



RE-EXAMINING IRISH NATIONALISM IN ULSTER

Conference Proceedings

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Acadamh Ríoga na hÉireann
Royal Irish Academy



Irish nationalism was strong in Ulster; however, the complexity and diversity of the history of northern nationalism has been reduced due to the more recent perspectives on 'the Troubles'. This diversity needs to be re-examined and articulated, especially in the context of contemporary Northern Ireland and the North/South relationship.

By recognising that Irish nationalism in Ulster is not owned by, or confined to, any one particular identity or grouping, we can engage in a more complicated, but ultimately enriched understanding of nationalism North and South, and we can reflect on what it means for contemporary Northern Ireland and the island as a whole.

Introduction

This conference was organised by the Irish Humanities Alliance (IHA), Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and the Royal Irish Academy (RIA), with support from the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade's Reconciliation Fund and Ireland 2016.

The one-day conference explored the complexity and diversity of nationalism in Ulster at the start of the twentieth century – the Irish Parliamentary Party tradition, Sinn Féin/Irish Republican Brotherhood and cultural traditions. It took the form of four consecutive panel discussions dealing respectively with:

1. The Parliamentary Tradition of Nationalism;
2. The Socialist and Republican Tradition;
3. Cultural Nationalism; and
4. Ulster Unionists' Response to Northern Nationalism.

The conference used historical figures and their narratives to explore the role of constitutional nationalism (Joe Devlin); cultural nationalism (Alice Milligan) and the complexity of nationalist experiences (Eoin MacNeill). The roles of the literary cultural experience, class and gender were also central to the debate. Similarly, the question of why nationalism is traditionally associated with, and confined to, Catholicism was examined. While the primary focus was northern nationalism – a diverse tradition which included Protestants and Catholics – the conference concluded with a session that explored the unionist response to northern nationalism.



Professor Daniel Carey

Professor Daniel Carey, Chair of the IHA, opened the proceedings by giving an overview of the programme for the conference and welcoming the panel chairs, speakers and other participants. Professor Carey also thanked his fellow organisers of the conference: Professor Mary E. Daly, Dr Margaret O'Callaghan and Dr Aoibhín De Búrca.

Professor Patrick Johnston, Vice-Chancellor, QUB, welcomed everyone to QUB and thanked the RIA and IHA for co-organising of the conference. He referenced the all-island nature of the RIA, noting that 70 members of QUB staff were members of the Academy. He further commented that the humanities were the mainstay of universities, enriching, benefiting and providing critical leadership for society, and that QUB would continue to support humanities scholarship. He considered the many-stranded nature of the conference – dealing, as it did, with political, economic and cultural forces and historical legacy – to be fundamentally important for exploration of the truths and diversity of shared history to help reflection and understanding.



Professor Patrick Johnston

Panel One

The Parliamentary Tradition of Nationalism

CHAIR **Professor Seán Farren**
SDLP

SPEAKERS **Dr Conor Mulvagh**
AND TOPICS Lecturer in Irish History at University College Dublin
TOPIC: The role of Joe Devlin in the Parliamentary Tradition

Dr Éamon Phoenix
Principal Lecturer in History and Head of Lifelong Learning at
Stranmillis University College, Queen's University Belfast
TOPIC: and Northern Nationalism

Dr Mary Harris
Senior Lecturer in the Department of History,
National University of Ireland, Galway
TOPIC: Eoin MacNeill and the Irish Parliamentary Party

Introducing the panel, **Professor Seán Farren** noted that his involvement in the SDLP had given him a particular interest in the constitutional strand of nationalism. He acknowledged also that alliances had been created whereby social and cultural approaches to nationalism were mindful of individuals from a unionist background.

He observed that it was in Ulster that Irish nationalism in the early twentieth century had met its most formidable challenge to Home Rule. Nationalists dismissed the challenge of the Ulster Volunteers or saw that challenge as so illegal that it had to be dealt with either by democracy or 'by waving a few rifles'. He posed a question for the participants: was self-determination seen as valid for Ireland but not valid for Ulster?



Professor Seán Farren

Position, promotion and partition: Joe Devlin, voice of Northern Nationalism 1906–18

Dr Conor Mulvagh presented a paper entitled 'Position, Promotion and Partition: Joe Devlin, Voice of Northern Nationalism 1906–18'.

