the advertisement by James Atkins, Coach,
   Sign and House Painter who declared himself willing to paint military
   drums, colours etc, "in the neatest Manner and on the shortest
   Notice." However they might also have recalled that it was this same
   James Atkins who painted the representations of Liberty for Belfast's
   celebrations of the Fall of the Bastille on 14 July 1782. See above,
   p. 136.

of William III, members of the Royal Family and local notables have long

been popular. So too have biblical subjects like the Scapegoat (after

Holman Hunt) or the Youth of Samson. But most interesting are the

images which refer to the ways in which lambeg drums are used, such as

the figure of a lion with the slogan <u>King of them all</u> or the crowing cock

most frequently titled <u>Cock o'the North</u> (ill 8 8).[1] The use of the

cock might well be read as no more than a repetition of an emblem familiar

in Orange imagery from the Loyal Orange Boyne Society folding picture of

1798 to the present-day Orange arch (ills 77&71). All informants agree

that in such charts the cock appears as an emblem of Christ's passion,

recalling the bird which crowed three times as Peter denied his Lord.

Moreover this interpretation seems supported by the Ulster folk-belief

that a cock crowing near the door of a sick person's house is a sign of

death.[2] Both emblem and meaning could have been adopted, like so much of

Orange symbolism, from the imagery of esoteric Freemasonry. The cock is

to be found on numerous objects in the small private museum maintained

by the masons in their hall in Belfast's Rosemary Street; it features

frequently on items illustrated in Lepper and Crosslé's <u>History of Irish</u>

<u>Freemasonry</u>; and its association with Christ's passion in masonic usage

is confirmed by the Knight Templar's song in the Belfast-printed Ahiman

Rezon of 1818.

---

1. The oldest lambeg I have seen painted with a cock was made by Mark
   Hewitt, grandfather of William, in about 1890. It is on display
   in the local history gallery of the Ulster Museum.
2. Jeanne Cooper Foster, <u>Ulster Folklore</u>, H.R. Carter, Belfast, 1951,
   p. 18.

Sir Knights remember your grand cause,

Lest Simon's fate should on you fall

Still persevere in Christ's grand cause,

The cock reminds you at his call.[1]

Yet the full meaning of the cock as an Orange symbol and the significance

of its appearance on lambeg drums are lost if its place in living rituals

is ignored. For cock-fighting was very much part of the world of the

early Orangemen. Indeed such fights often formed the ritual starting-

point for the late eighteenth century sectarian faction fights on the

borders of Armagh and Tyrone which led to the establishment of the

Orange Order.[2] And to this day, as the lyrical description of a recent

Border cockfight by the painter Basil Blackshaw makes plain, such

contests are like a chart of Orange symbols brought to life.

"It was a still moonlit night. And there was Long Nancy's closed

alright, but the boys in the next house, out they'd come. And we'd go

on through Cootehill, Virginia and Oldcastle...all that way, picking up

others on the road d'you know, in convoy. I've seen seventy, eighty cars

sitting on the road, going for a cockfight. We used to go to a place

called McInerney's... Pull in, it was like a point to point, there was

150-200 cars, there was a man there who parked me in on the bank. And

it was just coming dawn and we heard the cocks crowing and we went round

---

1. Ahiman Rezon, George Berwick, Belfast, 1818, p. 167. This work was
first published by Laurence Dermott, the garrulous Irish secretary
of the breakaway "Antient" Grand Lodge in 1756. Its contents
appear to have been variable and the 1782 edition in the Linen Hall
Library does not contain this song.
        It may be relevant that "cock" was often used in the
Elizabethan period as a substitute for "God" in such minced oaths
as "cock's wounds" Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, (ed)
Ivor H. Evans, Cassell, 1981, p. 250.

2. Sibbett, op cit, vol I, p. 243, Gibbon, op cit, p. 36 and J. Byrne,
op cit.

to the old farmyard, and they were weighing. They weigh them within the

ounce. And then...that took quite a while ...and then, when they had

them all weighed and they put them in the bags, they tagged the bags with

the weight on them...So it was coming lighter and lighter, and we went up

the hill for a bit of an old pee. Looked over the Meath, the Meath hill.

And there it was like ...you know what it was like? It was pure Della

Francesca, pale green hills and little dots of bushes, you know. It

could have been a background to the nativity painting. It was so

marvellous. And there over the land came a mile long line of black-

coated men with bags on their backs with the cocks in them, and a couple

with scythes on their backs to mow the pitch, and a couple with spades.

And they started fighting that morning at six o'clock. And they fought

until about one or two in the afternoon. That was my first experience of

what we would call a "main". It's a major cockfight. It's more than

just a few cocks thrown together you know, for instance the Tyrone men

would fight the Monaghan men, you had fifteen cocks each..."[1]

Scales, scythes and cocks all feature in the imagery of early Irish

masons and Orangemen. That the living symbolism of the cockfights is

still part of Orange imagery is indicated by the kind of titles

accompanying the paintings of the cocks on the Lambeg drums. The Defender,

---

1. From an interview with Basil Blackshaw by Liam Thompson n.d., early
     1970s.

Come Listen to me Boys, The Cock o' the North[1] and While we live we crow

are typical examples of these. Moreover this connection seems to be

confirmed by the remarkable parallels between cockfights and lambeg

drumming contests.

Both events are virtually all-male, as I discovered to my

embarassment when I attended a Lambeg competition. There is a strong

element of male sexuality in both. The drummers strut like cocks, each

one setting up his challenge as he plays himself into the arena before

the contest, and cocks themselves have been metaphors for the human penis

all over Europe since at least the days of Classical Greece.[2] Like game-

cocks, drums are prized possessions, the ownership of which is a form of

reflected pride. They are very personal objects, often known as her,

with a long history, for they may last for eighty or ninety years, being

handed down from father to son (replacing a lambeg drum is expensive for

they can now cost as much as £100). To be lent a drum is a great sign of

---

1. The title Cock o' the North may have been imported from mainland
     Britain. Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable (Cassell, 1981),
     states that George, 5th Duke of Gordon (1770-1836) who raised the
     Gordon Highlanders in 1795, is so called on a monument erected in
     his honour at Fochabers in Morayshire. The regiment served under
     the Duke in Ireland during the 1798 rebellion. At the time of his
     death in 1836 he was Grand Master of the Orangemen in Scotland (DNB).
     The phrase had reached Ireland by the early nineteenth century, for
     in 1812 John Gamble observed a coach called Cock of the North
     travelling between Balbriggan and Drogheda. (Gamble, op cit, 1813
     p. 16.) By the end of the same century a tune with this title was
     current in Scotland ("Times Past", Irish Times, 9 Oct 1981, p. 11).
     Although too slow for use by lambeg drummers, it is well known as a
     piping tune in Northern Ireland and must have been since early in
     this century, when it was used for a variety of sectarian ditties
     (Personal communication from John Moulder).
2. Edmund Leach, Culture and Communication, Cambridge University Press,
     1976, p. 18.

friendship. It is often the drums themselves which, like the cocks, are competing against each other in these competitions. The "Stick-in" is paralleled by the "Welsh main", "...a match-play competition, involving a large number of cocks, commonly thirty-two, out of which only one was able to survive."[1] And the contest between drums, as between cocks, often has regional overtones. Drums are played in regional rhythms. A drum-maker in Cookstown who plays both drum and fife himself told me that he played in the county Antrim fashion while his brother next door adopted the more staccato style of County Tyrone.[2]

One could try to establish direct links between lambeg-drumming and cock-fighting which would in some way account for these similarities. And indeed there is some evidence of an overlap between the drumming and bird fancying in Ulster. There is reputedly a man in Ballymoney whose twin passions are cock-fighting and lambeg drumming. Other lambeg drummers can be found practising in the pigeon-lofts from which they send out their birds in competitions of skill and endurance (ill 89), and William Hewitt, main supplier and decorator of their instruments, is himself a bird-fancier.

However it seems to me that what we have here is an example of the way in which the study of a symbol like a lambeg drum painted with a crowing cock can draw on a whole range of sporting and cultural references in a very strong though allusive fashion. In this case these references all endorse one theme. The supposed Williamite association; the

---

1. Robert W. Malcolmson, Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850, Cambridge, 1973, p. 50. However I am told that in current cock-fights in Northern Ireland there are no contests of this kind.
2. Conversation with John Jordan, 21 April 1978. See also Scullion, op cit, p. 30.
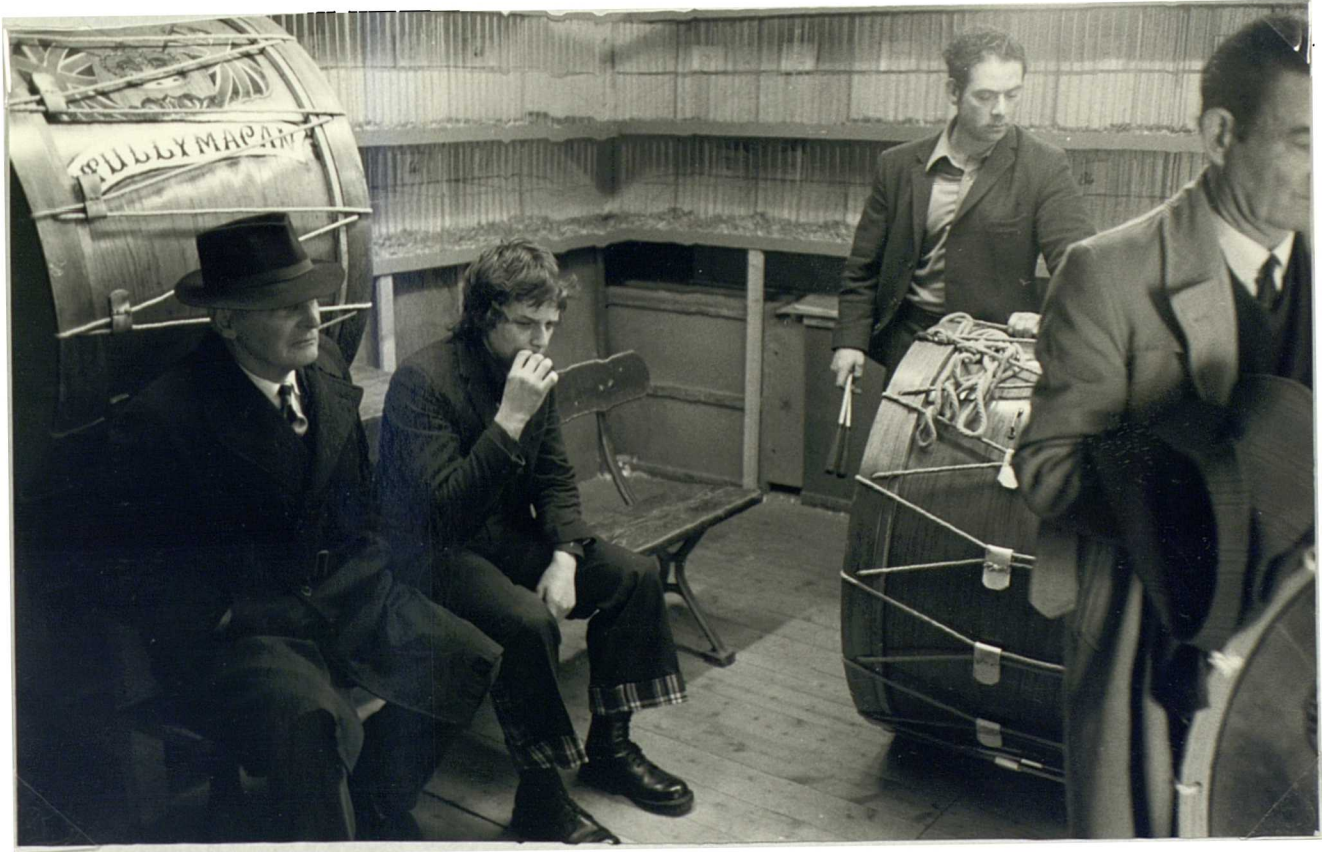
89. Lambeg drummers in a pigeon loft in Portadown/
1975/Photo: Bill Kirk.

offensive use of drums in the early nineteenth century; the drumming-parties substituted for processions from the 1850s; the association of lambegs with protests at the Party Processions Act; their repeated and increasingly noisy use after its repeal and during the campaign against Home Rule; the continuing representation of the lambeg as a symbol of determined support for the Union in the twentieth century; the challenge and counter-challenge of the drumming matches; the strutting of the painted cocks; their traditional association with the reminder to Peter of his betrayal of Christ; their link with the ritualised combat of the cockfight; the literally cocky slogans associated with them; and that jaunty little tune known as Cock of the North - all convey the same message, of challenge, defiance and reminder.

Orange Lilies

In studying the main subject painted on lambeg drums, one may overlook the abundant decoration surrounding it. On loyalist lambegs this decoration invariably includes luxuriant orange lilies. Indeed it is his orange lilies and four-coloured lettering that really give the drum-painter William Hewitt satisfaction. "My orange lilies are better painted than the older ones, more like the real thing", he claims.

In the summer marching season these lilies can be seen everywhere - they are painted on the drums, bloom in loyal gardens, laid on Protestant graves, reproduced on coloured postcards and tied to drums and banners.

Like so many Orange images the lily is believed by many contemporary Orangemen to date back to the days of William III. As a recent loyalist song put it:

It is called the Orange Lily,

Its history Protestants love to tell,

Songs have been written about it,

In July it always looks so well.

They tie it on top of Orange banners

Wear it at the side of the hat,

King William himself planted it

In some unknown spot.[1]

In sober fact the history of loyalist use of the orange lily is not so
clear-cut as this song implies. Certainly orange was the distinguishing
colour adopted during the Irish campaign by William and his troops by
reason of the Prince's status as leader of the House of Orange.[2] And
certainly Orange societies of various kinds flourished in eighteenth
century Ireland and England well before the establishment of the Orange
Order itself.[3] However when Orange lilies were first displayed by
Irishmen is not clear.

The historian of the Orange Order, R.M Sibbett, claimed that
orange lilies were worn at the Belfast parade of 1797 and that they were
used for the decoration of the Dublin statue during the Order's early
celebrations of the Battle of the Boyne and the birthday of William III.[4]
However the Belfast News Letter for 14 July 1797 makes no mention of any
use of orange lilies during the Orange Order's parade through the city
and I have been unable to find any documentation of the supposed use of
orange lilies in the dressing of the Dublin statue by the early Orange

1. S. Boyd, in Orange Loyalist Songs, 1971, quoted in Tony Gray, The
      Orange Order, Bodley Head, 1972, opposite p. 97.
2. See above, p. 226.
3. See above, p. 85.
4. Sibbett, op cit, vol 1, p. 152 and vol 2, p. 20.

Order. The first firm record of the display of the flower that I have
seen dates from 1810, when the <u>Belfast Monthly Magazine</u> criticised the
practice by reporting a fictitious conversation between an Irishman and
an Orangeman on the subject. In this the Orangeman is represented as
saying that it was "an old custom."[1] Two years later the observant John
Gamble, as he passed through Tandragee at the time of the Twelfth of July
celebrations, noted not only the banners and arch already referred to[2]
but also that

"Tandragee was a perfect orange grove. The doors and windows were
decorated with garlands of the Orange lily. The bosoms and heads of the
women, and the hats and breasts of the men were equally adorned with this
venerated flower."[3] Gamble himself was offered a nosegay of orange
lilies and roses, which he accepted, but refused to display in his hat,
saying that he was no party man and never wore party colours.[4]

From these accounts it is clear that the early nineteenth century
display of Orange lilies by members of the Orange Order was as ebullient
as it is today, and that the flower was regarded as a clear-cut symbol
of political allegiance. Moreover the report on the Belfast riots of
1857 makes it clear that display of the flower continued in industrial
Belfast and remained a provocation to Catholic observers. Not only were
orange lilies hung across the city streets to make impromptu arches;[5]

---

1. "A Dialogue between an Irishman and an Orangeman on the 12th of July
       1810", <u>Belfast Monthly Magazine</u>, vol 5, July 1810, p. 35.
2. See above, p. 262.
3. Gamble, <u>op cit</u>, p. 35.
4. <u>Ibid</u>, p. 36.
5. See above, p. 266.

they were also displayed in the windows of a few Protestant houses[1] and

worn in the buttonholes of some of the Orangemen who processed to church

on 12 July itself.[2] Continuing Catholic antipathy towards the flower

was proved by an incident at the junction of the Catholic Pound and

Protestant Sandy Row while the Orangemen were at their service. The

already restless Catholics staged a minor riot when an orange lily was

waved by a young man called Loughran. A Catholic himself, he was clearly

under the influence of drink. He had purchased the flower in Sandy Row

earlier in the day for the then not inconsiderable sum of 2s 6d.[3]

The persistent display of orange lilies in industrial Belfast is

striking. Why were they not affected by nineteenth century industrializa-

tion? How is it that the Orangeman still sports a real flower, while

his republican counterpart wears a mass-produced paper replica of his

Easter lily?[4]

The answer seems to lie partly with political tradition, partly

with the practical realities of Belfast's location, and partly with the

general love of flowers to be found in the city, particularly in its

linen industry.

By the time Orangemen and their Catholic counterparts started to

flock into Belfast in the mid-nineteenth century, the tradition of sporting

Orange lilies had already been established for at least half a century,

whereas the republican Easter lily was only to become a political symbol

of the 1916 Rising. Moreover it would have been fairly easy for the

newly-urbanised Orangemen to procure supplies of the Orange lilies. It

---

1. 1857 Report paras 2107-2109 and 2774-2776.
2. Ibid, paras 1326-1335 and 2724-2726.
3. Ibid, Report of the Commissioners, p. 3, and paras 20-28, 377-384,
   and 2736-2756.
4. See below, p. 391, p.439 and p.516.

must be remembered that even at the height of industrialisation,

Belfast's links with the surrounding countryside remained very strong.

By the late nineteenth century the city was undoubtedly noisy, dirty,

crowded and singularly lacking in greenery. Yet the surrounding hills

were not only visible from the city centre, but accessible to the most

ordinary citizens, on foot or by public transport. And Belfast

remained very much a market town, in which its inhabitants' country

relatives sold their fruit and vegetables and flowers, or made special

purchases and business transactions.

Something more than established tradition and practical availability

seems to have encouraged the continued wearing of orange lilies however.

Rural matters in general, and flowers in particular, seem to have

retained a peculiar hold on the imagination of Belfast men and women.

It was Belfast businessmen as well as the aristocracy who patronised

that charming, mid-nineteenth century wildflower painter, Andrew Nicholl

(ill   9 0).[1] They may have done so because they appreciated his

incorporation in his paintings of Irish views, just perceptible beyond

the banks of flowers, or because they enjoyed the way in which his works

combine botanical accuracy with a fresh and inventive technique. But

equally their patronage may have been due to the fact that Nicholl's

flower-paintings embodied an important facet of contemporary taste in

Northern Ireland, which was to persist in the province's visual traditions.

Looking for example at the list of books advertised by Hodgson's of

Belfast in 1837[2] one cannot fail to be struck by the array of titles

---

1. These included Williamson of the firm of Nevin and Williamson of Chrome
      Hill and, it is assumed, Francis Finlay, the proprietor of the
      Northern Whig, with whom he served an apprenticeship as a printer
      ("Reminiscences of Robert Young", Irish Booklore, Belfast, January
      1971, vol 1 no 1, p.9.).
2. In the Belfast Almanac for that year.

90. Andrew Nicholl/A Bank of Flowers with a distant Bay
and Town, possibly Bray, Co Wicklow/mid 19th cen-
tury/Watercolour on white paper/13^3/4 x 20$\frac{1}{2}$ ins (35.1
x 52.1 cms)/Ulster Museum/Photo: UM.

concerned with flowers, second only to tourist views. From the

instructional nature of several of them, eg. Andrews' Lessons in Flower

Painting, one can guess that their popularity was greatly due to the

obvious appeal of flowers as a subject for the province's growing army

of amateur artists. But there is more to it than that I think.

Later in the century the Northern Ireland photographer Robert Welch

took a photograph of wildflowers which closely resembles Nicholl's

painting (ill. 91). In his introduction to the Ulster Museum's

published selection of their Welch photographs,[1] E. Estyn Evans

attributes Welch's fondness for flowers to the influence of his mother

who had a great love for them, partly expressed in her "flowering" and

fancy work in wool. Evans goes on to speculate about the relationship

between textile industries and the cultivation and study of flowers.

The evidence he cites is for the main part English. Good arguments can

be made out however for this kind of interrelationship in Northern Ireland.

Not only has work on embroidery and handmade lace been traditionally

known in Northern Ireland as "sprigging" or "flowering".[2] The now

virtually defunct linen industry also involved flowers at every stage.

The fields of sky-blue flax remain as lyrical memories for many of the

province's older inhabitants, floral designs were habitually used for

the damask patterns woven into the cloth, and flowers were printed on

the wrappers or bands in which the linen was despatched. Those

responsible for the production of these industrialised flower designs

have recorded /pleasure they obtained from these reminders of the
the

1. E. Estyn Evans and Brian S. Turner, Ireland's Eye: The photographs
        of Robert John Welch, Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 1977.
2. Elizabeth Boyle, The Irish Flowerers, Ulster Folk Museum and
   Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University, Belfast, 1971.

91. Robert Welch/View of Fair Head Co Antrim, from
    the West, May 1896/Ulster Museum WO1-10-35.

countryside, and often of their youth. In 1959 a former weaver recalled

"My happiest hours were passed in the factory, so they were. I loved my work and my looms. I always got a thrill when I saw the pattern forming; often it would be flowers that took me back to my childhood's days."[1]

The interlacing garlands of the linen industry, and the winging bluebirds which often accompanied them, have had their influence on other kinds of decoration, such as the religious samplers made by men as well as women,[2] and the borders to Orange and Hibernian banners (ill 20). The process of transference from craft and industry to Orange imagery is well documented. Mrs McQuiggan, who was responsible for the earlier set of Royal Black Preceptory banners described above, was a practised embroiderer and her husband worked in the linen industry. Mrs Grattan, her successor, is constantly at work on crochet and embroidery and her mother was a lace-maker. William Bridgett, who established the Belfast banner-painting firm in 1878, was particularly fond of the bluebird and flowers motif. It seems to have been a fondness of his son as well, for in the academic year of 1911-12, when he was studying at Belfast's College of Technology he won a prize for a design for a damask napkin featuring them (ill 92).[3] It is little surprise therefore to see on Bridgett banners, past and present, endless borders repeating this motif.

---

1. William Haggan, "Weaver's Rubric-3", Linen Trade Circular, 24 Oct 1959, p. 16, quoted in Betty Messenger, Picking up the Linen Threads, University of Texas Press, Austin and London, 1978, p. 155.
2. Harbinson, No Surrender, p. 60.
3. There are several illustrations of floral textile designs in the prospectuses produced by the College of Technology in Belfast in the early years of this century. Sometimes these are accompanied by such suitable biblical texts as "consider the lilies of the field".
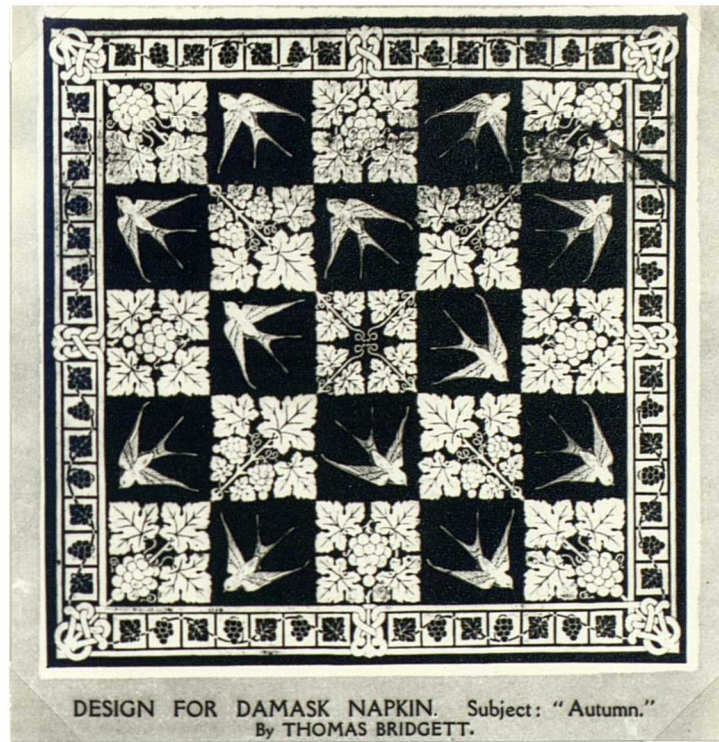
DESIGN FOR DAMASK NAPKIN. Subject: "Autumn."
By THOMAS BRIDGETT.

92. Thomas Bridgett/Design for Damask Napkin/illustrated
    in the Prospectus of the Belfast College of Technology
    for 1911-1912/Photo: Maire Concannon.

The Orangemen's lilies carry with them not only strong and longstanding Williamite associations but also memories of long, hot summer days in which the countrymen invade their city for the big parades, and the citymen holiday and return to their country origins which have continued to be remembered by many of them in their daily life and work.

Heraldry

Much of the imagery associated with Orange processions has been heraldic. Red hand symbols are prominently featured on instruments carried by the bands (ill 93), and various flags are displayed by both marchers and onlookers. Although some of these emblems have Orange and Williamite associations, their absorption into the processional imagery took place in the late nineteenth century and their significance for Orangemen is largely related to political and social developments of that period.

Hands have been a persistent feature in Orange symbolism from the Loyal Orange Boyne Society folding picture to the banners and emblems of the present day (ills 77 & 78). They were absorbed by the Order via freemasonry from the fragmented symbolism of the Reformation and the Renaissance, where such disembodied hands invariably represent the power of God. Most Orangemen will tell you that they refer to God's hand in the cloud. And indeed this is the interpretation made in the Loyal Orange Boyne Society picture where the hand symbol is identified by a biblical reference to Numbers chapter 17 verse 8, which records the appearance of God's hand in the cloud by the Ark of the Covenant as a symbol of his pledged support for the Children of Israel. Clearly this image would have had a particular appeal for the early members of the Orange Order, who, as we have seen, tended to identify strongly with the Israelites'

93. Loyalist band playing in Orange demonstration
     outside Belfast City Hall/15 March 1980/
     Photo: B. Loftus

struggle to establish themselves in the Promised Land in the face of native opposition. Two other heraldic emblems associated, like the hand, with the higher grades of Orangeism worked by the Royal Black Preceptory, are the six-pointed star and red cross. They too have a biblical significance highly relevant to the situation of the early Orangemen. The six-pointed star of David was the particular emblem of the Children of Israel; and the red cross was in the late eighteenth century, and remains to this day, a symbol of necessary suffering, appropriate to those struggling to maintain their political and religious independence in a strange land.

Most, though not all of the hands represented in Orange imagery are red. But does this indicate some relation between them and the local heraldic symbol of the red hand? And if so when and how did that relationship commence?

The first use of the red hand symbol in association with the area now known as Northern Ireland, is believed to date to the fourteenth century, when this image appeared on the seals of the O'Neills, the Kings of Ulster.[1] There are two different legends concerning their supposed reasons for selecting this device. According to the first, one of the O'Neills, racing in a boat to reach and claim a piece of land, forestalled his rival by cutting off his left hand and throwing it to shore, thus winning the territory. John Vinycomb, Ulster's heraldic authority at the end of the nineteenth century, pointed out the unlikelihood of this, given that a similar legend appears in many places, and that the O'Neills have habitually displayed the right, not

---

1. Hayes-McCoy, op cit, pp 62-3.

the left hand.[1] This legend is of interest however for its association

of the symbol with both belligerent determination and territorial

legitimacy.

The second legend has it that Hugh O'Neill (d. 1364), on staying or

calling at Monasterboice, noticed the hand carved underneath one of the

arms of the Celtic cross there .   On inquiring its meaning he

was told that it depicted the hand of God supporting the Christian Church,

symbolised by the Cross. So impressed was O'Neill by this that he

adopted the hand as the badge of his family, colouring it red to

represent the blood of the Cross.[2] Again the story is in all likelihood

apocryphal but of interest for its religious associations.

Indeed it is easy to see how the early Orangemen could have

associated the O'Neill red hand with their biblical symbol, for both

carry the meaning of territorial legitimation. The possibility that they

did indeed make this association is increased by what we know of their

general attitudes to symbolism of this kind. It has already been

remarked that the Protestant settlers in Ulster appear to have had a

strong feeling for heraldry, judging by the boldly-carved coats of arms

on their seventeenth and eighteenth-century tombstones (ill 83), so

completely different from the religious imagery on memorials to the ·

native Catholics (ill 148). It must also be recognised that a very

strong element in the early processions of the Orange Order was the

seeking of legitimation as a Protestant defence force, either by

marching to the home of a local member of the gentry, or by symbolic

involvement of him in the procession.[3] In doing this the Orangemen of

---

1. The Red Hand of Ulster, Ulster Museum, Belfast, 1964.
2. Letter to the Belfast News Letter, 1 August 1950.
3. See above, pp. 89-92 and pp. 222-223.

the late eighteenth century seem often to have been trying to retain the role of bands of patrimonial retainers, a role which had indeed been persistently reasserted by Protestant planters in Ulster.[1] Using the heraldic symbols associated with the landowners would have been one way of assuming to themselves legitimisation by their traditional leaders. (The general association of an upraised hand with the oath of fealty must also be borne in mind.) Moreover there appears to be every likelihood that the early Orangemen were well acquainted with such landowner heraldry, including the red hand. Many of them were linen-weavers and we know that the heraldic devices of arms-bearing families were incorporated in the damask designs made by such men from a very early stage in the industry's development. Indeed there is in existence a heraldic pattern, including red hands, drawn in 1811 for handwoven linen damask made by Coulson's of Lisburn (ill 94).

However for firm evidence of self-conscious use of the red hand by Protestant Ulstermen we have to wait until the late nineteenth century. The importance of the emblem at this time was related to both cultural and political developments. Culturally it owed its popularity to the growth of antiquarian studies from the 1850s onwards, to the craze for heraldry and pageantry at the end of the century and to the willingness of local manufacturers to exploit these developments.

Between 1850 and 1900 local antiquarians did much to ensure that the people of Ulster were acquainted with the red hand of Ulster and knew the old legends associated with it. During these years the Ulster Journal of Archaeology, which was read by virtually everyone of cultural and political significance in the province, displayed the

---

1. Miller, op cit passim.
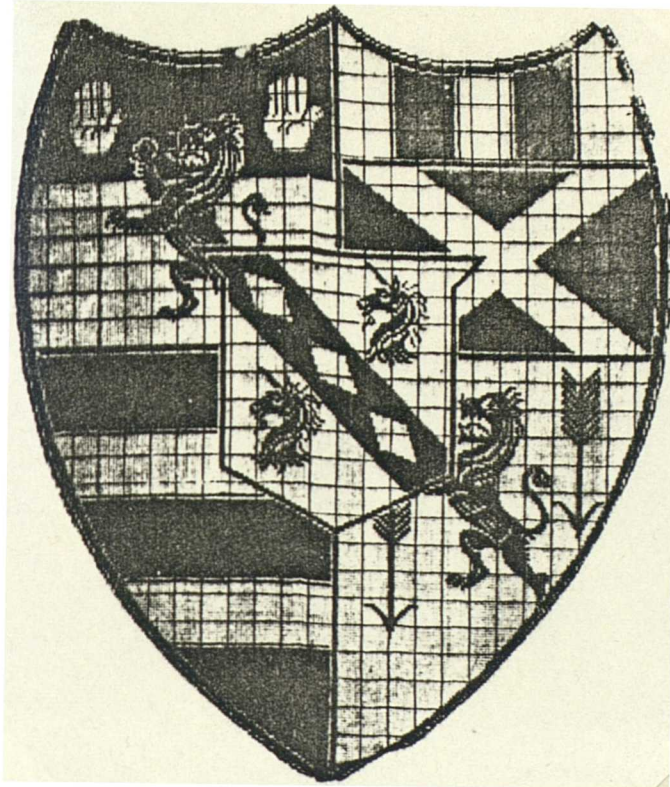
94. Mr Daly's Arms/Pattern for damask linen made by Coul-
son's of Lisburn/drawn 23 Dec 1811/red gouache on
squared paper/14 x 12 ins (35.5 x 30.5 cms) Public
Record Office of Northern Ireland D 1492/1/10.

symbol prominently on its cover, and explained its significance in the

very first issue with a specific reference to Hugh O'Neill's seal.[1]

For those who might have forgotten this article further explanations

were provided in the 1890s, in two lectures given to the Belfast

Naturalist's Field Club by John Vinycomb, an Englishman who headed the

design department of the Belfast printing firm, Marcus Ward. Vinycomb

not only taught and practised the art of manuscript illumination but also

had a consuming interest in heraldry. In his 1891 presidential lecture

on Symbolism to the Field Club[2] he spoke authoritatively on the many

types of popular imagery which shaped the Protestant Ulsterman's

consciousness. Biblical symbolism, emblem books, coins and medals

(including Williamite examples) and signboards were all discussed and a

number of emblem books were also displayed at the meeting, together with

a recent publication on the subject of devices. A year later Vinycomb

addressed the same body on the subject of Our National Symbols[3] and

devoted considerable attention to the red hand, describing its appearance

on Hugh O'Neill's seal and stressing the heraldic innacuracy of its

representation as the left hand, with drops of blood. This repudiation

suggests the popularity of the hand-severing, territorial legend at this

time , but does not seem to have affected the manufacturers of Unionist

badges.

The general interest in this kind of symbolism was already

apparent. In the 1880s the red hand, red cross and other Orange symbols

appeared alongside the Irish harp and the Celtic cross in the signs hung

1. Rev William Reeves, "The Seal of Hugh O'Neill",
    Ulster Journal of Archaeology, Belfast, 1st Series, vol 1, 1853, pp 255-8.
2. The lecture which was delivered on 17 November 1891 was reprinted by
    the Northern Whig on 20 November 1891. A copy of it is in the
    Linen Hall Library, Belfast.
3. President's Address to Belfast Naturalists Field Club, 22 Nov 1892,
    in the Linen Hall Library.

out at the "historical" fairs held in Belfast to raise funds for various

charities.[1] Meanwhile, Barbour's, the big linen-spinning company, adopted

the red hand as their trademark and the Belfast metalworking firm of

Sharman D. Neill was turning out red hand badges as readily as they

produced Celtic revival silverware or Paddy and the Pig imagery.[2]

Heraldic imagery also had a strong influence on the increasing

number of Orange banners being produced during this period. But they

seem to show the influence of longstanding working practices rather than

of the revivalism of contemporary antiquarians and manufacturers. For

the painting of Orange banners during this period overlapped with the

old traditions of painting heraldic devices on drums and coaches. The

Belfast family firm of Bridgett's started by painting drums in the mid-

nineteenth century and then moved on to banners as the demand for them

increased in the 1870s. And an artist who worked for Tom Bridgett, the

predecessor to the present head of the firm, learnt that his actual

painting technique was the same as that of the old coach-painters.[3] It

is clear too that the border decoration on these industrially-produced

Orange banners is a popularized version of heraldic mantling.[4] Indeed

to this day Bobby Jackson, the Derry painter of murals and banners[5]

continues to undertake the lining out of ceremonial limousines, which

is our twentieth century equivalent of coach-painting.

---

1. See the programmes for Ye Olde Ulster Fancie Faire (1882) organised
   in aid of workshops for the blind and Ye Grande Masonnic Fancie
   Fayre and Bazaar, organised in aid of Belfast charities (1883).
   Both of these are in the Linen Hall Library, Belfast.
2. See below, pp. 492-3.
3. He started with a layer of paint saturated with linseed oil, and put
   on the next layer while the first was still wet. Each successive
   layer used a decreasing amount of oil. This meant that the banner
   was very pliable and less likely to crack when rolled.
4. Popularized forms of heraldic mantling also feature prominently in
   fairground art. See Geoff Weedon and Richard Ward, Fairground Art,
   White Mouse Editions, 1981.
5. See above, (ill 9).

In the popular, working heraldic tradition of these banners the red

hand of Ulster is not featured. It was to be the leadership of late

nineteenth century Unionism who were to popularize amongst the vast bulk

of Northern Ireland Protestants this heraldic emblem, made familiar in

their own limited circles by the recent enterprise of local antiquarians

and manufacturers. This leadership gave prominent place to the red hand

in the badges supplied to delegates at the great demonstrations in 1892

and 1912 (ill   95); it encouraged the widespread dissemination of the

symbol in such increasingly popular cheap, mass-produced images as

stamps (ill   96), postcards and button badges;[1] and it adopted the

red hand as the official emblem of the Ulster Volunteer Force, formed in

1913 to resist the introduction of Home Rule by military means, if

necessary (ill   97).

It was not only Unionists who used the red hand of Ulster as their

badge during this period. Irish trade unionists and republican activists

also employed it as a symbol of intransigence in their fight for social

and political rights in the early years of this century. The Irish

Transport & General Workers Union adopted the red hand as their union

badge, possibly as early as 1908 and certainly by 1913, for it was widely

used during their great strike organised in Dublin that year by Jim

Larkin.[2] The emblem was then used as the badge of the Irish Citizen Army,

the military force formed by members of the ITGWU to fight for an Irish

---

1. Unionish postcards of this period are owned by the Ulster Museum, the
    Linen Hall Library, PRONI and Armagh County Museum. Red hand
    picture stamps can be found in PRONI D1679/1-4. Advertisements for
    various Unionist badges can be found in the Belfast News Letter for
    this period.
2. The Irish Times, Dublin, 28 Aug 1913 and The Irish Worker, 11 Oct 1913,
    quoted in Georges-Denis Zimmermann, Songs of Irish Rebellion, Allen
    Figgis, Dublin, 1967, p. 67. See also, Belinda Loftus, Marching
    Workers, Arts Councils of Ireland, Belfast & Dublin, 1978, pp 16-17
    and p. 77.
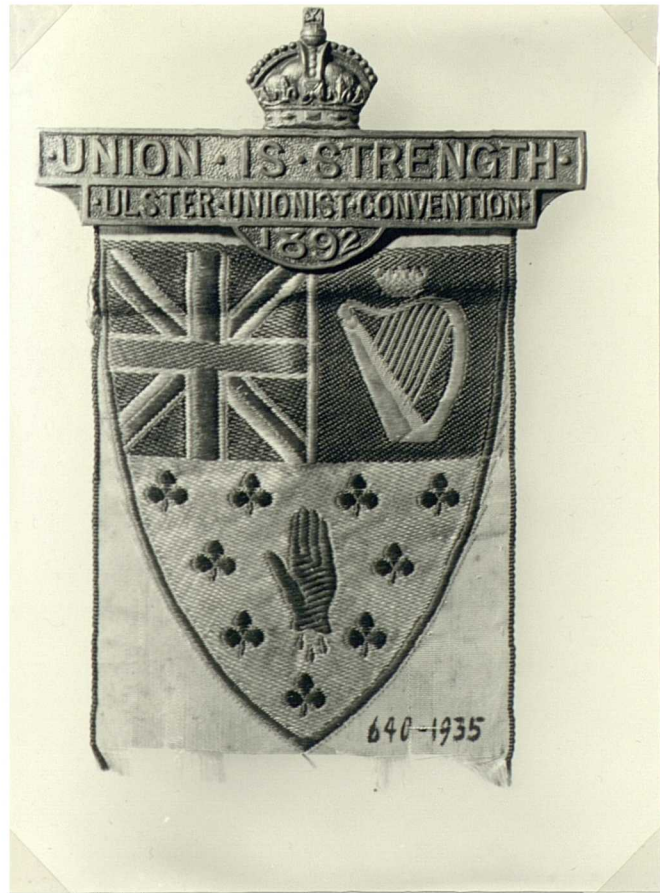
95. Official badge of the 1892 Unionist Convention/
actual size/Ulster Museum/Photo: UM.

Third Ulster Series.   TEN STAMPS FOR ONE PENNY.

WE WILL NOT HAVE HOME RULE
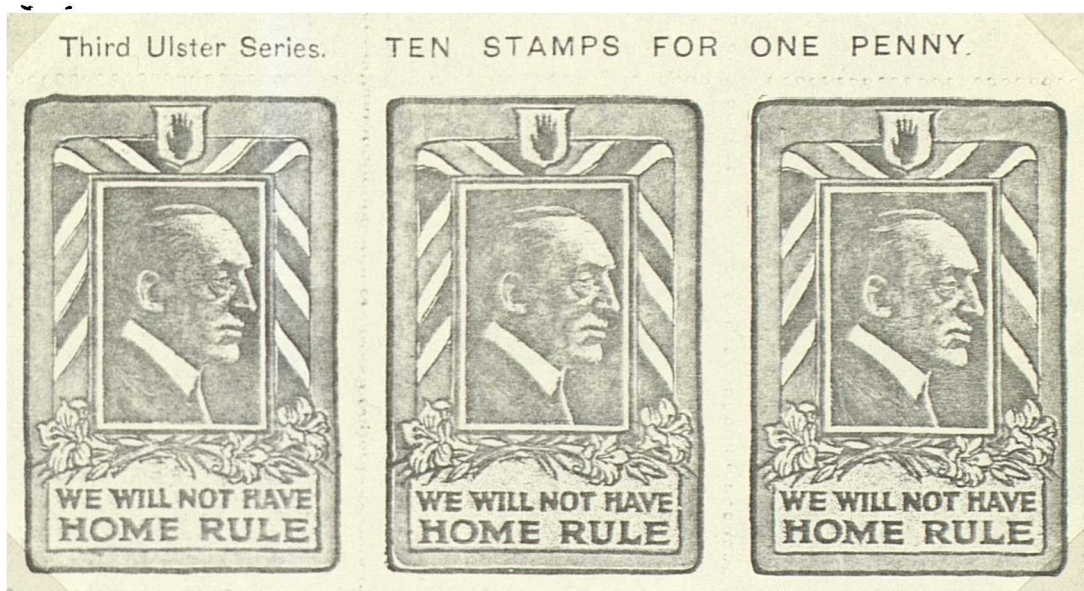
96. Unionist picture stamps/early twentieth century/
    coloured photo-gravure/actual size/Public Record
    Office of Northern Ireland D 1679/1.

97. Ulster Volunteer Force cap badge/1^7/8 ins (48 cms) high/Ulster Museum/Photo: UM.

republic. It was also adopted as a personal crest by that fervent Irish nationalist Maud Gonne, along with the motto "In Fighting and Hoping."[1]

Such nationalist use of the red hand was not really surprising. Not only did many Irish trade unionists and nationalists during this period admire and seek to imitate the fighting intransigence of the Ulster Unionists. (The Dublin strikers of 1913 even employed the Ulster Unionist slogan of "No Surrender"). They also recognised the red hand as a pre-plantation symbol, as relevant to their cause as that of the Northern Ireland Protestants. Indeed there is some evidence that in 1913 Larkin was popularly identified with the O'Neills. A large portrait of him carried at the head of an ITGWU procession was inscribed

> The chief who raised the red hand up
>
> Until it paled the sun
>
> And shed such glory o'er our cause
>
> As never chief has done.[2]

It was also during this period of conflict over the question of Irish Home Rule that two of the three flags now generally associated with Orange processions first began to be prominently employed by the Order. These were the flags believed to have been carried by the Williamite troops at the Battle of the Boyne, and the Union Jack.

The supposed Williamite flag is of orange-yellow silk, with a red five-pointed star in the centre, and the red cross of St George in the corner next to the top of the staff. Copies of it now generally head the Orangemen's various Twelfth of July processions throughout the province. However it does not appear to have entered the symbolic

---

1. In the Newsletter, Belfast, 14 Oct 1975, p. 3 there was a photograph of a Citizen Army plaque of the red hand taken from their headquarters at Dublin's Liberty Hall in 1916. Maud Gonne's use of the symbol is documented in Nancy Cardozo, Maud Gonne, Victor Gollancz, 1979, p. 255.
2. Daily Mirror, 18 Oct 1913.

repertoire of the Orangemen until the "original" was briefly displayed in

Ulster in 1912 at the time of the signing of the Solemn Covenant against

Home Rule. On the eve of the ceremony the flag was placed in the hands

of the Unionist leader Sir Edward Carson who unfurled it and held it

aloft, exclaiming

"May this flag ever float over a people that can boast of civil

and religious liberty."