The paper focused on the Belfast nationalist Joseph Devlin (1871–1934) in the provincial (Ulster), national and imperial context.

Joe Devlin was a West Belfast politician in the Westminster Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) tradition. Even though he had a stellar ascent into the highest echelons of the IPP, he left no papers of his own.

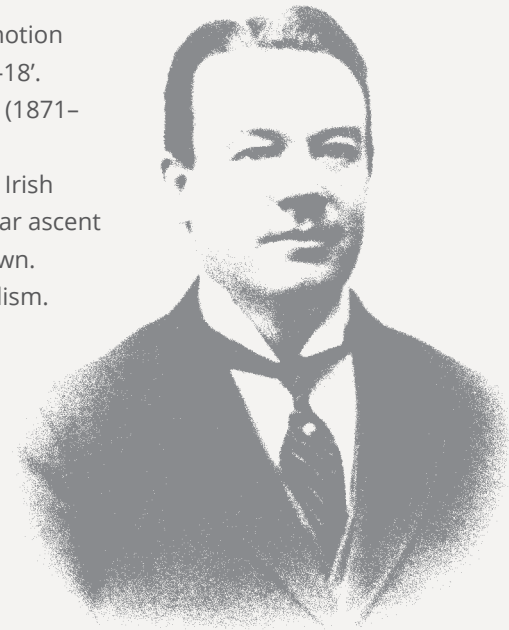
Devlin was a key figure in late-stage constitutional nationalism. Post-partition he was pivotal to the survival of northern nationalism and its evolution as a unified force via the foundation of the National League of the North (NLN) in 1928, which bridged the divide between moderate and advanced nationalism in Northern Ireland.

Although an anti-Parnellite, Devlin was not the darling of the Catholic Hierarchy, particularly in the person of Cardinal Logue, Archbishop of Armagh. This was due to his membership (and Presidency from 1905) of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH). The AOH, though nominally Catholic, was effectively the strong arm of the IPP, as manifested notably in the 'Baton' convention of 1909. The Church also disliked the AOH for its secrecy and its competitive role in social organisation, e.g. organising dances. There was also distrust of Devlin's presentation of himself as a champion of the cause of labour, whereby he could appeal to both labour and nationalist traditions.

As a political operator Devlin was peerless: he was the ultimate ward boss. His skills of fundraising (particularly in the US), organisation, oratory and networking were recognised early on by the IPP and resulted in his elevation to the decision-making core of the party alongside John Redmond, John Dillon and T.P. O'Connor as their talented protégé. Moreover, he was President of the AOH and General Secretary of the United Irish League (UIL). His significance within the IPP was not due only to his ability. As leader of constitutional Ulster Catholicism he represented a key demographic within the IPP, and this became increasingly important as the Home Rule crisis intensified and the spectre of partition surfaced from 1913 on.

His particular value to the IPP lay in being persuaded of, and being able to sell, the concessions of the IPP on Home Rule within Ulster. Devlin acknowledged the exception of Ulster and the right of unionist majority counties to democratically exclude themselves from Home Rule jurisdiction, and in 1916 was able to secure the acceptance of the Lloyd George proposals by the Ulster UIL counties. His grudging acceptance, in effect, of some form of partition was something he came to regret in later life.

His effectiveness and popularity as a machine politician continued throughout his political life after partition. His support for improving the conditions for workers, if not politically supporting the labour interest, ensured he was remembered favourably by many of his former constituents in West Belfast.



Joe Devlin

Cahir Healy and Northern Nationalism

Dr Éamon Phoenix gave a presentation on the topic of 'Cahir Healy and Northern Nationalism'.

Cahir Healy (1877–1970) was a significant leader and policy-maker within northern nationalism for half a century. He was born in Mountcharles, Co. Donegal. His mother was a native Irish speaker, he attended a mixed-denomination school, and he married a Church of Ireland woman. Throughout his life he showed a broad-minded tolerance.

His core career was in journalism, working in local newspapers, but he also worked as an insurance agent, a role that provided cover for activity as a revolutionary organiser.

He had a significant interest in cultural nationalism and had an exceptional circle of literary and cultural friends and collaborators who initially met in Ard Righ, at Francis Joseph Bigger's house. He was also a supporter of the Irish Ireland movement and contributed to Arthur Griffith's *United Irishman* weekly.

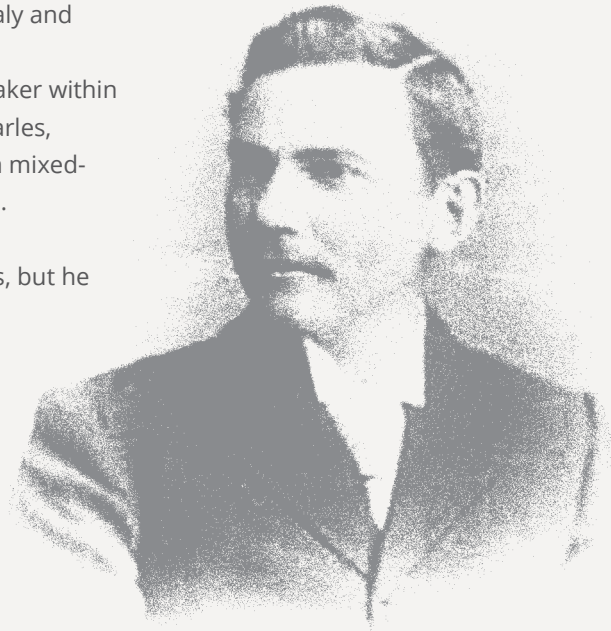
Cahir Healy represented Fermanagh at the National Council convention in November 1905. The contemporary press took no notice of this event, but Healy was instrumental in setting up a network of Sinn Féin branches in Ulster. He was also a supporter of abstentionism from Westminster and establishing a parallel Assembly in Dublin. He gravitated towards advanced nationalism. Although a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), he had no connection with the Easter Rising. He did however believe that the Rising had regenerated Ireland's national soul. By 1918, as elsewhere in Ireland post-1916, Sinn Féin was prominent in the North and Healy was increasingly prominent within Sinn Féin.

During the 1919–21 Anglo-Irish War Healy used his position as an insurance official to set up Sinn Féin arbitration courts, in which he served as registrar. Partition was a major preoccupation but he believed that Article 12 of the Anglo-Irish Treaty would ensure transfer to the Free State of border areas with a nationalist majority. In 1922 he was a member of Michael Collins's Provisional Government Committee on the North-East.

Almost certainly an intelligence officer in the IRA, he was interned in 1922–23 and elected to Westminster for Fermanagh/Tyrone. In the mid-1920s his focus was the preparation of the case for border nationalists in the context of the review of the border by the Boundary Commission, prior to collapse of the Boundary Commission in 1925. His ensuing belief was that northern nationalists had been sold out.

He was a key figure in the rapprochement between Sinn Féin and the remaining Home Rulers in the form of the foundation of the National League of the North in 1928, a constitutional nationalist party. With his fellow nationalists he boycotted the Northern Ireland parliament from 1932 to 1945, although he regarded Westminster as a forum for expressing the perspective of the minority; for example, in later years he drew the attention of the Harold Wilson Government to gerrymandering.

The 1938 Anglo-Irish Agreement was once again a disappointment in the absence of concessions to northern nationalism. Interned under the Defence of the Realm Act for 18 months during the Second World War, after the war Healy was a founder of the Anti-Partition League. He remained unequivocal in his opposition to violence.



Cahir Healy

In his later years he was persuaded that abstentionism did not work. He was sceptical with regard to the right of audience for northern nationalists in Dáil Éireann, and the 'Orange-Green' talks of the 1960s between the Orange Order and the AOH. He was also suspicious of the northern nationalist leaders emerging from the generation who had benefited from the 1947 Education Act.

In his final years he continued to write prolifically and produce numerous articles. He also became a founder of the Ulster Folk Museum.

His career provides a focus for the study of nationalism until the 1960s, advocating tolerant non-sectarian nationalism for over 50 years. He represents a distinct strand within northern nationalism – a person of eclectic friendships with a political attachment to Sinn Féin, but opposed to violence.