The following day it headed the procession to the City Hall for

the initiation of the signing ceremony. The use of the flag had been

carefully stage-managed by Captain William Craig, who was responsible for

the meticulous organisation of the Unionist demonstrations during this

period.[1]

It was also these demonstrations and their associated imagery which

firmly linked the British Union Jack with the cause of Ulster Unionism

and the symbolism of the Orange Order. The flag had come into being with

the Act of Union between England and Ireland in 1801[2] but it appears to

have been little used during the nineteenth century by members of the

Orange Order or other Ulster Protestants.[3] It was first significantly

1. A.T.Q Stewart, The Ulster Crisis, Faber, 1967, pp. 63-4. The flag was
   the property of a Mrs Burgess Watson and Craig secured the loan of
   it from her through the good offices of Lord Charles Beresford, a
   strong English supporter of the Ulster Unionists. A Catholic
   Belfast newspaper commented caustically: "If that flag ever saw the
   battle of the Boyne, all we can say is that the man who manufactured
   it deserves undying fame for the strength and durability of the
   material." (ibid, p. 256, note 12).
      The flag has since disappeared. Photographs of it can be seen in
   The Graphic, 5 Oct 1912, p. 486, and PRONI Cab/2/2/14 and D961/3.
2. Hayes-McCoy, op cit, pp. 36-40 and 43-4.
3. I have seen virtually no references to the display of Union Jacks at
   nineteenth century Orange parades. However the minute book of
   Anahoe Royal Black Preceptory (PRONI D2108/4) records the purchase
   of a "Jack and cord" for 12 July 1865.

featured during the struggle against Home Rule, notably at the demonstrations of 1892 and 1912-13.

At the Ulster Unionist Convention of 1892 a great variety of heraldic emblems were displayed but pre-eminent amongst them was the British flag. A huge Union Jack flew from the apex of the pavilion, constructed to house the delegates;[1] the badges they wore carried smaller versions of the flag as well as the red hand and the Irish harp (ill 95); it was the sole feature on the badge worn by their organising committee;[2] it was predominant among the flags displayed on Belfast buildings on that day;[3] and it was a prominent symbol on the large range of enamel badges, brooches, scarf pins and pendants which Belfast's long-established jewellers offered as souvenirs of the occasion.[4]

By the time of the Unionist demonstrations in 1912 and 1913 the Union Jack reigned virtually supreme. At the demonstration on 9 April 1912 no other flags or banners were allowed to the Orangemen attending,[5] and the Unionists unfurled what they claimed to be the largest Union Jack ever made.[6] In September of the same year the symbolic importance of the British flag was emphasised by the farewell words of the Unionist leader, Sir Edward Carson, after he had signed the Covenant.

---

1. Ulster Unionist Convention, Report, Belfast Newsletter, 1892, p. 9.
2. Ibid, p. 14.
3. Ibid, p. 15.
4. See the advertisements by Gibson & Co and Sharman D. Neill in the Northern Whig, 8 May 1893, p. 5.
5. Ulster Unionist Demonstration of 1912, Official Programme, p. 4.
6. See George Dangerfield, The Strange Death of Liberal England, Paladin, 1970, p. 99, and Stewart, op cit, p. 55 and p. 78. For photographs of this flag see the postcard of the Unionist demonstration in Belfast on 9 April 1912, published by Hurt & Co, (in the Linen Hall Library, Belfast) and The Graphic 28 Sept 1912, pp. 452-3. A similar stress on size can be seen in the photographs of the Covenant demonstrations.

He said, with a Union Jack prominently in view

"I ask you to keep the flag flying and no surrender."[1] His

association of the British flag with leadership and militancy continued

in Unionist imagery in the months that followed. On Unionist postcards

the Union Jack was shown nailed to the mast on Convention Day;[2] on

their picture stamps Carson was silhouetted against it and accompanied by

the red hand (ill   95);   and at the parades of the Ulster Volunteer

Force the monster version first displayed in April 1912 was again pressed

into service.

What is the significance of the growing use of the Union Jack by

Ulster Unionists in the period between 1892 and 1913? Clearly the

British flag was a very effective symbol of their desire not to be parted

from the mainland by the granting of Irish Home Rule. But to go no

further than that, is to ignore the way in which the Union Jack was

employed by Ulster Protestants at this time, the style in which it was

waved. This subject is dealt with indirectly by Peter Gibbon in his

general discussion of the imagery of the Ulster Unionist Convention of

1892.[3] He sees this imagery, with its emphasis on order, industry, scale

and complexity, as a part of the deliberate attempt of a Unionist Party

increasingly dominated by urban and industrial leaders, to impress upon

its Ulster Protestant supporters their position as beneficiaries from the

linked values of industry and Empire, in the face of the rural, backward

ethos of Irish nationalism. Gibbon's thesis is well-argued and both the

words and actions of Unionist politicians at this time bear out what he

says. It is inadequate however, largely because Gibbon does not extend

---

1. Reported in The Graphic, 5 Oct 1912, pp. 486-7.
2. In PRONI D1355.
3. Gibbon, op cit, chapter 6.

his analysis beyond 1892.

For between that year and 1913 there are some very clear developments in the imagery of the Ulster Unionists, particularly in their use of the Union Jack. It becomes increasingly simplified - the many different flags and emblems of 1892 are replaced by the single repeated images of the Union Jack and the red hand in 1912 and 1913. It lays a greater emphasis on scale - the monster Union Jack is flown at mass demonstrations. It becomes more aggressive and military - not only do the Ulster Volunteer Force parade as a paramilitary resistance group but a year earlier the delegates to the April 1912 demonstration march in military formation[1], and on Covenant Day in September 1912 the Orangemen for the first time wear dark suits and bowler hats in order to make their ranks look more uniform.[2] And finally the Unionist imagery of this period becomes cheaper and more widely available - whereas in 1892 the delegates' badge was supplied by the grand Belfast store of Robinson and Cleaver, and the souvenirs were relatively expensive jewellers' products (the price-range quoted in the advertisements is 1s 6d to 5s), by April 1912 only one cheap souvenir badge was permitted, made by the printers McCaw Stevenson and Orr, and costing 6d. By this time too the populace at large could display their loyalty to the Union at no great expense by purchasing some of the numerous picture stamps and picture postcards bearing anti-Home Rule designs (ill   95).

These changes cannot be simply related to political developments. As the struggle over the Home Rule issue intensified, it was natural that

---

1. Ulster Unionist demonstration of 9 April 1912, Official Programme, p. 3.
2. See "The Men from Sandy Row", in S.E. Long and W.M. Smyth (eds.), The Twelfth, County Grand Orange Lodge of Belfast, 1966, p. 15.

the Unionists should turn to images conveying a simple unified message

with greater forcefulness, and involving a large section of Ulster's

Protestant population. But really this is too simple and manipulative

an interpretation of the Unionist imagery of this period. That imagery

has to be set in the wider context of the interpenetration of Empire

jingoism and mass-production in this period.

Ulster's industrial rhetoric of Empire was not only stimulated by

local politics. In 1900 Belfast, in common with the rest of Britain, was

swept by the craze for wearing button badges featuring the British

leaders in the Boer War,[1] and there were royal visits to Derry in 1903

and Dublin in 1911, at which no doubt a great many Union Jacks were

waved.[2] Local manufacturers must have seen how they could feed off

jingoistic imperial emotions. But equally those emotions fed off the

style of mass-production, which has its own rhetorical impulse towards

scale, simplicity, repetition, aggression and cheapness - the very

characteristics which typify imperial militarism.

In order to understand the Orange Order's use of Union Jacks it is

necessary to recognise in the adoption of the flag by Ulster Protestants

between 1892 and 1913, not only the dictates of political necessity, nor

the knowing manipulation of skilled Protestant workers by their

employers, but also the wider impact of the mutually reinforcing and

accelerating imperialism and mass production of this period.

---

1. See "About Town", Nomad's Weekly, Belfast, 17 Feb 1900, p. 39.
2. There is a photograph of a Derry photographer's studio decorated for
   the royal visit of 1903 in Brian Walker, Shadows on Glass,
   Appletree Press, Belfast, 1976, p. 67. At the time of the Dublin
   visit of 1911 republican activists like the Countess Markievicz
   busied themselves with pulling down Union Jacks and replacing them
   with black flags. See Anne Marreco, The Rebel Countess, Weidenfeld
   and Nicolson, 1967, p. 140.

Indeed the symbolic rhetoric of this time proved remarkably
persistent. Even after they had successfully repelled Irish Home Rule
from Ulster, some sections of the province's Protestant population
continued to employ the Union Jack in much the same way as between 1892
and 1913. Now, however, the area to be attached to British imperial
values was generally a small piece of working or living space, and some
of these actions no longer received the unanimous support of all
Protestant Unionists.

When the statelet of Northern Ireland was established in 1921 it
acquired its own flag, consisting of a red hand on a six-pointed star on
a white shield on a red cross on a white ground, designed by the artist
W.R. Gordon,[1] (ill 98). However this triumph of heraldic super-
imposition was initially restricted in use to the Governor-General of
Northern Ireland and it was not until the time of Queen Elizabeth II's
coronation in 1953 that permission for its public use was given. (After
that date it was frequently adopted by local councils in Northern Ireland).
So it was that the Union Jack remained the flag consistently employed by
Ulster loyalists in the 1920s to symbolise at once their militant
opposition to the continuing Sinn Fein campaign in the North and their
determination to maintain their dominance of Belfast industries,
particularly the shipyards.

Already in 1916, in a mill located in a mixed area of the city,
fourteen Catholics out of a total of sixty reelers had walked out after

---

1. John Hewitt, <u>Art in Ulster: 1</u>, Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 1977,
        p. 113.

98. Ulster Flag/1982/printed cotton/36$\frac{1}{4}$ x 47$\frac{1}{4}$
ins (92 x 120 cms)/Ulster Museum/Photo: UM

being tormented by the waving of small Union Jacks in their faces, and
chased with the brushes used to clean the reels.[1] Now, in the period
immediately following partition, Union Jacks were unfurled by Protestant
workers in factory after factory and in shipyard department after
shipyard department, as they were cleared of "disloyal" elements.
Political leaders like Carson and Craig and Brookeborough voiced their
support for these actions, believing that the workers were repulsing the
threat of bolshevism as well as republicanism. However it is clear that
a sizable proportion of those Belfast industrialists who supported
Unionism, and who had formerly fostered the popular use of such
imperialist imagery, now saw in their leaders' actions too great a
cultivation of the working-classes. The Unionist peer Lord Londonderry
complained

"In the old days Carson and the Old Town Hall circle had
propagandised the shipyard workers. The business community were not
wholeheartedly with them. Craig recently appealed for £100,000 as a
minimum propaganda fund, result £13,000, £1,000 from me..."[2]

However the Protestant working-classes continued to use their
Union Jacks with all the earlier rhetorical emphasis on scale and
militancy, appropriated now to the conquest and purging of their working
and living territory. Both the rhetoric and the uncertainty about the
support of their superiors emerges in descriptions of the first Union
Jack unfurlings in the Belfast shipyards.

"The first such ceremony took place in the plumbers' department on
Queen's Island. The main speaker was James Crumlin. Four days earlier,

---

1. Messenger, op cit, p. 200
2. PRO,CO 906/24, quoted in Paul Bew, Peter Gibbon and Henry Patterson,
   The State in Northern Ireland 1921-72, Manchester University Press,
   1979, p. 67. See also ibid, pp 47-9.

District Inspector Swanzy, who had recently been transferred to the North, was shot down as he left a church in Lisburn. Swanzy's murder was followed by a short but intense period of fighting in East Belfast. Crumlin began by expressing their collective 'horror' at the callous and cowardly murder by Sinn Feiners of D.I. Swanzy. Crumlin then asserted their opposition to the employment of Sinn Feiners, criticised the government for not effectively suppressing these 'outrages', and threatened that 'loyalists will be compelled to take matters into their own hands.'

Two days later he spoke at the unfurling of a gigantic Union Jack erected on one of the shops of the sheet metal department in Harland and Wolff. In this speech, he concentrated on an appeal to the shipyard workers to help the authorities in suppressing the 'prevalent black-guardism'."[1] Possibly it was the same combination of continued adherence to imperial rhetoric combined with an awareness of faltering support amongst some of their leaders which led working-class Protestants of this period to use the red, white and blue of the Union Jack as a demarker of the territory in which they lived. Certainly the first evidence of the practice that I have seen is in the Illustrated London News for 1 April 1922.[2] It carries a photo of a loyalist street adjoining a republican area in Belfast, and the caption describes the surrounds of the doors and windows as picked out in red, white and blue. The practice cannot be solely attributed to the bitter conflict of the period, for Belfast had seen terrible inter-community fights before,

---

1. Henry Patterson, Class Conflict and Sectarianism, Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 1980, p. 137.
2. pp. 470-1.

and then the only sectarian frontier signs had been orange and green

arches. Nor can this paintwork be attributed to the availability of

commercial house-paints, for they had been on sale since early in the

century. That this practice was inspired and maintained by a combination

of persistent adherence to the rhetoric of imperial loyalty and

awareness of the need for self-reliance seems to be confirmed by a

later piece of evidence. A friend recalls attending scout-meetings in

the early 1950s in a hut belonging to the village contingent of the

B-Specials, Ulster's totally Protestant police reserve force. On the

wall was painted a Union Jack. Below it were the slogans

"One Flag

One King

One Empire

This we will maintain."[1]

The main heraldic emblems displayed at Orange processions have a long

history. The red hand goes back to pre-Plantation Irish traditions, the

Orange flag is associated with William III's victory at the Battle of the

Boyne; and the Union Jack recalls the union of Ireland with the rest of

Britain in 1801. However none of these emblems was strongly associated

with Orange imagery until the end of the nineteenth century. The stress

laid on them then, by virtually the whole of Northern Ireland's

Protestant community, can be attributed to political, economic and

industrial developments. The warlike rhetoric of heraldry and flags

suited the increasingly aggressive Unionist campaign against the

introduction of Irish Home Rule. It was also fostered by the

simultaneous international growth of imperialist jingoism and mass-

---

1. "This we will maintain", a slogan frequently employed by Ulster
   Protestants during the past thirteen years, was the motto of
   William III.

produced popular imagery. After the Irish question had been temporarily

settled in 1921, this heraldic imagery continued to be used by working-

class Protestants in Ulster. However only some of their leaders

continued to support such displays, and this symbolism was increasingly

appropriated to self-reliant, symbolic defence of their living and

working areas by Protestant workers.

The total meaning of Orange processions

It is now possible to see certain dominant themes emerging from this

study of individual Orange symbols. These are a strong association with

William III, a persistent emphasis on exclusion and defence, and a

delight in skilful rivalry.

It is clear that many Orange symbols, notably sashes and drums,

are believed by their users to have historical associations with William

III, associations which are hard to substantiate by closer study of the

available evidence. However such apparently "false" legends should not

be totally dismissed. They are self-deceptions which, if the context of

their origin is considered, can reveal much about the underlying

concerns of those making them. Thus the tendency to see Orange sashes

and drums as Williamite relics seems to have become prevalent in late

nineteenth century Ulster, at much the same time as the popular switch

to the heroic, historical image of William III. This was a time when

the world view of Protestants in the province was being challenged by two

major developments. On the one hand the impact of urbanisation and

industrialisation was threatening their already tenuous links with past

traditions,[1] and on the other hand they found themselves pushed

---

1. The writer of the Ordnance Survey Memoir on the Carnmoney parish in Co
   Antrim in 1830 said of its largely planter population: "There is
   scarcely a tradition in the parish. This is not much to be wondered
   when it is remembered that but two centuries have elapsed since their
   first ancestors settled into the country. But it is rather surprising
   that scarce a farmer can tell how even his father or grandfather came
   into possession of the farm on which he dwells." (quoted in Brian M.
   Walker, Sentry Hill, An Ulster farm and family, Blackstaff Press, 1981,
   p. 20). It would be interesting to know whether this was a widespread
   characteristic amongst Northern Ireland Protestant planters in this
   period.

onto the defensive by the mounting campaign for Irish Home Rule. By associating their ritual symbols with a gloriously heroic past the Orangemen were able to gloss over their insecurity as relatively recent invaders, many of them now cut off from such rural roots as they had developed, and threatened by a growing and increasingly nationalist native population.

For indeed, the underlying themes of the Orangemen's rituals and images, as opposed to their stated myths, has not been heroic conquest but self-defence. Since the earliest days of their Order's establishment they have seen themselves as the Children of Israel, trying to establish their Promised Land in the face of native opposition. They have used sword imagery to set themselves apart from others, as a secret society divided off from the wicked world surrounding them. Their arches and, at a later date, their flags and heraldry, have been employed to mark out the limits of the territory in which they have lived and worked.

Yet at the same time much Orange symbolism has been concerned with the apparently contradictory themes of pride, challenge and rivalry, expressed across the sectarian divide, as well as within the Protestant community. Drums have been used both to taunt Catholics and to challenge fellow-Protestants to displays of skill and endurance. Arches have been a classical assertion of a colonial triumph as well as occasions for rivalling the skill and industry of Protestant neighbours.

Both individually and as a whole, Orange symbols are a palimpsest of overlapping and sometimes conflicting meanings. In elucidating those meanings certain procedures and modes of analysis have emerged as crucial. The direct and immediate evidence has to be studied. Used with caution both the Orangemen's interpretations of their imagery and the history of the way they have employed it can tell us much about its

meaning. But the full significance of that imagery can only be understood if we are aware of the overtones and associations it carries with it.

Those overtones and associations are derived from two main sources. In the first place they have been absorbed from the wider cultural developments to which Orange symbols are related. It is impossible to fully understand the significance of the fragmentation of Orange imagery without some knowledge of its ultimate dependence on the Protestant way of seeing introduced into Northern Europe by the developments of the Reformation and the Renaissance. Equally it is impossible to appreciate properly the challenge of the lambeg drums without some feeling for their location within the lives of cock-fighting, pigeon-flying, horse-betting men.

The second main source for the overtones and associations carried by Orange imagery has been the media and working-practices through which that imagery has been maintained and transmitted. Bibles, sermons, tombstones, cheap book illustrations, cheap prints, embroidery, the designs on linen-damask, postcards and badges have all been important vehicles for the Orangemen's visual tradition: they are all involved with the major human concerns of religion, death and work, and they have brought to the Orange tradition some of the feelings and beliefs attached to those concerns. Knowledge of the early planters' taste for heraldry on their tombstones makes it easier to understand the deathly solemnity attached to the swords and hearts imagery of the Orangemen, just as the flamboyant display of Orange lilies during the marching season can be located within a whole context of feeling if one knows the way flowers and floral imagery have been part of the traditions of the local industry.

And finally, in order to understand the meaning of Orange symbols

it has been necessary to study the point at which they have been
appropriated, or given particular significance by their users. Such
moments of appropriations have been found to depend on a configuration
of circumstances. Bibles were especially emphasised by the mid-
nineteenth century Orangemen because of the simultaneous substitution of
religious processions for banned Orange parades, stress on unity
between the Established Church and the nonconformists and wave of
religious revivalism in Ulster. Flags and heraldry became prominent at
the end of the nineteenth century because of the joint pressure of
local political needs, worldwide imperial jingoism and opportunist mass-
production of popular imagery. And from these combined circumstances
there often emerges a rhetoric of usage, which is as significant as the
image itself. The Bible heads all the Orangemen in their processions;
the flags and heraldry are used in a simple, repetitive, assertive fashion.

But analysis of the individual emblems associated with Orange
processions is not sufficient. The meaning of those processions is also
carried in the succession of actions from which they are made and in the
total shape which they form. What then do participants in an Orange
procession actually do? These are their actions, in sequence: they dress
up, they align themselves into a set formation, they process to a "field"
where speeches are given and prayers offered, and they process back again
to their starting point.

A brief look at the historical origins of these actions does much
to illuminate their meaning. In the late eighteenth century when the
Orangemen first processed, dressing up had a significance which is hard
for us to recover today. In that period distinctions of dress between
class levels and occupational groups were still strong, a means of
reinforcing social order. When Orangemen, like the Volunteers before

them,[1] dressed up in fine regalia like their superiors they were flouting

an extremely strong social convention and proclaiming their importance in

a very forceful way.[2] (That they were able to do so was largely due to

the increased availability of cash following the expansion of the linen

industry in Ulster in the late eighteenth century. It was during this

period that articles of adornment like English-manufactured printed

cottons began to be offered by Belfast merchants as well as their Dublin

counterparts. Clearly a growing number of Ulster men and women could

afford to dress up.)[3] This late eighteenth century desire to publicly

identify with one's political beliefs, which characterises other

Protestant and Catholic demonstrations of this period, was shared by the

hangers-on to early Orange processions, as well as the Orangemen proper.

The Union Jack ladies who attend the Twelfth parades of today (ill 67)

are the symbolic descendants of "Orange Peggy", who is reputed to have

been taken to her christening wrapped in an orange flag on 12 July 1783,

and to have attended every Orange and Black demonstration in Co.

Fermanagh, garbed in a vast orange shawl, until she died, aged 108.[4]

---

1. There is plentiful evidence in the Charlemont manuscripts that not only the gentry but also the merchants and linen weavers of Co Armagh who joined the Volunteers in the late 1770s were able to provide their own "genteel uniforms" although they looked to their leaders for a supply of arms (See Charlemont MSS, vol 1, pp. 360-367 passim.)
2. On the importance of dress as a means of social classification in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries see John Brewer, Party Ideology and popular politics at the accession of George III, Cambridge University Press, 1976, pp. 183-4 and p. 309 note 100 and Malcolmson, op cit pp. 86-7.
3. Information from Bill Crawford at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. Locally-made woollen clothes remained in general use in the West of Ireland throughout the eighteenth century. By the 1760s English-made clothes were being imported through Dublin and soon afterwards they were being shipped into Belfast. By the 1790s such was the level of cash prosperity caused by the linen industry that English printed cottons were being worn in Co Donegal.
4. Martin O'Brien, "Do you know anything about 'Orange Peggy'", Belfast Telegraph, 19 June 1979, p. 3.

The shape of the early Orange marches also has significance. All

the witnesses of the period agree that the participants marched by two and

two. This formation is also constantly noted by observers as a feature of

mid-nineteenth century Orange processions.[1] And indeed it remains true of

Orange parades today. The office-bearers heading the lodge may walk four

or more abreast but the remaining members walk two by two with the width

of the road between them.

Two possible meanings can be ascribed to this formation. It can be

seen as derived from military practice, or it can be read as an expression

of the masonic structure of Orangeism.[2]

From what we know of the frequent associations between the Orangemen,

the volunteers, and other military groups in the late eighteenth and early

nineteenth centuries one might well expect members of the newly-established

order to have used military formation in their early processions. It is

however very difficult to establish how exactly Irish military groups of

the period marched. The Volunteers may have proceeded two by two but the

matter is by no means certain.[3] Observers of the early Orange parades

are also adamant that no arms were carried at them. In general this has

remained the case to this day. Indeed the essentially non-military

character of Orange processions is emphasised by the fact that the

military fours used by them in 1912 appears not to have been continued,

---

1. See Dolly's Brae Report, Mr. Berwick's Report, p. 7, and evidence of
   Thomas Scott, magistrate of Co Down, p. 19; also 1857 Report,
   evidence of Harris Bindon, p. 49.
2. There was no practical need for the Orangemen to walk two by two.
   Roads in Northern Ireland were from the 1760s onwards improved to
   meet a general standard which required that their gravelled surface
   should be at least fourteen feet wide. (W.A. McCutcheon, The
   Industrial Archaeology of Northern Ireland, HMSO, Belfast, 1980, pp 2-5.)
3. G.A. Hayes-McCoy, in "Irish Volunteer Formation in Two Ranks, 1784",
   The Irish Sword, Dublin, vol 1 no 1, 1949, pp. 58-9, cites the manual
   titled The Volunteers Companion (Dublin, 1784) which states that
   volunteers were usually drawn up in two-rank formation instead of the
   three ranks common for regular units until the time of Wellington.
   However this seems to be a reference to inspection or battle
   formation rather than marching order.

whereas the bowler hats and dark suits adopted in the same year have remained in use to this day.

It really seems far more likely that the marching style of early Orange parades was adopted from the freemasons' processions in that period, and has continued to be used to this day as an expression of the Order's masonic structure. We know that Irish freemasons in the late eighteenth century marched two by two[1] and if one considers this in connection with the presence of the tylers at the march to the Gosford estate it seems reasonable to speculate that the formation then, as today, was of men marching in pairs with the width of the road between them, ie in a hollow formation suited to the exclusiveness of a secret society rather than to the solidarity of a military organisation.

A further aspect of the early Orange processions commented on by observers is that they united numerous districts, playing "all manner of music". The coming together of different districts signifies that this was an organisation transcending local or factional loyalties. And the fact that they played "all manner of music" seems to indicate that in this coming together each district continued to assert its individual ethos, as today, by playing its own tunes, rather than co-ordinating with the other groups in a military fashion.

The terminal aim of these first Orange marches is also extremely significant. In Lord Gosford's account it is the Orangemen who take the initiative in marching to his estate and requesting permission from him to march through part of it. This accomplished

"they took their leave. I was at my gate; each company as they

---

1. Lepper and Crosslé, op cit, p. 98.

passed me by saluted me by lowering their flags. I recommended to the

heads of their companies to keep their people sober and to go to their

respective homes quietly which they assured me would be the case..."[1]

In Gosford's account, with its emphasis on his role as recipient rather

than instigator of the procession, one might well see an attempt to

impress on the government authorities in Dublin his fitness to act as

Lord Lieutenant for County Armagh, a post to which he had been appointed

in 1791. Other local landlords, like William Blacker were clearly eager

to become involved in this new grouping.[2] However Gosford's genuine

uneasiness about the Orange Order seems to have been confirmed by his

decision in December 1795 to call a meeting of Co Armagh landowners to

condemn the persecution of Catholics.[3] And there are various pieces of

contemporary evidence which suggest that it was the Orangemen who formed

themselves into associations before seeking validation from their

superiors in the form of legitimisation of public processions. Amongst

the Pelham Papers for example there is a document headed "Protestant

Associations forming the Loyal Union of Orange to the Magistrates and

Gentlemen meeting at Armagh". This paper which is undated but believed

to be from 1795, offers support to the magistrates, prays them to take

the Orangemen under their protection and requests from them permission

to parade on 12 July.[4] If, as this suggests, the early Orangemen were

using processions to remind local Protestant landowners of their duties

---

1. Lord Gosford, loc cit.
2. See above, pp. 89-92.
3. Stewart, op cit, p. 137 and P. Tohall, "The Diamond Fight of 1795 and
   the Resultant Expulsions," Seanchas Ardmhacha, Armagh Diocesan
   Historical Society vol 3 no 1, 1958, pp. 25-6.
4. Pelham Papers, BM Addl MSS 33101, p. 204. Similar permission was
   requested from General Lake.

towards them, they were acting in a manner familiar to other eighteenth century popular associations in England and Ireland and to previous generations of Ulster Protestants.

Various historians have analysed the way English groups of this period used the rituals of authority to remind their superiors of their duty. In Ulster it is known that the ancestors of the Orangemen had been accustomed to form themselves into armed bands from the time of the seventeenth century plantations. These bands were not only for self-protection but also to enforce what their members conceived to be the legitimate form of government. Moreover some of them were formed spontaneously, instead of being established by the local representatives of government authority.[1]

Economic and political developments in late eighteenth century Ulster encouraged the re-establishment of similar organisations. The rapid growth of the rural linen industry disrupted the previously near-feudal patronage of Protestant tenants by their landlords, placing them in an increasingly open land and labour market in which they faced growing competition from their Catholic neighbours. From the 1760s onwards their dissatisfaction with this state of affairs was expressed in fierce though spatially limited sectarian assaults on their Catholic rivals, and a more general series of attacks on the power of the landlords. These were characterised not only by such agrarian violence as cattle-maiming, corn-burning and breaking of fences, but also by imposition on the landlords of "legal" sanctions through such ritual means as the administering of oaths and the staging of mock-executions.

---

1. Miller, op cit, p. 25 and p. 172 note 55, and Ó Mórdha, op cit, p. 25.

Both kinds of tenant protest were well-known in the areas in which the Orange Order first developed.[1] It is possible therefore to see the earliest Orange parades as an extension of this kind of activity, in which Protestant tenants sought to symbolically re-establish the old paternalistic relationship with their landlords.

The landlords for their part appear to have speedily recognised the value of such a symbolic pact which re-established some of their control over their unruly tenants, while leaving them free to pursue their economic ends unhindered. As have seen,[2] the young William Blacker was quick to absorb himself in the displays of the Orangemen and he along with other members of the landlord class, was soon helping to frame the rules of the new Order which ensured that the aristocracy would mingle with their humbler brethren by requiring that each member of the elite 'grand lodge' also join a local lodge.[3]

During the nineteenth and twentieth century, Orange parades have continued to march to the demesnes of the local landlords. But what does the maintenance of this procedure signify? Does it represent the perpetuation of a lower-class initiative imposed on the upper classes, or a manipulation of the rank and file Orangemen by their leadership, or a shifting alliance between the two groups? And has the relationship acted out in these parades remained purely symbolic or has it at any time been related to the transmission of real political or economic power?

The overwhelming impression given in accounts of Orange procession is that they have been largely working-class manifestations, undertaken regardless of approval or sanction by either the government of the day or

---

1. Gibbon, op cit, pp. 32-33 and Charlemont MSS, vol 1, p. 139, note 1.
2. Above, p. 89-92.
3. Miller, op cit, p. 56, and Sibbett, op cit, vol 2 p. 25.

the Protestant leadership. However much of this evidence must be read with great caution, particularly that relating to Orange parades in the nineteenth century. The bulk of the comment on the processions of that period is contained in reports to parliamentary committees and it suited successive Protestant leaders to represent the Order to their masters at Westminster as a force which they were able to control, but only with difficulty. It is in this light that one must read, for example, the evidence given to the 1835 enquiry on the Orange Order. Some gentry involved with the Order represented themselves, like William Blacker, as restraining influences on it and therefore criticised the recently introduced Party Processions Act, banning all parades, because it

"took the thing out of the hands of the gentlemen on the spot, who knew the people and the best mode of dealing with them and who were conscientiously anxious upon the subject, in one word, I would say the government attempted to drive where we would have led. They severed the gentlemen from the lower and middle classes; the consequence was a loss of influence which could have been wholesomely exercised."[1]

Others, like William Verner, deputy Grand Master of the Order in Armagh, the very same area as that in which Blacker lived, thought the restraining influence of the gentry was of little use. He was asked whether Orange Lodges encouraged or discountenanced the processions.

"They are discountenanced.

But the inferior members do not attend to the directions

of their superiors?

In some instances they do not, it must naturally be

thought difficult to get persons of the lower class to

---

1. Quoted in Patterson, op cit, p. xvi.

give up a custom which they have held for so many years."[1]

It does not seem unreasonable to suspect that Blacker and Verner, in their separate fashions, were putting forward concepts of the Orange Order which supported the roles they wished respectively to play.

Nevertheless it seems that during this period relatively few Protestant landlords or businessmen were involved in the Orange Order or sympathetic towards it, except when the course of Irish politics made it expedient for them to temporarily sanction the Orangemen's activities. Right up to the time of the Home Rule crisis of 1885 the Order's membership was overwhelmingly lower class. Its ruling body, the Grand Lodge, was kept going by about 10-30 members of the middle gentry, while the aristocratic Deputy Grand Masters were exceedingly lax in their attendance.[2]

Meanwhile in Belfast the Protestant factory-owners remained on the whole unsympathetic to Orangeism, and the Order grew relatively slowly in the city. In 1851 the Belfast lodges numbered 13,335 members, or about one in ten of adult male Protestants in the city, whereas in Ireland overall the comparable proportion was more like one-quarter.[3] And although the Order's neatly graded organisation made it attractive to men employed in Belfast's similarly structured craft industries of shipbuilding and engineering, it was only one amongst many forms of Protestant job control and patronage in the city. The only element of the Protestant leadership in Belfast who consistently favoured the Orange Order were clergymen like Henry Cooke and Hugh Hanna. During the

---

1. Quoted ibid, p. vii.
2. Wright, op cit, p. 248 note 76.
3. Miller, op cit, p. 58.

years when the traditional Orange parades were banned, they supplied members of the Order with substitute occasions for public demonstration, providing church services to which the Orangemen could process, or religious excursions complete with bands and banners.

Outside the city landlords occasionally showed favour to the Orangemen by allowing them to process to their demesnes, but this was generally during periods like 1848-9 when repeal agitation was at its height and its supporters showed themselves prepared to use military action. Thus at the inquiry into the Dolly's Brae affray of 1849 Lord Roden stated that one of his reasons for allowing the Orangemen to process to his demesne the previous year was

"that in July last year there existed throughout some part of Ireland rebellion amongst a large portion of the population, and it was thought that the great body of the country were engaged in the desire for the Repeal of the Union. I saw the great exertions which the Government were making to put down that rebellion, also that every loyal man in the country was anxious to assist the Government in that most laudable object; and being held in the highest opinion of the humbler classes of the Protestants, and knowing their sentiments on rebellion and Repeal, I felt it most important that they should, at this period of difficulty, show their feelings and state their opinions in aid of the Government, for the suppression of rebellion."[1]

At times like this Orange processions were in the eyes of the landlords a tactical display of force.

---

1. Dolly's Brae Report, p. 34.
   See also Wright op cit p. 252 and John F. Harbinson, The Ulster Unionist Party 1882-1973, Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 1973, p. 6.

However from the late 1860s onwards Orangeism did emerge as a political force which had to be taken into serious consideration by both Protestant landlords and businessmen in Ulster. This was due to a number of developments. In the 1868 election William Johnston, an Orangeman and a member of the lesser gentry, proved that it was possible to defeat Conservative candidates in Belfast by appealing to the newly enfranchised Protestant workers. Part of his attraction for them lay in his active challenging of the Party Processions Act. Johnston was soon bought off by the Conservatives but the Act was repealed in 1872, and by the early 1880s Northern Orangemen were assisting Protestant landlords in the south to resist the boycotts imposed on them by their Catholic tenants in the Land War struggle for improved conditions of tenure.[1] And finally in 1885, when the threat of the introduction of Irish Home Rule had become very real, the Orange Order intervened massively in the election which took place that year, endorsing the selection of pro-union candidates, sometimes in opposition to those put forward by the Conservative Party, the traditional voice for Irish Protestantism.[2]

The accepted view that this intervention resulted in the immediate involvement in Orangeism of both Protestant landlords and industrialists in Ulster has recently been challenged by Peter Gibbon. He argues that the Order was by-passed by the province's urban Protestants who dominated the initial stages in the organisation of the political resistance movement which came to be known as the Ulster Unionist Party.[3] There is no doubt at all however about the massive involvement in the

---

1. Wright, op cit, p. 248 note 76.
2. Harbinson, op cit, pp. 7-8.
3. Gibbon, op cit, pp. 121-138. The traditional view is succinctly put in Harbinson, op cit, p. 8 ff.

organisation of the Unionist Party granted to the Orange Order from the
time of the formal inauguration of the party structures in 1905. The
Order was specifically allocated the nomination of one quarter of the
delegates to the Ulster Unionist Council, the party's controlling body,
and by the third home rule crisis in 1911, such was Orangeism's strength
in Ulster Unionism, that opposition to Irish nationalism was now organised
through the Order rather than, as previously, through the Unionist Clubs.[1]

Following the establishment of the Northern Ireland statelet in 1921,
Orangeism's political strength both within and without the Ulster
Unionist Party remained very great. The Order continued to nominate
approximately one quarter of the delegates to the central organs of
Unionism; it made it virtually impossible for any non-Orangeman, and
therefore any non-Catholic, to become a Unionist MP; its lodges remained
the focus for all local Unionist electoral activity; its pressure did
much to ensure the perpetuation of Protestant clerical influence within
the Northern Ireland state education system, and the prevention of
peaceful infiltration by Catholics into public positions within the
province.[2] In situations of direct confrontation Northern Ireland's
successive Unionist governments have been prepared to resist the demands
of the Orangemen,[3] and estimates of the Order's overall numerical
strength have, I suspect, been somewhat over-generous.[4] But having
secured such a control over the selection of their rulers, the Orangemen
have had little need to act as an external pressure group on them, and

1. Gibbon, op cit, p. 140.
2. Harbinson, op cit, pp. 90-95 and O'Dowd et al, op cit, p. 15.
3. Harbinson, op cit, pp. 93-4.
4. Harbinson, op cit, p. 93 gives a membership figure of 125,000-130,000
   supplied by Rev Martyn Smyth, the Imperial Grand Master of the Order,
   on 30 April 1969. It must be remembered however that as lodge
   minute-books and the comments of many Orangemen reveal, membership
   of the Order has for many consisted of little more than marching on
   the Twelfth.

so little need to watch the level of their membership. It has been sufficient from time to time to demonstrate to the Protestant leadership that they can be recalled from a "liberal" or "undemocratic" actions by the sanctions of their local lodge,[1] or by the intervention in electoral contests of candidates combining extreme Orange or Protestant sentiments with working-class demands.[2]

Analysis of Orange processions as entire actions both endorses and extends the meanings of the individual symbols associated with them. Two of the actions involved in the parades confirm meanings which have already emerged from specific symbols. The marching pattern used by individual lodges is another variation on the theme of exclusion and self-defence already discovered in such individual symbols as swords and arches, while the succession of lodges playing different tunes is a confirmation of the Orangemen's delight in skilful rivalry already seen as manifest in the use of lambeg drums. However the two other actions performed by processing Orangemen remind us of aspects of their symbolism not previously considered. Their dressing-up points to the more general social role of the parades, and their marching to the local landlord's demesne indicates the directly political significance of Orange processions. That political significance can be seen relating to the realities of Orange power in the province. Historically the amount of control over their political leaders achieved by the Orangemen has varied greatly, but it is arguable that the underlying pattern throughout has been a movement from the rank-and-file members of the Order to which their superiors have responded with intermittent fervour.

1. Rosemary Harris, Prejudice and Tolerance in Ulster, Manchester University Press, 1972, p. 196.
2. On this see Patterson, op cit, passim.

However none of the actions so far described are sufficient to explain why Orange processions have traditionally been associated with sectarian conflict. This association will be discussed in the next two sections, the first dealing with the situation prior to 1968, the second with events since then. The chapter will then conclude with a final section on the wider implications of Orange symbolism during the present troubles.

Orange parades and sectarian conflict prior to 1968

This thorny question has been frequently discussed, generally in a somewhat crude fashion. Four recent influential approaches to it can be briefly outlined. A.T.Q Stewart has argued that Orange parades have not caused sectarian conflict because marching Orangemen have not, on the whole, launched attacks on their Catholic brethren;[1] Sybil Baker views the parades as sparking-points for a conflict nurtured by other factors, such as the endemic alcoholism of nineteenth century Belfast;[2] Peter Gibbon has endeavoured to provide a more sophisticated analysis of the changing nature of Belfast riots between 1830 and 1886, which he sees as attributable to sociological developments in the city's Protestant working classes, rather than to any aspect of the Orangemen's demonstrations;[3] and Frank Wright has argued that conflict between Protestants and Catholics at the time of the Orange parades has generally been caused by the breaking of agreed procedure on matters such as the routing of processions and the siting of arches.[4]

---

1. op cit, pp. 151-2.
2. Baker, op cit, p. 794ff.
3. Gibbon, op cit, chapter 4.
4. Wright, op cit, p. 250 note 84.

It is this last kind of relationship between the symbolism of the
Orange parades and the conflict surrounding them that I intend to analyse.
In order to do this I shall look briefly at three major nineteenth
century sectarian affrays, the Battle of Dolly's Brae in 1849, and the
Belfast riots of 1857 and 1886. In doing this I would like to stress
two limitations to my discussion and that of others.

In the first place it must be remembered that prior to the greater
involvement of the Protestant leadership in the Orange Order at the end
of the nineteenth century many observers of sectarian conflict tended,
through ignorance, to use the term Orange as a substitute for Protestant.
As we have seen they were by no means synonymous, particularly in Belfast.
In the second place discussions of sectarian conflicts related to Orange
parades is largely focussed on the Belfast riots of the second half of
the nineteenth century. Evidence on earlier and rural disturbances is
far harder to recover but I suspect that further research along the lines
of the late Aiken McClelland's examination of the Battle of Garvagh,[1]
will reveal much to disprove David Miller's assumption that up to 1820
Orange parades were not disruptive. Indeed this assumption is challenged
by his own citation of a Belfast parade in 1813 which provoked a sectarian
riot in which two lives were lost.[2]

Miller's comment on parades and sectarianism prior to 1820 is

---

1. Aiken McClelland, The Battle of Garvagh, County Grand Lodge of
    Londonderry, n.d.
2. Miller, op cit, p. 58 and p. 68. An account of the affray can be
    found in J.J. Monaghan, A Social and Economic History of Belfast,
    1801-1825. Ph.D, Queen's University Belfast, 1940, pp 586-590.
    In 1810 John Gamble commented, à propos of a proposed Orange
    parade through Strabane "Beyond all other things, Orange
    processions are become offensive to Catholics; they remind them
    forcibly of their ancient misfortunes and what they think their
    present degradation." (Sketches of History, Politics and Manners
    in Dublin, and the North of Ireland in 1810, Baldwin, Cradock and
    Joy, 1826, p. 269.)

coupled however with perceptive comment that it was the pressure for

Catholic emancipation in the 1820s which brought into sharp question the

Orangemen's right to hold their parades wherever they willed, and raised

the level of feeling about the appropriation of territory in this

fashion. It is my belief that Orange parades have led to instances of

sectarian conflict in Ulster because they have consisted of a range of

symbolic challenges offered to Catholics both intentionally and

unintentionally. However, lacking adequate information on early and

rural Orange parades, I will argue from a study of the conflicts of 1848,

1857 and 1886, that sectarian affrays were precipitated by the Orangemen's

demonstrations, and indeed were to a great extent acted-out extensions of

the symbolic messages encoded in their imagery.

Two of the strongest themes that have emerged from the preceding

study of Orange symbolism are those of challenge and exclusion. Both

were related to practical action in the earliest days of the Order's

existence. Its origins lay in the challenge and counter-challenge made

in sectarian versions of faction-fights and sporting rivalry,[1] and its

early members sought to exclude their Catholic neighbours from both

land and work.[2]

Challenge and exclusion continued to characterise the main kinds

of sectarian conflict which ensued from subsequent Orange parades. Thus,

if we take the matter of exclusion first, in 1848 the Orangemen at Dolly's

Brae sought not only to assault the Catholics who lived along their

disputed line of march but also to expel them from their homes by burning

them out; in 1857 territorial expulsions of Protestants from the Catholic

1. Byrne, op cit
2. Tohall, op cit

Pound and of Catholics from neighbouring Protestant Sandy Row was remarked on as an element of the Belfast disturbances during the marching season of the year; and in 1886 numerous attacks on Catholic businessmen living in Protestant areas of the city, and expulsion of Catholic workers from the largely Protestant shipyards, followed the July parades.

The challenge or "dare" element in the affrays of these years can be seen as emerging at two levels, the local and the national or international. Thus in 1849 the battle at Dolly's Brae was essentially provoked by the taunts of Catholics in the area who derided the Orangemen for their failure in 1848 to take their accustomed route past Catholic dwellings. And the Orangemen were simultaneously provoked by the audacity of Irish Catholics as a whole in their pursuit of repeal of the Act of Union between England and Ireland. Indeed the local Catholics included strident references to Repeal in the taunting note sent by them to the distinctly pro-Orange local magistrates on 8 July 1849.

"Sirs, - As wee Call you at a meeting of our Society on fridaway (Friday) wee agred to give you notice you and Moore and Beers, and Hill, Skinner and all other Magistrates, with the pig-drovers (the police) and your handful of solgiers to meet us on Dolly's Bray on the 12 morning Inst - to show your valure. But remember you will not find us King James or his men - there is no River convenent that wee could drown you in, But wee will Blow you to the ealements with good powder and ball, and the town of Castlewellan Shall Quake afterward, as it is the last 12 ever the Blood Hounds shall walk in or through this country, and we bid Defience to all Her Majestys authority and powers.

Repaill, Repaill, Repaill for ever.

'FROM THE REPAILLERS.'"[1]

The affray which followed these taunts was no mean affair. It was estimated that some twenty to thirty Catholics were killed by the Orangemen.

In 1857 the disorders following the Twelfth parade were largely sparked off by local challenges between the Pound and Sandy Row. These consisted of incidents such as the provocative waving of the orange lily by the bold Loughran; and the drumming-parties on the nights of 11 and 12 July.[2] A wider challenge was not issued until 6 September when Rev Hugh Hanna delivered an anti-Popery sermon near the Customs House in the centre of town. However this exercise had been planned by Reverend McIlwaine for 19 July, and had only been postponed because of the troubled state of the city. Moreover Orangemen were conspicuously involved in the occasion, for they provided Hanna with an ostentatious guard of honour of some 300 of their number, ships carpenters armed with sharpened staves employed in their trade. The Sandy Row and Pound mobs were also in attendance and severe rioting soon ensued.[2]

The whole localised ritual of taunt and counter-taunt familiar from the earlier faction fights had again, as in 1848, been appropriated to a wider forum. The Orange ships-carpenters had previously been out in 1852, when they attacked a Catholic teetotallers' excursion, because it was allowed to parade with bands at a time when the Orangemen could

---

1. Quoted in Dolly's Brae Report, p. 44. The Catholics had also composed "abominable songs" taunting the Orangemen for their cowardice in 1848 and many witnesses in 1849 mentioned the presence of Catholic women jeering and taunting the marchers (Ibid pp 16, 20 and 21 and Zimmerman op cit p. 313).
2. See above, p. 270ff.

not.[1] And following his sermon the Rev Hanna issued a letter addressed to the Protestants of Belfast, promising a further sermon the following Sunday, and challenging the Catholic right of public assembly in the city centre in an exceedingly offensive manner.

"it begins:- 'Men and brethren, your blood-bought and cherished rights have been imperilled/the audacious and savage outrages of a Romish
by
mob.' Again, he says - 'Your ministers have a legal right to preach in the open air, no man now can deny that. You have all a right to listen to them. Let them choose convenient places for their service. Where you assemble around, leave so much of the thoroughfare unoccupied that such as do not choose to listen, may pass by. Call that clearance "The Pope's Pad"'"[2]

Small wonder that the commissioners' inquiry into the riots concluded

"The place selected was the most public place in Belfast, the habitual walk of all the working classes on Sunday, and the hour selected was the hour at which most certainly the greatest number would be assembled; and if street-preaching were practised in the spirit or with the forms inculcated in Mr Hanna's letter, it would be and would seem as intended to be, a public and marked insult to the Roman Catholic people; and they, in passing, would be forced to endure a proclamation made of their inferiority; and this would seem to us to turn street-preaching into a new and more taunting celebration of every thing most offensive in connexion with the Orange festival of July."[3]

---

1. Ibid, p. 31.
2. Quoted ibid, p. 13.
3. Ibid, loc cit.

In 1886 the same kind of relationship between local and national
political feelings can be found. In sequence what happened in the early
stages of this year's summer riots in Belfast seems to have been as
follows. A bill for the introduction of Home Rule in Ireland was before
Parliament. There was strong feeling about/in the north of Ireland and
moreover, a general election was regarded as inevitable, an election in
which it was known that one of the Belfast constituencies would witness a
very closely fought contest. Conflict between Catholics and Protestants
in Belfast was seen first in the dockland area of the city, where there
was bitter fighting between the predominantly Catholic navvies employed
in the construction of the new Alexandra Dock and the Protestant ship-
building men of the adjacent Queen's Island. This was followed by
conflict on the interface of the areas in which the two groups lived,
rioting at the funeral of a Catholic boy killed in the dockland fighting,
attacks on Catholic public-houses in Protestant areas and resistance
by the Protestant rioters to police intervention. Traditional, local,
territorial confrontations were still strongly interwoven with the more
cosmopolitan clashes over wider political and social issues detected by
Peter Gibbon. This interweaving of local and wider challenges and
counter-challenges in 1848, 1857 and 1886 leads me to believe that Peter
Gibbon's analysis of the changing patterns of Protestant riot action in
nineteenth century Belfast requires some modification. The dichotomy
between local and wider action was not, I suspect, quite as sharp as he
would lead us to suppose. It was not only the "cosmopolitan", empire-
conscious Orange ships-carpenters who attended Hugh Hanna in 1857. The

---

1. 1887 Report, pp 4-6.

Sandy Row mob were there as well. This should remind us also that given the dearth of other wider leadership for both Protestants and Catholics in nineteenth century Belfast it was the clergymen of both denominations who turned their followers eyes to issues larger than those of their immediate environment. And finally the linking of local and wider issues in the challenges issued by each community returns us to the way in which the community violence of this period remained very much an acted out extension of the ritual meanings of Orange processions.

It is clear that those meanings were to a certain extent shared by the Catholic community. They challenged and counter-challenged with their taunts, their processions and their arches,[1] whether in 1848 or 1857 or 1886. And in this ritual process there seems to have been an element of games-playing enjoyment as well of bitterness. This comes out most clearly in a much later comment by a Ballymurphy woman who was recalling the Orange marches in West Belfast in the bitter years between the two World Wars.

"I was brought up on the very brink of one of the most bigoted districts regarding religion, Brown's Square, but we had wonderful times for all that. We were on the very edge of where they had the Twelfth celebrations. They came from the Shankill, east Belfast, Sandy Row. It was more exciting from their point of view to have somebody to provoke than to sit in the heart of the Shankill - typically Irish.

I was reared a stone's throw from Sammy Smyth. It was excitement for us as well as for them. If they had not had the celebration we would have been very disappointed. It was part of the long summer holidays. I

---

1. See below, p.421ff.

was seven years here in Ballymurphy before I stopped going down to see

the arches and 'the bonfires on Eleventh night, to make sure they were

there, to make sure that they were carrying on the tradition. It made

you more broad-minded to live in a place like Brown's Square, because,

unconsciously, we enjoyed their Twelfth and related it to holidays and a

happy time in life."[1]

Undoubtedly linked to the Catholic view of Orange processions as

a game which must be played according to certain rules is the fury

traditionally felt at the excessive favouring of Orangemen by those who

should have been, in Catholic eyes, acting as umpires, ie the government

and its servants. It was the influence of orange ribbons on trial

verdicts following the Battle of Garvagh in 1814 which was remembered

with bitterness, rather than the orange and green faction fights which

culminated in the battle.[2] In 1848 there was considerable Catholic

resentment against what appeared to be the obvious Orange sympathies of

the local magistrates,[3] and in 1887 one of the main criticisms offered

by a deputation of Belfast Catholics to the commissioners investigating

the riots of the previous year was the favouritism shown to the Orange

Order by the authorities.[4] The same kind of feeling for orange and green

displays as a game regulated by well understood ground-rules, the

breaking of which causes sectarian friction, has been detected by Frank

Wright in relation to various incidents caused by the siting of arches

and routing of processions in Co Tyrone in the 1860s and 1870s.[5]

---

1. Quoted by Eileen O'Brien in "Battered Ballymurphy", The Irish Times,
     Review of 1976, 30 Dec 1976, p. III.
2. McClelland, op cit, note 16.
3. Dolly's Brae Report p. 9 and p. 11.
4. See 1887 Report, Appendix E.
5. op cit, p. 250 note 84.

Indeed the relationship between Orange parades and sectarian conflict is much more easily understood if one thinks of Northern Ireland's summer marching season as a time of high ritual definition when in general the province's two communities have played their symbolic games with a fierce intensity, revelling in the rivalry of taunt and counter-taunt but ready to leap upon any hint of a rule broken or a boundary crossed, and in particular certain patterns of behaviour are so ingrained that they permeate both the symbolism and the reality of their practitioners' existence.

Orange processional imagery since 1968

In many ways it may seem that since 1968 the symbolic and practical roles of the Orange Order have diminished, as the result of both the violent turmoils of the present troubles and the emergence during them of apparently less traditional Protestant organisations. Individual Orange images are still very much in use, but for the bulk of the Protestant community they have been symbolically outflanked by flags and heraldry; the right of the Orangemen to process has been strongly defended, but the numbers of those taking part in parades appears to have dropped; and attempts to maintain the Order's political power seem to have been defeated by the shattering of the Unionist monolith, the emergence of Paisleyite and paramilitary groupings, and the modernisation of Northern Ireland's administration brought about by successive British governments. Yet this apparent erosion of the Order's symbolic and practical power is somewhat deceptive. Its imagery still provokes sectarian conflict structured along very traditional lines, and its social role within the Protestant community remains very considerable.

There has been no diminution in the traditional use of individual Orange symbols since 1968, nor in the traditional meanings associated

with them. All the elements of the displays surrounding the Order's
processions have continued to flourish, while their symbolic significance
is repeatedly celebrated by those who use them. In particular the
numerous songs and verses composed by working-class Protestants since
the outbreak of the present troubles endlessly revive traditions
surrounding Orange symbols. A typical example is the loyalist poem,
written in the early years of the conflict, in which a youth shot down
by a republican sniper asks his mother to bring him his orange sash
before he dies, because it is the emblem of the tradition which he and
his father before him fought to maintain.

> "Before I depart this earth, one thing I ask of you
>
> Please put the sash around my neck, show the colours Orange and Blue
>
> For that is what these rebels fear, thus they dare not show their
>
> > face
>
> Wipe the tear from your tender eye, for I've not died in disgrace
>
> I followed my father's footsteps, and yearly in July
>
> I walked behind the banner, now for the colours I must die
>
> I leave behind no regrets, I fought for a noble cause
>
> To maintain an open Bible that gave our freedom and laws."[1]

Not only have items of Orange processional imagery like the sash, the
banners and the open Bible remained full of meaning for Protestants during
the past thirteen years. They have also continued to be developed and
elaborated. Orange arches in particular became especially resplendent
displays of Protestant pride in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Their

---

1. "This we will maintain", in Marion White, Jim McCorry and Sam Smyth
   (eds), love orange love green, Whitcor Publications, Belfast 1974.

other traditional functions certainly remained very apparent. They

continued to be used as processional symbols along King William's route

through Ulster, in Lisburn, Hillsborough and Dromore. Their role as

definers of Protestant territory also remained very important. But during

the economic boom of the late 1969s and early 1970s it was their lavish

display of skill which predominated. Enormous constructions, erected by

builders' firms, replaced the streamers of earlier years (ill   85). In

Belfast, Dee Street, Sandy Row, Lindsay Street, and Bright Street all had

arches like this, while smaller trellis-work versions were erected in

Memel Street, at the entrance to the Belvoir Estate, and in the ship-yard.[1]

Lisburn, Hillsborough and Dromore each had sizable arches; in 1975

Portadown had six;[2] and there were many more scattered round the

province. Handmade contributions and personal pride still figured very

large however. One of the slides made by the late Aiken McClelland shows

a house in Newtownards with its own individual arch;[3] in the early 1970s

the fiercely loyalist Thompson family in King's Moss erected a home-made

castellated arch in their garden;[4] and the decorations on the larger

arches were often a labour of love by an individual craftsman. Many of

the painted symbols were the work of Joe Hamilton of LOL 964; it was his

paintings for example which decorated the Sandy Row Arch.[5] And the life-

size effigies of King William topping arches in Lisburn, Bangor, Derry

and Belfast's Sandy Row were the contribution of William Warlow, an

elderly man who lived in a small street off the Donegall Road. Not all

---

1. News Letter, Belfast, 9 July 1968, p. 5 and 12 July 1973, p. 5 and
      Belfast Telegraph, 3 July 1968, p. 5.
2. "Twelfth Pride in Portadown", News Letter, Belfast, 12 July 1975, p. 3.
3. These slides are now in the possession of Mr McClelland's family.
4. See the photo in the News Letter, Belfast, 11 July 1972, p. 8.
5. "No Sandy Row Arch for the Twelfth", Belfast Telegraph, 15 May 1978,
      p. 1.

the recipients of these figures gave them the care they deserved. The Sandy Row figure toppled from his perch, somewhat symbolically, in 1969 - but then Sandy Row are notorious for their happy-go-lucky attitude to the preservation of their street decorations.[1] Not for them the fervour of the boy who told Frank Wright that one of the reasons that he liked living in his street off the Shankill was because it was very loyal and the second-best decorated street in Belfast on the Twelfth of July.[2]

However by the late 1970s such pride in display was being eroded by developments external to the Orange Order. In 1979 no arch went up in Sandy Row. Woodworm had invaded the old structure, and redevelopment of the street meant that a new, lighter construction was needed anyhow. Costs had also risen steeply from about £1,000 to £6,000. In Dee Street too there was no arch in 1979, and out in the country the few arches which did appear were up for only a few days. Some said this was because of a desire to keep sectarian tensions low but others blamed a run of bad weather. Economic and practical considerations as much as political pressures have affected the rise and decline in the use of Orange arches since 1968.

To a certain extent the same is true of the very marked increase in the use of flags and heraldry by Ulster Protestants since the late 1960s. It has already been established that this kind of imagery only became a significant part of Orange processional symbolism at the end of the nineteenth century, as a result of the fusion of political, military and economic pressures at that time. A very similar conjunction of circumstances seems to have fostered the notable revival in the use of

---

1. Conversation with William Warlow, 27 July 1976. The Ulster Folk Museum own an example of his work.
2. Wright, op cit, p. 249.

these images in recent years.

The militant waving of Union Jacks by Ulster's Protestant extremists became very noticeable in the 1960s. They used the British flag as a symbolic reminder to their political leaders of the religious and constitutional verities from which, in the eyes of these flagwavers, these leaders were departing in showing leniency towards the public displays of the Catholic community. Thus in 1964 Ian Paisley led a demonstration at Belfast City Hall protesting at the flying of the flag at half-mast following the death of Pope John XXIII, and in 1968 and 1969 he and his supporters constantly opposed civil rights demonstrators with waving Union Jacks, notably at the time of the People's Democracy march from Belfast to Derry in January 1969. On 1 January Major Bunting, who was a close associate of Paisley, stated that it was intended to carry out "Trooping of the Colour" ceremonies at points along the route of the PD march. He said

"The Union Jack has never been 'trooped' in the Bogside since the formation of the state of Northern Ireland and we feel this would be an appropriate occasion to do so."

When the marchers set out from Belfast City Hall, Major Bunting and his supporters were present, waving Union Jacks and Ulster flags. They constantly harassed the marchers along their route, finally launching a full-scale attack on them at Burntollet bridge near Claudy.[1]

Meanwhile the Official Unionist Stormont MP William Craig, who was dismissed from his post as Home Secretary by the Northern Ireland Prime Minister Terence O'Neill in December 1968, following brutal police handling of a banned Civil Rights march in Derry on 5 October 1968, used

---

1. Richard Deutsch and Vivien Magowan, Northern Ireland 1968-73, A
       Chronology of Events, vol I, 1968-71, Blackstaff Press, Belfast,
       1973, p. 16, entries for 1-4 Jan 1969.

Union Jack demonstrations in loyalist areas of Belfast to launch attacks
on O'Neill's moderate policy towards Northern Ireland's Catholic
minority.[1]

During this same period events outside Northern Ireland contributed
to loyalist investment in the symbolism of the Union Jack, much as they
had done at the turn of the century. In 1968 local manufacturers produced
large quantities of badges and tea-cloths for the "Back Britain" campaign.[2]
And later in the same year, when Terence O'Neill launched an Ulster Week
to promote Northern Ireland goods, a local firm cannily turned out a bag
bearing the Ulster coat of arms. 10,000 copies were printed and reports
claimed that it sold well.[3]

During the early years of the present troubles Union Jacks
continued to be used by Ulster's loyalists as a semi-military gesture of
outrage against any favouring of the Catholic minority, and as a profitable
form of commercial investment. When the sectarian confrontation between
Catholics and Protestants in Belfast started in real earnest on 14 August
1969, the Union Jack headed the Protestant rioters as the tricolour did
the Catholics.

"Dover Street and Percy Street, two mixed roads linking the Shankill
to the Falls, had been invaded by Catholic crowds. One had swarmed into
the Protestant end of Percy Street waving tricolours and singing the
Soldier's Song - national anthem of the Irish Republic; the other was
advancing up Dover Street behind ingeniously made corrugated iron shields.
John McQuade, the hard-line Unionist MP for Woodvale (and a former boxing
champion), was marshalling men armed with sticks and hatchets behind the

---

1. See Belfast Telegraph, 22 Jan 1969, p. 3 and 28 Jan 1969 p. 3.
2. "The Diary - Backing Britain", News Letter Belfast, 26 Jan 1968, p. 3.
3. Belfast Telegraph 21 Aug 1968, p. 6.

uniformed Specials. [John] McKeague later claimed that he took charge of 'defence' operations on his arrival and organised an ambush of the Catholic insurgents, during which their shields were captured. Behind these shields, the Protestants then advanced on Divis Street in the Lower Falls, where, says McKeague, 'even in the moment of extreme danger, the Union Jack, the flag of our country, was planted in the middle of the road.' As rioting continued, a Protestant was shot dead by a Catholic sniper and in a brief gun battle three policemen were injured. Catholics were also driven back from Percy Street by shot-gun fire from the SDA (Shankill Defence Association)."[1]

Militant sectarian feelings continued to be expressed by references to the Union Jack for a number of years. The songs sung and verse written by both adults and children in the Protestant community in the early 1970s endlessly celebrated the triumph of the Union Jack and the downfall of the Tricolour.[2]

Militant use of the red hand symbol by Ulster Protestants was also clearly re-established during the early years of the present troubles. In the late 1960s the Ulster Protestant Volunteers organised by Ian Paisley to counter civil rights marches chose as their emblem the red hand badge of the 1913 Ulster Volunteer Force,[3] and between 1969 and 1972 there was, according to the Belfast tattooist, a craze for political tattoos, particularly the red hand.[4]

As this combative, street-level usage of Union Jacks and red hand symbols increased, so they became an embarassment to some liberal

1. David Boulton, The UVF 1966-73, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin 1973, p. 119.
2. McCorry, Smith and White, op cit, especially Six into Twenty-Six Won't Go and The Losing of the Green; and Children in Crossfire, first transmitted on BBC I on 12 March 1974.
3. David McKittrick, "Making a virtue of extremism", The Irish Times Dublin, 18 Feb 1981, p. 12.
4. Conversation on 8 Nov 1979.

politicians, manufacturers and wholesalers. Whereas Terence O'Neill
while Prime Minister from 1963 to 1969 felt no embarassment about
habitually wearing a red hand tie, as a symbol both of Ulster and his
own family ancestry, or about employing it as an emblem for all Ulstermen
in the various trade weeks he promoted in Britain,[1] by 1971 the use of
the red hand as the identifying symbol of the <u>Ulster 71</u> exhibition aroused
considerable nationalist mockery.[2] And as early as the summer of 1970
some wholesalers and manufacturers were refusing to supply local shops
with Union Jacks and other emblems.

"More in sorrow than in anger the Sandy Row shopkeeper said: 'Any
day now they'll declare the Red Hand to be sectarian.'

He was talking about the state of the trade in loyalist emblems and
knick-knacks in Northern Ireland since the 'Troubles'. Trade, he said,
was poor for the time of the year.

Around the small shop were displays of Union Jacks in all sizes from
yards-square to tiny ones on sticks, framed pictures of William of Orange
riding his white horse, being received at Carrickfergus and galloping
into the Boyne. In show-cases there were key-rings, badges, china cups
and ash-trays, all bearing the Ulster symbol of the Red Hand, some with a
crown surmounting the hand, some without.

There was a good demand for such things, I ventured.

'Indeed there is,' said the shopkeeper. 'Coming up to the Twelfth
we do a great trade.'

He smiled wanly. 'But to hear some people you would think we were
carrying on some sort of illegal trade. Some people would make you think

---

1. <u>The autobiography of Terence O'Neill</u>, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1972, p.7.
2. See below, pp. 580-1 and ill 187.

there was something shameful in it.'

Among the 'some people' he included certain wholesalers who he said were keeping their loyalist ornaments under the counter, allegedly for fear of 'offending some people'.

Included too was an English manufacturer who, last July, refused to supply Northern Ireland with Union Jacks,

'That was the craziest one of all,' said the Sandy Row shopkeeper. 'It was quite deliberate, not just a mistake. They simply refused to send the flags because, they said, they did not wish to contribute to the troubles.

Imagine! The flag of the country is supposed to be an incitement to trouble. We were told we would get no Union Jacks until August, which of course was useless to us for the Twelfth.'

The English firm manufacturing the flags is the major supplier for the Sandy Row shops and the self-imposed ban on supplies hit the shops hard.

Some managed to place alternative orders with a local manufacturer in time for the Twelfth.

'But', said the shopkeeper, 'there were people who had to do the best they could. Some I know of sat up to all hours making flags by cutting up red, white and blue cloth and stitching the pieces together.'

There will be no repetition of the Great Flag Crisis this July. The reluctant English firm has lost its Sandy Row orders 'for all time' and supplies have been obtained locally and from Glasgow."[1]

Indeed an extraordinary range of loyalist emblems continued to be

---

1. Ken Nixon, "Psst! Want a King Billy?", News Letter, Belfast, 3 June 1971, p. 4.

available in loyalist shops until the mid-1970s. The commercial output

of flags, tie-clips, tea-cloths, ties, badges and earrings, mostly

bearing the Union Jack or the Red Hand, allowed Ulster loyalists, as at

the turn of the century, to personalise their symbolic allegiances as

well as putting them on public display in the streets.[1] And again, as

before, developments in the wider field of emblem-production influenced

and boosted the sale of such localised imagery. In the early 1970s there

was a widespread increase in enthusiasm for badge-wearing in the Western

world, notably amongst teenagers. This was clearly related to certain

technical innovations in the production of button badges and self-

adhesive stickers. Suppliers of loyalist emblems adapted themselves to

both the new demands and the new techniques. By at least 1973 it was

possible to buy in Belfast a Union Jack sticker in the shape of a hand

giving the V for Victory sign (ill 99). Two years earlier similar

stickers featuring the Stars and Stripes had been available in the United

States.[2]

However by the early 1970s some loyalists were already turning away

from the Union Jack to the more local emblems of the red hand and the

Ulster flag. Their addiction to the red hand became particularly marked

with the introduction of British Direct Rule in March 1972. The Vanguard

Unionist Party and the two main loyalist paramilitary groups, the Ulster

Defence Association and the Ulster Volunteer Force, all emerged during

this period to assert the claim to self-rule in Northern Ireland, and all

used the red hand as their emblem (the UVF, like the UPV before them,

---

1. Penny Simon "Ballymena, Stronghold of the old order," The Times
   20 June 1973, p. 2 and Alan Whitsitt, "Among our souvenirs",
   News Letter, Belfast, 12 July 1976, p. 7
2. Gary Yanker, Prop Art, Studio Vista, 1972, p. 248.

99. Union Jack victory hand sticker/1973/Belfast.

returned to the 1913 badge). Something of the strength of feeling attached to the red hand by Ulster Protestants in the early 1970s can be gathered from two cartoons in loyalist paramilitary newsheets. One, in the Official UDA News[1], showed Edward Heath eating the red hand; the other, in the Loyalist News for 25 January 1975, depicted the red hand of Ulster smashing the Southern harp for pushing the North too far (ill 100).

The Ulster Protestant swing from the Union Jack seems to have started well before the introduction of Direct Rule, in the summer of 1970. Simon Winchester, who was then reporting events in Northern Ireland for the Guardian, later recalled that at the Twelfth of July celebrations that year "... for the first time in years one could see a massive collection of Ulster flags - red and white with the Red Hand of Ulster firm and stiff in the middle - fluttering over the parade."[2] In May 1971 the Protestant Telegraph, the newsheet controlled by Ian Paisley, was advertising them for sale[3] and by June suppliers of loyalist regalia began to receive as many requests for this flag as for the Union Jack.[4] By the late summer they were being used in political confrontations. By a year later the demand for Ulster flags was growing fast. They were carried by Protestants fleeing the Ardoyne area of Belfast during the riots which flared up following the introduction of internment on 10 August, and they featured fairly prominently in loyalist demonstrations from then onwards.[5]

1. Vol 1 no 3, n.d, in the Linen Hall Library, Belfast.
2. Simon Winchester, In Holy Terror, Faber, 1974, p. 75.
3. Protestant Telegraph, 29 May 1971, p. 3.
4. Ken Nixon, loc cit.
5. Ireland, A History, programme no 12, transmitted on BBC1 and RTE on 17 Feb 1981 and Morris Fraser, Children in Conflict, Penguin, 1974, p. 34
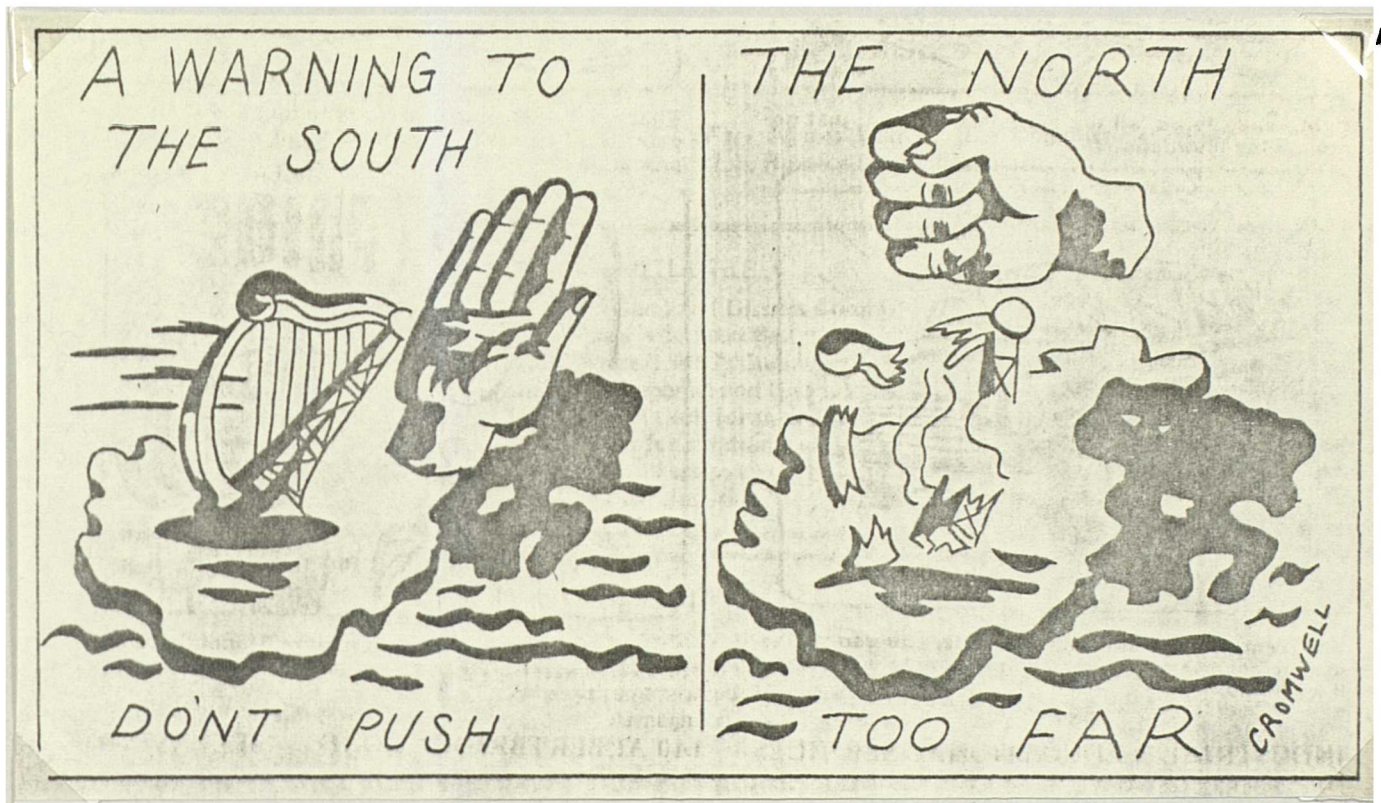
100. Red hand and harp cartoon/Loyalist News, 25 Jan 1975.

Clearly the loyalist switch from the Union Jack to the Ulster flag was encouraged by the growing rumours in late 1971 that Britain was contemplating the abolition of Stormont and the introduction of Direct Rule in Northern Ireland. Indeed the association of the Ulster symbol with the growing disenchantment was made explicit by a loyalist politician in early December of that year.

"Speaking at the Current Affairs and Debating Society of Wesley College in Dublin, Mr. Richard Ferguson, former Unionist MP said on the subject, 'Ireland-dare we still hope for unity?' that the flag of the Covenant had now replaced the Union Jack in the North. Northern Ireland should negotiate now or it would be in danger of having a political settlement forced upon it. To England it had become a 'political embarassment.'"[1]

It is scarcely surprising therefore to find the Ulster flag in the loyalist demonstrations of March 1972 following the announcement of the introduction of direct rule by Westminster in Northern Ireland.[2] Yet many of the so-called "Ulster flags" used at this time were strange hybrids dreamed up for a quick sale by local manufacturers. The News Letter in July 1972 reproduced a typical example, which

"does not include the cross of St George, which, the manufacturers claim, was not acceptable to some Loyalist elements.

The new flag consists of six stars, representing the six counties, a Union Jack inset and a shield encompassing the cross of St Patrick, the Red Hand surmounted by the Crown and the open Bible. It has a white background. The other colours, incidentally, are red and blue.

---

1. Deutsch and Magowan, op cit, p. 142, entry for 5 Dec 1971.
2. Ibid, vol 2, 1972-3, Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 1974, p. 166, entries for 27 and 28 March.

.

The manufacturers, who seek no publicity for themselves for security reasons, say that some Loyalist bodies were asked for their opinions before the flag was printed. Thousands have already been sold."[1]

In this flag and the more widely-disseminated one used by Ulster Vanguard, the Unionist pressure group formed by William Craig early in 1972 to oppose direct rule in Northern Ireland (ill 101), the Union Jack was still featured. Indeed, although demand for Ulster flags seems to have continued to grow, reaching a peak in 1974, the year of greatest Protestant opposition to Britain's political plans for the province,[2] the Union Jack was never entirely abandoned by loyalists. In 1972 it appeared alongside the Ulster flag in the direct rule protests; in 1973 the Ulster Defence Association could be found protesting about its absence from Unionist Party election posters;[3] and in the early months of 1974 Observer reporters commented on the fervent display of the flag in Ulster.[4]

Something of the Ulster loyalist's feelings about the Union Jack during this period are conveyed by the comments of the Vanguard member Tommy Seymour made to me early in 1974 when British proposals for a Council of Ireland were causing considerable concern in Northern Ireland's Protestant community. Although he claimed he would rather wave an Ulster flag than a Union Jack he was eloquent on the importance of the Union Jack to loyalists.

---

1. "Big demand for the new flag" News Letter 11 July 1972, p. 3. A photo of the flag is given.
2. Letter from director of Centre for Analysis on Conflict, The Times, 23 Jan 1974, p. 15; photo of loyalist rally, The Times 29 May 1974; and "Ulster flags replacing Union Jacks", The Observer, 2 June 1974.
3. Official UDA News, June 1973.
4. 17 Feb 1974.
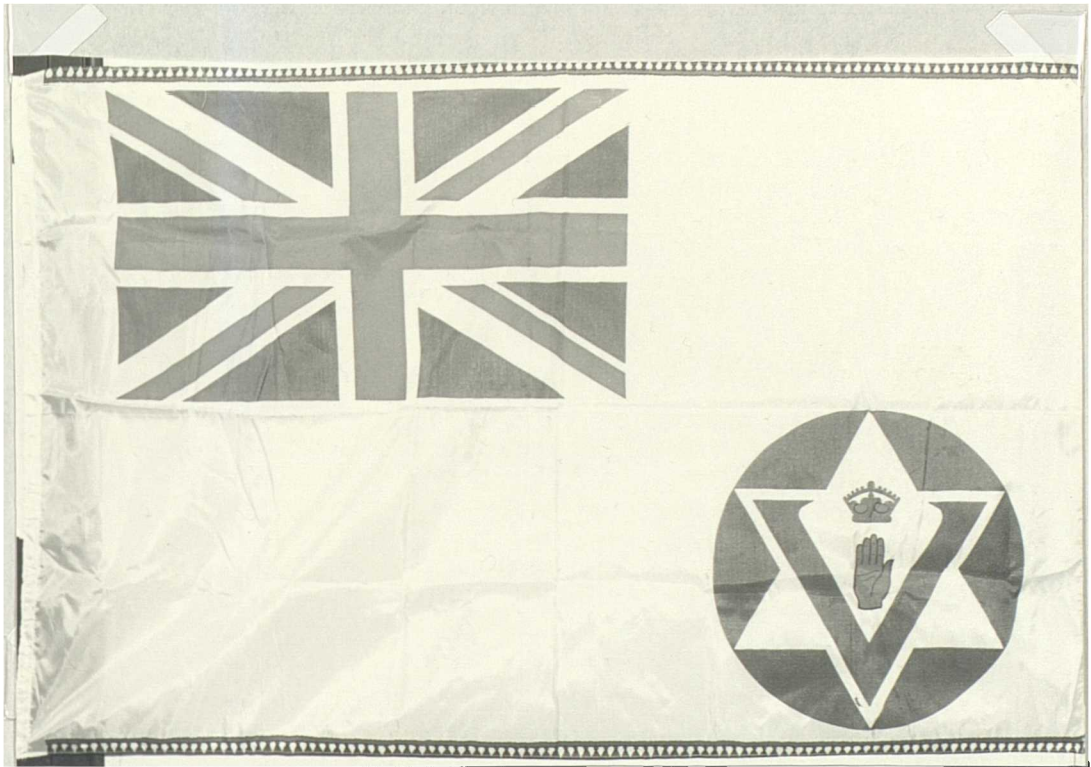
101. Vanguard Flag/1973/printed nylon/33 x 52½ ins (83.8
     x 133.3 cms)/Belfast/Collection B. Loftus/Photo:
     Pete McGuinness.

"This has always tended to be a country of the flag, they've always waved the Union Jack. The majority of times it's waved...provocatively to say to the other side 'right, this is it and you dare wave your flag.' There was a Flags and Emblems Act here which prohibited the flying of the tricolour and we have always tended to be that way, everything has to have a flag on it, the flag being the symbol of, some people say, the Protestant way of life and our heritage...We tend to identify ourselves with the flag, what other way can we?"

Seymour saw loyalists as

"...always trying to prove to ourselves that we are British, that although we're separated by water we really are just as British as the people over there. Maybe we're too flag-conscious."[1]

Some indication of Catholic attitudes to the Union Jack and to the various loyalist flags which had joined it, emerged in various incidents in the summer of 1975. On 5 July the following short report appeared in the News Letter.

"The Union Jack 'unites' workers

Protestant workers at F and B. McKee's building site, Donegall Square West, Belfast, have claimed that when they raised the Ulster flag to commemorate the Battle of the Somme it was torn down by republican workers and set on fire.

And when another Ulster flag was flown in its place the Roman Catholic workers walked out in protest saying they would continue work if the Union Jack were flown instead.

Two Union Jacks were flown by the 30 Protestant workers on the site, and, on seeing this, most of the 60-strong Roman Catholic labour

1. Conversation 28 Jan 1974.

force returned."[1]

Three days later Ulster and English papers reported the closure of
Grundig's tape recorder plant in Derriaghy just outside Belfast, after
Catholic employees, who formed a majority of the workforce there, had
objected to the display of the Vanguard flag in the factory. These
workers are recorded as having no objection to the Ulster flag or the
Union Jack, but only to the Vanguard flag because it was a "party
emblem."[2] This distinction may have been due to a pragmatic realisation
of the limitations of the firm's ban on "party emblems." Nevertheless
what seems to emerge from these two incidents is a readiness in the
Catholic community to tolerate the use of established national flags by
loyalists, particularly during the traditional period for their display
in the summer marching season, coupled with an adamant opposition to
heraldic imagery of a more sectarian or party political nature. This
appears to be borne out by reports and photographs in Catholic newspapers
recording, with disapproval, the displaying of red hand and Vanguard flags
by members of the security forces.[3]

On the Protestant side there appears to have been not only an
assertion of the right to this kind of seasonal decoration but also a
reversion to the 1920s practice of staking out claims for the employment
of loyalists. A significant element in the Grundig incident seems to
have been the Protestants' annoyance at having lost their former
dominance of the factory's workforce, largely as a result of the

---

1. News Letter, Belfast, 5 July 1975, p. 2.
2. "Hope unfurls in row over flag", News Letter, Belfast, 9 July 1975, p. 1;
   and "Threat over Vanguard flag-Grundig boss", Irish News, Belfast,
   9 July 1975, p. 1.
3. In the Andersonstown News for 29 June 1974, there is a report of the
   First Battalion Royal Highland Fusiliers waving Vanguard and Red Hand
   flags as they left the area, and in the same paper for 12 March 1977
   there is a photo of members of the Ulster Defence Regiment displaying
   a Vanguard flag at Ballykinlar army camp (p. 2).

increased number of Catholics moving into the nearby Twinbrook estate, following their intimidation out of homes elsewhere in the city.[1] In a time of rising unemployment, whether in the 1920s or the 1970s, Ulster Protestants sought to stamp their symbolic identity on areas of industry which they had traditionally controlled.

Since the mid-1970s the use of flags by Northern Ireland Protestants has remained fairly unspectacular, and more or less balanced between the Union Jack and the Ulster Flag except on a few specific occasions. (Thus when a group of Ulster loyalists floated the idea of an independent Ulster in November 1976 they designed a possible flag for such a state, comprising the red cross of St Patrick and the red hand of Ulster;[2] and in the summer of 1977 there was a fervent display of Union Jacks and red, white and blue bunting to honour the Queen's Jubilee visit to Northern Ireland.)[3] However any perusal of the province's local papers for this period will reveal that Protestant display of flags and heraldry continued to be significant and to be a cause of annoyance to the province's Catholics particularly during the summer marching season.

During the early years of the present troubles marching as such clearly remained very important to the Northern Ireland Orangemen. From the autumn of 1968 to the early months of 1972 there were sporadic government bans on parades and processions in an attempt to avoid sectarian conflict and ease the task of the security forces. In some ways the Orange Order got off lightly, as "traditional" processions

1. "Threat over Vanguard flag"; "Grundig refutes pull-out rumour", Belfast Telegraph, 9 July 1975, p.1 and "Loyalist flags shut Ulster plant", The Times, 9 July 1975.
2. Derek Brown, "The Red Hand of Ulster flies again", The Guardian, 12 November 1976, p. 22.
3. Alan Whitsitt, "Sandy Row, the village near Belfast", Belfast Telegraph, 21 April 1977, p. 10; "Banking on a Good Show", Belfast Telegraph, 31 May 1977, p. 5; and "Jacks flying again in this colourful street", Belfast Telegraph, 9 July 1977, p. 8.

were frequently excluded from the bans. When they were included their reactions ranged from resigned co-operation to outraged defiance. In 1970 for example the Orange Order leaders agreed to cancel a number of minor parades during the summer months but insisted on walking on the Twelfth. The Apprentice Boys officially agreed to simply rally in Derry on 12 August without bands and banners, but some of their number did turn up with banners and flags and a few of them attempted to march into the city. They were firmly repelled by the army and on this and other occasions Orangemen flagrantly breaking the ban were taken to court.[1] In the spring of 1971 the Northern Ireland Community Relations Commission stated in its first annual report that

"There is some evidence that tension is highest and keeps mounting at the season when ceremonial processions are most frequent. Such processions seem to fall into several categories: those which are purely ceremonial and often colourful and lively; those which are largely social or annual occasions; and those which may be regarded as expressions of territorial supremacy. It is this last group that is most likely to cause tension and to be regarded as provocative by opposing groups. Simply banning processions is not the answer in the long term: it is more important to remove the causes of fear on both sides.

It seems too that there would be less tension attending the great ceremonial occasions on fixed annual dates if there was not a protracted build up through a large number of small local and largely unorganised parades particularly in city areas. Another contributing factor to the growing tension is the constant public debate as to whether parades should be banned or not with a general sense of impending risk as the

---

1. Deutsch and Magowan, op cit, vol 1, p. 66, entries for 23 June and 29 June 1970; p. 68, entry for 7 July; p. 70, entries for 26 and 27 July; p. 71, entry for 7 August; and p. 72, entry for 12 August. Also Belfast Telegraph, 7 Aug 1970, p. 1 and 12 August 1970, p. 1.

days pass.

For this reason we have asked that an attempt be made to secure voluntary agreement from all bodies likely to promote processions whereby it will be known early in the year what parades will in fact take place and what arrangements can be made for stewarding and the preservation of public order."[1]

That summer Orange leaders agreed to reduce the number of parades, and events went smoothly, apart from deliberate flaunting of a specific ban on an Orange procession through the strongly Catholic town of Dungiven.[2] The following January Brian Faulkner announced that all parades, including the Orangemen's traditional summer processions were to be banned for a further year. The Grand Orange Lodge stated flatly that they were not prepared to observe the ban and in April William Whitelaw lifted the prohibitions on all parades.[3] From hence forward the Orangemen were free to walk.

Yet simultaneously it seems that the numbers of Orangemen turning out for their traditional parades were declining. While in 1970 it was estimated that nearly 40,000 marched on the Twelfth of July in Belfast, in 1971 the figure was just under 22,000 and in 1974 and 1975 approximately 20,000.[4] It seems likely that the drop in the turnout was related to an overall decrease in the Order's membership. As we have seen the official estimate of total membership given in 1969 by the Rev Martyn Smyth, the Order's Imperial Grand Master, was 125,000 to 130,000.

1. Northern Ireland Community Relations Commission, First Annual Report, 1 March 1971, p. 4, para 3:2.
2. Deutsch and Magowan, op cit, vol 1, p. 106, entry for 13 June 1971 and p. 117, entry for 2 Aug 1971. Also Brian Faulkner, Memoirs of a Statesman (ed. John Houston), Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1978, p. 102.
3. Deutsch and Magowan, op cit, vol 2, p. 150, entry for 18 Jan 1972; p. 151, entry for 23 Jan 1972; and p. 173, entry for 27 April 1972.
4. These figures are based on estimates given in newspaper accounts of the Twelfth processions.

Since then the Order has refused to give details of membership figures.

However by 1978 David McKittrick, the normally reliable Irish Times

reporter on Northern Ireland affairs, was quoting the figure of 60,000.[1]

It seems likely that this decline in membership has been chiefly due to

the large-scale movement of population which has taken place in Northern

Ireland since the late 1960s. Lodge membership has always been closely

related to feelings of local pride and involvement. These feelings have

been slow to develop in the new housing estates and scattered bungalows

to which many Ulster Protestants have moved in recent years. Indeed

those Orangemen who have retained an association with the Order following

such a move, have generally continued to attend their old lodge.

For the Orangemen who have remained within the Order, the

traditional parades have continued to be immensely important. The

secretary of the lodge in the provincial town nearest to my present home

remarked rather acidly on the fact that of thirty to forty members only

a dozen regularly attend meetings, "but they all turn up on the morning

of the Twelfth to pay their annual membership fee and take part in the

parade."[2]

In part this continued emphasis on marching can be seen as a

reaction to political circumstances. Thus in the late 1960s and early

1970s the bans on parades were clearly being flaunted because the

Orangemen felt the government was being liberal towards Catholics, and

in particular towards the predominantly Catholic civil rights marches.[3]

---

1. "The cost of music hits the lodges", The Irish Times, Dublin, 8 July
   1978, p. 5.
2. Conversation 7 April 1982. The town is mixed and there is relatively
   little sectarian feeling in it.
3. Wright, op cit, pp. 274-6.

And recently, in 1981, there was a notable upsurge in Orange parades in response to the republican hunger-strike demonstrations. More generally it is possible to see the Orange parades as a form of symbolic compensation for Ulster Protestants who, since 1968, have seen their community pushed into a defensive position by external forces and fragmented by internal divisions.

Increasingly members of Northern Ireland Protestant community have become the target of terrorist attacks to which legitimate retaliation in kind is illegal. (Even if they join the security forces the legal restrictions on their display or use of arms are very considerable).[1] Orange symbols, with their dual emphasis on ritualised challenge and a semi-military but highly legalised display of self-defence, serve to diffuse the feelings of angry impotence aroused by this situation. During the present troubles Ulster Protestants have also witnessed the falling apart of the disparate political elements which had previously combined to form Ulster Unionism. It seems likely that Orange symbols, with their stress on individuality and unity, inclusion and exclusion, have allowed this disturbing reality to be both recognised and glossed over. Indeed these twin compensatory functions of Orange parades since 1968 were very clearly indicated in the reply given to me by the local lodge secretary, when I asked him why Orangemen have continued to see processing as so important. He said that Orangemen march

"to show the united front of Protestantism and the determination not to be swallowed up by Romanism."

However the traditional meanings of Orange parades also continue to function. Marching is still a means of asserting control over the political leaders of the Protestant community; it is still a way of

---

1. This is not meant to be a statement of objective realities. I am talking here of the situation as seen from a Protestant rather than a Catholic point of view.

challenging Catholics; and it is still a medium for the potent display of Protestant pride.

There are many who would argue that since 1968 the Orange Order has to a large extent lost its former hold on the political leadership of Ulster's Protestant community. Both Terence O'Neill and Brian Faulkner were Orangemen. Both challenged Orange assumptions in their political policies as Ulster premiers and leaders of the Unionist party. Both were toppled by Protestant groups other than the Orangemen. Paisleyite protesters and Protestant paramilitary groupings like the Ulster Defence Association appeared by the early 1970s to have far more street-level clout than the Orange Order. Indeed every time they offered themselves, in time-honoured fashion, to Ulster's political leaders as a defence force, the Orangemen met with polite refusal. Moreover, with the fragmentation of the Unionist party, the Order appeared to retain its traditional links with only that section of it which became generally known as the Official Unionist Party (OUP). Ian Paisley, whose Democratic Unionist Party has run neck and neck with the OUP during the past few years is not an Orangeman but a member of the breakaway Independent Orange Order.

Yet this apparent weakening of Orangeism's hold over its political leaders, and decline as a force uniting the different sections of the Protestant community is misleading.

The involvement of the Orange Order with the Official Unionist Party is extremely strong

"The present leader of the OUP, Mr Jim Molyneaux, is of course Sovereign Grand Master of the Royal Black Institution, the Orange Order's prestigious cousin, as well as being Deputy Grand Master of the order itself. That's almost a tradition by now: Mr Molyneaux's predecessor in

Glengall Street, Mr Harry West, was also head of the Blacks and one way

or another the institution's leaders have always been Official Unionists.

The Grand Master of the Orange Order for the last ten years, and

some would say Mr Molyneaux's natural successor for leadership of the OUP

is the Rev Martin Smyth, who now doubles as the MP for South Belfast. At

leadership level the two organisations are indistinguishable.

But it doesn't stop there. The key decision-making body in the

order is the central committee of the Grand Orange Lodge. Of its 40 or

so members only a half a dozen are not members of the OUP and four of the

committee, the Rev Martin Smyth, Mr Jim Molyneaux, Sir George Clark (a

former Grand Master and now OUP president) and Colonel George Liddle, are

all officers in the OUP. It used to be five until Captain Michael Armstrong

died earlier this year.

All of the eight County Grand Masters are Official Unionists (one

each for the six counties and one each from Belfast and the city of Derry):

men like Mr Tommy Passmore, Mr Harry Anderson and Mr Willie Douglas. All

Glengall Street, to a man.

The order thus exerts enormous influence within the party and vice-

versa. The influence even extends way down to the choice of Westminster,

and now assembly, candidates with only a handful of local Orange district

lodges not represented on Official Unionist constituency associations."[1]

Moreover the links between Northern Ireland's other Protestant political

organisations and the Orange Order are more numerous than might at first

appear. Paisley may not be an Orangeman, but his two most stalwart

lieutenants, Peter Robinson and John McQuade, are. So too are many members

of the paramilitary Ulster Defence Force and Ulster Volunteer Force.

Prisoners from both groups have held Twelfth of July parades in Long Kesh,

---

1. Ed Moloney "Headstrong Unionist with a liberal mind", The Irish Times
   Dublin, 10 July 1982, p. 17.

complete with home-made banners and sashes[1] and members of the UDA

marched with their own banner in the Twelfth parade in Belfast in the mid-

1970s. Their involvement and that of Peter Robinson is a strong indication

of the Order's continuing importance, for these men come from precisely

that group of young, sharp, city-dwelling, highly-politicised Ulster

Protestants whom one might expect to discard the traditions of their

fathers.

As we shall see, the continued appeal of Orangeism for members of

a very wide range of organisations within the Protestant community has

resulted in the permeation of their political ideology by traditional

Orange modes of thought.[2] However it is debateable whether the Order is

still an efficient means of controlling Protestant political leadership.

That leadership is still expected to provide jobs for the Orange rank

and file. Many Northern Ireland councils continue to refuse to sign the

Fair Employment Agency's declaration of intent to implement the principle

of equality of job opportunity, regardless of religious affiliation, and

in 1978 a loyalist councillor explained the kind of sectarian discrimina-

tion in the allocation of jobs still expected of him

"You see, when people find out you're on a selection board they

chase you up no end...and say, 'Look, I'm in Lodge so-and-so and I'm in

for that council job - you'll not forget now. That other fellow isn't

one of us you know'... Now, I wouldn't deny a man a job because of his

religion because that's not right... But then if Catholics get in at all,

your own people come and hump at you and say 'huh, you're not looking

1. See the photo of the UVF leader Gusty Spence preparing for a Twelfth
   of July Long Kesh parade, in The Sunday Times, 24 Aug 1975, p. 1.
2. See below, p. 365ff and Chapter 6 passim.

after your own'...A lot of councillors say they're not going to come in

for that sort of abuse so they just vote for the Protestant candidates."[1]

Nevertheless Orangeism remains only one route to Protestant job

opportunities. Indeed recent surveys stress that the main means of

obtaining a job in both communities has remained the family network.[2]

And to a certain extent these tactics have been undermined in recent

years by the anti-discriminatory tactics introduced as the result of

British Direct Rule.

The extent to which the Orange Order still controls political

policy is also debatable. Certainly it has proved itself resistant to

overt manipulation from above. Orange protest parades engineered in

recent years by the Official Unionists to draw attention to concern on

such matters as security in the province have not generally been well

attended. And at the Twelfth the speeches and sermons delivered by

politicians and clergymen at the various "fields" continue to be largely

ignored by the marchers, whose attention is lavished instead on food,

drink, conversation, courting and sleep. Indeed those politicians speak

only on sufferance. They are there on invitation and must theoretically

1. O'Dowd et al, op cit, p. 116.
2. See R.J. Cormack, R.D. Osborne and W.T. Thompson, Into Work? Young
   School Leavers and the Structure of Opportunity in Belfast, Fair
   Employment Agency, Belfast, 1980, and Dominic Murray and John
   Darby, The Vocational Aspirations and Expectations of School
   Leavers in Londonderry and Strabane, Fair Employment Agency,
   1980.

speak to the resolutions decided upon for that year by the Order. And in some areas in recent years their orations have been ousted in favour of a religious service. Yet in a way this very indifference to the words of their leaders may be a mark of the Order's lack of political strength in recent years. The UDA spokesman who said to me in 1974

"our fellows paid the price of following the flag and listening to that band instead of listening to the bastard who was behind the microphone"[1]

could really have been speaking for Orangemen as a whole.

The impact of Orange processions on Northern Ireland's Catholic community has changed very little since 1968. As before, many of the parades are territorial, and are followed by riots in which the ritual exclusion symbolised in them is played out in actual ejection of Catholics from their homes or jobs. Clearly these aspects of the processions have continued to give serious annoyance to the province's Catholic population. The bitterly resented Orange marches through nationalist Dungiven in 1971 or Castlewellan in 1981, the massive burning of Catholic homes in West Belfast in 1969 and the evictions of Catholics from their new accommodation in the Lenadoon estate in July 1972 were for the nationalist population reiterations of centuries-old Orange rituals of aggression. The Catholic response ranged from a generalised tension, through movement away from Northern Ireland during the peak of the marching season, to counter-demonstration by slogan-painting, attacks on Orange parades and abuse, intimidation and eviction of Protestants.

Yet, as in previous centuries, few Catholics have demanded the banning of Orange parades during the past thirteen years. The erection

---

1. Conversation with Sammy Doyle, 29 Jan 1974.

of screens to prevent Catholics in troubled areas from seeing the marchers go by (ill 107),[1] while no doubt it reduced attacks on the Orangemen, was a typically English way of handling parades. Indeed many Northern Ireland Catholics, like the Ballymurphy woman in earlier years, continue to take a certain pleasure in the Orangemen's displays. There are few people in the province who can resist the appeal of a marching band, and in my own village there are staunch Catholics who will pack their sandwiches and flasks of tea every Twelfth in order not to miss a moment of the day's delights. Indeed some of the orange and green musical traditions are very close. Lambeg drums are occasionally carried in Hibernian processions, and at all times the rhythms played on them are those of traditional Irish dances, hornpipes, reels or jigs. While Catholics prefer the lighter, more fluid tapping of the bodhran, a small tambourine-like drum, played with a double-ended stick, the hand, or even the feet of a dancer, they frequent the same drum-makers (William Hewitt is the chief manufacturer of bodhrans as well as lambegs)[2] employ cocks

in their imagery[3] and can admire the fierce individuality of the lambeg players.

---

1. See also the photograph of screens at Belfast's Unity Flats in Belfast Telegraph, 5 August 1972, p. 1.
2. Mary E. McCusker, "The Enduring Skills", Outline Annual, West Belfast Historical Society, vol 2, 1976, p. 29.
3. The image of the cock is part of the symbolic traditions of Northern Ireland's Catholic community. Thus the emblems on eighteenth century penal crosses often include the cock and pot. However in this context the image refers to the traditional medieval association of the cock with the Resurrection rather than with Peter's denial. Moreover, although cock-fighting has been and continues to be engaged in by members of the province's Catholic community, I know of no Hibernian lambegs decorated with the cock emblem, and it appears never to have been employed by Catholics in the combative fashion favoured by Orangemen.

"Who but an Irishman would beat a Lambeg drum?" said Austin Currie, a member of the predominantly Catholic Social, Democratic and Labour Party in 1976, claiming that Protestants showed their Irishness by their very intransigence.[1]

Nevertheless there can be no doubt that drumming on Lambegs is often intended by Protestants as a taunt to their Catholic neighbours and is taken as such. When I visited William Hewitt to talk to him about the lambegs, there were two young lads in his workshop collecting a drum which had been fitted with a new head. The previous head had provoken, presumably as the result of fierce and provocative "blattering", just as they were marching past the small and beleaguered Catholic enclave of Short Strand in East Belfast.

Significantly however the greatest Catholic resentment of Lambeg drums is provoked by the playing of them when passing a house in which a death is being mourned. Not far from where I live the Orange Order refused the services of a local loyalist band after it had committed this offence, and in the summer of 1981 the Unionist MP Harold McCusker vigorously defended himself against charges that he and his companions had deliberately drummed outside both a house of mourning and the home of the recently-deceased H-block hunger striker, Raymond McCreesh.[2]

As in the past many members of the Catholic community, like their Protestant counterparts, appear to look on Orange parades as a kind of ritual game, played according to certain unwritten but well agreed rules.

---

1. Barry White, "Which way are the Catholics looking now?", Belfast Telegraph, 4 November 1976, p. 10.
2. Eileen O'Brien, "Selective drumming in Bessbrook," The Irish Times, Dublin, 14 July 1981, p. 6 and letter from Harold McCusker in The Irish Times, Dublin, 23 July 1981, p. 11. The importance of the boundaries within which Orangemen should operate is also discussed in Frank Wright, op cit, p. 250 and pp. 258-9.

And as in the past their greatest anger has been directed towards the government when it has been seen to deviate from the role of even-handed umpire. Time and time again Catholic newsheets have reiterated their support for the Orangemen's right to walk, while expressing bitter resentment at the Government's failure to allow them to do likewise. A caption to two photographs on the front page of the Provisionals' An Phoblacht for September 1970 is typical:

"TWO KINDS OF LAW: The Crown Forces use the German water cannon for the first time in Belfast's New Lodge Road area where Danny O'Hagan was murdered. But the Orangemen can break the parade ban and get away with it. More power to their guts but it illustrates the kind of law and order on which imperialistic divide-and-conquer rule is based."[1]

Indeed the ritualised game aspect of the Orange parades appears to be as important a part of their continuing appeal as their political function. This role of the parades does not appear to have been diminished by the rival attractions of football fever, pop music or paramilitary activity. Instead there has been a cross-fertilisation between Orange processional imagery and the displays associated with such groupings in recent years. Supporters of Protestant football teams have waved Ulster flags; Protestant street gangs have distinguished themselves with tartan scarves, identifying with the same Scottish traditions as the pipe-bands in the Orange parades; those bands have been interspersed with brass or accordion groups, playing pop tunes like Yellow Submarine or Viva España as well as more traditional Orange melodies; their youthful members have often mingled Orange and teenage culture in their passionate

---

1. This kind of comment is to be found also in Unfree Citizen, the newsheet of People's Democracy, and in Andersonstown News, the largely republican newsheet of the Andersonstown area of Belfast.

display of badges (ill 93); and walking along the pavements beside them there have been, in successive years, Bay City Roller fans with tartan decked clothes, or Protestant punks sporting red hand earrings.

To understand how this continuing cultural cross-fertilisation can take place it is necessary to have some awareness of the variety and cumulative effect of Orange parades. For the Twelfth of July procession is by no means the only public demonstration made by the Orange Order each year. Both Orangemen proper, and their brethren in the associated Apprentice Boys and Royal Black Preceptory, hold numerous celebrations during the summer marching season. It is, I think, salutary to give here brief descriptions of my experience of four such events in 1975, the Belfast street celebrations on Eleventh Night, the Twelfth of July parade through the city, the Royal Black Preceptory's procession and Sham Fight at Scarva on 13th July and the Apprentice Boys' commemoration of the Shutting of the Gates in Derry on 12th August. From the notes I made then I hope some of the variation in atmosphere and symbolism at these events will emerge.

"Belfast, the night of 11th July. Bonfires all over the city so that the sky is red with their blazing. In Sandy Row a street corner religious meeting is taking place amidst the milling crowds. First a man sings into the mike, then a girl with a piercingly sweet voice. Whole families are out on the street. The night is turned into day. But Aiken stands there, morose, saying it was a much better occasion six or eight years ago, that cars wouldn't have been allowed down the street then.

The Twelfth itself. From early morning people are walking down the side streets with their stools and chairs and cushions to claim a grand-stand view on the Lisburn Road. We wait hours. An old lady gives me tea, in a bone china cup, and biscuits. At last the procession comes into

view, headed by preachers in plastic sandwich boards, with banners crudely lettered in red on white with biblical texts. Piped gospel music is relayed from the vans and cars behind them. A long pause ensues before the arrival of the main procession. The endless succession of lodges pass by, complete with banners, bands, sashes and swords. Nearly all the banners feature King Billy; the other scenes are historical, moral and religious,   endlessly repetitious. It is a grey, heavy day and there is little air of enjoyment about the occasion. The march is slow, awkward, purposeful, the light touch being provided by the Bay City Rollers fans and the occasional band playing Yellow Submarine or Viva España instead of the traditional tunes. There are middle-aged women too, decked out in Union Jacks, dancing valiantly to the music, but they have the forced gaiety of set pieces who reappear each year.

At the field exhaustion strikes after the eight-mile march. There is little drunkenness and it is sheer fatigue which lays out row after row of middle-aged Orangemen on the grass in a sad stupor. There is litter everywhere. A sense of purposelessness reigns. Few listen to the speeches from the platforms.

The return march is a little gayer, despite the chilly weather. The banner carriers dance now, the teenage supporters link arms and sing their way alongside on the pavements. But there are still too many grey, drawn, peaky city faces, and laughter is a rare delight.

Scarva, 14th July. Brilliant sunshine and thunderous rain move over the beautiful farmland as incredible crowds pour their way good-naturedly into the tiny village of Scarva. Most of them are deeply-tanned farmers accompanied by their wives and children. The older men look sideways in sheer disbelief at the few city kids in their Bay City Rollers gear. The banners display religious subjects almost without exception. They climb

up the village street, past fairground stalls selling gaudy souvenirs
and baubles, then dive under the dappling avenue of trees and out into
the field, twisting round the courtyard of the castle. Disbanded, the
marchers flock into the tea tents. It is an archetypal village fete scene,
with the rain drumming on the canvas above, while strange assortments of
people sit around on orange boxes, eating ham sandwiches washed down by
endless cups of tea.

Afterwards the sham fight between the troops of "King Billy" and
"King James" is a gay, haphazard affair, performed with an offhand,
practised gusto, reminiscent of the best morris-dancers. The actors are
local farming men wearing sadly faded costumes and plumes. They are
mounted on stolid and presumably deaf horses who budge not an inch as the
green flag is ritually shot to tatters.

The bitterness of politics has no place here. There are no speeches.
A man collects for the Loyalist Prisoners Aid but is refused with a jest
by a Royal Black Preceptory friend. "I'm a prisoner myself", he quips. A
small girl puffs meditatively at a balloon which swells and deflates, the
words, 'Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life', appearing and
disappearing at her absent-minded whim.

Derry, 12th August.

There is joyful pandemonium. This is a far less organised affair
than Belfast or Scarva, with bands marching and countermarching everywhere
along the waterside and up through the steep narrow streets above.
Standing at any one point you are surrounded by their conflicting, violent
rhythms. There are not a vast number of banners, but many flags and
bannerettes. Nearly all display events connected with the Siege of Derry.
There are no King Billys or religious scenes.

There is much less gang mentality than is apparent in Belfast.

Teenagers either form part of the bands or roam together in twos and threes. Often they are fantastically decked with loyalist badges of every description. Even children in prams have the Union Jack. There is a family atmosphere, a sense of holiday, as the sun blazes down and we sit on the grass. The oppressive division between performers and audience which is so apparent in Belfast is lacking here. Instead, partly because the 'audience' is far smaller, there is much more participation and intermingling; people wander through and across the bands at will. There is some drunkenness but little of it violent or morose. Here they dance in the streets and march up and down for the hell of it, not with that grim, masochistic determination so evident in Belfast.

The setting contributes to the occasion. Always, behind the bands, glimpsed through the narrow streets, there is the beauty of the river, with the city rising behind it, and beyond again, the hills. As the last train departs the rain descends, drifting gently over the city."[1]

Not only the variety but the cumulative effect of these events has to be remembered. For each Orangeman the year is marked not only by the regular ritual and conviviality of lodge meetings but also by a familiar cycle of public and semi-public celebrations, centred on the summer months. Between Easter and the end of August his calendar is marked by a succession of such events, Easter parades, banner unfurlings, band competitions, the opening of arches, church parades, the commemoration of the Battle of the Somme, the Little Twelfth, Eleventh Night, the Twelfth, Scarva, the Apprentice Boys Derry parade, the Royal Black Preceptory's processions on 12 August - and finally there is the Apprentice Boys'

---

1. The trouble came later. So riotous were some of the by now very drunken Apprentice Boys on the train to Belfast, that they were removed by the police half-way along the route. Ironically the sermon delivered to them before their parade had contained a lengthy indictment of the evils of drink.

Lundy-burning in Derry on 18 December.

If one takes into account the amount of preparation and practise this all involves - our local Orange band practises two nights a week during the summer months - the cumulative impact on the life of any one Orangeman and his relatives and friends must be seen as very considerable.

The sheer cost of all this display also entails a considerable investment in terms of money or money-raising. The Orange Order no longer binds its members together by the money it pays out to them. The friendly society functions of insurance against illness, unemployment and funeral costs which it performed in the nineteenth century have been taken over by the Welfare State, and it has not ventured into any modern equivalent such as the provision of credit unions. But the collection of funds to cover the ever-rising cost of parades still binds its members together. Banners require replacing at least every thirty years and are now extremely expensive. The London firm of Tutill's which in the late 1970s was supplying approximately 20 of the 50 new banners sought by the Orangemen each year,[1] charges between £875 and £1650 for a full-sized one;/Bridgett's and Bobby Anderson charge about £600 to £800; amateurs normally come cheaper. Other marching expenses have also risen. Sashes and collarettes have more than quadrupled in price during the past ten years and bands can cost anything from £20 for a church parade to £200 for the Belfast Twelfth, plus food, drink and transport. Funds are raised by membership dues of approximately £12 to £14 a year.[2] Collections

---

1. "The cost of a walk to the field", News Letter, 12 July 1977, p. 4.
2. Ibid and David McKittrick, "The cost of music hits the lodges", The Irish Times, Dublin, 8 July 1978 p. 5.

during parades also bring in useful cash; loss of such income made the

banning of parades particularly unpopular. On 28 October 1970 the Grand

Lodge of Ireland said that several thousands of pounds had been lost to

its charities because of the ban on parades.[1] Nevertheless the ritual

regalia still persists. Even the swords are still carried, though they

can now cost £300 each.[2]

The elaborate display of Orange parades unites the Order's

membership by virtue of their contributions towards its purchase, and

their fierce sense of pride in their local lodge.[3] It also remains a

major social attraction, both for the actual members and for their

families and friends. The elderly farmer in his best suit with his old,

and lovingly preserved sash; the young bandsman strutting in his jacket

and kilt, eyed by adoring teeny-boppers; the Sandy Row drum majorette with

her high white boots and flashing thighs; the women dressed entirely in

Union Jacks, who dance alongside the parade on the Twelfth (ill 67) -

all these for their various reasons enjoy the dressing-up. In all sorts

of ways it forms part of their social networks. Mothers knit King Billy

jerseys for their teenage sons to wear to the parades; those sons court

their girlfriends after the processions and band-practices in which

they've both taken part, dressed to kill. Family firms paint the drums

and the banners, on which several generations of an Orange family may be

represented.[4] Disparate geographical and social groups are still united

by their involvement in the Order. Lodges from Donegal and Glasgow,

---

1. Deutsch and Magowan, op cit, vol 1, p. 796.
2. Conversation with a supplier of Orange regalia, 6 Dec 1979.
3. See Harris, op cit, pp. 132-133.
4. S.A Armstrong, "A Family and a Banner", in S.E Long and W.M Smyth, The Twelfth, Grand Orange Lodge of Belfast, 1967, p. 30.

Antrim and Derry all take part. There are temperance lodges and bold

drinking men, red-faced farmers and pasty Ulster Defence Association men,

Church of Ireland clergymen and Presbyterian ministers, members of

parliament and shipyard workers.

The functions of Orange parades have changed since the onset of the

present troubles. Because of the break-up of the Unionist Party, the

decline in membership of the Orange Order and the emergence of other forms

of Protestant street protest, the traditional processions are no longer a

realistic representation of Protestant working-class control of the

political leadership. Nevertheless a wide section of Northern Ireland's

Protestant community continues to use and develop the imagery associated

with the Orange parades. And, as we shall see in the next section, that

imagery also continues to affect the ways of seeing of many Northern

Ireland Protestants who reject any overt links with Orangeism.

The wider impact of Orange symbolism

In this section I am going to argue that not only has Orange symbolism

retained most of its traditional roles during the present troubles, but

that the ways of seeing associated with it have crucially affected

Protestant views of the conflict. In order to demonstrate this I will

discuss troubles imagery produced by three groupings in the Protestant

community, schoolchildren, paramilitaries and professional painters.

In January 1974 I removed a painting from the wall of a secondary

school classroom in West Belfast (ill 102). The imagery employed in it

can be analysed in a number of ways. In the first place it can be

related to the immediate circumstances of that time. The slogan over

the death's head almost certainly refers to a threat by Loyalist politicians
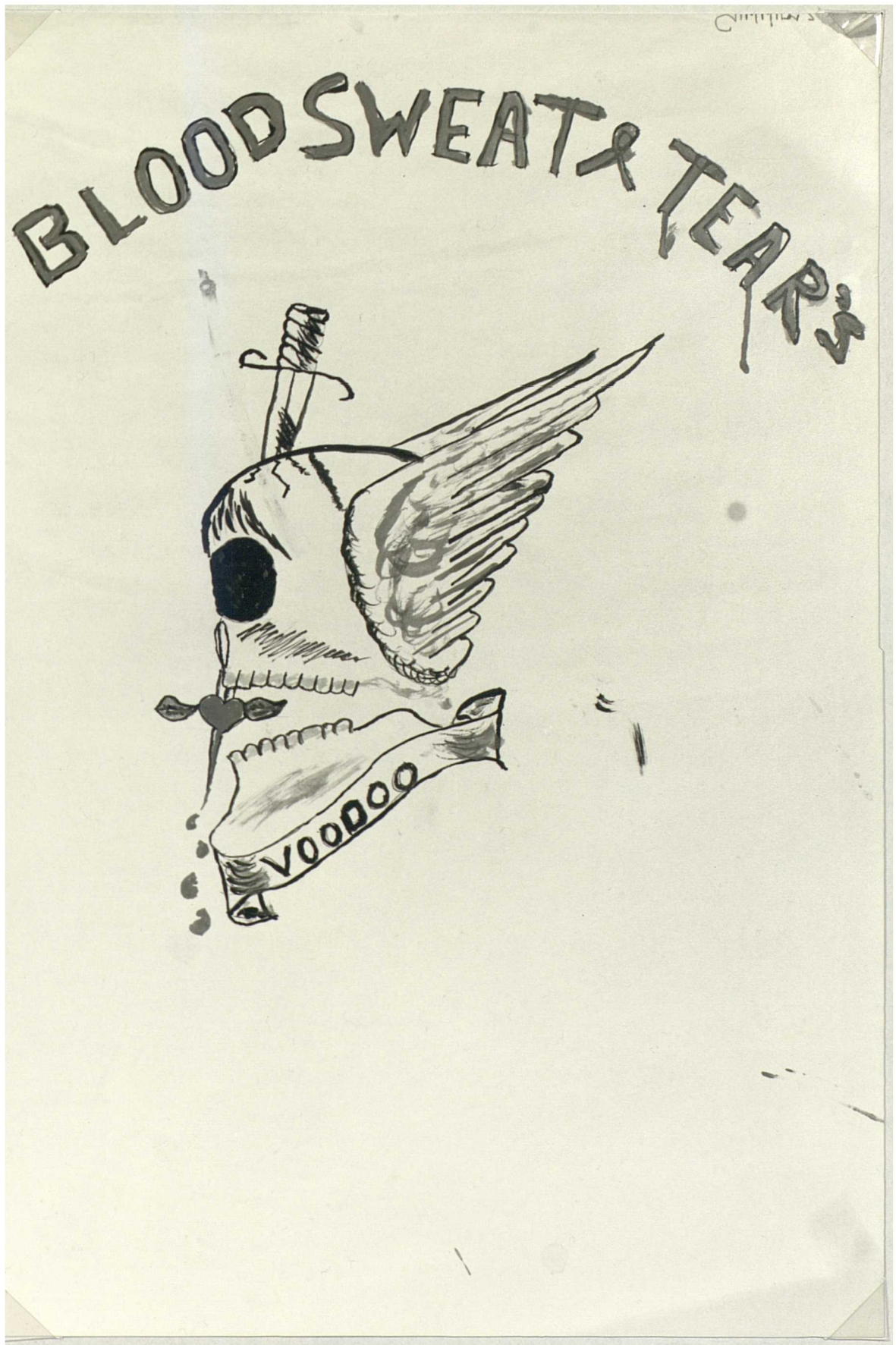
102. Child's painting from Protestant secondary
school in West Belfast/Jan 1974/gouache on
paper/Collection B. Loftus/Photo: Chris
Coppock

that there would be a day of "blood, sweat and tears" in Northern

Ireland.[1] And the word "Voodoo" underneath the symbol of death is

probably there because of the rumours of black magic practices

circulating in Belfast following the discovery of a particularly gruesome

child murder in September 1973.[2]

In the second place one could see the symbolism of this picture as

part of a general teenage cult of the death's head, disseminated across

the Western world through such images as tattoos and Hell's Angel badges.

And one might well conclude that recourse to such emblems would have been

encouraged by the lack of anything much in the way of alternatives. The

school in which the painting was produced was in an extremely troubled

area. Teaching in it during this period was largely a question of

policing. Former excursions to exhibitions, the railway station, furniture

shops or the hillsides behind the school had been abandoned because of the

troubles, as had exchanges of artwork with other schools. Matters did not

improve until the late 1970s which brought a decline in violence,

improved staffing, a better art syllabus, and the resumption of regular

exhibitions of artwork drawn from schools all over the province.[3]

However explaining the symbolism of this painting by reference to

immediate events, general teenage fashions or cultural deprivation is not

sufficient. For while this picture is similar to many produced by

members of Northern Ireland's Protestant community since 1968, it has

virtually no equivalent in Catholic troubles imagery. Not only were the

---

1. The threat was reported in The Times, 14 Jan 1974.
2. See "Probe into black magic in Ardoyne", Sunday News, Belfast 23 Sept
   1973, p. 1; Ed Moloney, "Kincora police reopen child murder case",
   The Irish Times, Dublin, 1 March 1982, p. 1; and "Murder link to
   Kincora denied", The Irish Times, 2 March 1982, p. 5.
3. These have been shown at the headquarters of the Arts Council of
   Northern Ireland in Belfast since the autumn of 1975.

walls of the artroom from which the emblem was taken covered with similar paintings, but images like it were commonplace in the work of Protestant schoolchildren at that time. In 1973 the Irish National Teachers Organisation ran a competition amongst schoolchildren for a poster to be titled "Sectarianism Divides, Friendship Makes Sense." Although the organisation is predominantly Catholic, a fair number of entries were received from Protestant schools, particularly Protestant secondary schools. Some of the symbols they used, such as the colours orange and green, barbed wire, flags and explosions, were shared with their Catholic counterparts. In general too, older children tended to be more concerned with graves, coffins and skulls, regardless of their religious affiliation. But while the Catholic children painted endless figurative scenes relating to their religion or to street violence, (ill 287), the Protestant entries were remarkable for their abstract symbolism. Crosses, doves, hearts, handshakes, maps, daggers and fighting cocks proliferated in their work, with only the occasional British soldier to give some human interest. A simple explanation of this division in imagery would run as follows; Protestant teachers have habitually banned direct representations of the troubles, particularly during the early 1970s, in order to preserve their schools as havens of peace. However repressed emotions will out, and the children in these schools have expressed their feelings in symbols which technically obeyed the ban, and were an easily available part of teenage culture in the Western world.

But this culturally neutral interpretation is insufficient. It does not explain why hearts, daggers, swords and skulls have also been lacking from adult troubles imagery in Northern Ireland's Catholic community. The only examples of such emblems in republican imagery that

I can recall are a Provisional Sinn Fein poster of a Union Jack bleeding

on a skull and crossbones,[1] a curious symbol in an Official Sinn Fein

newsheet, which appears to be loosely based on the emblems of organisa-

tions like the SAS or certain American regiments (ill 103),[2] and the

crossed swords tattooed on the arm of a participant in the Official Sinn

Fein Bodenstown commemoration in June 1975. (Significantly none of the

handicrafts produced by republican internees in the aftermath of the 1916

rising or in recent years have turned to symbols of dreadful secrecy.

Instead they have employed Sacred Heart imagery or the gentler hearts and

arrows of secular love).[3]

For the very existence of bans on representation of the troubles by

Protestant schoolchildren points us to an understanding of this painting.

It has been produced by a member of a community in which there is not only

political embarassment about the troubles in themselves, but also cultural

embarassment about making anything resembling "graven images." In such

an atmosphere reversion to the symbols of dreadful secrecy so long

associated with the traditions of the Orange Order, as well as with

successive youth groups, is very understandable.

Indeed such symbols were by this time also being used in the badges

and emblems of the Protestant paramilitaries, whose members included many

former pupils of the school in which this painting was produced. The

skull and crossbones was featured in internee glass-paintings on view in

1. In the Linen Hall Library, Belfast. This poster was displayed in the
    Ardoyne area of Belfast in the early 1970s.
2. See Ronald Scutt and Christopher Gotch, Skin Deep, Peter Davies 1974,
    p. 71.
3. In the National Museum in Dublin the Sacred Heart appears on a wooden
    plaque made in Frongoch internment camp in 1916 and on a Derry
    prison prayer card dating from 1921. A heart pierced with arrows,
    accompanied by tricolour, harp and shamrocks, is painted on a 1923
   handkerchief from Port Laoise gaol, also in the National Museum.
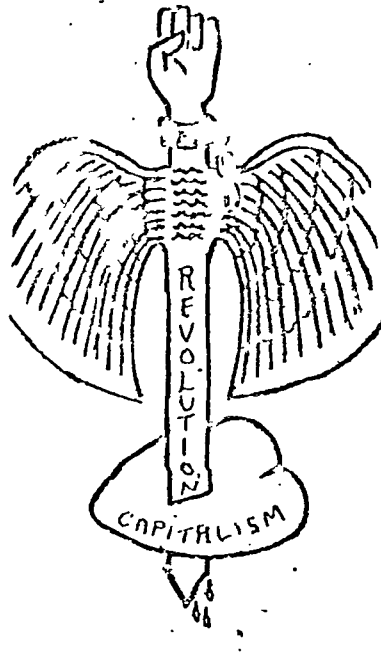
103. Drawing in An Eochair, Official Sinn Fein newsheet,
no 8, p6/ca 1973/actual size/Linen Hall Library,
Belfast.

the Ulster Defence Association's Loyalist Prisoners Aid shop in the summer of 1975, and the red hands and eagles heads featured in some of the other paintings by children in this school, were also being used in UDA badges at that time. Loyalist symbols used during present troubles have also reflected to a remarkable extent the influence of the heraldic imagery and fragmented, dehumanised style of seeing so strongly associated with Orange visual traditions. The most striking example is an emblem frequently used in Orange Cross, a newsheet produced to raise funds for the imprisoned and interned members of the outlawed Ulster Volunteer Force (ill 104).   In a triumph of superimposition a man's face is successively covered by a cross, a six-pointed star, a hand and a neat grid of prison bars.

To any eye accustomed to the usual prisoner symbolism of hands clutching bars, or figures trapped in cells, which has been internationally current since the cold war years of the 1950s, this emblem, with its complete suppression of human appeal is, to say the least, startling. It is as well therefore to emphasise its typicality. Certainly there have been a number of loyalist internee images which differ from it very greatly. Occasionally the loyalist newsheets have depicted the face or
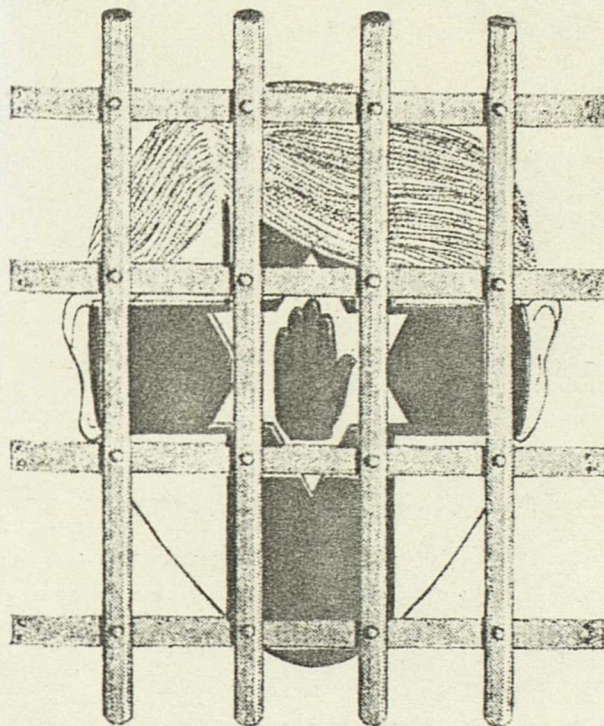
104. Loyalist Prisoners symbol in Orange Cross, new-
     sheet of the Ulster Volunteer Force, ca 1974/actual
     size/Linen Hall Library, Belfast.

the silhouette of a prisoner behind bars.[1] More frequently the painted

handkerchiefs and leather-goods produced by loyalist prisoners have

depicted traditional religious imagery, such as the Last Supper, Orange

emblems like William III and the Dee Street arch, Walt Disney cartoon

characters, Kung Fu fighters or scenes from sunny Spain.[2] But neat,

heraldic imagery does characterise a very considerable proportion of

Protestant internee symbolism. The banner made by the UDA for their

Twelfth of July parade in Long Kesh in 1974 has a realistic depiction of

the internees drawn up before their nissen huts but the heraldic flags

they carry are prominently featured.[3] Similarly, on another UDA banner

smuggled out of Long Kesh in the same year, a representation of the

prison camp is flanked by two red hands dripping blood, the official

symbol of that organisation's Loyalist Prisoners Association.[4] And in

1975 the UDA calendar carried a blurred photo of Long Kesh internees with

a flag on which the red hand, red cross and pointed star feature

prominently.[5]

Clearly the Orange Cross symbol is fairly typical of the continuing

predilection during the present troubles of Ulster loyalists for heraldic

imagery. But why is this so? Why have they not been influenced by the

type of prisoner imagery so long familiar in international politics?

The simple explanation would be that loyalists lack the tradition

1. Orange Cross, no 69, n.d, ca February 1975. See also Combat vol 2 no 2, January 1975 and the Ulster Defence Association Christmas card for 1976, reproduced in "Season's greetings from behind the wire", Irish Times, 23 Dec 1976, p. 5.
2. These are all subjects I have seen on loyalist internee crafts in the Loyalist Prisoners Aid shop in the UDA headquarters on the Newtownards Road, and other loyalist shops on the Shankill Road and in Sandy Row. See also the advertisement in Orange Cross, no 49, ca March 1974 and the few loyalist handkerchiefs owned by the Linen Hall Library.
3. illustrated in Hayes-McCoy, op cit, p. 233. The banner is in the Ulster Museum, Belfast.
4. Photo in United Irishman, Dublin, Sept 1974, p. 9.
5. Author's collection.

of imprisonment which exists in the republican community[1] and that it was not until well into the 1970s that they had any contact with outside organisations which employed the by then cliched images of hands and bars, or figures in prison cells.

Prior to 1973,[2] virtually no Ulster Protestants had experience of being imprisoned or interned for their political beliefs, although since then that experience has affected a sizeable proportion of their community. The need to raise funds to support prisoners and their families has driven loyalists, like republicans, to heavy involvement in the sale of craft-goods, magazines, Christmas cards and calendars,[3] but for the imagery employed they have turned to visual traditions with no particular association with internment or imprisonment.

Moreover, whereas republican organisations had numerous contacts with leftwing groups outside Ireland from the late 1960s, and assimilated the prolific protest imagery of that period via free designs carried out by foreign sympathisers, or straightforward plagiarism and imitation,[4] it was not until the mid-1970s that loyalists began to establish such contacts. It was in November 1974 that the Ulster Defence Association

1. See below, p.517ff.
2. 5 February 1973 saw the internment of the first loyalists since the outbreak of the current troubles. See Deutsch and Magowan op cit, vol 2, 1972-3, Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 1974, p. 269, entry for 5 Feb 1973 and John McGuffin, Internment, Anvil, Tralee, 1973, p.167.
3. In Orange Cross, no 75, 28 Feb 1975, it was stated that £7,000 worth of leather handicrafts had been sold since April 1974, making a total of £20,000 worth since sales commenced in 1971. Also in 1975 the normally reliable Northern correspondent of the Irish Times estimated that the average expenditure by loyalist paramilitaries on support of a loyalist prisoner and his family was £100 a week, which, with a total of some 500 loyalists then behind bars, meant a total of £5,000 each week to be found between the two main loyalist organisations the UDA and the UVF (David McKittrick "Politics are always about economics", Irish Times, 30 June 1975).
4. See below, p.560ff.

sent a deputation to Libya to seek funds from the Ghadafi regime, and

since then both the UDA and the Ulster Volunteer Force have made close

studies of foreign political struggles both past and present.[1]

Yet even after years of imprisonment and internment and the growth

of interest in political struggles outside the Irish area, loyalist

prisoner symbolism and indeed loyalist imagery in general has remained

markedly dominated by local heraldic traditions. The reasons why this is

so becomes more readily apparent if one considers not only the heraldic

content of these images but also their general style, and the non-heraldic

elements incorporated in them. The style of the Orange Cross emblem is

one of superimposition and obsessive neatness. The non-heraldic elements

in it are the man's face obliterated by the heraldry and the grid of

prison bars clamped over it.

The superimposition is not simply derived from the Ulster flag, for

it appears in a number of other recent loyalist symbols, notably the

emblem of Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party (ill 216). It seems

to me that one reason for it is the fragmented nature of the symbolism

derived by Ulster Protestants from Renaissance and Reformation imagery.[2]

Clearly the scattered symbols found in Orange imagery required

reorganisation for effective propaganda. Given Protestant inhibitions

about "graven images" this kind of superimposition was one possible way

of achieving such a reorganisation. This semi-religious suspicion of

figurative, arty or romantic imagery may also go some way to explain the

---

1. There have been frequent comments on international politics in Ulster,
       the latest UDA newsheet, which commenced publication in 1978. And
       when I visited the UVF headquarters in Belfast in 1980 one of the
       men I met there was reading a study of the Cyprus question.
2. See above, p. 233ff.

manner in which the prisoner's face in the Orange Cross symbol is blotted

out by the emblems piled on top of it.

The general neatness of this symbol must, I think, be chiefly due

to the traditional involvement of Ulster loyalists in Northern Ireland's

leading industries of linen, engineering and shipbuilding. That neat

grid of prison bars with every rivet hammered home becomes more

understandable if one remembers not only the checkerboard floors of

Masonic and Orange charts of imagery (ills 71 & 75) but also the weavers'

warp and weft, the squared designs woven into linen damask (ill 94),

the precise drawings of designers in Belfast's shipyard, aircraft and

engineering industries,[1] the painstakingly accurate work of the men

employed in them, and the stress by Unionist politicians, from the 1890s

onwards, on this skill and neatness as a distinguishing mark of the

Protestant Ulstermen, which set them apart from the careless, rural

Catholic natives, and marked them out as leading members of Britain's

industrial empire.[2] Significantly, the shop assistant selling me loyalist

internee handkerchiefs in Sandy Row apologised for the slightly messy

execution of a rather romantic scene of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,

and insisted on reducing the price of it for me because of what she

obviously felt was poor workmanship. Clearly it was not, in that revealing

Ulster phrase, sufficiently "Protestant-looking."

Finally I think one must recognise in the Orange Cross symbol and

similar loyalist emblems employed during the present troubles, an

obsession with legitimacy which has dominated the visual traditions of

this community from their very inception. The heraldry is piled on, the

---

1. There is a fine collection of ship designs in the Ulster Folk and
   Transport Museum at Cultra, Co Down.
2. See Patterson, op cit, pp. 20-27 and Gibbon, op cit, pp. 132-6.

prison bars neatened and the prisoner concealed so as to emphasise the lawfulness of the symbol's appeal. To have used a figure clutching bars or a clenched fist of solidarity would have looked too much like defiance of the state and association with the imagery of the republicans.

Lest it be concluded that these speculations are based on a single piece of evidence I would like to cite one further image which demonstrates the persistence in recent loyalist emblems of both the symbols and ways of seeing associated with the Orange visual tradition. In November 1976 some members of the Ulster Defence Association produced a booklet supporting the concept of an independent Ulster, a concept which was fairly revolutionary for members of a community so traditionally espoused to maintenance of the link with mainland Britain. Yet although the cover of the booklet proclaimed "Ulster can survive unfettered", the image on it (ill 105) retained the chains traditionally used to symbolise the Orangemen's bond of loyalty to one another and the link between Ulster and Britain, patterning them into a neat grid superimposed on the map of Northern Ireland. It seems as though yet again embarassment about a departure from accepted Protestant politics, together with the strength of Orange visual traditions, prevented the use of a more dynamic and appropriate image such as say, figures representative of Ulster Protestants and Catholics severing chains linking them to both mainland Britain and the Republic of Ireland.

Indeed the persistence of Orange visual traditions within the Protestant community since the onset of the present troubles extends far beyond sub-groups like schoolchildren and paramilitaries who, to a certain extent, reproduce the inturned, secretive world of the Orange Order. Songs about Union Jacks and Irish tricolours have had a widespread

YOUR FUTURE ?
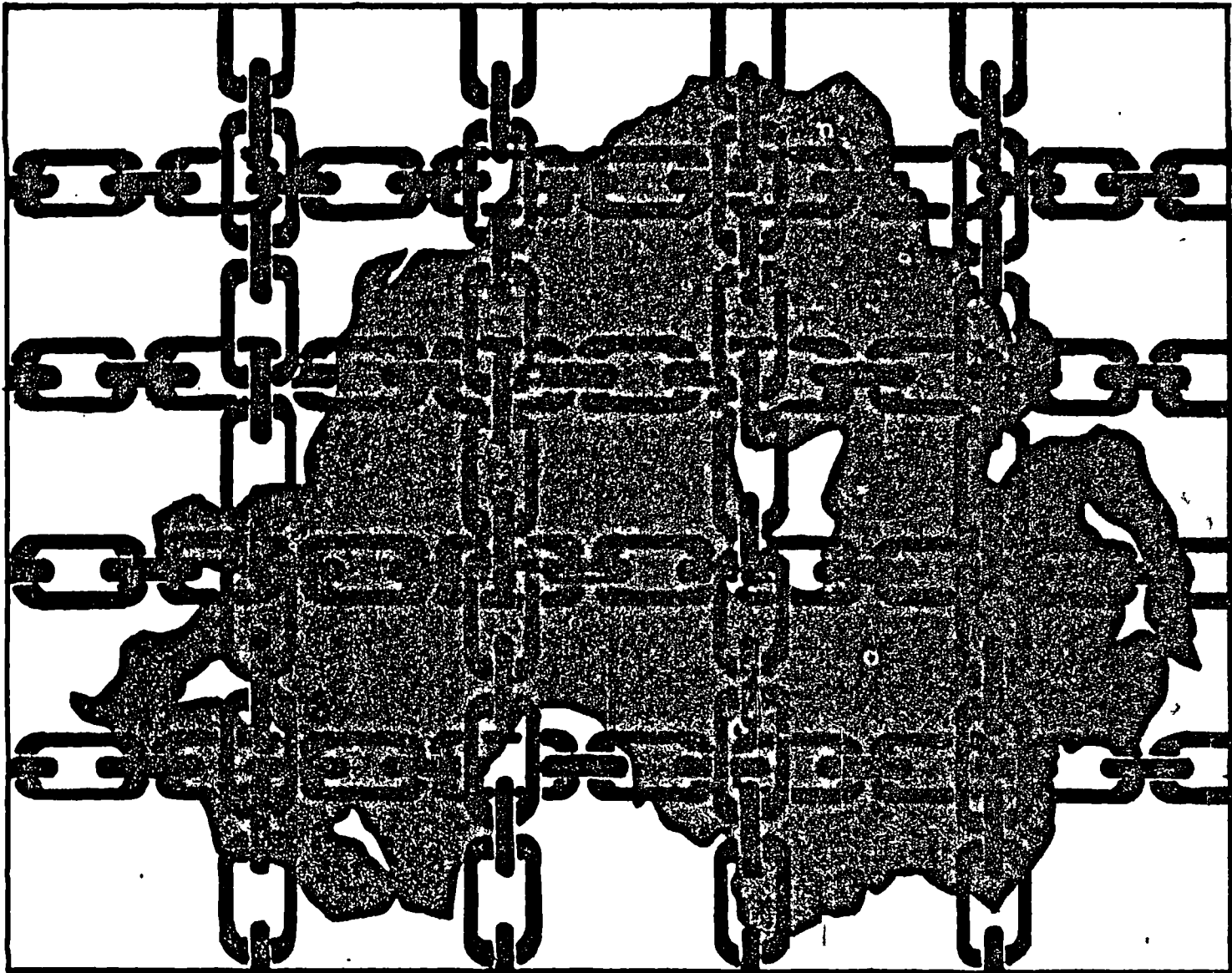
ULSTER
can survive
UNFETTERED -

105. Cover of pamphlet issued by Ulster Loyalist
Central Co-Ordinating Committee/1976/black and
green on yellow/actual size/Collection: B. Loftus

popularity since 1968.[1] Children group coloured shapes to make these flags,[2] and jokes about orange and green have been abundant.

Indeed so embedded is awareness of such imagery in the Protestant consciousness that it may be perceived in places where it was never intended. Mike Catto records a typical incident:

"... my admiration of a delightful still life by the Ulster/Scots painter William Scott was cut short one day, when a stranger turned to me and fulminated against the work because the colour scheme juxtaposed a (dull) orange shape with white and green shapes. This was seen as a hidden reference to the Irish Tricolour; ergo Scott must be a closet republican, ergo the painting was a bad painting. QED."[3]

There is a certain validity to this observation as we shall see in Chapter 7. However art critics in Northern Ireland have been equally guilty of deliberate aesthetic myopia in their unwillingness to see any relationship between orange or green visual traditions and the work of fine artists in the province. It will be my argument that such a relationship does exist and has had a crucial effect on the works of a number of local artists depicting the present troubles.

At first sight this argument may appear difficult to sustain. Direct representations of Orange imagery by Northern Ireland artists are rare. Prior to the present troubles, there was only one of any significance, Sir John Lavery's The Twelfth of July, Portadown, 1928

---

1. See Whyte, McCorry and Smyth, op cit, and Children in Crossfire, first screened on BBC1 on 12 March 1974.
2. "Asked to group coloured shapes, Belfast 10-year olds ignored their form and grouped them in colours of the Union Jack and the Irish tricolour - unlike contemporaries in Europe and the US, where younger children concentrate on colours and older children on form." (Barry White, "The Troubles and our Children: The grim facts", Belfast Telegraph, 23 March 1977, p. 12).
3. Mike Catto, "Making Sense of Ulster", Art and Artists, Feb 1980, p. 9.

(ill 106).[1] Lavery was an Ulster emigré artist of Catholic extraction,

and in recent years artists from the province's Catholic community appear

to have found it easier to make direct representations of the Orangemen

and their regalia than have their Protestant counterparts. Indeed

painters like Brian Ferran, Joe McWilliams and Fergal McConnell have at

various times demonstrated a kind of fascination by this subject-matter.

Brian Ferran's interest in Orange parades started in the early

1960s when he made his Paper Tiger series of flat, coloured cut-outs,

rather like Japanese origami, in response to the Paisleyite demonstrations

of the period. This was before he had even seen his first Orange parade,

in Belfast in 1966. In the early 1970s he returned to the theme. After

persuading his wife to photograph a number of the parades in 1972, he made

a series of paintings of Orangemen in which he explored the power of

simple, formal shapes, which carry emotive references to flags, badges,

banners and medals.

Joe McWilliams' first representations of Orangemen were made in the

early 1970s, when he started to paint his immediate reactions to the

violence going on around him, often working on the spot. He was

fascinated by the drama of the streets, and particularly by the flamboyant

roles played in it by Orangemen and British soldiers. He treated

photographs of Orangemen with methylated spirits, to give them a faded

look, before decorating them with a bravura display of regalia.[2] A few

years subsequently, in 1975, he made a more complex painting of an

Orange procession, titled Orangemen passing Unity Flats (ill 107). It

shows the neat feet of the marchers twinkling beneath the canvas screens

1. In the early years of this century William Conor also made a number of
    studies of Orange processions. These are in the Ulster Folk Museum
    at Cultra in Co Down. One of them is illustrated in Hewitt, Art in
    Ulster: 1, p. 89.
2. The Faded Orangeman, July 1971.

106. Sir John Lavery/The Twelfth of July, Portadown,
     1928/oil on canvas/25 x 30 ins (63.5 x 76.2 cms)/
     Ulster Museum/postcard:UM.

used by the Army to prevent Catholics from seeing the parades passing so close to their home territory. Not only does McWilliams show that the screens are a kind of ludicrous parody of the Orangemen's banners;[1] he also turns them into an eloquent symbol of the restraints applied on the violence of the past thirteen years, by representing them with pieces of canvas stuck down onto the picture surface. The viewer longs to rip them off, like itchy plasters, breaking the barriers between the confused, menacing shapes moving in the shadows on his side, and the sunlit world beyond. Just so does any observer of Ulster's troubles long from time to time to see the artificial constraints removed and cathartic meetings occur.

Fergal McConnell. while a student at the Belfast College of Art in the late 1970s and early 1980s, became fascinated by the flags carried by Orangemen and their republican counterparts and made a number of paintings using them. In one he simply placed together the Union Jack, the tricolour, the Ulster flag and the Starry Plough, showing them through the white flecks of flying debris often present at demonstrations. In another piece he used the Union Jack alone, but showed it both in its natural colours and painted green, white and orange. This he related to his feeling that there are very few Ulstermen, even Protestants, who do not think of themselves as Irish. The flags in this work are successively photocopied, so that ultimately they fade away, just as media imagery of the troubles has a gradually fading and blurring effect. Sometimes he used his own photographs of riots and demonstrations, which he was able to take with relative lack of harassment from the upstairs window of his home on the Falls Road, One that he is particularly fond of shows a

---

1. Catto, op cit, pp. 133-135.
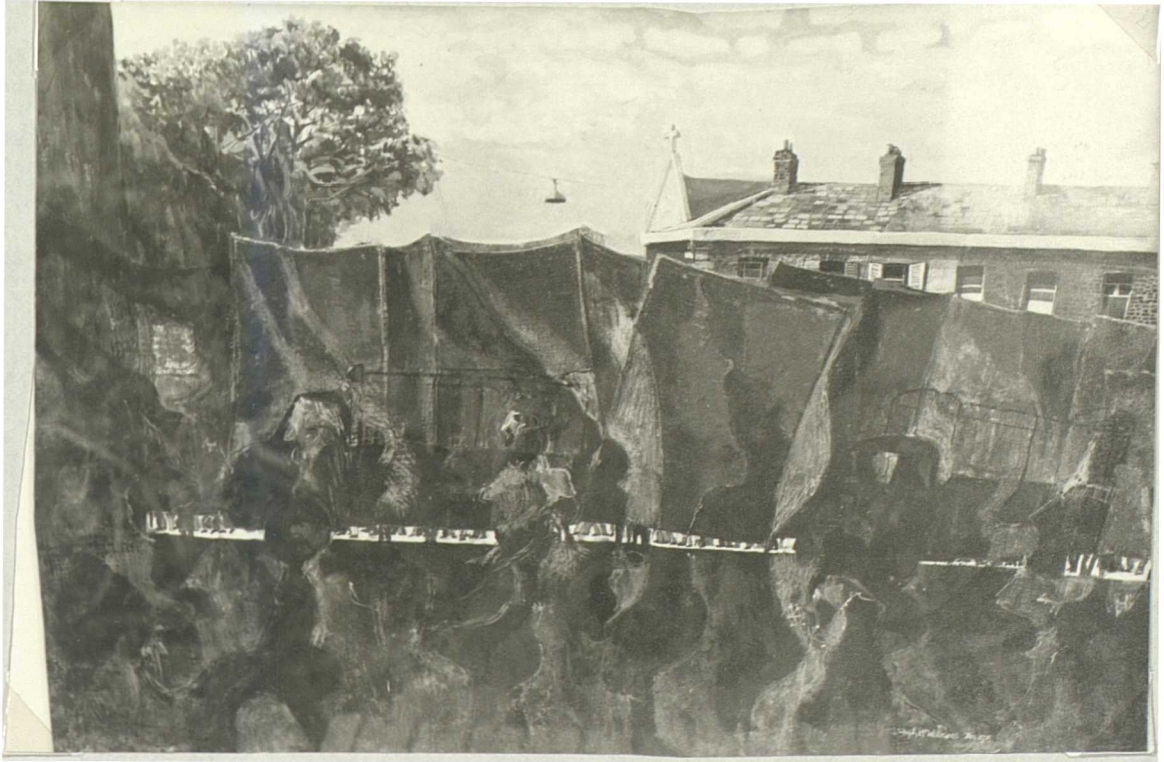
107. Joe McWilliams/Orangemen passing Unity Flats/1975/
     mixed media/15³/4 x 26 ins (40 x 66 cms)/Private
     Collection/Photo: Sean Watters.

colour-party at the head of a republican parade, seen through curtains

blowing in the breeze. This he feels gives a very honest statement of

his role as a spectator. In one particular picture where he has used it,

he has emphasised the grid-markings on the road, so clearly apparent

from above, picking them out in orange and green (ill 108). These

checkerboard patterns and the way people move across them like chessmen

are fascinating to him, for he sees in them an image of the way participants

in the Northern Ireland troubles have been pieces in a grim game.

Ferran, McWilliams and McConnell display certain shared character-

istics in their handling of the Orangemen and their regalia. They have

found no difficulty in approaching this subject-matter, indeed they have

been fascinated by it; their handling of it has been based, at least in

part, on direct observation; they have found the Orangemen's imagery

aesthetically exciting; and they have seen Orange marches as part of a

game or drama.

These characteristics are markedly different from those displayed

by artists from the Protestant community who have made works relating to

the Orangemen and their regalia since the onset of the present troubles.

They have found it very difficult to approach this subject matter;

until very recently they have tended to handle it in a highly abstract

manner, and have not derived any aesthetic pleasure from the Orangemen's

imagery; and although they have also tended to see the Orangemen as

participants in a game, their emphasis has been on its grim nature.

In the early years of the present troubles three artists from a

Protestant background made approaches to Orangeism and its imagery, all

provoked by particularly disturbing events or chains of events. In 1970

Colin Middleton, an artist of long-established stature in the province,

made a small series of paintings and drawings relating to the conflict,

108. Fergal McConnell/Republican Parades/Collage/
      Present whereabouts unknown/Photo: B. Loftus

of which <u>Angry Shapes</u> (ill 109) was the most important. It followed on a period in which Middleton had been completely unable to paint, as a result of the turmoil surrounding him. He was appalled by the violence in itself;[1] he felt unable to identify with either extreme republicanism or extreme loyalism; and in particular he felt sadly betrayed by Paisley and his followers. In the end it was only indirectly that he could come to terms with the role of Orangeism and loyalism in the troubles. He told me[2] that the subject-matter of <u>Angry Shapes</u> came almost by chance, when he was doing a drawing of a weathervane which gradually, with a certain malicious humour, came to refer to Ian Paisley. It is a grimly playful work. A big black shape, reminiscent both of Paisley's massive features, and of the huge Lambeg drums, is followed by marching and skipping legs decorated with harlequin patterns, while above lour shadows of the leader. The miniature parade is like a veering weathervane, going nowhere. Middleton has always been a witty painter, using ornamentation and quotations with the skill of a jazz-player (many of the titles of his paintings indicate a fondness for jazz).[3] This game is not funny however. Talking about it he said that he saw Ulster politics as a play with no comedians.[4]

Denis McBride comes from a mixed background. It was the introduction of internment in August 1971 which jolted him into making direct use in his work of the imagery associated with Orangeism. Wanting to show how the Ulster working poeple were tearing each other apart, he made a piece titled <u>Ulster Bouquet</u>, in which a little box contains a section of an old grey working shirt, with a Union Jack used as a

---

1. In 1941 Middleton had also found himself unable to paint for a period of six months following the terrible Easter blitz on Belfast.
2. Conversation in January 1974.
3. Catto, <u>op cit</u>, pp. 28-9.
4. Conversation in January 1974.
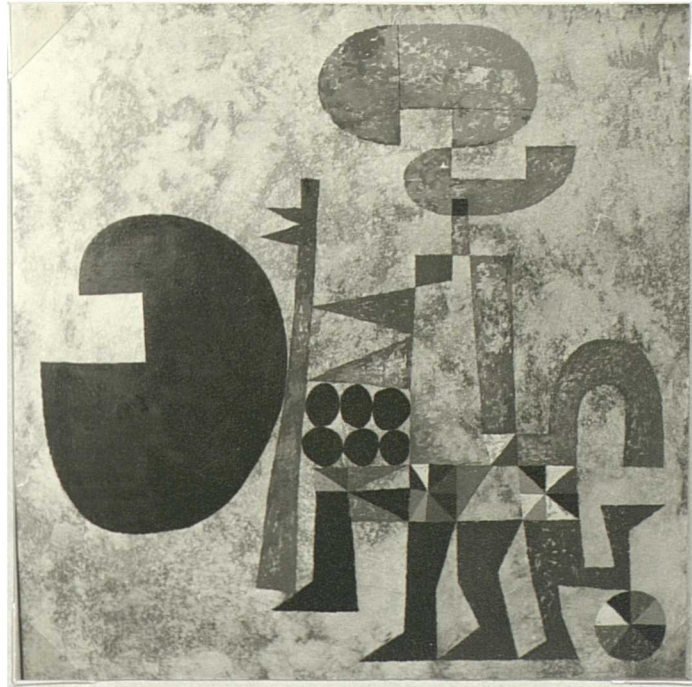
109. Colin Middleton/Angry Shapes I/1970/oil on board/
     23³/4 x 23³/4 ins (60 x 60 cms)/Ulster Arts Club,
     Belfast/Photo: Sean Watters.

cravat.[1] Its stark directness makes this work very different from McBride's usual oblique and gentle handling of the troubles.

It was the rapidly-escalating violence in the second half of 1971 which prompted Roy Johnston, an artist generally absorbed in highly technical abstract works, to make a single piece dealing with the symbolic traditions of his community. A conceptual work, intended for the Concrete Poetry exhibition shown in the Ulster Museum in the winter of 1971-2, it consisted of an orange square with the word orange written in green on it, and a green square with the word green written in orange on it, to be hung as far apart as possible.

These three pieces of work by Middleton, McBride and Johnston were all isolated from the rest of their output; they were provoked by extreme circumstances; and they dealt with the Orangemen and their imagery in an abstract rather than a representational fashion. In the late 1970s two younger artists from the Protestant community made more full-scale, overt explorations of this imagery while they were studying at the Belfast College of Art. But the work of both was influenced by the aura of secrecy and reticence surrounding Orange symbolism.

Colin McGookin has very close links with Orange traditions. His grandparents were in the Orange Order, and as a child he was taken to Orange parades. The popular imagery associated with Orangeism was also familiar to him in his youth. Nearly all the boys at his school in Bangor visited Sailor Bill, the travelling tattooist, when he spent a month in the town, and he himself made tattoo-type paintings at this time.

However McGookin did not begin to deal seriously with the imagery of loyalism and Orangeism until he spent a year in London, between his

---

1. Conversation with Denis McBride, 7 Aug 1979.

foundation studies and the beginning of his three-year degree course at

the Belfast College of Art. During this time away, Orange symbols, such

as the columns, the coffin, the ladder, the dove and the compasses began

to emerge in his work. Some time subsequent to their initial appearance,

McGookin realised their significance, and on his return to Belfast he

started to research the traditions of Orangeism and freemasonry, and to

explore their resonances in his work. In one picture for example he

questioned the obsession with grades and degrees to be found in the Orange

Order and the Masons, by captioning a drawing of a man on a staircase

"Are there really different levels?"

At the same time McGookin was trying to come to terms with some of

the symbolism of Northern Ireland's Catholic community, in a number of

works relating to the Pope's visit to Ireland. (His close friend and

ally at the Belfast College of Art at this time was Fergal McConnell.)

In his last year at the Art College McGookin moved on to making his

own versions of Orange banners. These torn and battered emblems,

decorated with branches of fading flowers, are the most memorable

demonstrations of his twin obsessions, the layers of meaning in Ulster

symbolism, and the link between the imagery of Protestant and Catholic,

Loyalist and Republican. In Sons of the Fathers for example, there is a

complex play on the interconnections between patriarchy and patriotism,

with the Orange symbols of destiny and descent, such as Adam and Eve, the

rainbow and the Bible, reinforced by the use of such visual devices as

the steep perspective of the checkerboard, and layered and battered

paintwork. And in an untitled banner (ill 110), the symbols and

stylistic devices of Orange and Celtic imagery are fused together,

revealing shared obsessions. Interlocking Celtic interlace and Orange

banner scrollwork frame a red cross merging into a High Cross, roundels

110. Colin McGookin/Ban Flag no 2/1980-1981/mixed media/
156 x 108 ins (396.3 x 274.3 cms)/Collection the
artist/Photo: B. Loftus.

holding an Orange cock and a Celtic bird, a King Billy on a wildly rearing

horse, and a sash on which there are both Orange and AOH symbols.

Dermot Seymour was in the Belfast College's graphics department at

roughly the same time as Fergal McConnell and Colin McGookin were

studying fine arts there. Shortly after he completed his postgraduate

studies he made a series of large colour illustrations for a portfolio to

show to prospective employers. Almost all of these are hyper-realist

scenes set in the Ulster countryside or in local housing estates. Almost

all juxtapose images referring to Orangeism, loyalism or violence, with

objects of natural beauty and innocence (ill 111). One additional

illustration consists of a checkerboard design, on which are placed

various different symbols representing the thoughts passing through one

man's imagination. Many of these symbols refer to Orange and loyalist

traditions, and the checkerboard itself has been a prominent element in

Orange imagery (ill 71).   Yet despite the very strong

interest in the Protestant visual heritage evident in these illustrations,

Dermot Seymour insists that they are nothing more than the clear-eyed

depiction of the world around him by a man who looks carefully at small

details.[1]

All the artists from the Protestant community who have made works

referring to Orangemen and their imagery during the present troubles have

done so with a certain reluctance. Seymour is reticent about the content

of his works; McGookin was slow to approach his family's Orange

traditions; Middleton, McBride and Johnston were precipitated into

consideration of this subject-matter by extraordinary circumstances, and

have dealt with it in an abstract, oblique fashion. All this is very

---

1. Conversation 27 August 1981.
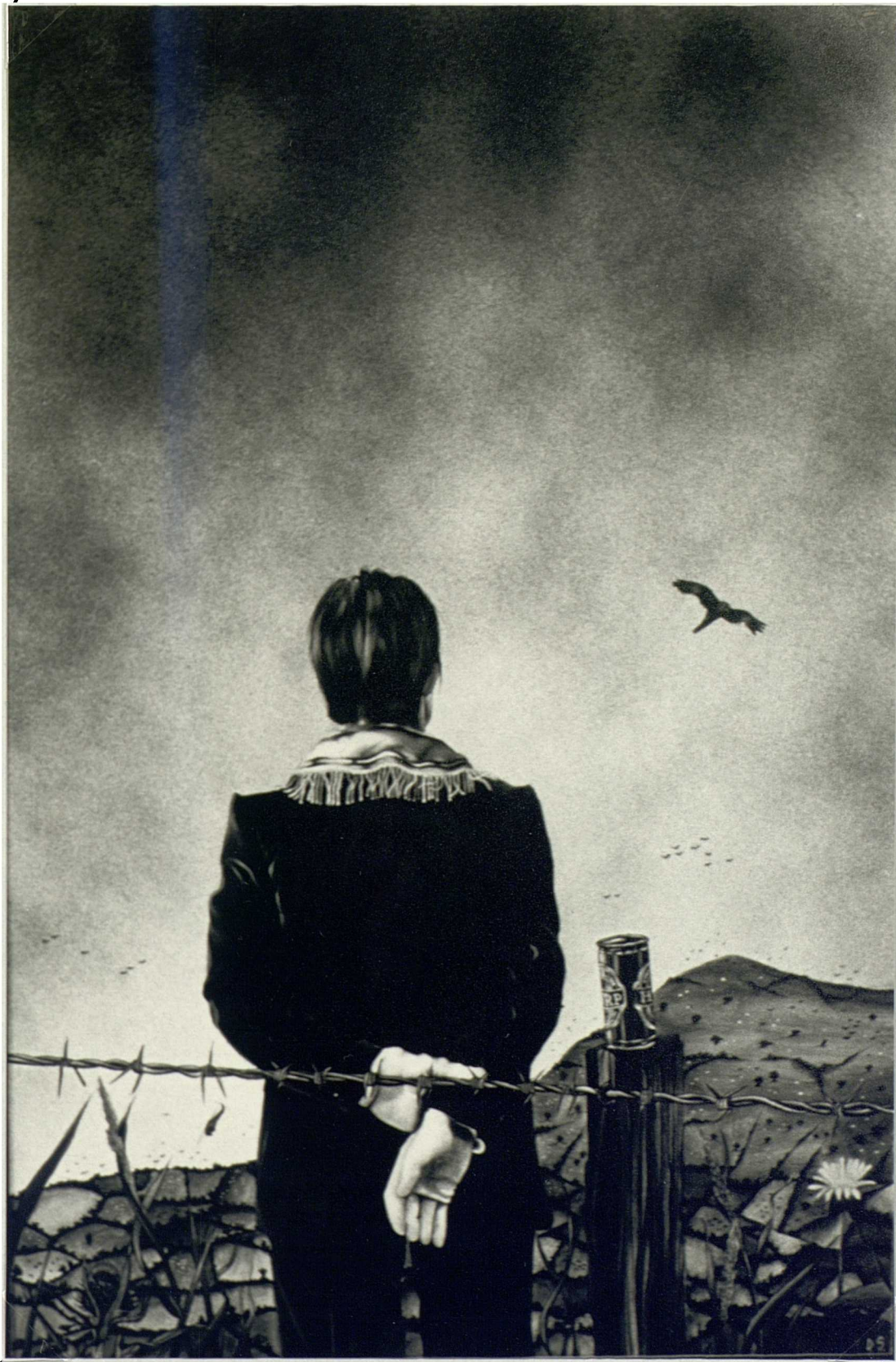
111. Dermot Seymour/Orangeman/1979/gouache/18½ x 11³/4
ins (47 x 30 cms)/collection: The Artist.

different from the direct, representational, aesthetic approach to
Orange imagery of artists from the Catholic community.

Clearly the political difference between the two groups of artists
helps to explain the divergence in their attitudes to Orange symbolism.
For artists from a Catholic background there is no embarassment involved
in painting Orangemen and their regalia, whereas artists from the
Protestant community feel ashamed to deal with this subject, either
because they regard Orangeism with distaste or because they accept it,
and in doing so find themselves restricted by its aura of frightful secrecy.

To these political differences one must add differences between
attitudes to art and imagery in the two communities. In the course of
this chapter there has been repeated emphasis on the Orangemen's
absorption of Protestant mistrust of imagery, of the fragmented symbolism
which resulted from that mistrust, and of the stress on craft and skill
made by the province's Protestant leadership in the nineteenth century.
When one looks at a work like Dermot Seymour's painting (ill 111   ), it
is possible to see how these aesthetic attitudes adopted by Orangeism
have continued to affect the work of artists from Northern Ireland's
Protestant community in a way that helps to explain the very difficulties
experienced by those artists in handling the symbolism of the Orange
Order. For the images in this painting are deadpan, evasive, scattered
and depicted with exquisite craft, just like those employed by the Orange
Order. Yet for all their aesthetic reticence they betray an absorption
in that clear-cut distinction between good and evil, purity and dirt,
which has been established as such a crucial feature of Orange symbolism.

Indeed it is my belief that one can see the traditions of Orange
imagery affecting more general works about Northern Ireland's troubles
produced by artists from the province's Protestant community. Take, for

example, a painting by Colin Middleton titled <u>Tierra del Fuego: The</u> <u>Wilderness of Fiorenza Cossotto</u> (ill 112) and a sculptural piece by Gordon Woods called <u>Irish State</u>.

Middleton's painting ostensibly refers to trips he made to Australia and Spain and South America in the mid-1970s, partly as a form of escape from the Northern Ireland conflict. In this work, as in many others he made during this period, the sun burns over great desert spaces, and scrubbed boards stretch purposefully into the distance like the deck of a ship forging across the ocean. This is an image apparently far from the misty complexities of Ulster life. If it is to be related to an aesthetic context, the likely candidate would seem to be the long tradition of European Surrealism which has had a fascination for Middleton throughout his career, rather than the local symbolism of the Orange Order. In its overall conception the painting is, like all surrealist works, a conjunction of impossibles, a magical view of the world apparently unhampered by historical and social realities. Its details are those familiar in surrealist art, whether the strongly sexual array of bare breasts, key-hole, dark drawer and central groove, or the steep-perspective planks, suggesting a vast stage on which some strange and unreal drama is enacted.[1] And the style is that of surrealism, which seeks to convey a fantasy with the maximum degree of realism. Indeed according to Kenneth Jamison, Colin Middleton was, earlier in his career

"fascinated with the precision of the Flemish painters, who, like Van Eyck, had mastered the representation of reality to convey convincingly some unreality or, like Jerome Bosch to convey a truly surrealist fantasy. The disciplines of this period...equipped Colin

---

1. Catto, <u>op cit</u>, p. 31.
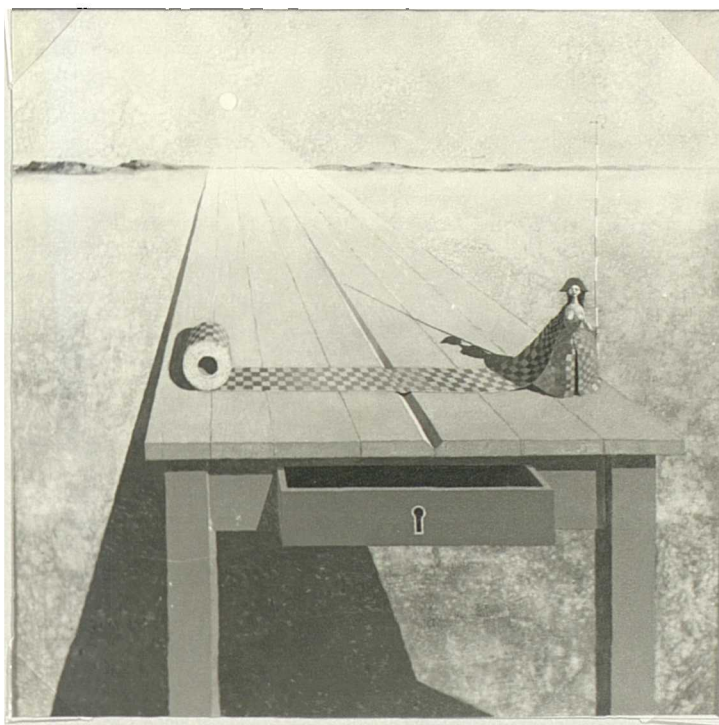
112. Colin Middleton/Tierra del Fuego: The Wilderness
     of Fiorenza Cossotto/1972-4/oil on board/23³/4 x
     23³/4 ins (60 x 60 cms)/Private collection/Photo:
     Sean Watters.

Middleton with a technical capacity of extraordinary range."[1]

Yet the roots of Middleton's imagery and style should also be located in the visual traditions of his own community, in the neat patterns of Orange symbolism (which includes secret keys and checkerboards), in the meticulous decoration of houses (note the beautiful graining) and the careful weaving of linen, (intended, as here, to be seen with a three-dimensional ripple). Middleton was, after all, a damask-designer for twenty years of his life, and he makes knowing use of this kind of local background to handle his feelings about the local troubles. "Boyd's [a big store] would like lay a brash, new carpet across the wilderness of Belfast", he said, talking about wilderness series of which this painting forms part.[2]

In Gordon Woods' works dealing with the Northern Ireland troubles, Orange traditions appear to play a less overtly recognised, but nevertheless significant part. In 1974, during the Loyalist strike, he made a series of skull-scape drawings which were forms of memento moris linked to landscapes. That this was more than a chance appropriation of a universal symbol of death, appears to be confirmed by the lack of skulls in works by artists from the Catholic community in the past thirteen years and the relative frequency with which they have been used by artists from a Protestant background.[3]

Moreover in Woods' Irish State completed in the late 1970s, the principal theme is closely related to Orange symbolism. The piece is

---

1. Introduction to the catalogue of an exhibition of Colin Middleton's work held by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland in Belfast in 1964.
2. Conversation in January 1974.
3. Such as Graham Gingles, Jack Pakenham, Jean Duncan and Paul Yates.

based on a slab of chipboard covered with the black bitumen Woods had been using to coat the roof of his house. On top of this is set an aluminium grid which, for Woods, refers to the grids we're all caught in or getting out of, the grids of bureaucracy, the troubles, imposed geometric standards. Across this moves a red plastic exponential curve, relating to the curves he has studied in books on the Western economy. Following the line of this time-curve are a bundle of briars and branches, dangerously prickly but also displaying a natural, rather than an imposed bent. Overlapping the edge of the board they would, if the piece was correctly displayed horizontally at coffee-table height, catch at the legs of passers-by. Gordon Woods subsequently made three-dimensional developments of this theme, involving a large tree-stump (nature again), protected by a lead canopy (against radiation), with a number of grids related to it, and a series of convex mirrors evoking a multiplicity of sensations from personal involvement of the viewer, to memories of Van Eyck's painting of the Arnolfini marriage, to the senses of menace engendered by Northern Ireland's omnipresent security mirrors (ill 113).

Central to these works is the whole concept of opposition, whether between civilization and nature or security and danger, which has constantly been re-presented in the visual and indeed the verbal symbols of the Orange tradition. And one of the key images used to present this opposition, as in Middleton's painting, is the grid/checkerboard. It is an image found in many works relating to the Northern Ireland troubles,[1] and the meanings attached to it in them are various, but for Middleton

---

1. Such as some of John Aiken's environmental pieces in which it seems to represent structured violence; or Fergal McConnell's Falls Road picture in which it is a games board, or Rita Donagh's Ulster Series in which it refers to mapmaking, or paintings by Catherine and Joe McWilliams in which it appears to be a formal borrowing from Middleton's work.
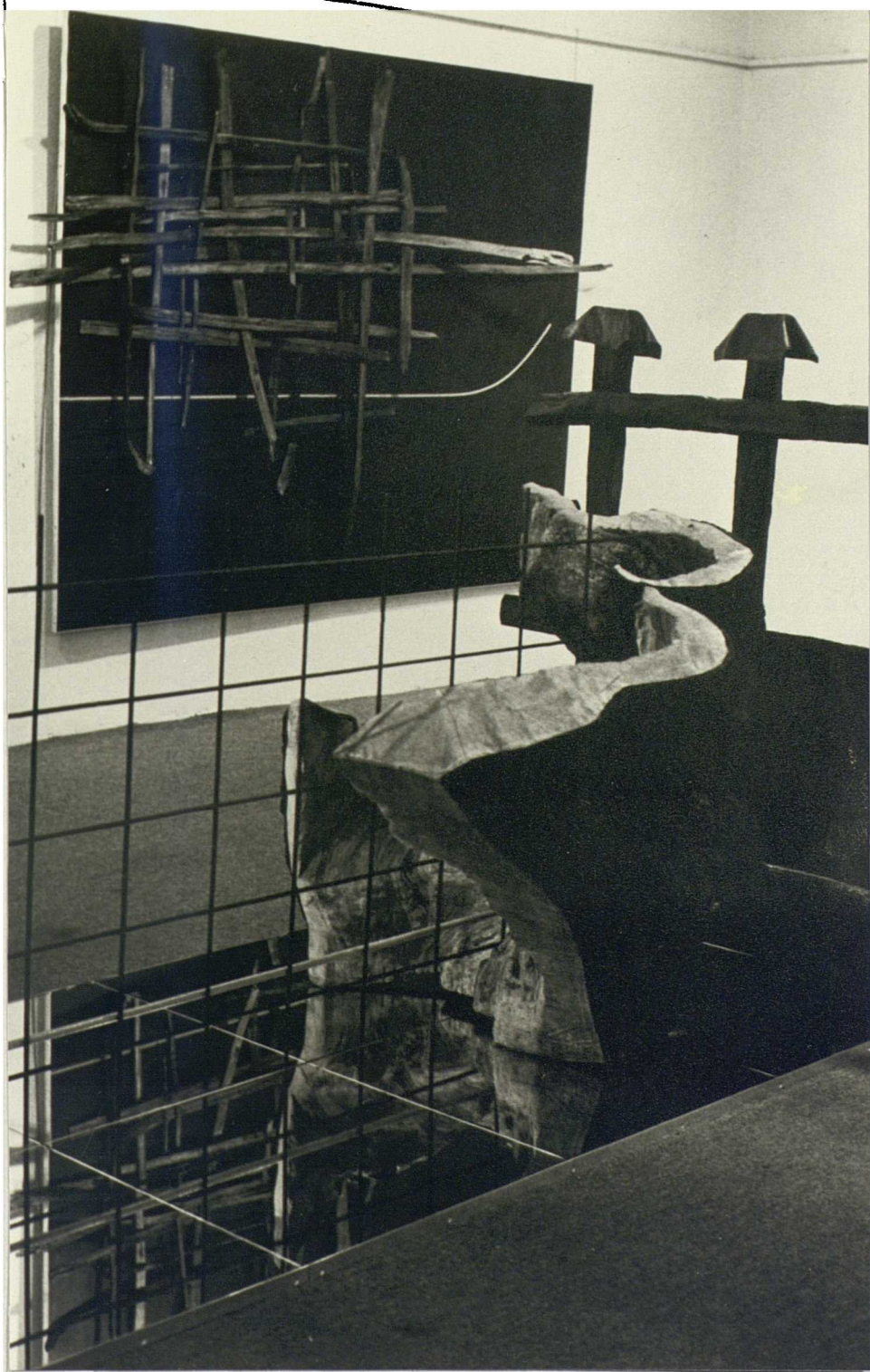
113. Gordon Woods: on wall Grid Graph I/1978/mixed media/
132 x 72 ins (335.3 x 1083 cms)/Photo: Christopher
Woods/on floor: Symbiotic Paradox with Eyewitness/
1980/mixed media/72 x 254 x 60 ins (183 x 822.9 x
152.5 cms)/Photo: Christopher Woods.

and Woods it is, as for the Orangemen and for the designers of the

Orange Cross prisoners emblem (ill   104), a compulsive symbol of man's

attempt to impose order on the world.

Conclusions

For by now it should be apparent that when the Orangemen march through my

village, and through numerous other Ulster villages and towns on the

Twelfth of July, the symbolism employed by them signifies more than a

simple commemoration by a semi-secret society of the historical defeat of

the Catholic forces of James II by the Protestant William III at the

Battle of the Boyne. Their imagery carries layers of meaning acquired

and altered throughout the development of their Order, in successive

attempts to create a history and a political structure for a community

whose historical rights and internal political arrangements were

continually called into question. Many Orange symbols have therefore

little to do with 1690 and much to do with developments since then. They

cluster around the key concepts of separation and exclusion; challenge;

and display. And their impact has extended far beyond the confines of

the Orange Order itself, because their development has been linked to

whole areas of life in Northern Ireland's Protestant community, such as

religion, mortality and work, and because they have been part of a series

of rituals, marking out the calendar year, and involving a very wide

range of people.

Since 1968 the roles of Orange imagery appear to have been

diminished with the erosion of the political relationship symbolised by

the processions, the decline in the Order's membership resulting from

the movement of population caused by the violence, the emergence of other,

apparently more effective Protestant organisations, such as the Paisleyites

and the paramilitaries, and the diminution in the display functions of
Orange symbols caused by Northern Ireland's economic decline in the late
1970s. But the loss of power suffered by Orange imagery in the past
thirteen years is more apparent than real, for its social pervasiveness
has ensured its continuing absorption by and cross-fertilisation with
the visual emblems made and used by Northern Ireland Protestants who seem
strongly divergent from the Orange Order. So it is that we find the
troubles-related images of such groups as schoolchildren, paramilitaries
and artists are, like Orange symbols, evasive, abstract, neat, highly
crafted, strongly concerned with legitimacy, and with very clear divisions
between right and wrong, dirt and purity, order and nature. The symbols
of the marching Orangemen are not simply ritual references to other
realities, whether political, social or religious. They are living
codifications of a way of seeing and constructing reality, widely shared
by members of Northern Ireland's Protestant community.

CHAPTER 5: GREEN

A world apart

Although the village where I live has a nearly equal balance of Catholic

and Protestant inhabitants, it never witnesses any Catholic equivalent

to the Orange parades. On 17 March most of the local Catholics attend

mass in honour of St Patrick, generally wearing the shamrock associated

with him. But if they wish to process on that day they must travel to

Belfast, or Dublin, or one of the two or three provincial towns in

Northern Ireland in which the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) may be

parading. (Meanwhile in the Protestant community, church services in

honour of St Patrick are held in the locality. Those attending do not

generally wear the shamrock, but St Patrick's emblem is distributed to

both Protestant and Catholic members of Irish regiments in the British

Army, whether they are stationed in Northern Ireland, or in England, and

occasionally even an Orange lodge processes to church on 17 March,

wearing the shamrock.)[1] At Easter those Catholics who wish to commemorate

the men and women who have died in the fight for an all-Ireland republic

must go to Belfast to attend the large parades organised there by various

republican groups, or to one of the local towns for a smaller, simpler

ceremony. Round about the Twelfth of July, if political feelings are

running high, such republican sympathisers may make their opposition to

Orangeism and loyalism known by painting a few kerbstones green, white

---

1. "People need another saint, says Primate", News Letter, Belfast,
    18 March 1982 p. 8 and photo in The Orange Standard, Belfast, April
    1973, p. 6.

and orange, or by daubing political slogans on walls and roads. And on 15 August, the Catholic feast-day of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, members of the AOH have a further opportunity to process, in one of the two or three parades organised by their Order in the province on that day.

This is by no means an exceptional state of affairs. In general the political parades of the Catholic community in Northern Ireland are fewer, more localised and smaller than those of their Protestant counterparts. They are also less widely reported and publicised. Whereas the Orange and loyalist parades receive enormous coverage in the Northern Ireland newspapers and television, with pictures that range over the whole gamut of their symbolism, Hibernian and republican processions are rarely reported, and the few photographs of them are generally confined to single and often misleading shots.

The parades attended by members of Northern Ireland's Catholic community are not only fewer, smaller and less well publicised than those of the Protestant Orangemen. They are also more varied and employ very different forms of imagery.

The Catholic processions which are closest in style to the Orange marches are those held by the Ancient Order of Hibernians. Like the Orangemen, they parade by lodges, with the office-bearers preceding a banner, after which comes a band, followed by any remaining lodge-members, walking two by two, their ranks sometimes closed by two pikemen (ill 114). Like the Orangemen the Hibernians wear sashes, collarettes and emblems which show the influence of freemasonry. Like the Orangemen their bands all play different tunes, and sometimes include a lambeg drum. Like the Orangemen they process to a field at which political speeches and religious exhortations are delivered. And as at Orange parades flags

114. Ancient Order of Hibernians procession/St Patrick's
Day 1982/Kilrea, Co Derry/Photo: B. Loftus.

are carried, both by the marchers and the by-standers.

However the differences between the AOH and Orange parades are as striking as the similarities. The predominant colours in the Hibernian regalia, banners and band uniforms are green, white and yellow, not orange and purple, or red, white and blue; the main subjects on their banners are Mother Ireland, Irish saints, Catholic popes, Jacobite leaders and republican heroes, not William III, Protestant clergymen and Old Testament figures; the main emblems on their regalia, uniforms and instruments are the harp and the shamrock and pieces of Celtic interlace, not the symbols of the Orange arch (ill 128); and the flags employed by them are the gold harp on a green ground, the tricolour of the Irish republic and the flags of Ireland's four provinces, not the Orange flag of King William, the British Union Jack or the Ulster flag. Moreover, whereas the Orange processions are far more important to most Protestants than flag-carrying parades, Hibernian processions have little significance for most Catholics when compared with the flag-carrying commemorative marches held each Easter by republican organisations.

The imagery employed in these commemorations scarcely resembles that of the Orangemen at all. No lodge-formation is involved. Instead these parades are headed by a small group of uniformed men and women, marching in military fashion. Their faces are often made unrecognisable with scarves and dark glasses, and they carry the flags of their organisations, together with those of the four Irish provinces and the Irish tricolour (ill 115). Behind them surge crowds of people differentiated by nothing more than an Easter-lily symbol, or occasionally a tricolour rosette, which may incorporate a simple slogan like Ireland for ever, or a picture of St Patrick or the Sacred Heart or Christ crucified (ill 116). These crowds are interspersed with a few bands, wearing much the same uniforms

115. Provisional IRA colour party/Parade commemorating
     the republican dead/Easter 1982/Falls Road, Belfast/
     Photo: Pacemaker Press.

116. Easter lily and rosette/Provisional Sinn Fein & IRA
     Easter parade, 1975/Belfast/Photo: Conrad Atkinson.

as at Hibernian parades. The goal of the procession is not a field, but a cemetery at which prayers are said and the republican dead are honoured in military fashion with wreaths, the Last Post and a gun salute, before a political oration is delivered.

On St Patrick's Day, Protestants as well as Catholics in Northern Ireland honour the island's patron saint. But few Protestants wear the shamrock, and the style of the Catholic St Patrick's Day parades occasionally held in Belfast, or in provincial towns in Northern Ireland, is very different from that of Orange processions. They involve not members of a single organisation, but representatives from a very wide range of political, sporting, cultural and commercial groups from Northern Ireland's Catholic community. Commercial floats, Catholic boy scouts and girl guides, the occasional lodge of Hibernians or Irish National Foresters,[1] clubs belonging to the Gaelic Athletic Association, groups making political protests about issues like the H-block hunger-strike (ill 117), Irish wolfhounds, and children dressed as colleens and leprechauns are all likely participants. The parade has no specific goal but is an end in itself.

Apart from the specific differences between Orange parades and the three main types of procession held by Northern Ireland Catholics, more general divergences between orange and green imagery are also discernible. Green parades are held on religious feast-days rather than secular holidays. They are less ordered, hierarchical and closed than their orange counterparts. Association with them is generally signified by the wearing of a single, simple emblem, such as the shamrock or the Easter

---

1. An organisation similar to the Ancient Order of Hibernians, which broke away from the Foresters organisation in England in the late nineteenth century, because of its support for Irish Home Rule.

117. Float supporting political status for republican
     prisoners/St Patrick's Day parade, 1977/Falls Road,
     Belfast/Photo: Pacemaker Press.

lily or a rosette. Participation in them is often informal – the lady
heading an AOH women's lodge with an old green harp flag in one hand and
her shopping bag in another was by no means exceptional.
And they do not generate such a fervent orgy of decoration as is apparent
in the Orange marching season.

Indeed much of the traditional political imagery of the Catholic
community in Northern Ireland is displayed not in the public thoroughfare
but within the privacy of the home. There can be found the framed copies
of the proclamation of the Irish Republic at Easter 1916, the political
posters and badges and Christmas cards, and the hand-crafted emblems made
by republican internees, in which harps, shamrocks and Celtic interlace
are the types of imagery most frequently employed (ills 118 and 119).

The various kinds of popular political imagery employed by Northern
Ireland Catholics are different from those used by the province's
Protestant community: they are handled with a different style or rhetoric;
and their class and aesthetic status is also different. AOH and
republican parades and the emblems associated with them, resemble the
Orangeman's ritual imagery, in that they are often looked down on by middle-
class members of the Catholic community, even if they hold strong
nationalist or republican beliefs. But allegiance to St Patrick and
shamrock-wearing is shared by virtually all Irish Catholics; internee
crafts can be found in the homes of Catholic politicians who are strongly
anti-republican; and the celtic imagery widely associated with them is
valued by artists from Ireland's Catholic community north and south of
the Border, and has been seized on by a number of them as a potent source
of themes and visual approaches with which to handle Northern Ireland's
present troubles. This is in strong contrast to the low estimate of
Orange imagery generally found amongst artists in Northern Ireland's

118. Republican internee handkerchief/made in Long Kesh
ca 1972/Linen Hall Library, Belfast/Photo: Sean
Watters.

119. Carved internee harps/1982/Falls Road, Belfast/Photo:
     B. Loftus.

Protestant community, and their wariness in employing it in their works about the Northern conflict.

What are the reasons for the similarities and differences between orange and green symbolism in Northern Ireland? And what is their significance?

In order to discover the answers to these questions, I propose to look first at the layers of tradition embedded in some of the most popular political symbols employed by Northern Ireland Catholics during the present troubles. The symbols I have chosen for this historical analysis are the shamrock, the colour green, the Irish tricolour, the harp and Celtic imagery. I shall commence with a section titled Myths and realities. In this I shall examine some traditional accounts of the origin and significance of these symbols. The main theme to emerge from these accounts will be seen to be an assessment of these emblems as evidence of a native, national, continuous cultural tradition in Ireland. In place of this interpretation, I will argue that the symbols of Ireland's Catholic community, like those of her Protestant population, have been constructed over the centuries by a series of decisions, and that they have acquired layers of sometimes conflicting meaning.

To examine this process of construction I shall look first at the intertwined histories of the shamrock, the colour green and the Irish tricolour. This I shall do in the series of sections titled:

The imagery of St Patrick and the holy wars of the seventeenth century

Republican green and the 1798 rebellion

Green symbolism and Irish nationalism in southern Ireland in the nineteenth century

Green symbolism and Irish nationalism in northern Ireland in the nineteenth century

Flags of military rebellions from the 1890s to partition

and

A response to events: Northern Ireland after partition

Then, in Harps, I shall turn to a discussion of the historical development of the Irish harp symbol. Following this, Celtic imagery and its appropriation as the visual tradition emblematic of Ireland's national identity, will be discussed in the sections titled:

Celtic imagery:

A native, national tradition?

Early revival by the Anglo-Irish colonists

The beginnings of nationalist culture, ca 1820-1850

Dissemination and Validation 1850s-1880s

Return to handcraft 1890s-1921

and

State support? 1921-1968

Having established some of the layers of meaning available to Irish Catholics employing the shamrock, the colour green, the Irish tricolour, the harp and Celtic imagery, I shall turn to the way they have used these symbols since 1968, in the sections titled Green Processions since 1968, Internee Crafts and Artists. Then I shall look at the attitude of Northern Ireland Protestants to these symbols during the present conflict, in a section titled Protestant reactions, before ending with some brief Conclusions.

Myths and realities

With green as with orange images, the analyst is confronted by various popular myths which describe their origin, and implicitly or explicitly elucidate their political significance.

The shamrock and the colour green have traditionally been associated with St Patrick. In old accounts of his life he was said to have employed the shamrock to explain the mystery of the Trinity and to have carried a green banner.[1] In the past decade or so the history books and religious publications produced for use by the Catholic community in Ireland[2] have been at pains to stress that these were legends about St Patrick introduced by pious hagiographers writing long after his death, but the association between the symbols and the saint still continues. Its implication is that Ireland has a green, native, holy tradition, which goes back to the early history of aboriginal inhabitants.

The generally accepted story about the origin of the Irish tricolour is that it was brought to Ireland in 1848 by the Young Ireland leader Thomas Francis Meagher, as a present from the leaders of the 1848 revolution in France. Republican News, the newsheet issued by the Provisional Sinn Fein in Northern Ireland from June 1970 to January 1979, carried a fairly typical version of this story in the issue for Nov-Dec 1970.

"Early in March 1848, a party of Young Irelanders set out for Paris to convey to the French people the congratulations and good wishes of the Irish people on their fight for their Republic.

Among the returning deputation was Francis Meagher, a masterly and captivating orator. It was he who, after the address of welcome stepped forward and presented to the Chairman of the meeting a beautiful tricolour flag, surmounted by an Irish pike head and we are told that the Flag was embroidered by the ladies of Paris as a symbol of the friendship between the two nations.

---

1. G.A. Hayes-McCoy, A History of Irish Flags from earliest times, Academy Press, Dublin, 1979, p. 42. A green cloak was also attributed to Brian Boru.
2. See Brian de Breffny, In the Steps of St Patrick, Thames & Hudson, 1982 and John Ryan SJ, Saint Patrick, Irish Messenger Publications, Dublin, 1978.

'From Paris', said Meagher, 'The gay and gallant city of the tricolour and the barricade this flag has been proudly borne. I present it to my native land, and I trust that the old country will not refuse this symbol of new life from one of her younger children.'

He then explained the meaning of the colours of the flag. Green, White and Orange. The White in the centre was to signify an everlasting peace between the Orange and the Green. 'And I trust', he added, 'that beneath its folds the hands of the Irish Protestant and the Irish Catholic will be clasped in generous brotherhood.'"[1]

As with the shamrock and the colour green, recent accounts of the origin of the Irish tricolour, whether in academic history books[2], or republican newsheets like the one quoted here, add to this account information about the use of the flag in Ireland prior to Meagher's return from Paris in 1848. But this romantic story remains the chief crystallisation for Irish nationalists and republicans of the meaning of the tricolour. What it implies is that the flag is derived from a republican tradition common to other European countries, and symbolises reconciliation between Ireland's own Orange and Green communities.

Traditionally the use of the harp as a national symbol for Ireland is regarded as derived from the association of harp-players with the lords who ruled the country prior to its conquest by the English, and most particularly with Brian Bóroimhe (Boru), the eleventh century High King of Ireland who decisively defeated the forces of the Viking invaders at the battle of Clontarf in 1014. For long indeed, an old and beautiful Irish harp preserved in Trinity College (ill 130) was known as "the harp of Brian Boru".

1. This information was repeated in Republican News, Belfast, 5 July 1975 p. 8. Similar accounts can be found in Eolas, an Official Sinn Fein journal published in Dublin (no 2, Feb 1973, p. 1) and a Civics textbook used in schools in the Republic of Ireland (Colm O'Loingsigh, Illustrated Civics 2, The Educational Co, Dublin, 1977, pp. 27-8.)
2. Such as Hayes-McCoy, op cit, pp. 140-148.

Recent accounts[1] make plain that this harp dates from considerably later,

and that harps in general cannot be safely regarded as part of Irish

culture until the end of the eleventh century, somewhat after the time of

Boru. However the association remains strong, and its implication that

the harp is a symbol of an Ireland free from English rule and resisting

all invaders, is endorsed by the frequent association with it of the

words "Irish Freedom", in its recent employment by republicans in

Northern Ireland.

Popular beliefs about the origins of Celtic imagery in Ireland, and

the political significance with which that imagery is thereby endowed,

can best be conveyed by quoting the reactions of an Irish art critic to

the Rosc exhibition of Celtic artifacts in Dublin in 1967.

"It was not possible for an Irishman to make an objective assessment

of the ancient Celtic artifacts at the National Museum. He went on

pilgrimage to his past; to the relics of the great race from which he

derives and to the reflection of the source that gives him his character

and culture-pattern. As he stood beside the great plastic cubes in which

gold collars, ornaments, crosses, bell-shrines - the aesthetic procession

of a people from a pagan to a Christian world - seemed to float, he could

only yield to a sense of reverence and awe. They made plain that at a

time when most of Western Europe was barbaric and near-savage, Ireland

was matching the great civilizations of the Nile in sophistication and

skills. What is more they underlined the continuity of Irish culture

over 7000 years and seemed to postulate not alone the past, but the

future."[2]

---

1. Such as Charles Acton, Irish Music and Musicians, Eason, Dublin, 1978.
2. Anthony Butler, "The Irish Art Scene", Éire-Ireland, Minnesota vol 3
   no 1, Spring 1968, pp. 94-8.

Scholarly publications emphasising that Celtic culture was international rather than national[1] have had little impact on this kind of attitude, and most of the recent studies of the subsequent use of Celtic imagery in Ireland have chosen to emphasise cultural continuity and rediscovery, rather than reconstruction.

In summary therefore, the myths about the origins of the most popular political symbols employed by members of Ireland's Catholic community during the present troubles propose that Ireland has a separate, native, national, continuous culture, with a strong artistic and religious content, which has occasionally absorbed symbols and concepts from political movements in other countries opposed to the English.

In the sections that follow I shall offer a somewhat different interpretation of the origins, history and significance of these symbols. It will be my argument that as we now know them they are historical constructs, which are the product of a series of decisions made by a very wide range of individuals and groups taken at different points in time, decisions which have given them sometimes conflicting layers of meaning; that these donations of meaning have been conditioned by cultural as well as political developments, many of them common to the western world rather than peculiar to Ireland; and that the history of the style and rhetoric with which these symbols have been used at various times is as important as the history of them as single images. In other words we are looking at the history of images in action, not static, as in the pages of a

---

1. Such as Stuart Pigott, Early Celtic Art, catalogue of an Arts Council of Great Britain exhibition shown in Edinburgh and London, 1970, and the articles by Liam de Paor in the Irish Times, cited below, p. 462.

history book or the cases in a museum. The reasons for the way in which you wave your green flag or your tricolour are as important as those for it being in your hand.

The imagery of St Patrick and the holy wars of the seventeenth century

There can be no doubt that there was indeed a St Patrick, who laboured as a Christian missionary in Ireland in the fifth century, and was honoured there as a saint from his own lifetime onwards.[1] Nor can there be much doubt that the shamrock was well known in Ireland from a fairly early date. It appears in the decorations used on Irish celtic manuscripts and carved high crosses,[2] and is frequently mentioned in English sixteenth century accounts of the Irish, where it is described as a staple part of their diet.[3]

However it was only in the seventeenth century that the shamrock and the colour green began to be associated with St Patrick and the nation of Ireland, as a result of a slow and gradual process. The earliest recorded emblems worn on the saint's day are the St Patrick's crosses of red ribbon sported by Irish troops stationed at Witham in Essex in 1628,[4] and indeed crosses of various colours continued to be worn for this annual commemoration until the early years of this century.[5] It was not

---

1. On the historical St Patrick and the early growth of his cult in
      Ireland see de Breffny, op cit.
2. Ibid, pp. 144-5.
3. Jeanne Sheehy, The Rediscovery of Ireland's Past, Thames & Hudson,
      1980, p. 9. Exactly which plant bearing trefoil leaves was
      designated by the word shamrock remains unclear. See Kevin Danaher,
      The Year in Ireland, Mercier, Cork, 1972, p. 63.
4. These troops are said to have been outraged because unknown persons,
      whom they assumed to be local inhabitants, mocked the custom by
      tying such crosses to dogs' tails and the town whipping post. (Journal
      of the Society for Army Historical Research, vol 1 no 5, Sept. 1922,
      p. 177 and G.E. Aylmer, "St Patrick's Day, 1628, in Witham, Essex",
      Past and Present, Oxford, no 61, Nov 1973, pp. 139-148. On the general
      history of the red cross of St Patrick, see
      Hayes-McCoy, op cit, pp. 36-40.)
5. Danaher, op cit, pp 60-62.

until 1681 that the wearing of green crosses and shamrocks was recorded,

in the journal of an English traveller in Ireland, Thomas Dineley.

"The 17th day of March yeerly is St Patrick's, an immovable feast

when ye Irish of all stations and conditions weare crosses in their hats,

some of pins, some of green ribbon, and the vulgar superstitiously wear

shamroges, 3-leaved grass, which they likewise eat (they say) to cause

a sweet breath."[1]

By this time the legend that St Patrick had employed the shamrock

to explain the doctrine of the Trinity was probably well established.

The so-called St Patrick's halfpennies, copper coins believed to have been

produced in Dublin in / show the saint holding up an enormous three-leaved

approximately 1674[2]

shamrock (ill 120). And an explicit reference to both the legend and

its connection with shamrock-wearing is to be found in Caleb Threkeld's

Synopsis Stirpium Hibernicorum, subtitled A Short Treatise on Native

Plants, especially such as grow spontaneously in the vicinity of Dublin,

published in 1727:

"The plant is worn by the people in their hats on the 17th day of

March yearly, which is called St Patrick's Day, it being a current

tradition that, by this three-leaved grass he emblematically set forth

to them the mystery of the Holy Trinity."[3]

The firm association of the shamrock with St Patrick should, it

seems, be attributed to the religious fervour of the counter-reformation

period rather than to any aboriginal connection with the saint. And from

the tone of both Dineley's and Threkeld's accounts, wearing the shamrock

1. Thomas Dineley, Observations in a voyage through the kingdom of
        Ireland, 1681, p. 20, quoted Sheehy, op cit, p. 10. See also
        Hayes-McCoy, op cit, p. 39 and pp. 109-110.
2. Michael Dolley and Margaret Warhurst "New evidence for the date of the
        so-called 'St Patrick's' Halfpence and Farthings", Irish Numismatics,
        vol 10, no 5, Sept-Oct, 1977, pp.161-163.
3. Quoted Sheehy, loc cit.

120. "St Patrick's halfpenny"/ca 1674/silver and copper/
     1¹/8 in (2.9 cms)/National Museum of Ireland/Photo:
     NMI.

on the saint's day was, during this period, confined to the native

Irish peasantry. This also appears to be confirmed by Sir Joshua Reynold's

painting of 1751,[1] showing the Irish peer Lord Charlemont wearing a

spray of shamrock in his hat, for the portrait is clearly intended as a

caricature in which the sitter is cast in the role of a lowly Irish

buffoon, a form of mockery also directed at the Welsh and Scots during

this period.[2]

Yet only a few years later the shamrock's role as the symbol of St

Patrick and his adopted land appears to have been accorded a measure of

recognition by institutions set up by both the Protestant ascendancy in

Ireland, and the English monarchy, in several of which the same Lord

Charlemont was a prominent figure. The plant was featured in the medal

of the Friendly Brothers of St Patrick, established in 1762;[3] it was

widely employed in the flags of the largely Protestant Volunteers which

Charlemont helped to form and lead in the 1770s and 1780s;[4] and it was

prominent in the insignia of the Order of St Patrick, established by

George III in 1783, with Charlemont amongst the first to be invested.[5]

The linking of the colour green with Ireland, like the association

of the shamrock with St Patrick, appears to date from the politico-religious

---

1. Reproduced in Sheehy, op cit p. 11.
2. See J.O. Bartley, Teague, Shenkin and Sawney, Cork University Press, 1954.

3. William Frazer, "The Medallists of Ireland and Their Work, no I, The Mossops", Journal of the Royal Historical & Archaeological Association of Ireland, Dublin, vol VII, 1887, p. 451.
4. Hayes-McCoy, op cit, pp. 83-108.
5. Illustrated ibid, p. 40. See also "Regalia of the Order of St Patrick", Belfast Museum and Art Gallery Quarterly Notes, vol 55, no 119, Dec 1937, pp 1-2. The Prelate's Badge of the Order is in the Ulster Museum. The shamrock also began to be widely featured on Irish glass during this period. See Mary Boydell, "A versatile National Emblem", Country Life, 23 May 1974, pp 1280-1281.

conflicts of the seventeenth century. Prior to this time it was "St

Patrick's blue" which had been associated with the various coats of arms

instituted by the English monarchy from the fourteenth century onwards.[1]

Now, during the Catholic Confederacy uprising in the 1640s, there were

references to a flag bearing the Irish harp on a green field, flown by

Owen Roe O'Neill's frigate, and to a whole series of Confederacy flags

whose reverse was green and bore emblems associated with Charles I.[2]

There seems therefore to be no evidence that the shamrock and the

colour green had a real, historical association with St Patrick. They

were given this role by later pious hagiographers, and then acquired

political meaning in the seventeenth century, when the Irish fought the

English as enemies of their religion as well as their local political

freedom. Further layers of meaning began to accrue to the shamrock very

speedily, for by the second half of the eighteenth century it was being

used by Ireland's English and Protestant rulers, in an upgrading of folk

custom very common throughout Europe at this time.[3] But it was not

however until the late eighteenth century that both the shamrock and the

colour green were generally adopted as symbols of a separate Irish

nation, largely as the result of the influence exerted by the imagery

associated with the American and French revolutions.

Republican Green and the 1798 Rebellion

In the insurrection of 1798, instigated by the United Irishmen in the

hopes of establishing an Irish republic independent of English rule, green

1. John Vinycomb, Our National Emblems, A Mayne & Boyd, Belfast, 1893,
   and Peter Alter, "Symbols of Irish Nationalism" Studia Hibernica,
   Dublin, no 14. 1974, p. 107.
2. Hayes-McCoy, op cit, pp. 43-4, 51-2 and Plate II.
3. See Peter Burke, Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe, Temple Smith,
   1978, chapter 1.

flags, uniforms and badges were universally employed by the rebels.

Contemporary writers explained this prevalent use of green by stating

that it had been adopted as the Irish national colour, with reference to

the shamrock.[1] There is indeed some evidence that in the years

immediately preceding the rebellion the shamrock was being worn with a

separatist emphasis. In February 1793 Lord Charlemont, in a letter to

his friend Alexander Haliday, lamented the infiltration amongst the Irish

volunteers of the concepts and imagery of the French revolution and

demonstrated the contemporary variation in attitudes to the shamrock

symbol when he remarked

"It has been their custom to assemble on St Patrick's day, but I

have never yet attended them on that occasion, and most certainly shall

not begin now."[2]   .

However the adoption of green imagery by the largely Protestant

United Irishmen appears to have been stimulated by the Liberty Tree

symbolism employed in the American and French revolutions, rather than

the shamrock traditions native to Ireland.

Liberty Trees had appeared in America during the decade 1765-1775

as symbols of opposition to "English Tyranny", the first being an old elm

in Boston, from which the Sons of Liberty hanged effigies of unpopular

officials. At this time Ulster contacts with America were close. During

the eighteenth century many of the Presbyterians in the province, faced

with trade restrictions and rack-renting landlords, had emigrated there,

and a significant number of Ulstermen were involved in the signing and

---

1. Hayes-McCoy, op cit, pp. 109-110.
2. Letter dated 26 Feb 1793, in Charlemont MSS, Historical Manuscripts
        Commission, vol 2, 1894, p. 211.

dissemination of the American Declaration of Independence.[1] The United

Irishmen may well therefore have heard of the American Trees of Liberty -

indeed their great mentor Thomas Paine wrote a poem on the subject -

although the influence of their close links with revolutionary France was

probably more important.

In France the first <u>arbres de liberté</u> were planted in 1790, with

great ceremony, to celebrate the advantages of Revolution and Liberty.

They became the objects of popular veneration and their death was regarded

as a calamity. This was probably because they became associated with the

<u>mai</u> planted by peasants, which was simultaneously regarded as a symbol of

spring, an emblem of authority, and a privileged abode for the souls of

the deceased, procuring their protective presence.

In the United Irish catechism a series of questions and answers

makes plain the movement's awareness of the history of the Liberty Tree

image.

"<u>Question</u>: What have you got in your hand?

<u>Answer</u>: A green bough.

<u>Question</u>: Where did it first grow?

<u>Answer</u>: In America.

<u>Question</u>: Where did it bud?

<u>Answer</u>: In France.

<u>Question</u>: Where are you going to plant it?

<u>Answer</u>: In the crown of Great Britain."[2]

This symbolism appears to have been rapidly disseminated amongst supporters

---

1. See J.C. Beckett, "The Eighteenth Century Background" in J.C Beckett & T.W
   Moody, <u>Ulster since 1800: a political and economic survey</u>, BBC,
   1954, p. 12, and Charles Dickson, <u>Revolt in the North</u>, Clonmore &
   Reynolds, Dublin/Burns, Oates & Washbourne, London, 1960, p. 73 and
   p. 89.
2. Quoted on the title page of Thomas Pakenham, <u>The Year of Liberty</u>,
   Panther, 1972.

of republicanism in Ireland in the 1790s. In November 1792 the following declaration of the Londonderry Volunteers was published in the <u>Northern Star</u>, the paper of the United Irishmen which had that year commenced publication in Belfast.

"Some branches of the Tree of liberty, planted by our ancestors, are withered, and stripped of their verdure; but the roots are stuck deep into the bosom of the land; and when the parasite plants shall be cleared from its Trunk, it shall put forth new shoots with renovated and increasing strength, and the WHOLE people of the land shall rejoice beneath its peaceful shade. We declare outselves protectors of this Tree."[1]

By 1796 verses about the Liberty Tree were being widely disseminated in the collection of republican ballads known as <u>Paddy's Resource</u>.[2] In the same year a county Antrim blacksmith was imprisoned for a year for displaying on his shop-door a "seditious libel", calling upon people to plant the Tree of Liberty.[3] And even the relatively unsophisticated and unrevolutionary Defenders incorporated the Liberty Tree in their imagery during this period. This semi-masonic Catholic defence organisation originated in Co Armagh in the mid 1780s, as the result of attacks by the Protestant Peep O'Day Boys, and then spread to other parts of Ireland. In its catechism, alongside references to the Irish Jacobite leader Patrick Sarsfield, to masonic and biblical images, and to Catholic saints there are the following questions and answers.

"Are you consecrated? - I am.

To what? - To the National Convention - to queal all nations -

---

1. 12 December 1792, quoted in Georges-Denis Zimmermann, <u>Songs of Irish Rebellion</u>, Allen Figgis, Dublin, 1967, p. 41. The following discussion owes much to Zimmermann.
2. See above, pp. 136-7.
3. Zimmermann, <u>op cit</u>, p. 42. Zimmermann believes that the "seditious libel" was probably a broadside.

> to dethrone all kings, and plant the tree of liberty on
>
> our Irish land - whilst the French Defenders will protect
>
> our cause, and the Irish Defenders pull down the British laws.
>
> Which is the first tree? - The tree of liberty.
>
> Who planted it? - The Duke of Orleans.
>
> Where? - In his own lawn."[1]

It is possible that some of the enthusiasm for Liberty Tree symbolism

amongst humble followers of the United Irishmen, or Catholic peasant

movements like the Defenders, was due to its assimilation to local Irish

traditions of tree veneration. According to one such tradition's sacred

trees, or <u>bili</u>, were planted to commemorate the inauguration or the death

of a king, and to cut down those of the enemy was one of the greatest

triumphs which could be achieved. Such trees were still held in great

veneration at the time of the United Irishmen. Indeed to this day sober

Ulstermen, including members of the Orange Order, will tell you grim

tales of the ills befalling men who dare to cut down a "fairy thorn".

The peculiarly Irish emphasis on a liberty tree which had withered but

would put forth new growth, which is evident in the proclamation of the

Londonderry Volunteers, may also have been related to locally well-known

Christian symbolism. An Irish "prophecy" current at this time took up

Isaiah's prediction that the last shoot of the Tree of Jesse would bring

liberation, a prediction previously revived in the popular medieval legend

that the dead wood of Christ's cross grew again when watered by his

blood.[2] The development of political images is often crucially determined

1. T. Macnevin, "Trials of the Defenders" in <u>Lives and Trials of Eminent Irishmen</u>, Dublin, 1846, quoted in M.R. Beames, "Peasant Movements - Ireland 1785-1795", <u>Journal of Peasant Studies</u>, p. 504.
2. Zimmermann, <u>op cit</u>, p. 42. On contacts between the Defenders and the United Irishmen at this time see Marianne Elliott, "The Origins and Transformation of Early Irish Republicanism", <u>International Review of Social History</u>, Van Gorcum, Assen, vol 23, 1978, pp. 405-428.

by this kind of merging of meanings.

Assimilation of the new imagery was also facilitated by wider social and cultural developments which took place in Ireland during this period. It was not only through words that the United Irish leaders transmitted to their followers and associates the revolutionary green imagery of the Liberty Tree. They also devised for themselves green uniforms and emblems, which were rapidly adopted by large sections of the population, in an extraordinarily widespread and apparently largely spontaneous outburst of political dressing-up. This was possible because the lower classes could increasingly afford to adorn themselves in this way[1] and clearly enjoyed the symbolic rise in status this adornment brought them.

By the early 1790s Irish volunteer units sympathetic to republican ideals were changing their uniforms from the hitherto predominant red or blue, adopted in imitation of regular units in the British army, to the revolutionary green.[2] Civilians too were quick to display their association with the new political ideals by the adoption of green emblems. In 1792 it was they as well as the volunteers who sported green cockades in the procession which took place in Belfast on 14 July in celebration of the French revolution.[3] And in 1797 in Newry, Lord

---

1. It is important to remember that in certain Irish cities, such as Dublin, Limerick, Drogheda and Kilkenny, guilds dressed up for a series of public events between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries (see Belinda Loftus, Marching Workers, Arts Councils of Ireland and Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Belfast 1978, pp 3-9). But the passion for uniforms and emblems shared by election supporters, Freemasons, Volunteers, Orangemen and United Irishmen in the late eighteenth century was nonetheless remarkable, and seems to have been encouraged equally by the political excitement and economic developments of the period.
2. Hayes-McCoy, op cit, pp. 110-111.
3. Belfast Politics, or a Collection of the Debates, Resolutions and other proceedings of that town, in the years 1792 and 1793, H. Joy & Co, Belfast, 1794, p. 47 and pp. 52-5 and R.M. Sibbett, Orangeism in Ireland and throughout the Empire, Henderson, Belfast 1914-15, vol 1 p. 205 and p. 207.

Carhampton insisted on removing from the neck of a Mr Turner a green

handkerchief which he regarded as "a symbol of rebellion."[1]

When that rebellion came the following year, not only the United

Irish leaders, but virtually all those associated with the insurrection,
(ill 121),
devised for themselves green uniforms/ badges and flags. Some feeling

for the extensiveness of this usage and the meanings attached to it, can

be obtained by considering the green emblems employed by the rebel

leaders and their men at the Battle of Ballynahinch. The Commander-in-

Chief, Henry Monro, is said to have worn as a distinguishing badge, a

green and white plume or cockade, which was afterwards given to Bishop

Percy of Dromore.[2] Some of the leaders had green coats, and most of

them wore green or yellow belts. Their followers wore no uniform.

"The only thing in which they all concurred was the wearing of green:

almost every individual having a knot of ribbons of that colour, sometimes

mixed with yellow, in his hat. Most of them besides had their hats and

button-holes decorated with laurel from the adjoining grounds."[3]

The women associated with the United Irish movement were also

prominent in their display of green imagery, both before and during the

battle. Henry Monro's sister Margaret had from girlhood worn orange and

green ribbons in her head-dress;[4] it was wives, sweethearts and sisters

who presented to the rebel leaders ornaments consisting of such symbols

as "the harp entwined with the shamrock or bays, but without the crown;

the British lion and unicorn in a falling attitude; the cap of liberty;"[5]

---

1. Edward Newell, Autobiography, quoted in M.J. McManus, Irish Cavalcade
       1550-1850, Macmillan, 1939, pp. 199-200. For other instances of
       attacks on people for wearing the green see Zimmermann, op cit, p. 43.
2. Dickson, op cit, p. 228 note 1.
3. Eyewitness account by James Thomson, a boy of twelve at the time, first
       published in The Belfast Magazine, vol 1 no 1, and quoted in Dickson,
       op cit, p. 228.
4. Account of Poyntz Steward, quoted Dickson, op cit, p. 251.
5. Thomson, op cit, p. 229.

121. Belfast Volunteers uniform believed to have been worn
     by Henry Joy McCracken, one of the leaders of the
     United Irishmen/ ca 1792/green woollen cloth with
     yellow facings and silver-plated copper buttons/Ulster
     Museum/Photo: UM.

and it was the two town prostitutes, clad in green silk, who carried

two of the three or four green rebel standards later captured by the

loyalist forces. Two such emblems are represented in Thomas Robinson's

painting of the battle (ill 231). He shows them as small green flags,

one bearing a yellow harp, the other a red cross. It is difficult to

tell how accurate his depiction of them is. Certainly the work was

painted in 1798 and in other respects tallies very closely with accounts

of what took place.[1]

The importance attached to all this verdant display can be deduced

from a revealing sentence in James Thomson's eye-witness account.

"The leaders were...pointed out...with pride and exultation, and

their dresses and ornaments explained."[2]

It is by adhering to those two concepts of pride and explanation

that it is possible to reach some understanding of the way in which green

liberty symbolism was being absorbed by supporters and associates of the

United Irishmen during this period. Like the Volunteers in the previous

twenty years, and like the Orangemen during the same period, these humble

followers clearly revelled in the politically symbolic dressing up of this

period, in which, because of the cash economy created by the developing

linen industry, they could afford to participate, thereby placing

themselves on a hitherto unexpected level with their social superiors.[3]

---

1. Pakenham, op cit, p. 264; Hayes McCoy, op cit, p. 118; and Anne
   Crookshank and the Knight of Glin, Irish Portraits, 1660-1860,
   (exhibition catalogue) Paul Mellon Foundation for British Art, 1969,
   pp 60-61.
2. Thomson, op cit, p. 228. For further information on the green imagery
   flags, uniforms and emblems used in the republican uprising of 1798
   and 1803, see Pakenham op cit, passim, and Hayes-McCoy, op cit, pp.
   111-121.
3. See above, p. 310 note 3.

The kind of delight this engendered, and the resentment, is most poignantly conveyed in the account given in the pro-Government Belfast News Letter of the capture of one William Ainslie Holton in the aftermath of the further, abortive Irish republican uprising led by Robert Emmet in 1803. In Holton's possession was found

"an elegant suit of green uniform, splendidly ornamented with gold lace. On each shoulder of the coat was a massy gold epaulette in the centre of which was the figure of a harp and crown reversed; he had also a pair of green pantaloons, likewise adorned with a profusion of gold lace."[1]

Before leaving Belfast barracks to be examined by Brigadier General Campbell, the bold Holton chose to dress himself in this uniform, topped off by a huge cocked hat, with a small tricoloured cockade, and a large green feather.[2]

But it was his fine regalia which had been his undoing. Three days later the Belfast News Letter revealed

"About a fortnight ago Holton had purchased in Dublin a quantity of gold and silver lace, a pair of epaulets, and a large military cocked hat, together with a quantity of green cloth, in consequence of which circumstances being made known, a strict search had been making after him for some days previous to his apprehension."[3]

The United Irishmen and their supporters and associates took to themselves the green imagery of republican liberty, making themselves personifications of the new political order they desired. In doing this

---

1. Belfast News Letter 30 Aug 1803.
2. Ibid
3. Belfast News Letter 2 Sept 1803. The tailor who made the uniform was also taken into custody.

they were facilitated by the existence of local myths to which such imagery could be assimilated, and by the financial and social impetus for dressing-up which existed in this period. But they often employed the republican green symbols in a confused fashion, and they had to discuss and explain them amongst themselves, whether at the battlefield of Ballynahinch, or in the proclamations of the Volunteers, or in the catechisms used by the United Irishmen and the Defenders. This was a new, unfamiliar kind of imagery, and what remained of it after the failure of the republican uprisings in 1798 and 1803 was largely a nostalgic memory of "the wearing of the green."[1]

Green symbolism and Irish nationalism in southern Ireland in the nineteenth century

That the green symbolism of the 1790s was inspired by the liberty imagery of the revolutions in America and France, rather than by native traditions of shamrock-wearing, appears to be confirmed by the very different usages made of shamrocks and other green emblems in nineteenth century Ireland.

Throughout the century the shamrock retained the ambivalent position it had achieved in the 1760s and 1770s, as an Irish symbol usually acceptable to the Protestant ascendancy and the British monarchy, but also employed by the country's Catholic population in the emblems of organisations which pursued the establishment of a separate Irish nation.

English interventions in nineteenth century Irish history were celebrated with shamrock imagery. The Act of Union was commemorated by medals in which the English oakleaf was intertwined with the shamrock;[2]

---

1. See the early nineteenth century ballads on this theme in Zimmermann, op cit, pp 167-171.
2. Sheehy, op cit, p. 12.

122. Glass engraved with shamrocks, celebrating the visit
     of George IV to Dublin in 1821/height 6½ ins (16.5
     cms), diameter 4¹/8 ins (10.5 cms)/National Museum
     of Ireland/Photo: NMI.

when George IV visited Dublin in 1821 he wore an enormous cockade of

shamrocks to which he repeatedly pointed during his progress;[1] a souvenir

glass made to celebrate the occasion was also festooned with shamrock

leaves (ill 122); and when Queen Victoria toured Ireland in August 1849,

shamrocks were again abundant in the decorations which greeted her.[2]

Indeed by the mid-nineteenth century so acceptably loyal was the

shamrock, that it became a stock design in wares produced by Irish

manufacturers for English tourists, or by English manufacturers for

popular consumption in Ireland. Inlaid woodwork from Killarney, bog-oak

jewellery and Belleek pottery all tempted English (and Irish) customers

with objects thickly encrusted with shamrocks (ill 123), and

as early as 1847, the catalogue of a London seal manufacturer whose wares

were sold by a Belfast retailer, featured such subjects as:

1. Shamrock (small) - "Cushlamachree"

2. Shamrock, with a word on each leaf. - "Erin's my home"

17. Harp and Shamrocks - "Erin ma vourneen - Erin go Bragh"

(two sizes).[3]

Yet at the same time shamrocks appeared on the emblems employed by

nationalists and republicans in Ireland. They were, for example, twined

round the harp images successively employed by O'Connell's Repeal

Association, the Fenian Brotherhood and nationally-minded Irish trade

unions.[4]

---

1. Hayes-McCoy, op cit, p. 126.
2. See the various reports on the Queen's visit in the editions of the Illustrated London News for August 1849.
3. Catalogue of a portion of the celebrated and beautiful Lewisian composition seals, manufactured by J. Bray, Battersea, London, sold wholesale and retail, by J. Henderson, 15½ Castle Place, Belfast. (Attached to a copy of the Belfast People's Magazine, vol 1 no 9, Sept 1847, in the Linen Hall Library, Belfast).
4. See p.454ff. The earliest traceable harp and shamrocks image appears to be on a wine-glass of about 1750, mentioned in Boydell, op cit. For a discussion of the apparent variation in loyal and national display of shamrocks on nineteenth century Irish glassware, see ibid. O'Connell may have been familiar with this emblem from its use on songsheets of Thomas Moore's compositions such as the one held by his daughter Ellen, in a portrait dated 1818, at present in Derrynane Abbey.

123. Davenport/ca 1860/made in Killarney/veneered with
     yew and inlaid with various woods/height 44^1/8 ins
     (112 cms)/Ulster Museum/Photo:UM.

Green was a less ambivalent symbol, and seems to have remained very largely an emblem of the Irish desire to be free of English rule. It is significant that at the time of the two royal visits in 1821 and 1849, the green harp flag was markedly absent from the displays greeting the monarch. Indeed in 1821 the old blue harp flags were flown instead, alongside the Union Jack and the royal standard.[1]

This distinction between the ambivalent shamrock and the disloyal green was almost certainly a reaction to the current use of green symbolism by Catholic Irishmen, as well as to its earlier employment in the rebellions of 1798 and 1803. For, particularly from 1830 onwards, green emblems of every kind were repeatedly used in large-scale public demonstrations supporting campaigns for Catholic emancipation, repeal of the Act of Union, release of Irish political prisoners and Home Rule for Ireland.

This usage appears to have been largely spontaneous. Its most spectacular manifestation was at processions and meetings attended by Daniel O'Connell, the leader of the first two of these political campaigns. O'Connell himself frowned on the excessive use of green harp flags. Always a cautious reformer, he disliked any emblems which gave a military air to the mass demonstrations which he called in support of his parliamentary fight for emancipation and repeal. Indeed the button designed to be worn by members of his Repeal Association carried a polite, unaggressive image of the harp and shamrocks (ill 124). But O'Connellite demonstrations were marked by the constant display of green arches, boughs, banners and flags, the latter often bearing slogans which combined nationalist feeling with support for a constitutional settlement.[2]

---

1. Hayes-McCoy, op cit, p. 127
2. Hayes-McCoy, op cit, pp. 128-129. Typical slogans were "Ireland for the Irish and the Irish for Ireland", "Victoria our Queen, with her we'll stand or fall" and "Repeal and no separation."

124. Hardiman & Iliffes/Button of the Repeal Association/
     1844/silver plate/diameter:^{7}/8 in (2.25 cms)/National
     Museum of Ireland/Photo: NMI.

Contemporary accounts and illustrations make plain how popular this imagery was. An English visitor who was present at the monster repeal meeting at Tara in 1843 (ill 125), was so disturbed by the great display of flags and banners at it, that he dreamed that night of a battle of flags, in which the Irish green harp flag, adorned by the word "Independence", was supported against the English standard by the French tricolour and the American stars and stripes.[1] The Young Irelander Charles Gavan Duffy, who was also present at the meeting, later described the banners there as "past counting", stated that twenty of them were planted round the burial place of those who fell in 1798, and observed that the memory carried away by thousands was of "the green flag they loved streaming in the wind."[2]

One may indeed suspect that the Young Irelanders played some part in engineering the displays of green at the O'Connell demonstrations, for their interest in devising both propaganda and regalia for the cause of repeal is well recorded.[3] But at many of these demonstrations, and at the later processions in the 1860s and 1870s commemorating O'Connell, or supporting the cause of Irish political prisoners, it was the Irish trade unions who provided the most spectacular displays of green imagery. They did so with a gusto which was clearly spontaneous rather than dictated by instructions issued by political leaders. Not only did they carry increasingly enormous green banners featuring national emblems, heroes and saints, but they also decked themselves out in elaborate costumes and regalia, which included green sashes, aprons, wands and rosettes. These

1. J. Johnson, A tour in Ireland, 1844, pp. 65-81, quoted Hayes-McCoy, op cit, p.129.

2. C. Gavan Duffy, Young Ireland, Unwin, 1896, vol I, p. 166ff, quoted Hayes-McCoy, loc cit. According to Johnson's account, most of the green flags and banners carried on this occasion were displayed by trade unions.

3. Ibid, pp. 134-6 and 138-9.
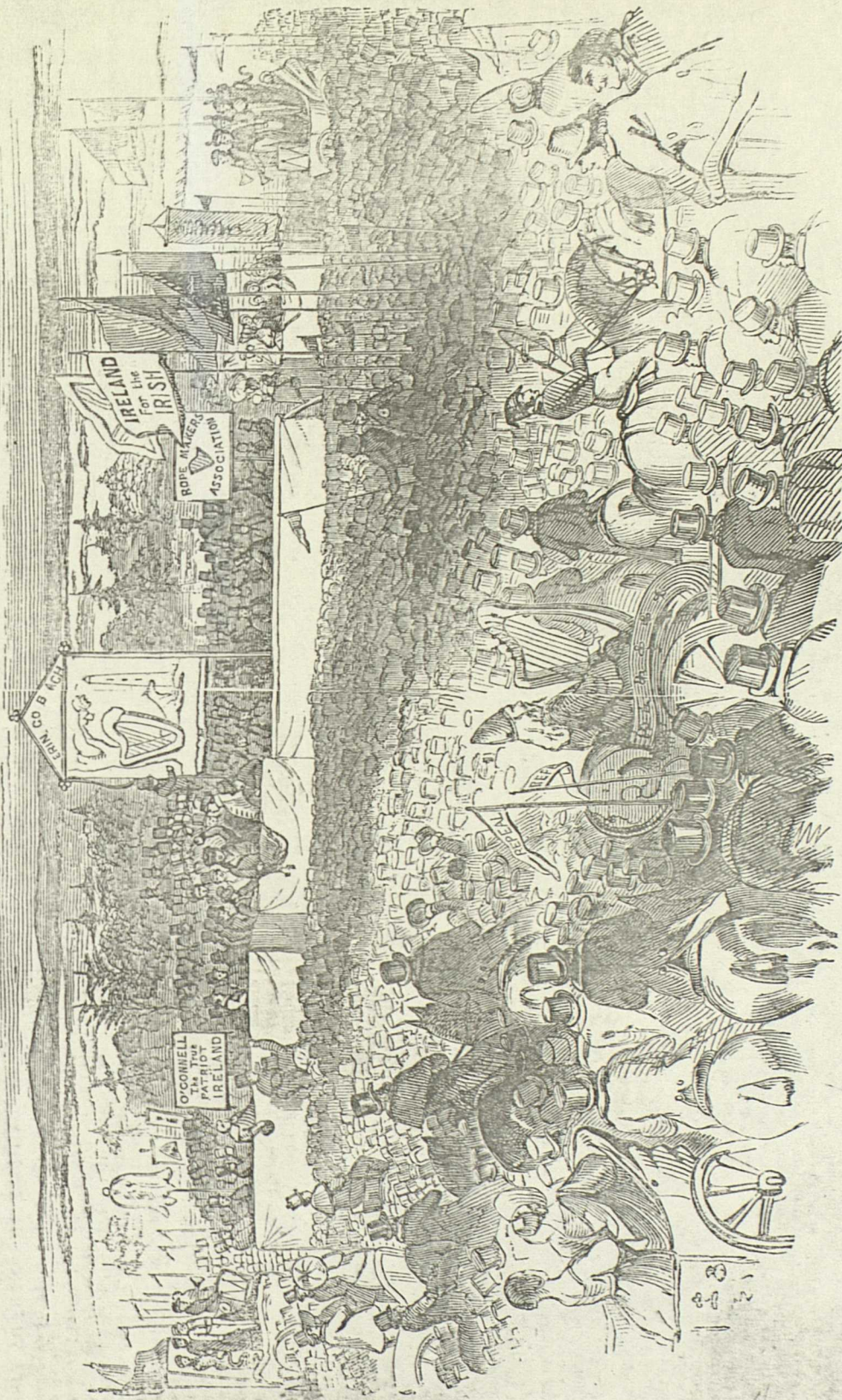
REPEAL MEETING AT TARA.

125. Repeal Meeting at Tara, 1843/Illustrated London News,
26 Aug 1843/wood-engraving/actual size.

emblems appear to have derived partly from the traditions associated with guild processions and political elections in the eighteenth century, partly from the masonic and friendly society imagery appropriated by the early trade unions, partly from exuberant nationalism, and partly from sheer delight in display. Their extravagance can best be conveyed by this description of the barbers and hairdressers in the 1869 Dublin procession which supported the demand for an amnesty for Irish political prisoners.

"This body consisted of 250 respectable and intelligent men, wearing distinctive rosettes of orange and green, with green pendants, ornamented with a Brian Boroimhe harp, also wearing green and gold sashes, carrying their beautiful and artistic trade banner, trimmed with falls of white and green silk, ornamented with gold lace ...from the framework of the banner (which was tastefully decorated with artificial flowers and natural ferns) was suspended black and crimson chains. The body of the procession was marshalled by six stewards bearing wands, ornamented with flowers, ferns and chains, the same as banner, being preceded by three boys carrying bannerets of green and gold...In the general body of the procession were two bannerets of green and gold bearing the words 'Erin, dear Erin', and 'Break their chains' - the banner being erected on a handsome carriage drawn by four grey horses, with outriders wearing rosettes of orange and green, was supported by two bearers wearing Hungarian hats, with orange and green feathers and large leather gauntlets, in addition to the rosettes and sashes of the body. The tout ensemble of this body reflected great credit on the patriotic exertions of Mr George C. Delahunt."[1]

This kind of display was not confined to the capital city. Limerick and Drogheda trade unions repeatedly supported nationalist demonstrations

---

1. <u>Weekly Freeman's Journal</u>, 16 October 1869, p. 2.

of this period with lavish quantities of green imagery, and even in small

and remote towns like Ennis in Co Clare the trades turned out on

appropriate occasions with similar, though less exuberant, regalia.[1]

What however did the men and women who made such lavish use of green

displays in the nineteenth century mean by it? The confused memories of

wearing republican green clearly lingered on, in the various street ballads

celebrating this theme.[2] But the colour now seems to have been popularly

seen as Catholic alone, instead of the emblem of Protestants and Catholics

alike, united in the pursuit of the republican ideal. In 1810 John Gamble,

after watching women purchase gowns in Dublin, observed that

"The colours they preferred were all different shades of green: a

very elegant stuff of a pale yellow was shown them; the youngest seemed

pleased with it, but the other whispered something in Irish and then laid

it aside. I remarked that the shopman smiled, and asked him what she

said? 'Don't have any thing to do with it; it is a protestant colour.'"[3]

Gamble added his own speculations as to further reasons why the

women preferred the colour green.

"Green, in all its shades, is Catholic; orange is Protestant.

Green is not only the most beautiful, but it is the national colour. All

the attachments, indeed, and prejudices of the Catholic, have a reference

to the country, to the soil, to the sod, as he affectionately terms it;

this is a more natural feeling, and therefore bids fair to be more lasting

than the Protestant one, which is artificial and factitious, founded on

recollections that time must infallibly weaken, and on attachments that

are extrinsic and adventitious."[4]

---

1. On nineteenth century Irish trade union regalia see Loftus, op cit,
      pp. 19-36.
2. Zimmermann, op cit, pp. 167-171.
3. John Gamble, Sketches of History, Politics and Manners, in Dublin and
      the North of Ireland in 1810, Baldwin, Cradock & Joy, 1826, pp. 136-7.
4. Ibid.

These observations run counter to current opinion about the extent

of Irish nationalist feeling prior to the famine years of the 1840s. In

particular Thomas N. Brown has argued very persuasively[1] that Daniel

O'Connell's followers were strongly bound by localism, felt a passion

for their land but not for their nation, and may often have turned out

for the O'Connell demonstrations as much from the love of a show as any

political interest. Nevertheless the experience of attending such

demonstrations, and of witnessing their massed displays, must in itself

have helped to engender a sense of nation. And one cannot discard

Gamble's comments too lightly, for he was a sympathetic and perceptive

observer of the Irish scene. Moreover he had that ability to seize on

the intersection between public and private meaning which frequently evades

the historian and in which national feeling is so often crucially located.[2]

And the little scene he observed is clear evidence that affection for the

green in the nineteenth century existed amongst the Catholic population

at large, not solely their political leaders or romantic song-writers.

Indeed, even the adoption of the Irish tricolour, traditionally

regarded as the result of a single action by the Young Irelanders in 1848,

is now known to have been the result of a more gradual process, in which

groups like the trade unions were involved, as well as more notable

leaders of Irish opinion. There is apparently indisputable evidence that

tricolour emblems were carried by some of the rebels in Wexford in 1798.[3]

---

1. In "Nationalism and the Irish Peasant 1800-1848", The Review of Politics, University of Notre Dame, Indiana, vol 15 no 4, Oct 1953, pp. 403-445.
2. For a stimulating discussion of this question in an English context see Fred Inglis, "Nation and Community: A landscape and its morality, The Sociological Review, Keele, vol 25 no 3, Aug 1977, pp. 489-514.
3. Michael Toibin, "Enniscorthy and the National Flag", in The Past, U Ceinnsealaigh Historical Society, Enniscorthy, no 7, 1964, p. 145.

However their widespread adoption seems to date from 1830, when, following

France's second revolution, Louis Philippe restored the French tricolour

of 1789 as his country's national flag. There is a variety of evidence

which suggests that Irish men and women from various walks of life were

inspired by this event to create Irish tricolours combining the colours

of green, white and orange to symbolise the peaceful unity of the Protestant

and Catholic peoples of Ireland. Thus at a meeting in September 1830, the

purpose of which was to prepare a message of congratulation to the French

revolutionaries, the O'Gorman Mahon MP wore an Irish tricolour cockade

sent by Emilia Eleanor Hamilton of Annadale Cottage, Phibsborough. The

emblem and Miss Hamilton's letter explaining its conciliatory symbolism,[1]

must have become a topic in polite conversation in Dublin, for not only

was the meeting attended by those stars of the social scene, Tom Moore

and Lady Morgan,[2] but both it and the letter were subsequently reported

in The Irish Rushlight.[3] In December of the same year the prevalence of

Irish tricolour ribbons, badges and trade union banners on display during

Daniel O'Connell's ceremonial return to Dublin makes plain that the

emblem was also becoming popular in less exalted circles.[4] And one of

these banners used slogans and images conveying the same message of

conciliation as that proposed by Miss Hamilton. It was composed of green,

orange and white silk.

"On the green a crown, surmounted by a harp, and in gold letters the

---

1. She wrote: "Hereafter, may the orange remind us only of a patriot King,
   a necessary revolution and a bill of rights; the green of that heart-
   cheering hue which a residing aristocracy can easily confer on our
   uncultivated bogs and mountains; and the white of a virtuous and
   peaceful people's fairly elected representatives in parliament."
   (Quoted in Hayes-McCoy, op cit, p. 141.)
2. Owen Dudley Edwards, "Choosing of the Irish Flag and Anthem", Irish
   Times supplement on Cabinet Papers, North and South, 21 April 1976.
3. 1831, p. 91ff.
4. Hayes-McCoy, op cit, p. 142.

word 'Conciliation'. On the orange, the Union of hands, one having an orange glove, the other a green. Above a dove, dropping the olive of peace into the united hand. On the white, in gold letters 'Repeal of the Union'."[1]

Clearly both the tricolour, and its meaning, were well established in Ireland before their supposed introduction by Meagher. Indeed it was already being employed by the Young Ireland movement before the celebrated deputation to France in 1848. In 1844 a tricolour flag was displayed in prison by O'Connell, Duffy and other repealers. And in 1848 itself an Irish tricolour was carried in a demonstration honouring the French in Enniscorthy in Co Wexford, a week before Meagher's deputation to Paris. Moreover it was widely believed at the time that Meagher himself supplied the tricolour flag supposedly given to him in France, a belief which seems reasonable in view of the cautious reception known to have been accorded to the Young Irelanders by the leaders of the French revolution. However the flag was displayed on a number of occasions in the following months, its national significance was constantly emphasised by the leaders of the abortive Young Ireland rising which took place later in the year, and Meagher's melodramatic speech, having been recorded by the Dublin newspapers, remained available for later generations of romantic Irishmen.[2]

The meanings evoked by the various forms of green symbolism in southern Ireland in the late nineteenth century did not derive simply from memories of late eighteenth century politics, or from the gestures of contemporary Irish politicians. They were produced by the wide range

---

1. Loftus, op cit p. 20.
2. This account of the Young Irelanders' use of the Irish tricolour is based on Hayes-McCoy, op cit pp 143-8.

of groups and individuals who employed these symbols, not always with direct political intent. The shamrock could still be seen by some as an emblem of the loyal Irishry, not only because it has been previously used as such, but because local representatives of the Protestant ascendancy continued to employ it on state occasions, and Irish manufacturers offered it on wares intended to appeal to the widest possible range of customers, and to accord with the new taste for polite domesticity. Yet simultaneously nationalist and republican organisations employed virtually identical shamrock images with a separatist national emphasis. The colour green lost some of its republican symbolism in popular usage, but it was that popular usage, not just memories of 1798 or the activities of the Young Irelanders, which maintained its potency as an emblem of mass nationalism. And Irish tricolours too were copied from the French republican flag, and given their conciliatory symbolism, by individuals and groups from different sections of Ireland's political and class structure in this period, although the well-reported Meagher story was undoubtedly of key importance in giving them a romantic appeal. Many hands and minds continued to maintain, develop and modify Ireland's green symbolism in nineteenth century southern Ireland.

Green symbolism and Irish nationalism in the nineteenth century: the North

It is generally assumed that Irish nationalist movements in the nineteenth century had little impact on the northern part of the country, and that such green imagery as was employed there was generally used as a form of counter-challenge to the displays of the Orangemen. There is indeed some truth in these two assumptions. O'Connell's sole appearance in Ulster was brief and unspectacular, the abortive Young Ireland rebellion of 1848

and Fenian rising of 1867 did not spread to the province, and the Land League never really gained a foothold there. And, as we shall see, some of the most resplendent green displays seen in the north in the nineteenth century were clearly tit-for-tat responses to Orange parades. However green imagery was employed in Ulster during this period with many other political connotations. The subject deserves far greater research than is feasible or appropriate within the context of this thesis, but some indication of the range of imagery employed and the meanings attached to them can be given.

In the early years of the nineteenth century it seems that Catholics in the north continued the old practice of honouring the feast day of St Patrick by a personal display of green imagery. In 1822 The Irishman, the Belfast newspaper run by Jack Lawless, a fervent supporter of Daniel O'Connell, reported that

"In that part where we reside, and particularly in the County Down, there has been an immemorial practice of walking in procession on the anniversary of St Patrick, the men and women dressed in their beloved green, and each vying with the other in the enthusiasm of their homage."[1]

Other observers also reported the occurrence of these parades, described them as "national processions", and claimed that

"It is a national custom upon the 17th of March for a man to put up his shamrock."[2]

Lawless concluded his article on St Patrick's Day celebrations with the following comments.

---

1. The Irishman, Belfast, 22 March 1822, p. 170.
2. Report from the Select Committee appointed to inquire into the Nature, Character, Extent and Tendency of Orange Lodges, Associations or Societies in Ireland, Parl Papers, 1835, (1835 Report), vol 16, evidence of Capt David Duff, para 8243. See also evidence of Sir F Stoven, para 4556.

"This custom, so innocent and so interesting, has been lately viewed
with a suspicious eye. The motives of those who thus manifested their
respect to their Patron Saint were abused - they were called Ribbonmen
or rather they were confounded with Ribbonmen (an illegal association
growing out of another illegal association called Orangemen) and, therefore,
they became objects of jealousy and suspicion, and sometimes of alarm."[1]

These remarks must be viewed in the light of Lawless's strong
commitment to O'Connell's pursuit of constitutional nationalism, and his
fierce opposition to the Orange Order, but it is undoubtedly true that many
observers, both in this period and subsequently, tended to label all
marchers displaying green emblems as Ribbonmen.[2]

Certainly the Ribbonmen existed. They were an oath-bound, semi-
masonic society very similar to the Orange Order in their organisation and
imagery. None of their regalia appears to have been preserved, but there
is an illustration of what is claimed to be a Master Ribbonman's sash,
belt and collar in W.S Trench's Realities of Irish Life (ill 126). Dated
1838, the regalia, with its red hand and crosses and hearts looks like a
simpler version of Orange emblems.

However when contemporary observers talked of Ribbonmen marching, or
being involved in sectarian fights,[3] or challenging Orange displays with
green imagery, it is often hard to know whether the men they saw were
indeed Ribbonmen, or simply groups of Catholics who shared some kind of
nationalist feeling or opposition to the Protestant Orangemen. What can
be said is that there were numerous green displays in the North during

---

1. Lawless, loc cit.
2. This tendency is frequently alluded to in the 1835 Report. See paras
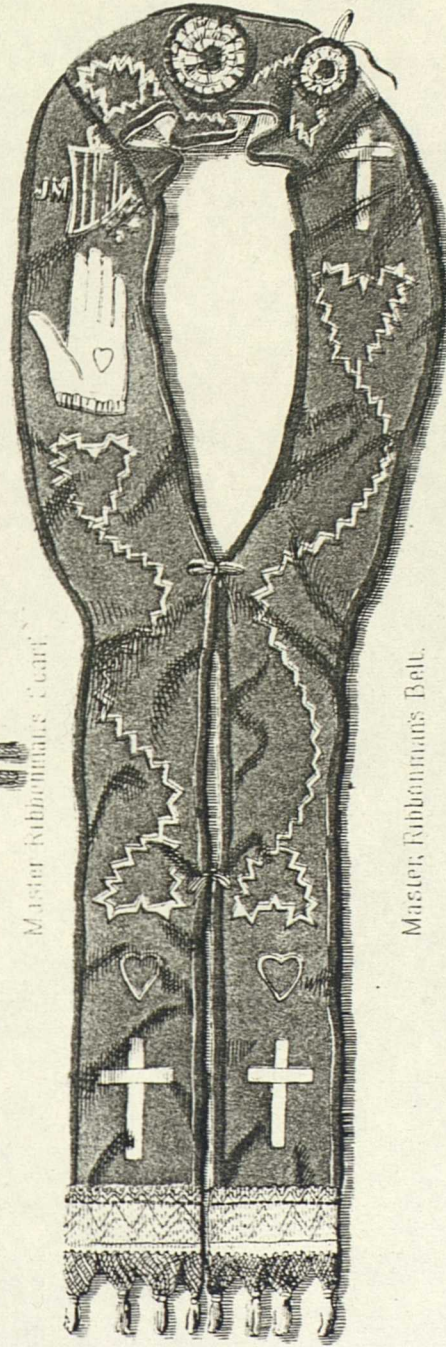   4397, 4555-6, 7785-7793, 8135-8137, 8384-5 and 9858.
3. Such as the affray in Antrim in June 1819, the trial of whose
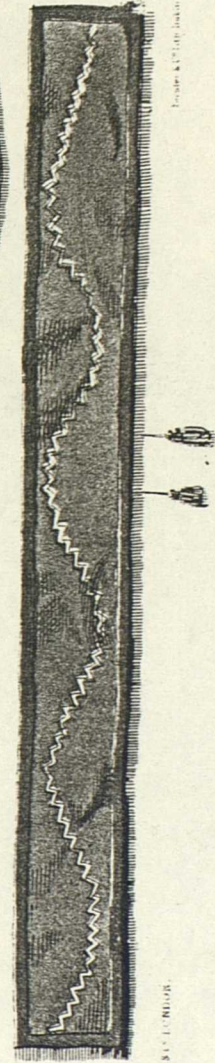   participants was reported in The Irishman for 24 March 1820.

PLATE 3.

JM

Master Ribbonman's Collar.

Master Ribbonman's Scarf.

Master Ribbonman's Belt.

126. Master Ribbonman's Regalia/1838/illustration by J. Townsend Trench in W.S. Trench, <u>Realities of Irish Life</u>, Longmans 1869, plate 13 opposite p.47.

this period in which continuing allegiance to St Patrick, opposition to the Orangemen and support of more sophisticated political campaigns were all symbolised.

In the 1835 Report on Orange lodges it is generally stated that Roman Catholics habitually celebrated St Patrick's Day (17 March) and St John's Day (24 June) with drum-beating, bonfires and processions in which ribands, badges, music and arms were all featured.[1] A number of reports about the parades on St Patrick's Day in 1834 record in more detail the regalia employed. At Camlough 150-200 marched, headed by fife and drum, with green ribands in their breasts, and playing the White Cockade, Patrick's Day and M'Donald's reel;[2] in Downpatrick 4,000 are claimed to have paraded, wearing green ribands and sashes; at Crossgar about 100 processed, sporting green and white ribands on their hats, and scarves of the same colours; and at Plumb Bridge 400-600 turned out with four banners, three of which were green, with the representation of a man's head and shoulders on each side of them, the fourth white, with a man's head and shoulders on one side, and a harp on the other.[3] Certainly the last three parades give the appearance of an organised society.

Such parades appear to have been unknown in this period in Belfast, where celebrations of the saint's day were generally confined to incessant playing of St Patrick's Day on pipes and drums, and dinners held by such eminently loyal organisations as the Nelson Club and the Friendly Brothers of St Patrick. However the influx of Catholics into the city in the mid-nineteenth century is believed to have brought the Ribbonmen with it, and to them were attributed the green boughs and arches which challenged the

1. vol 15, paras 366-374 and 431-437.
2. Ibid, para 378.
3. Ibid, vol 16, Appendix, pp. 136-138.

displays of the Belfast Orangemen in the mid-nineteenth century.[1]

According to a recent researcher of Ribbonism, its adherents did not seek the overthrow of the government, the establishment of a republic or the freedom of the Irish nation.[2] However there is considerable evidence that groups of northern Catholics, many of them described as Ribbonmen by contemporary observers, did pursue a range of political ends which included nationalism and republicanism, and did utilise green imagery in that pursuit.

Sometimes it is difficult to determine the precise aims of such evidently political displays. Thus when Lt Col Verner recorded that "a body of persons who came to vote against me in the year 1826, came decorated with green",[3] we have no way of ascertaining exactly what that green symbolised. That national issues were involved in local sectarian conflicts in the north of Ireland at this time is apparent from various fragments of evidence. Thus in 1828, when the campaigns for and against Catholic emancipation were at their height, the agent for the Lennard estates in Co Monaghan wrote to his master referring to

"speechifying, publications etc of the Catholic Association, Orange Societies, and Brunswick Clubs. It is hardly possible for an educated mind to conceive the rancour to which the lower order of both Protestants and Catholics are worked up by these proceedings. No person who has not stood between the rival factions as I have done at the fair of Clones would believe that man was such an odious beast."[4]

---

1. Sybil E. Baker, "Orange and Green, Belfast 1832-1912", in H.J. Dyos and Michael Wolff, The Victorian City, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973, pp 794-6.
2. Michael Foy, The Ancient Order of Hibernians, MA thesis, Queen's University of Belfast, 1976, pp. 4-5.
3. 1835 Report, vol 15, para 392.
4. Quoted in Pilip O Mordha, "Some Notes on Monaghan History (1692-1866)", Clogher Record, 1976, p. 39.

And as already observed,[1] the "Ribbonmen" who challenged the local Orange lodges to walk over Dolly's Brae in 1848, and taunted them with green and white flags,[2] did so with very specific references to the campaign led by Daniel O'Connell for the repeal of the Act of Union between England and Ireland.

The Irish tricolour also appears to have been used in Northern Ireland during this period in a way that mingled its wider implications with local meaning. There is some evidence that it was employed in Ulster, to symbolise conciliation between rural Catholics and Protestants when they joined forces to campaign for abolition of tithes, reduced rents and increased wages.

"In mid-November 1830 'a flag, striped with orange and green alternately' flew for a few days on Shaneshill - about three miles from Portadown - before the meeting of about fifteen hundred mainly labourers and small farmers on the 20 November. They were agitating against tithes and for increased wages and reduced rent. The atmosphere of reconciliation was further marked in the comment that 'The Orangemen had white flags instead of their usual insignia and declared they would henceforth burn those trappings which only served to revive hateful memory of their former strife and discord. Mr J. Brown of Waringsford rode up to and tore up the flag at the meeting itself where he succeeded in persuading the crowds to disperse.'"[3]

For a brief period in the mid-century Ulster Protestants, especially Ulster Presbyterians, allied themselves with the tricolour-flying Tenant

---

1. Above, pp. 325-6.
2. Papers relating to an investigation into the Occurrence at Dolly's Brae, 12 July 1849, Parliamentary Papers, 1850 (1143) p. 22.
3. Hayes-McCoy, op cit, p. 142. The quotations are from the Belfast News Letter 20 Nov 1830 and the Kilkenny Journal 1 Dec 1830.

League.[1] And at an O'Connellite meeting in Dublin in 1844, an eloquent

appeal was made for the union of orange and green by J. Grey Porter, a

northern Irish landowner, the son of a bishop and a momentary supporter

of repeal. He said that

"it would certainly be a most magnificent consummation of Irish

history if that proud and fiery body, the Protestants of Ireland, should,

inflamed by a generous nationality, march in the ranks of their Catholic

countrymen, unfurl the standard of orange and green, and casting off

the shackles of England, display their hereditary valour in fields that

would eclipse the glories of Derry and Boyne."[2]

Clearly the green displays made in the north of Ireland in the

nineteenth century included more than demonstrations by Ribbonmen and

tit-for-tat responses to Orange imagery. A wide range of groups from the

Catholic community appear to have made various kinds of displays ranging

from the St Patrick's Day commemorations traditional since the seventeenth

century, to tricolour-waving associated with political conciliation from

the 1830s onwards. However what does distinguish nineteenth century green

displays in Ulster from those in the rest of the country is their

meagreness and lack of extravagance prior to the repeal of the Party

Processions Act in 1872. Whereas in the south the numerical balance in

favour of the Catholic population made it easier for them to flout the

Act, particularly in trade union processions, in the north the strength of

the Protestants, especially the Orangemen, made this more difficult, and

trade unions were slow to develop, their role often being supplanted by

the Ribbonmen and the Orange Order.

---

1. Ibid, p. 194 and David W. Miller, Queen's Rebels, Gill & Macmillan/
       Barnes & Noble, New York, 1978, p. 77.
2. Hayes-McCoy, op cit, p. 143.

The exuberant displays mounted by the Ribbonmen in 1872, when they were legally free to march, underlines the extent to which their demonstrations had previously been limited. On Ladyday, ie the Catholic feast of the Assumption of the Virgin on 15 August, they held a number of processions in the province. In Belfast they marched to Hannahstown.

"The display of green was amazing. The flags were green, with white edgings; the scarfs were green, with tinsel ornaments; green ribbons were bound round the hats of many people; rosettes of the same colour adorned the breasts of the people's coats; and the habiliments of women and children bore a painful sameness for a similar reason."[1]

In front of the marchers rode "a little boy, fantastically dressed, with a long green cloak bound with white, a buff-coloured felt hat with gold trimming and mounted on a white horse."[2]

Much of the imagery employed confirmed the closeness of Ribbon and Orange traditions.

"There were the bands leading the lodges, the men with swords marching alongside, the green sashes worn by the Ribbonmen and the banners at the heads of the lodges portraying heroes like St Patrick, Rory O'More and Patrick Sarsfield."[3]

Indeed some of the Ribbonmen who processed this year actually made use of Orange regalia. In Monaghan, where 10,000 people are said to have attended the celebrations, drums borrowed from local Orange lodges were used by the marchers after the embarassing labels and slogans had been covered up. So friendly was the feeling on this day that at the end of

---

1. Belfast News Letter, 16 August 1872.
2. Ibid.
3. Foy, op cit, p. 14.

the march, while the Ribbonmen

"were recovering their exhausted energies with bread and beer, several Orangemen asked for and got possession of a drum and played their own loyal tunes without molestation around the Fair Green."[1]

(However not all such assistance from Protestants was so well regarded. At the Lady Day celebrations in Coleraine in this same year, local Protestants insisted on burning an effigy of a man whose loyalty and Protestant descent was suspect, and who had made drums for Ribbon marchers at Kilrea.)[2]

Much of the imagery used by the Ribbonmen in their processions in 1872 also looked back to earlier nationalist displays. Many of the flags carried resembled those used in the repeal demonstrations in the south some thirty years earlier. Some displayed the uncrowned harp, others slogans like "Remember Limerick" or "God save Ireland" or "Erin go Bragh." And in the procession held in Dundrum in Co Down there were several flags bearing representations of St Patrick, thereby recalling still earlier national allegiances.

But these 1872 parades also had other, more immediate political intentions. The speeches at the various fields were on the subjects of home rule and the release of Irish political prisoners. And not only did the march to Hannahstown lead to various sectarian scuffles between Protestants and Catholics in Belfast, but approximately 150 "roughs" from the Catholic community proceeded in the afternoon to Queen's Island to challenge the Protestant shipyard workers to a fight.[3] This action makes me suspect that Peter Gibbon's "cosmopolitan" Protestant shipyard workers

---

1. *Belfast News Letter*, 19 August, 1872.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Belfast News Letter* 16 August 1872.

of the late nineteenth century may well have been involved in an urbanised

version of the traditional faction fight, in which family networks of

industrial recruitment were fostering a gradual meshing of the outlooks

of traditional kin groups and industrial workforces aware of their position

within a wider economic and political context.

Indeed what the processions in 1872 forcefully emphasise is that

although the green displays of Northern Catholics were different from

those of the southern brethren they were not as different as is commonly

supposed. Green emblems were used in Ulster with a local emphasis, to

honour St Patrick, to assert the existence of the Ribbonmen and to

challenge the Orangemen. And they were, prior to last quarter of the

century, very muted in comparison to southern displays, because of the

local sectarian situation. But Northern Catholics were not entirely cut

off from the activities of their southern brethren. They read about them

in the increasingly popular and informative Irish newspapers, and, with

the development of the Irish railways in the second half of the century,

contingents of them participated in major events like the Dublin processions

commemorating Daniel O'Connell in 1864 and 1875. Improvements in national

communications were fostering a national consciousness expressed in

national symbolism, so that by 1872 we can see green emblems being used in

Ulster both as local challenges and as indications of involvement in a

mass Irish identity.

Flags of military rebellion: from the 1890s to partition

Further layers of meaning were added to Ireland's green symbolism by

various groups active in Irish politics at the end of the nineteenth

ccentury and the beginning of the twentieth. Some attempted to convert

the colour green, like the shamrock, to an emblem of Irishmen loyal to

the crown. Simultaneously, other political factions in Ireland were reviving both the green harp flag and the Irish tricolour as emblems of Irish republicanism. They were confirmed as such by the rebellion of 1916. Partly as the result of this and the conflicts which followed, partly because of the general jingoism of the period, these flags also came to be handled by both the Irish and the English in a strongly military fashion.

In the last years of the nineteenth century three groups with an interest in Irish politics were employing both the shamrock and green imagery in a way that denied their association with militant Irish separatism. The British monarchy actively sponsored or implicitly approved the use of such imagery in ceremonies, confirming its relationship with loyal Irishmen. In 1900 Queen Victoria recognised the contribution of Irish troops to the British cause during the Boer War, by inaugurating the custom of presenting the shamrock to Irish units on St Patrick's Day.[1] And when in the same year she visited Dublin, she was greeted by a number of green harp flags which caused no controversy.[2] This was very different from 1885 when Dublin Corporation's decision to greet the visit of the Prince of Wales, first by lowering their own flag, and then, after its theft by local Trinity College students, by flying a green harp flag, met with a chorus of loyalist and English outrage.[3]

For indeed by this time the Home Rule party, under Parnell's leadership, were playing down the militant emphasis on green imagery, and attempting to make St Patrick's Day "the national festival."[4]

---

1. Hayes-McCoy, op cit, p. 192.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid, pp. 180-182.
4. Alter, op cit, pp. 112-113.

Simultaneously Orangemen and Unionists were laying their claims to the green imagery which they saw as part of their Irish heritage, despite the attempts of the native population to appropriate it to nationalist, republican or sectarian usage. Thus in 1870 Mr W. Verner, one of the officers of the Irish Grand Lodge, said during the House of Commons debate on the repeal of the Party Processions Act that

"he was not disposed to view the green as a party colour for he had often worn the shamrock on the seventeenth of March, in order to show that he was not ashamed of his nationality"[1]

And in 1893 a Unionist badge made for a Belfast demonstration displayed the shamrock entwined with the English rose."[2]

But the nationalist and republican use of the Irish green had not ceased. It had been strongly stressed by the Fenians in their abortive rebellion in 1867. (They called upon Irishmen to enlist under "the green banner of the Irish republic", envisaged the green flag unfurled on the hills during their rising, and indeed carried several green harp flags when it took place, one of which was inscribed "Remember Emmet".)[3] It was re-emphasised by the prominent displays of green at the meetings of the Land League and the Amnesty Association. It was waved by the crowds which attended meetings of the Irish National League, the organisation of the Home Rule Party in Ireland.[4] It was used in street decorations greeting visits of Home Rule leaders. It was generally described in the contemporary Irish press and the literature of the Home Rule Party as the

1. Hansard, vol 200 (Second volume of Session 1870), p. 947, quoted in H.W. Cleary, The Orange Society, Catholic Truth Society, 1899, p. 215.
2. Photo in the Belfast Telegraph, 10 Nov 1969, p. 6. In this context it is salutary to remember David Miller's comments on Ulster Protestant attitudes to their identity in this period. It is his assertion that prior to the agreement of Westminster to Home Rule in 1912, Ulster Protestants saw the Irish question as a matter of loyal v. disloyal elements rather than Ulstermen v. Irishmen or Protestants v. Catholics (Miller, op cit, pp. 110-112.)
3. Hayes-McCoy, op cit, and O.Snoddy, "Fenian Flags", The Irish Sword Dublin, vol 8, 1967-8, p. 2. Besides the flags mentioned by these authors there is the Fermoy Fenians green harp flag preserved in Cork Museum.
4. See above, p. 147.

127. Wm Bridgett/Banner of the Michael Dwyer Club, Leeson
     St, Belfast/ca 1898/oil paints on silk/123 x 111 ins
     (312.4 x 282 cms)/Ulster Museum/Photo: UM.

Irish national flag.[1] And its historical tradition was revived in the

centenary commemorations of the rebellions of 1798 and 1803, celebrated

with fervour throughout the whole of Ireland. In Belfast the young horse-

woman leading the 1898 centenary demonstration dressed herself in green

and carried a green banner; she was accompanied by a cavalier dressed in

the Emmet uniform; green rosettes, badges and scarves were universally

worn; green arches spanned the streets; green and white uniforms were worn

by many of the bands; and '98 heroes were universally represented on the

banners, such as the one representing Michael Dwyer which was carried by

the people of Leeson Street (ill 127).[2]

It is debatable however how extensive the influence of '98 nationalist

fervour was in Northern Ireland. In Dublin the Irish National Foresters

marched regularly in the Lord Mayor's Procession in the 1890s wearing

the full Robert Emmet uniform;[3] but the Dwyer banner was not used again

until the 150th anniversary of the 1798 rising in 1948. And '98

symbolism seems to have had little effect on the imagery of the Ancient

Order of Hibernians, the successors to the Ribbonmen who proved such

effective supporters of the Northern Home Rule campaign in the decade

prior to 1914. True, a photograph of an AOH group in Clough ca 1910

shows them with a banner carrying a very recognisable depiction of Emmet,[4]

but contemporary accounts of the organisation's processions leave one in

no doubt that it was earlier heroes like Rory O'Moore and Patrick Sarsfield

who were still favoured.[5] Moreover the few pieces of AOH regalia which

survive from this period combine the Ribbonmen's secret society emblems of

red hand and heart with the cliched nationalist symbols of harp, Celtic

cross, round tower, rising sun, shamrock and St Patrick (ill 128).

1. Alter, op cit, pp. 106-7.
2. "Centenary in Belfast", Weekly Freeman, 11 June 1898.
3. C.P. Curran, Under the Receding Wave, Gill & Macmillan, Dublin, 1970, p. 26.
4. PRONI D 1422/3/9.
5. Foy, op cit, p. 28.

128. Ancient Order of Hibernians sash/pre 1900/
appliqué on green silk edged with gold braid/
48 x 6 ins (122 x 15.2 cms)/ made by the Irish
Sisters of Charity, Ballaghaderian, Co Mayo

Indeed when Irish nationalists decided in 1913 to imitate the Ulster loyalists by forming the Irish Volunteers, to provide the military training required to secure Home Rule, the green harp flags they acquired showed a stronger influence of the revival of Celtic traditions than of 1798 republicanism.[1] Indeed the use of green harp flags by the Volunteers demonstrates their appeal during this period to both Irishmen loyal to the British crown and those who sought to oppose it. For in September 1914 the Volunteers split over the question of fighting for the British in the First World War. Those who followed the call to do so, made by the Home Rule leader John Redmond, styled themselves Irish National Volunteers. Those who decided to continue their opposition to Britain over the Irish national question retained the old title of Irish Volunteers. Both sections remained loyal to the green harp flag. There is a photo of John Redmond presenting one to the Irish National Volunteers in 1915.[2] And the Irish Volunteers made widespread use of this flag before, during and after their rebellion against the English at Easter 1916.

This last assertion runs counter to

---

1. See below, pp. 457-8.
2. Reproduced in Robert Kee, The Green Flag, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972. ill 34. The many Irishmen who fought for the British in the 1914-18 War were doomed to disappointment however. While the Ulster Division was permitted to carry the red hand as a badge, the use of the green harp flag was forbidden to Irish regiments. They made and carried their own versions of it, but the decision rankled bitterly. (See the comments of Lloyd George on this matter in his War Memoirs, quoted in Jacqueline Van Voris, Constance de Markievicz: In the Cause of Ireland, University of Massachusetts, 1967, p. 181 n. 2).

the widely accepted belief that the participants in the rebellion of 1916 were so angered by English ambivalence towards the green harp flag in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, that they turned instead to the tricolour, which was formally instituted as the flag of the Irish republic in their Easter week rising and continued to be used as such thereafter. There is some evidence for republican use of the tricolour in the period leading up to 1916. Tricolour badges were worn in the great '98 centenary procession in Dublin on 14 August 1898; tricolour flags draped the coffins of the Fenian leaders James Stephens and O'Donovan Rossa in 1901 and 1915; and tricolour badges and armlets were devised for the use of the Irish Volunteers.[1] According to one observer there was also more general display of the tricolour in the years immediately before the Easter Rising.

"During the period 1914-16, it was fashionable to wear favours, such as rosettes, ribbons, buttons etc, on every public occasion and the tricolour was adopted by the followers of Sinn Fein; hence they came to be popularly known as the Sinn Fein colours."[2]

Nevertheless the tricolour does not appear to have been sufficiently widely employed at this time to become familiar to all supporters of Irish republicanism. In 1914 its meaning had to be explained to the Ladies' Irish Volunteer Committee[3] and even in 1916 some of the Sinn Fein supporters who saw tricolour flags displayed during the Easter Rising on the Dublin GPO and elsewhere, were clearly far from familiar with the emblem.[4]

---

1. Hayes-McCoy, op cit, p. 197 and pp. 205-6.
2. Quoted in James O'Donnell, How Ireland is Governed, Institute of Public Administration, Dublin, 1965, Appendix F, History of the National Flag, p. 151.
3. Hayes-McCoy, op cit, p. 206
4. Ibid, pp. 209-14.

And indeed it was the green harp flag which the Irish Volunteers continued to carry right up to their involvement in the 1916 Rising. It has been claimed that this was a means of concealing their revolutionary intentions, for despite English ambivalence towards it, the green harp flag remained a far "safer" emblem than the republican green, white and orange. But use of the green harp at this time may have been a matter of straightforward preference. On Palm Sunday in 1916, only eight days before the actual Rising, it was displayed with considerable pomp by the Citizen Army, the military organisation formed in 1913 by the Irish Transport and General Workers Union to fight for an Irish republic. Their leader, James Connolly, appears to have arranged the event to dispel some of the strain caused by the weeks of waiting and uncertainty before the Rising. He had announced the occasion a fortnight before, in his union's paper, Workers Republic

"Where better could that flag fly than over the unconquered citadel of the Irish Working Class, Liberty Hall, the fortress of the militant Working Class of Ireland."[1]

The working class of Ireland were not altogether enthusiastic about the idea. Connolly had to argue hard to overcome the opposition of the committee of the ITGWU. The ceremony went ahead however with elaborately detailed pageantry which appealed strongly to both those who participated and those who watched.

"On Palm Sunday, April 16, 1916, the Citizen Army was drawn up to form three sides of a square in front of Liberty Hall. Inside the formation were positions occupied by the Women's Section, the boy scouts under Captain Carpenter, and the Fintan Lalor Pipers' Band. A colour

---

1. Workers Republic, 8 April 1916, quoted in William O'Brien, Forth the banners go, Three Candles, Dublin, 1969, p. 280.

guard of sixteen uniformed men accompanied a lovely young redhaired

girl, Molly Reilly, who carried a green flag, which was placed on a pile

of drums in the centre of the square. After inspecting the troops,

Commandant Connolly, in uniform for the first time, took up his position

in front of the drums with Vice Commandant Mallin on his left and

Lieutenant Markievicz (in her green uniform, complete with her best black

hat with feathers) on his right. After much ceremony, bugles, drums, pipes,

and salutes, the young colour bearer, radiant with excitement, mounted an

inside stairway to the roof, and 'with a quick graceful movement of her

hand unloosed the lanyard and the flag fluttered out.' On a green field

was the golden harp - without a crown."[1]

During the Rising itself tricolours and green harp flags were

displayed on the various rebel headquarters in a way that suggests both

types of flag had been carefully prepared for the occasion.[2] And even in

the aftermath of 1916 the tricolour's ascendancey as the symbol of Irish

republicanism was by no means total. True it was now connected with the

act of rebellion; it was raised on the roof of the Dublin GPO on the first

anniversary of the Rising; it was flown over Cork City Hall and formally

saluted on the same occasion; it was praised in songs about the men of

1916; it was used as an emblem of defiance in the war of independence

between 1919 and 1921; and both sides in the Civil War of 1921-3 employed

it to legitimise their claim to be the true representatives of nationalist

Irishmen.[3] However even in this period of militant assertion of

independence from England the old green imagery crept back again. In 1923

---

1. Van Voris, op cit, p. 173.
2. Hayes-McCoy op cit, pp. 206-215.

3. Ibid,   pp. 220-226 and "Scenes in Cork City", Irish News
         10 April 1917, p. 2.

the republican women's organisation, Cumann na mBan, reintroduced the custom of giving the shamrock to Irish troops on St Patrick's Day.[1] And it was not until 1937 that the tricolour was officially recognised to be the national flag of the Irish state.

In studying the changing usage of green imagery in the period between the 1890s and the 1930s it is easy to become too absorbed in assessing what images were employed rather than how they were used. As important as the abandonment of green flags and emblems for the tricolour, is the increasingly military style with which both types of images were handled in this period. The tricolour-draped coffins of the Fenians, the presentation of green flags to the Volunteers, the adoption of military-style armlets, Connolly's ceremonial honouring of the green harp flag, and the appropriation of government buildings with the flags of insurrection in 1916 — all this was very different from the massed, political imagery of the previous period. And it is surely no coincidence that green and tricolour flags and emblems were being used in this way in a period which saw the peak of British jingoistic flag-waving. Indeed, for all the absorption of the British in the more pressing matters of the Great War, they recognised these gestures for what they were. British soldiers deliberately dishonoured the flags of militant republicanism by inversion in 1916, and by trailing them in the mud after their lorries in 1919-20.[2]

Not only did Irish republican imagery become more militant during this period. After 1916 it was also increasingly associated with the memory of the men who had died for Ireland. This emphasis on commemoration of dead martyrs and heroes was not new to Irish political

1. Lil Conlon, Cumann na mBan and the Women of Ireland 1913-25, Kilkenny People, 1969, p. 288.
2. Hayes-McCoy, op cit, p. 211 and p. 224.

traditions. It was widely manifest in the aftermath of the rebellions

in 1798, 1803 and 1867, and again at the time of the centenaries of the

two earlier revolts. But the urge to commemorate the rebel leaders shot

by the British in 1916 was particularly potent. Irish political aspirations

were at a peak of frustration with the delaying of Home Rule caused by

the First World War; that war had created an absorption in military heroics,

not, as yet, tarnished by the full realisation of its miserable realities;

the leaders of the Rising were men and women of political stature who had

behaved with great heroism; and their executions by the English had been

handled with callous ineptitude. Small wonder that in the years that

followed new ceremonies and emblems were created by Irish republicans to

honour their memories.

It appears to have been republican women who took the lead in this.

In 1917 it was they who initiated the annual commemoration of the men

shot in the 1916 rising, by visiting their graves in Dublin's Glasnevin

cemetery and placing on them wreaths trimmed with Sinn Fein coloured (ie

Irish tricolour) ribbon, before offering prayers in Irish for the repose

of their souls.[1] And it was the republican Cumann na mBan or Council of

Women who first made and sold little paper emblems of Easter lilies to be

worn on Easter Sunday in commemoration of the men who fell during the

1916 Easter Rising.[2] These badges, which were henceforward to be worn

each year by republicans commemorating the Rising, represent the arum

lilies traditionally used to decorate Catholic churches at Easter. As

with the seventeenth century adoption of the shamrock as the sign of

allegiance to St Patrick, Irish men and women were seeking to symbolise

their country's separate identity with the kind of simple, personal,

---

1. "A Glasnevin Demonstration", Irish News, 9 April 1917, p. 2.
2. "Soldiers of Cumann na mBan", An Phoblacht, Dublin, Feb 1971, p. 12.

natural emblem of identification with a belief used in the rituals of the Catholic Church.

For although in this period Irish Catholics increasingly turned from the shamrock, the green harp flag and the massed green displays of the nineteenth century, to the militant use of green emblems in which the tricolour predominated, these changes were not swift or abrupt or universal. Various political groups handled green imagery during this period, each giving it a slightly different meaning. And even after the overall change in emphasis had been made, the old associations lingered on.

A response to events:

Northern Ireland after partition

As in the early nineteenth century, the use of green imagery in Northern Ireland between partition and the present troubles was less assertive than in the south, and modified by local conditions. Although Northern Ireland men played a prominent part in the development of Sinn Fein, the province was not involved in the Easter Rising, which was indeed virtually confined to Dublin. The northern counties were involved however in the war of independence in 1919 and 1920. A number of Sinn Fein activists were killed by the security forces and at their funerals their coffins were covered with the Irish tricolour, as had been the practice since the Dublin funerals Stephens and O'Rossa in 1901 and 1915.[1]

In the late 1920s, republicans in Belfast, Derry, Newry and Armagh began to commemorate the men who had died for Ireland by assembling at their graves. Speeches were delivered, tricolour wreaths were laid and

---

1. See for example the accounts of the funerals of Eamonn Trodden and Sean Gaynor, in "Funeral Scenes", Irish News, Belfast, 29 Sept 1920, p. 6.

Easter lily emblems were worn, but it is difficult to establish more

about the extent or nature of these commemorations. They were subject to

constant bans by the government, and harrassment by the security forces,

and were only scantily reported by Belfast's Catholic morning paper, the

Irish News, for it was not sympathetic to republicanism.[1] However in

general republican displays in Northern Ireland do appear to have been

very muted in the first twenty years or so following partition.

Meanwhile the traditional wearing of the green continued much as

before. The shamrock was worn on St Patrick's Day, with guarded tolerance

from the Protestant community,[2] and the Ancient Order of Hibernians

continued their processions, with a brief lapse during the Second World

War. However the organisation gradually declined, as nationalist

politicians in the North switched from the Home Rule line traditionally

supported by the AOH to Sinn Fein republicanism.

The display of imagery which boldly proclaimed support for that

republicanism appears to have developed largely in response to the

jingoistic waving of Union Jacks, or the flamboyant symbolism of Orange

processions. In the immediate aftermath of the 1916 rising the most

prominent use of the Sinn Fein tricolour seems to have been on anti-

conscription platforms,[3] and when the flag began to be noticeably

employed again in the late 1930s it was in relation to displays of British

nationalism. Thus in 1939 John Dolan, who had previously organised a

protest anti-Coronation meeting in Derry, dropped a tricolour parachute

---

1. See "Easter incident in Belfast," Irish News, 9 April 1928, p. 6;
     "Released from Prison", Irish News, 17 April 1928, p. 5; "Meetings
     Ban", Irish News, 1 April 1929, p. 5; "Enforcing Home Office Ban",
     Irish News, 21 April 1930, p. 5 and "Falls Road Fracas", Irish News,
     22 April 1930, p. 5.
2. Betty Messenger, in Picking up the Linen Threads, University of Texas Press,
     Austin & London, 1978, p. 190, records that in mills employing both
     Protestants and Catholics shamrock-wearing by Catholics was tolerated
     even in the troubled inter-war years, although they were sometimes
     required to don a bit of red, white and blue as well.
3. See for example the account of such a meeting in "Ireland United from
     Centre to Sea", Irish News, Belfast, 22 April 1918, p. 3.

over a British function at the time when the national anthem was being played.[1] By the late 1940s the tricolour was making frequent appearances. In 1948 it was carried in St Patrick's Day and 1798 anniversary parades, provoking numerous RUC attacks.[2] No doubt the police action was generally supported by the loyalist community, for even moderate Northern Protestants found the flag offensive at this time. Robert Harbinson records the reaction of a staunchly Protestant but in no way bigoted woman to the gift of an apron made for her by a nun and decorated with the tricolour.

"Maggie would not hurt the nun's feelings by not wearing it, but first she unpicked the offending tricolour border."[3]

Feelings about the tricolour grew increasingly intense in both sections of the northern community following Southern Ireland's assumption of the status of a republic in 1949. Yet even then the flag was employed in a far less militant fashion in the province than had been adopted in the South. Often it was inserted into the old-style green parades which continued to be held in Ulster. (Thus in March 1950 it was carried in a St Patrick's Day procession at Aughnacloy, in August 1951 at an AOH parade in Enniskillen, and in March 1952 at a St Patrick's Day march in Derry.) Sometimes it was used in commemorations of the heroes of 1916. (Thus in May 1951 it appeared in an Irish Labour Party parade in memory of James Connolly). Very occasionally the tricolour was employed to appropriate a loyalist monument, as when a Derry republican fixed it to the flagpost on top of Walker's Pillar in April 1951.[4] Most of these usages seem to have been a continuation of green opposition to the Orangemen's displays. Only the occasional exhibition of a tricolour on a private house, or at

1. The Last Post, National Graves Association, Dublin, 1976, p. 56.
2. Michael Farrell, Northern Ireland: The Orange State, Pluto Press, 1976, p.15
3. Robert Harbinson, (Bryans) Song of Erne, Faber, 1960, p. 193.
4. Eamonn McCann, War and an Irish Town, Penguin, 1974, p. 135, and
    Farrell, loc cit.

election time, could have really been construed as a challenge to the
legitimacy of the state. Even the loyalist flag-waving at the time of
the Queen's coronation in 1953 does not appear to have provoked any
major counter-challenge with tricolours.

However Northern Ireland Protestants were outraged by any display
of what they saw as an emblem of disloyalty. The police repressed such
exhibitions with considerable harshness, and the government, under constant
pressure from hard-line loyalists, repeatedly banned nationalist parades
and finally, in 1954, brought in the Flags and Emblems Act, which made it
illegal to interfere with the display of the Union Jack anywhere except on
one's own private property, but gave the RUC power to take down any other
flag or emblem on public or private property, if they thought it might
lead to a breach of the peace.

The final qualification was important. In effect the Act was
intended to confine tricolours to Catholic areas, and has generally been
applied so as to fulfil this intention. Thus tricolours displayed at
Gaelic football grounds in Northern Ireland have as a rule been left
undisturbed. A similar attitude is incorporated in the Northern Ireland
Public Order Act of 1951, which, unlike the British Public Order Act of
1936, did not prohibit the wearing of military or quasi-military
uniforms.[1]

During the late 1950s and early 1960s there appear to have been no
significant tricolour incidents, possibly because the IRA campaigns of
violence in Northern Ireland in that period made display of the flag both
an unnecessary and an inadvisable gesture. However when it reappeared
again in 1964 it generated feelings of extraordinary violence. Following

---

1. Miller, op cit, pp. 138-9.

its display in the window of the election headquarters of the Republican

candidate in West Belfast there was a vehement protest by the Rev Ian

Paisley, the flag was seized by the police, republican sympathisers reacted

angrily and there were four nights of riots in the city.[1] (However the

government's action on this occasion appears to have been a reluctant

deviation from a settled policy, for a week after the seizure of the flag,

a large republican procession, headed by a tricolour, marched more than

a mile through West Belfast, including Divis Street, along a route lined

with police who made no attempt to interfere.)[2]

1964 was also the year in which there was a noticeable increase in

the amount of display attending the Easter parade held in Belfast. The

previous pattern had been that a small parade, organised by the National

Graves Association, and including members of the Old IRA, Cumann na mBan

and ex-internees, would proceed up the Falls Road, headed by a tricolour,

to the Milltown cemetery, where the 1916 Proclamation would be read, a

decade of the rosary said, wreaths laid, the Last Post sounded, and a

minute's silence observed before the playing of the Reveille.[3] In 1964

however over three thousand marched, including members of the National

Commemoration Committee, the Gaelic Athletic Association, camogie clubs

and other nationalist organisations. The procession was headed by a

colour party formed by officers of the National Commemoration Committee.

It carried the Tricolour, the Plough and Stars and the flag of the Fianna,

the IRA youth organisation. The procession also included two bands, and

1. Farrell,
      op cit pp. 232-5 and Richard Deutsch and Vivien Magowan, Northern
      Ireland 1968-73, A Chronology of Events, vol 1 1968-71, Blackstaff
      Press, Belfast, 1973, p. 3.
2. Miller, op cit, p. 138.
3. See "Easter Commemoration Ceremonies", Irish News, Belfast, 3 April
      1961, p. 1.

Easter lilies were considerably more in evidence than in previous years.
The growth in aggressive self-confidence visible on this occasion
continued to increase, particularly in 1966, the fiftieth anniversary of
the Easter Rising, when streets in Catholic areas of Belfast were a forest
of tricolours. And in 1967 the colour party added to their flags the
emblems of Ireland's four provinces, and the flag of the Oglaigh Na
hEireann, the IRA itself.[1] Yet it would be incautious to view these
displays as firm evidence of the growth of militant republicanism in
Northern Ireland during this period. Looking back to this time republicans
of various different persuasions have told me that the changes in the
Easter parades at this time derived from the IRA's need to recover lost
face after the failure of its border campaign of 1956-1962.

Green imagery was used with a variety of meanings by Northern Ireland
Catholics in the years immediately preceding the outbreak of the present
conflict in 1968. These meanings derived from the previous history of
this imagery, the overall political situation within the province, and the
fluctuating fortunes of different political groups within the local
Catholic community. An awareness of this background of interlinking
factors makes it easier to understand the variety of uses made of such
symbolism in Ulster during the past thirteen years.

Harps

While it has been green symbolism which has been most prominently featured
in the public displays of Northern Ireland Catholics during the past
thirteen years, harps, along with Celtic interlace, have during this
period been the emblems most frequently employed in the internee crafts

---

1. "Thousands turn out in rain for 1916 ceremonies", Irish News, Belfast
   3 April 1967, p. 5.

129. Harpist on Shrine of St Mogue/11th cent/bronze 1⁷/8
     x ³/4 ins (4.70 x 2 cms)/National Museum of Ireland/
     Photo: NMI.

preserved by members of this community in the privacy of their homes.
These harps are generally adorned with some form of Celtic ornament, and
they are generally regarded as an old national symbol for Ireland, a
meaning often underlined by the association with them of the slogan "Irish
Freedom."

Harps have indeed been known in Ireland for some eight centuries or
so, for they are recorded in images like the plaque on the eleventh
century Shrine of St Mogue (ill 129), and in writings like those of the
twelfth century chronicler Giraldus Cambrensis.[1] From the very beginning
these Irish harps were made according to a distinctive pattern;[2] they were
frequently adorned with Celtic-style ornament (ill 130); and they had
some political significance, for they were used to accompany the singing
or reciting of historical and political poems, and the genealogical
praises of the country's kings and chiefs, a practice eventually proscribed
by the English. However they were not national symbols. The so-called
harp of Brian Boru (ill 130) on which most subsequent Irish harp-symbols
are modelled, carries with it an implied association with Irish freedom,
by virtue of its supposed use for the pleasure of the High King of Ireland
who decisively defeated the Danish invaders at Clontarf in 1014. In
reality however it dates from approximately the fourteenth century, and
the first use of the harp as a national symbol for Ireland was made by an
English king, Henry VIII. Moreover, the subsequent history of Irish harp-
symbolism demonstrates that, like the country's green imagery, it acquired
a range of fluctuating meanings from its successive use by groups and
individuals holding a variety of political beliefs.

1. Quoted in Acton, op cit.
2. See the comments on the Dalway harp by John Teahan in "Discovering the
   National Museum", Irish Times, Dublin, 12 March 1982, p. 8.
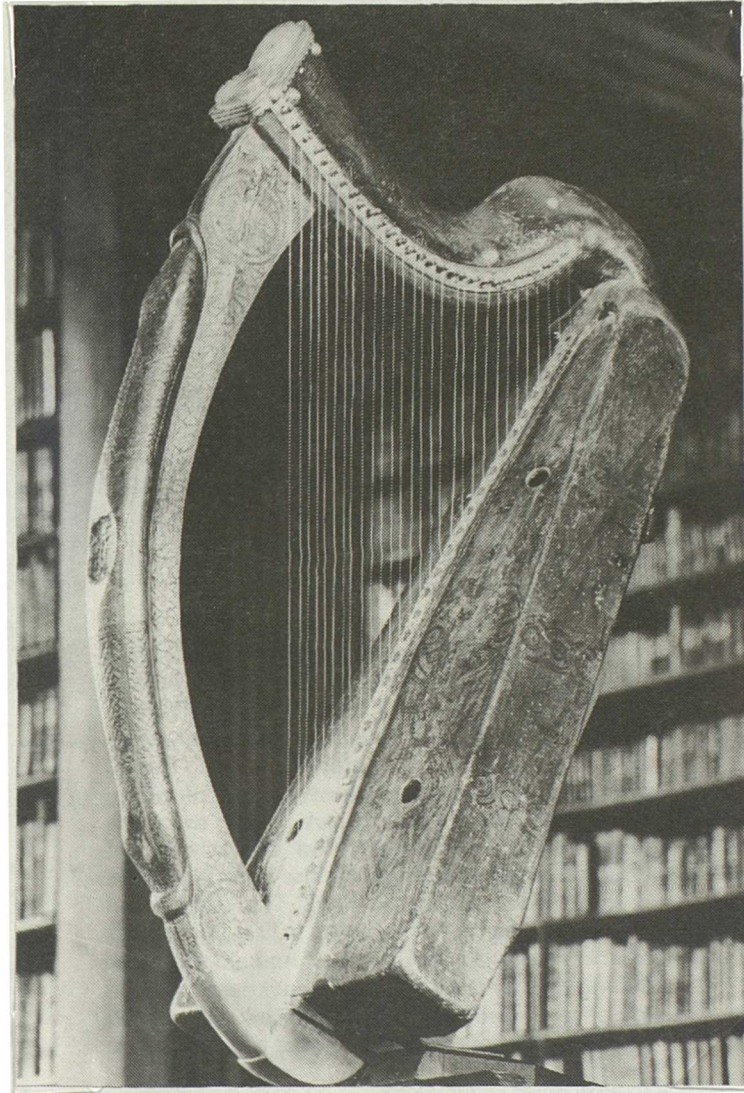
130. So-called Harp of Brian Boru/14th century/willow
with brass strings/27½ ins (70 cms) high/Trinity
College, Dublin.

It was in approximately 1533 that Henry VIII chose to use the harp as a national symbol for Ireland, by featuring it on his Irish coinage (ill 131). Thereafter it was frequently featured as a national emblem on the Irish coins, maps and charters made for the English. In 1603 it appeared on the banner of Ireland carried by the Earl of Clanricard at the funeral of Queen Elizabeth I, and later in the same year it was incorporated by James I in the royal arms, where it has remained to this day.[1]

It is not clear why Henry VIII chose to use the Irish harp in this way. There are various flimsy theories such as that Henry had been given the harp of Brian Boru (ill 130) by the pope, or that he feared the three crowns previously used on Irish coins might be mistaken for the papal tiara. But neither of these tales seem likely, and the argument that Henry used the crowned harp to mark his change of title from Lord of Ireland to King of Ireland, ignores the fact that the title was changed some seven years after the first recorded use of the new coinage. Whatever the reason for Henry's action, it provoked a sour reaction from the Earl of Northampton, the Deputy Earl Marshal, who said that he

"had no affection for the change; that for the adoption of the harp the best reason he could assign was that it resembled Ireland in being such an instrument that it required more cost to keep in tune than it was worth."[2]

In the seventeenth century there were four important developments in the symbolic manipulation of the Irish harp. In the first place the

---

1. Illustrated in Hayes-McCoy, op cit, p. 22 and Dr A.E.J. Went, Irish Coins and Medals, Easons, Dublin, 1978, ill 13.
2. Sheehy, op cit, p. 12 and Hayes-McCoy, op cit, pp. 22-3.

131. Henry VIII groat/ca 1534/silver/diameter 1 in (2.
5 cms)/National Museum of Ireland/Photo:NMI.

forepillar of the harp gradually evolved into the figure of a woman in

English heraldic usage. The earliest representations of the harp as a

national symbol for Ireland - such as the coins of Henry VIII and his

immediate successors - show the instrument with a plain forepillar. In

the early seventeenth century this pillar becomes a grotesque figure,

sometimes a beast, sometimes a fish, sometimes an Irish kern. Then, from

at least the second quarter of the century, it is frequently shown as a

naked and generally winged maiden, a development which seems to be linked

to the appearance at this time of the figure of Hibernia.[1] The earliest

known occurrence of this maiden harp is in the arms of Ireland depicted

on the map in Thomas Stafford's Pacata Hibernia, first published in 1633

(ill 132). All three forms of the harp appear to have remained in use

for fifty years or so, until the grotesque figure disappeared from

sight in the last decade of the century.[2]

In the second place, amongst the parliamentary flags depicting

Irish harps which were employed in the Irish civil wars of the mid-

seventeenth century, was one which showed, apparently for the first time,

a golden harp with broken strings, a propaganda image of Ireland's

distressed state very similar to the weeping Hibernias shown in

parliamentary prints of this period.[3]

These two innovations, which were later to be given nationalist

significance, were made by Ireland's English Protestant rulers. But the

two further alterations to Irish harp symbolism made in this century

appear to have been the work of Catholic Irishmen. During the civil

---

1. See above, p. 129.
2. Hayes-McCoy, op cit, pp. 46-7 and British Heraldry, exhibition
    catalogue, British Museum, 1978, nos 81, 88, 91, 92.
3. See above, p. 130.

(e)

132. Arms of Ireland from a map in Thomas Stafford,
Pacata Hibernia, 1633, illustrated in G.A. Hayes-
McCoy, A History of Irish Flags from earliest
times, Academy Press, Dublin, p.47.

wars of the mid-seventeenth century, the Catholic forces in Ireland began to use harp flags in which the blue ground traditional in English heraldry was replaced by green. Some confusion has been caused by the adoption of this so-called "green harp" emblem as the arms of the Irish province Leinster, also in the mid-seventeenth century. But from the very beginning there was a clear separation between national and provincial usage. Owen Roe O'Neill's use of the green harp flag on his frigate in 1642, and the incorporation of the harp in the Catholic Confederacy's seal in the same year (ill 81) were both clearly intended as symbols of Irish resistance to English rule, in which O'Neill and the Confederacy were involved.[1] Various references in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century seem to indicate the acceptance in Europe of the green harp flag as the national symbol of Ireland, a process which may have been encouraged by its use by the "Wild Geese", or brigades of refugee Irishmen who served with the French in the eighteenth century.[2]

In the 1670s a symbolic association was made between the Irish harp and David, the harpist King of biblical fame. The St Patrick's halfpennies and farthings which were probably produced in Dublin about 1674, show not only St Patrick with his shamrock on the obverse, but also King David playing an Irish figure harp, with the crown above, on the reverse (ill 120). The circumstances in which these coins were produced are obscure, so it is possible only to speculate as to the reasons for their symbolism. The figure of David the harpist was known in the visual traditions of both the native Irish and their English (and

---

1. Hayes-McCoy, op cit, pp. 43-4 and p. 49.
2. Hayes-McCoy, op cit, p. 45. There is a Wild Geese banner, bearing the crowned harp, in the 1798 room in the National Museum.

Scottish) rulers by this time. He had frequently been represented on

high crosses and related pieces of early Christian sculpture in Ireland,

and continued awareness of him amongst the Catholic Irish is confirmed

by his appearance on some of their eighteenth century tombstones.[1] In

his role as the survivor of Saul's attacks, he also appeared playing a

crowned harp on a Protestant Association medal, commemorating William III's

survival of an assasination attempt.[2] However it seems unlikely that St

Patrick complete with shamrock would have been featured by English settlers

in Ireland at this date,[3] and the very lack of information about these

coins seems to indicate a Catholic provenance.

It was however the Protestant patriots and the largely Protestant

volunteers and United Irishmen who secured for the harp symbol a firm

association with the concept of Irish freedom during the second half of

the eighteenth century. The unstrung harp of Thomas Pingo's medal of 1749,

which is believed to commemorate Charles Lucas's efforts in favour of the

liberties of the Corporation of Dublin,[4] was soon followed by numerous

representations of the instrument in the imagery associated with the

Volunteers. Analysis of this imagery is bedevilled by the sheer number of

objects in existence, the lack of firm dates, and the knowledge that a

number of Volunteer medals have been forged. However what seems to have

happened is that as the movement became affected by republicanism from

the late 1770s a number of Volunteer troops used, instead of the decorously

loyal crowned harp, either the uncrowned harp associated with revolutionary

---

1. Helen Hickey, _Images of Stone_, Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 1976, pp. 36-7, 39, and fig 14e, and Ada Longfield (Mrs H.G. Leask), _Some Irish Churchyard Sculpture_, Gifford & Craven, Ballycotton, Co. Cork, 1974, p. 10.
2. Edward Rogers, _Revolution of 1688 and history of the Orange Association of England and Ireland_, 5th edition, W & G Baird, Belfast, 1881, p. 14.
3. See above, p. 400ff.
4. Rev Henry Dawson, "A Memoir of the Medals and Medallists Connected with Ireland", _Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy_ (TRIA), Dublin, vol 19, 1843, p. 8.

symbols like the rising sun,[1] or a harp surmounted by an "Irish" rather than a British crown (ill 133).[2]

The use of harp imagery at this time may have been influenced by the strong revival of interest in Ireland's native musical traditions, part of the general late eighteenth rediscovery of folk music in Europe.[3] A Belfast (later Irish) Harp Society, was set up in 1791 and a Harp Festival was held in the city in 1792. While at this period, and indeed until the mid-nineteenth century, the Harp Society involved both Protestants and Catholics regardless of their political opinions, and indeed so stout an Orangeman as Colonel Blacker could take a lively interest in Irish harpers,[4] the work of this organisation may have stimulated the imaginations of members of the United Irishmen, the revolutionary successors of the Volunteer movement. Certainly families involved with them (such as the McCrackens), or sympathetic to their aims (such as the Joys) belonged to the Society.[5] And certainly the United Irishmen made very strong symbolic use of the harp, in which they repeatedly stressed that it should sound out for Irish freedom. One of their favourite slogans was "It is new strung and shall be heard", and the subtitle to Paddy's Resource, the immensely popular chapbook collection of United Irish songs,[6] was "The Harp of Erin, attuned to freedom".

---

1. Rathfriland Volunteers gorget, 1779, Ulster Museum, Belfast.
2. Bucknaw Volunteers medal, Ulster Museum; Waringstown Volunteers flag, illustrated Rev E.D Atkinson, "Waringstown Volunteers", Ulster Journal of Archaeology (UJA), Belfast, 2nd series, vol 4 no 3, April 1898, p. 159; Gill Hall Volunteers flag, Ulster Museum, illustrated Hayes-McCoy, op cit p. 95, ill 3; and Braid Volunteers flag, Ulster Museum, illustrated ibid, p. 95, ill 7.
3. Burke, op cit p. 7.
4. For Colonel Blacker's activities as an Orangeman, see above, pp.89-92 and p.316. He refers to his interest in Irish harpists in his manuscript autobiography, now in Armagh County Museum.
5. Padraig O Snodaigh, Hidden Ulster (revised edition), Clodhanna Teoranta, Dublin, 1977, pp. 17, 20-21 and 26.
6. See above, pp. 136-7.
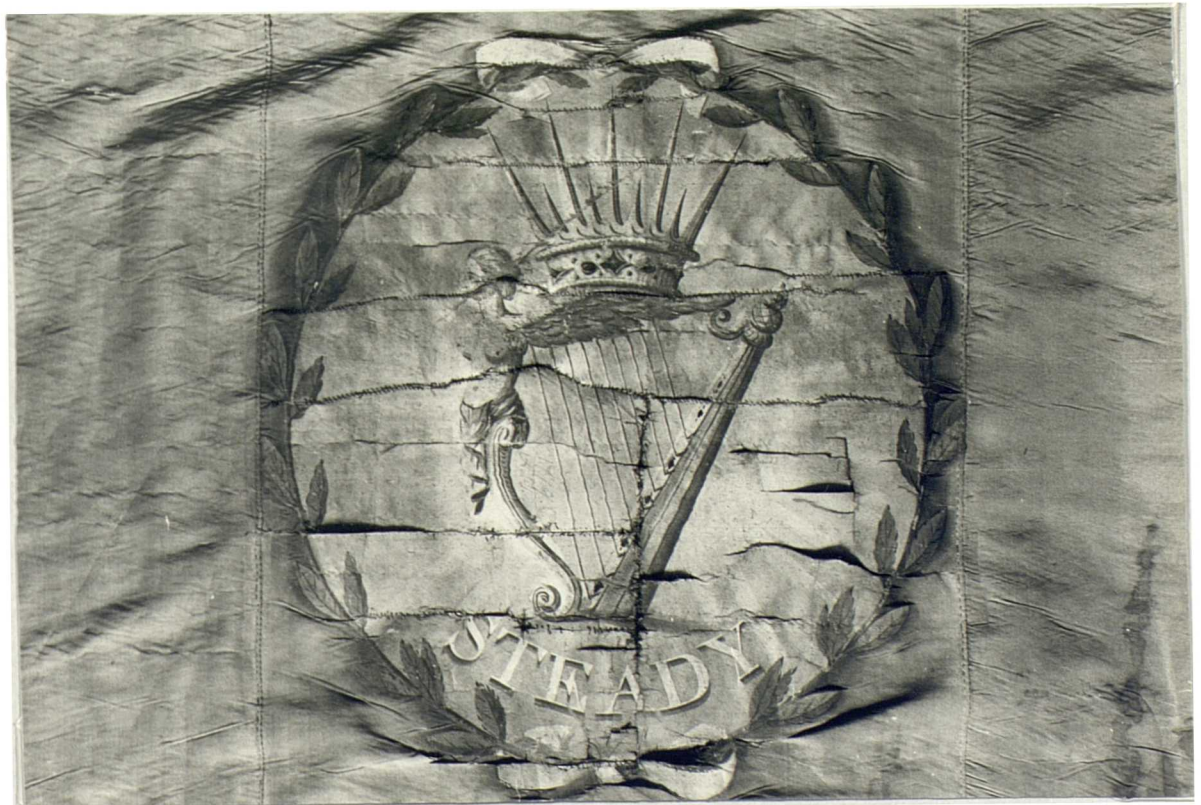
133. Flag of the Caledon Volunteers, Co Tyrone/ca 1782/
painted silk/72 x 66 ins (183 x 167.7 cms)/Armagh
County Museum/Photo: Bill Kirk.

During the United Irish rebellion in 1798 harp flags were much in evidence (ill 231)[1], and their significance was remembered afterwards, by both the leaders and supporters of Irish republicanism. Not only did Robert Emmet, the instigator of the abortive 1803 rebellion, give his sweetheart a brooch in the shape of a harp,[2] but more lowly supporters of Ireland's right to its own legislature could purchase a broadside opposing the union of England and Ireland in 1800, headed by an exceedingly interesting wood-engraving which shows a volunteer accompanied by a barking wolfhound, and supporting a maiden harp surmounted not by a crown, but a crowing cock (ill 134). The subversive nature of harp symbolism at this time appears to have been well-recognised by the government forces. When they ransacked the house of the supposed United Irish leader, Thomas Reynolds, in 1798, they vented their particular fury on his pedal-harp.[3]

However in the aftermath of the defeat of the United Irishmen and the Union of England and Ireland, the harp, like the shamrock, returned to loyal respectability. Indeed, as early as the end of 1798, amongst the Dublin decorations celebrating Bonaparte's defeat at the Battle of the Nile, there was an illuminated transparency on the Post Office of "Brave Admiral Nelson defending with his sword the Harp and the Crown."[4] The harp was also featured amongst the emblems greeting George IV on his visit to Dublin in 1821[5] and on the Irish medals which commemorated this occasion,[6] and the centenary of the House of Hanover in 1814.[7]

---

1. Hayes-McCoy, op cit, pp 109-118.
2. See above, p.138.
3. Pakenham, op cit, p. 79. Reynolds was in fact a government agent, but this was not known to the troops who made this attack.
4. Pakenham, op cit, p. 386.
5. See the aquatint by Havell in the National Gallery of Ireland, reproduced Edwards, op cit, p. 21.
6. See Dawson op cit, p. 19.

7. See the medal by W. Stephen Mossop in the National Museum, Dublin. Loyalty amongst Irish medal-makers may have been encouraged by financial difficulties. The 1798 rebellion and the Act of Union are said to have caused a considerable loss of work for the greatest amongst them, William Mossop Sr. (Dawson, op cit, p. 16 and Dr A.E.J. Went "William Mossop", Dublin Historical Record, vol 28 no 3, June 1975, p.97.)

134. Emblem heading broadsheet ballad titled The Union/
     ca 1800/wood-engraving/actual size/Public Record
     Office of Northern Ireland, T1689/2/63a.

Not only were the Irish carried along by the great wave of loyalty

to monarchy and military leaders which swept through Britain at the close

of the Napoleonic Wars, but they were also caught up in the move towards

respectable domesticity. The national emblems of the harp, the shamrock

and the wolfhound and round tower were turned to mere decorative elements

on the furniture with which their rooms were increasingly crowded

(ill   123).[1]

Meanwhile however, amongst the Protestant ascendancy in Ireland,

there were a number of archaeologists and historians who were gradually

refining the visual images which acquainted the general public with the

emblems of their country's native past. A sequence of pictures may make

this clear. Whereas in 1817 the wood-engraved vignette on the title-pate

of The Posthumous Works of James Orr (ill   135) shows a crude harp as

part of the kind of picturesque, Bewick-influenced scene of historic ruins

familiar in Irish travel books from the 1780s, by 1832 the harp in the

woodcut of "National Emblems" in the Dublin Penny Journal (ill   136),[2]

bears a distinct resemblance to the so-called Harp of Brian Boru (ill   ).

And by the 1840s the glowing harp so prominently featured in one of the

membership cards of O'Connell's Repeal Association (ill   137) is very

clearly a representation of that instrument. These illustrations may well

have had a wider influence than is now readily apparent. From descriptions

of Irish trade union banners in the 1860s and 1870s it seems likely that

their painters were still using the Dublin Penny Journal woodcut of the

national symbols as a model.[3] And it should be remembered that in the 1869

Amnesty Association procession in Dublin the barbers and hairdressers wore

1. Irish Art in the Nineteenth Century, catalogue of the ROSC 1971
     exhibition at Cork, 1971, p. 108.
2. For information on this publication, see below pp.471-473.
3. Loftus, op cit, p. 61.

THE

POSTHUMOUS WORKS
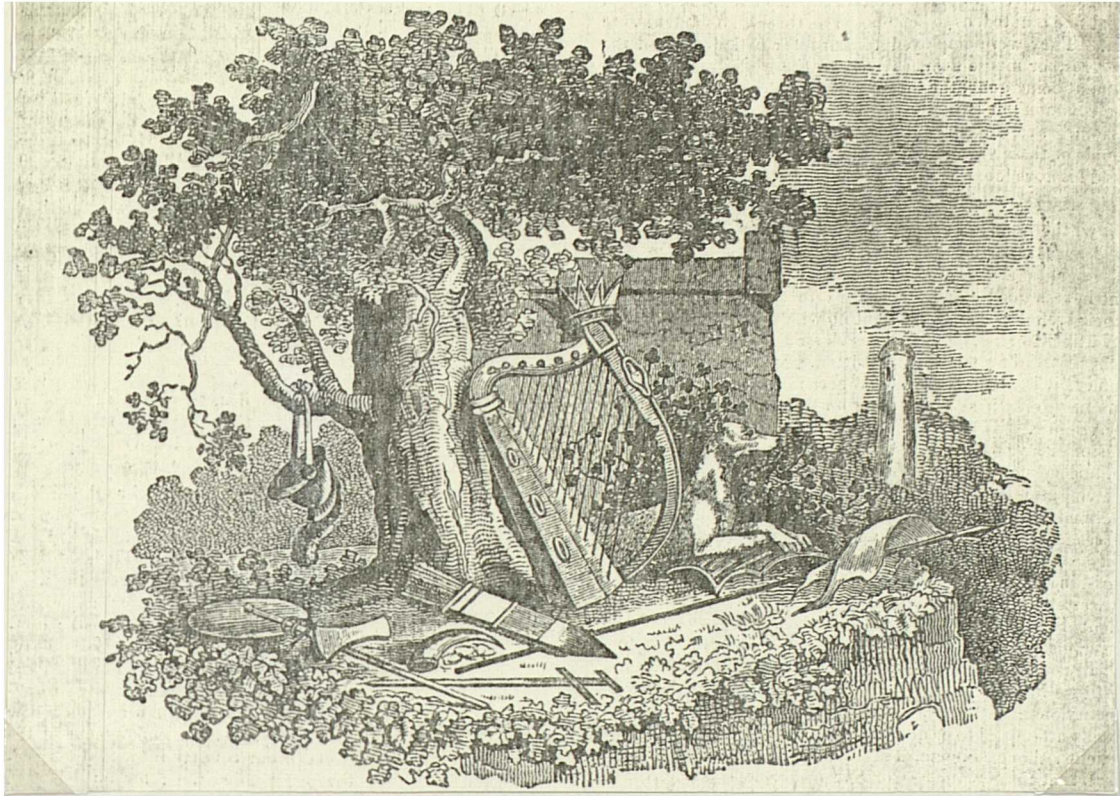
OF

JAMES ORR,

OF BALLYCARRY:

WITH

A SKETCH OF HIS LIFE.
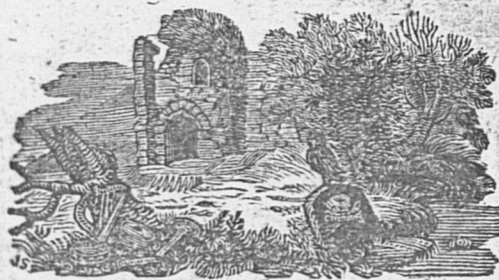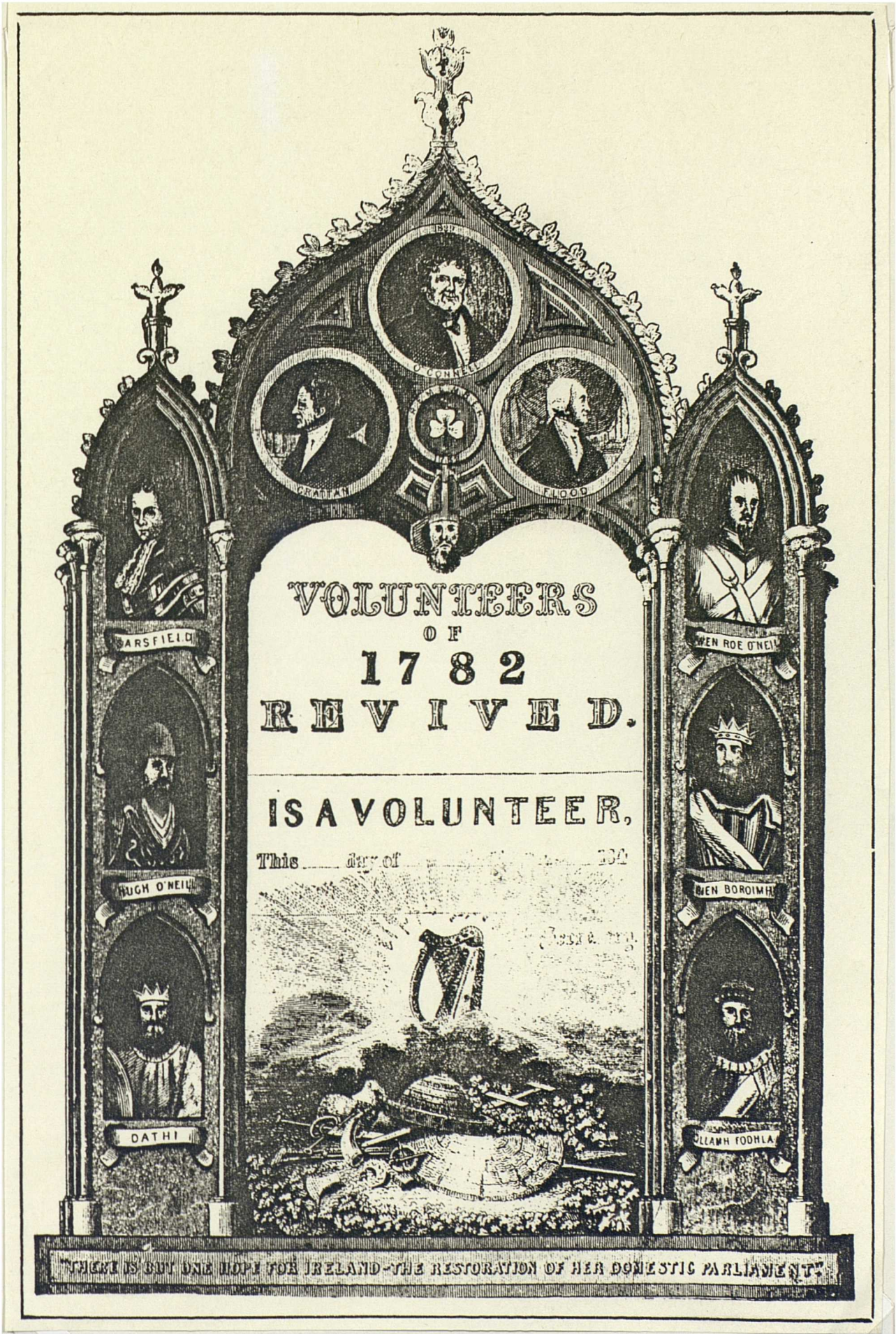

" Fareweel! my rhyme-composing brither."—BURNS.

BELFAST:

135. Title-page of The Posthumous Works of James Orr/
1817/Belfast/wood-engraving/actual size/Linen Hall
Library, Belfast.

136. National Emblems/wood-engraved illustration on p.1
of The Dublin Penny Journal, 7 July 1832/actual
size/National Library of Ireland.

137. Membership card of the Repeal Association/ca 1842/
illustrated in Jeanne Sheehy, The Rediscovery of
Ireland's Past, Thames & Hudson, 1980, p.28.

rosettes with pendants "ornamented with a Brian Boroimhe harp."[1]

O'Connell and his followers certainly emphasised the native traditions associated with the Irish harp in their campaign for the repeal of the union between England and Ireland. At the massive Repeal meeting at Tara in 1843 a harpist in "Celtic" garb was prominently featured, and the Illustrated London News engraving in which he is clearly depicted (ill 125), was subsequently advertised in The Nation, the immensely popular newspaper of the Repeal Movement.[2] A year later members of the Repeal Association could acquire a silver button displaying the harp and shamrocks (ill 124).

It is significant that whereas fifty years earlier this harp-symbolism might have attracted government or loyalist attack, now it could be freely used and illustrated without rancour in an English magazine. It was not only the constitutional nature of O'Connell's campaign that made its harp imagery acceptable at this time. That imagery had long-standing and recent associations with loyal Irish symbolism; it had been domesticated during the early years of the nineteenth century; and it was part of that Irish past now recorded with varying degrees of accuracy by those very English and Anglo-Irish rulers and industrialists who were in the process of destroying it, a paradox to be found throughout Europe at this time. Petrie's researches, Thomas Moore's plaintive songs about The Harp that Once in Tara's Halls, or the Minstrel Boy; and Daniel Maclise's equally plaintive depictions of Irish harps and harpists (ill 48), were all part of this general mood of nostalgia.

---

1. Ibid, p. 28. See above, p. 416.

2. The Nation, Dublin, vol 1 no 46, 26 August 1843, p. 72. This harpist appeared again during the celebrations which greeted O'Connell's release from prison the following year. See the picture in the Illustrated London News, 14 Sept 1844, p. 165, reproduced in R. Dudley Edwards, Daniel O'Connell and his World, Thames & Hudson, 1975, p.86.

In the second half of the century industry helped to further this process of destruction, recording and de-politicisation. Not only did Irish harps of normally inaccurate design continue to be carved by hand on endless churches, pubs, furniture, graveyard monuments and bog-oak ornaments in this period. They were also mass-produced, both as charming ornaments, like the bog oak harp of ca 1875 (ill 138), and as accurate replicas of the few remaining ancient harps, like the brooches copying Brian Boru's harp made by the Dublin jeweller, Waterhouse, in the early 1850s.[1] These harp products were promoted and sold at Ireland's numerous industrial exhibitions during the second half of the nineteenth century, and the harp was also employed as an appropriate trademark for a number of Irish industries. (Guinness's Brewery adopted the Brian Boru harp as its trademark in 1862).[2]

Yet nevertheless the harp remained a potent symbol of Irish nationalism for those who sought to rid their country of English rule. In the imagery of the Fenians, who made their abortive rising in 1867, the harp was prominently featured. It was generally accompanied by sprays of shamrocks, which seems to indicate some memory of the Repeal Association button (ill 124). Now however there was an additional symbolic reference, for the leaves on the shamrock sprays sometimes totalled 32, the number of Ireland's counties. Moreover not only was this emblem used on the flags carried during the 1867 rising,[3] and on a printed commission issued by the Fenian brotherhood in America,[4] but

---

1. Sheehy, op cit, p. 87.
2. Ibid, p. 12.
3. Hayes-McCoy, op cit, pp. 151-155.
4. Illustrated in Mark Tierney and Margaret MacCurtain, The Birth of Modern Ireland, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1969, p. 74.

138. Bog oak harp/ca 1875/4³/4 ins (12.05 cms) high/
Collection Mrs. Mary Boydell/Photo: MB.

also on the so-called Fenian stamps (ill 125), indicating a willingness

amongst Irish republicans to seize for themselves a very new form of

national symbolism (postage stamps as a means of postage rating were only

being widely introduced in the mid-1860s).[1]

The harp, generally accompanied by shamrocks, continued to be a

much-loved and much-respected nationalist symbol; in 1869, as we have seen,[2]

it was prominently featured amongst the emblems carried by the Barbers

and Hair Dressers Union in the Amnesty Association procession in Dublin,

and indeed one of their bannerets reworked an old tradition with its

representation of a harp accompanied by the words "its music is sadness

till our brothers are free";[3] in 1873 it was included in the trade union

banner of the Boyne fisherman, made by the nationally-minded William

Reynolds of Drogheda;[4] in the 1880s it was featured on the Land League

banner from Cullen, Co Tipperary, now in the National Museum in Dublin,[5]

and in 1921 it was painted on a handkerchief by a Dublin internee in

Ballykinlar Camp (ill 140). Indeed the Celtic Revivalists at the end

of the nineteenth century might despise the national symbols of harp and

shamrock, round tower and wolfhound, for their commercial degradation and

the use by British rulers, but, as we have seen, both leaders and men in

the 1916 rising continued to regard the harp and the colour green as

fitting symbols of their nationalism. Indeed one of the two Sinn Fein

propaganda labels first issued in 1907 represented a female figure playing

a harp.[6] And when an Irish state was finally achieved the harp of Brian

1. David Feldman, Handbook of Irish Philately, David Feldman/The Dolmen Press,
   Dublin, 1968, p. 13. Fenian opportunism in employing such new
   popular forms of propaganda has been attributed by some to their
   strong American connections.
2. See above, p. 416.
3. The Weekly Freeman's Journal, Dublin, 16 Oct 1869, p. 2.
4. Loftus, op cit, p. 63 and no 38.
5. Hayes-McCoy, op cit, pp 175-176 and plate VII, ill 4.
6. Feldman, op cit, p. 15.

139. Fenian stamp/1865-1867/green/1 x $^3/_4$ ins
     (2.5 x 2.1 cms)/National Museum of Ireland

140. Republican internee handkerchief/1920/made in
     Ballykinlar camp, Co Down/painted linen/19 x 19
     ins (48.2 x 48.2 cms)/National Museum of Ireland/
     Photo: NMI.