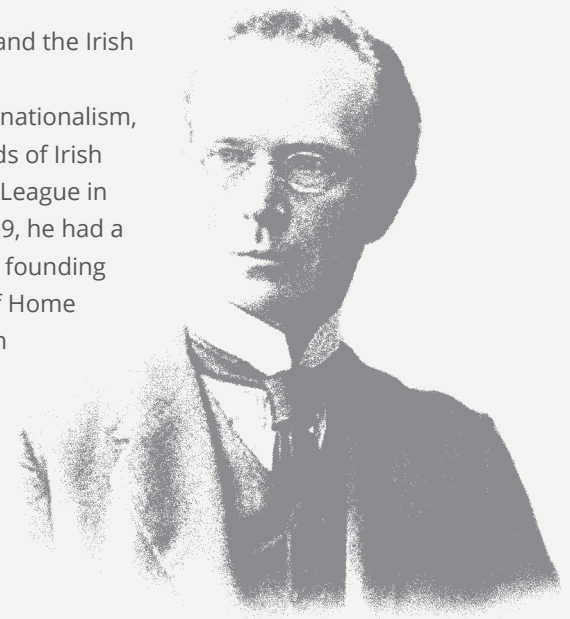
Eoin MacNeill and the Irish Parliamentary Party

Dr Mary Harris gave a presentation on the topic of 'Eoin MacNeill and the Irish Parliamentary Party'.

Occupying a liminal zone between constitutional and advanced nationalism, Eoin MacNeill provides a useful prism through which various strands of Irish nationalist opinion can be examined. As a co-founder of the Gaelic League in 1893 and professor of Early Medieval Irish History in UCD from 1909, he had a profound influence on the shaping of Irish identity. Instrumental in founding the Irish Volunteers in 1913, he hoped it would bolster the cause of Home Rule, but he later became one of the most vitriolic critics of the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP).

MacNeill's study of early Irish literature inspired his nationalist thinking. In it he found evidence of a distinct cultural entity and a unified people. Writing in 1894, he highlighted the intellectual calibre of the writers, whom he described as:

Men of deep, acute, original thought, of bold and comprehensive view, of fine aesthetic feeling and subtle taste (MacNeill, 1894, p. 138).



Eoin MacNeill

He deeply resented the low status of the Irish, and asked,

Is it not enough that in peace we men, Irish and Scotch, of Gaelic blood are the hewers of wood and drawers of water, in war the mercenaries of a stronger race? Ought we not rather, by endeavouring to catch the spirit of our forefathers aim also at their former pre-eminence of mind? (MacNeill, 1894, p. 149)

MacNeill's central role in the Gaelic League gave him much scope to promote his cultural interests through editorial and other activities. The relationship between the League and the IPP was somewhat uneasy: the League saw the IPP as contributing to Anglicisation while the IPP saw the growth of the League as a challenge, at one stage seeking to draw Douglas Hyde into the party. Nevertheless, Redmond promoted Gaelic League concerns in parliament.

When there were fears that unionist militancy would jeopardise Home Rule, MacNeill played a leading role in the formation of the Irish Volunteers. Calling for assertiveness with the slogan 'They have rights who dare maintain them', he appealed to young men's sense of masculinity, hoping to promote a self-reliant, morally regenerated Ireland. According to the manifesto penned by MacNeill, the Irish Volunteers would be 'open to all able-bodied Irishmen, without distinction of creed, politics or social grade' (MacNeill, 1913, pp. 503–5). Within a few months, the IPP's attempt to gain control over the movement proved highly controversial. A split became inevitable following Redmond's call on Volunteers to enlist after the outbreak of war in Europe.

From late 1914 MacNeill was titular editor of *The Irish Volunteer* newspaper, which he used as a platform to lambaste Redmond for his apparent obsequiousness, his failure to speak out against measures detrimental to Irish interests (whether in the form of increased taxation or the implementation of DORA), and his willingness to concede on partition. Alive to the dangers of sectarianism, he had repeatedly argued that it was the

product of British manipulation.

MacNeill's writings were used in evidence against him at his court martial following the Rising. After his release from internment in June 1917, he became heavily involved in Sinn Féin, where he filled the role of an indispensable moderate. He was regarded by some as a wise and safe leader who enjoyed the support of the Catholic Hierarchy. However, his involvement in a deal brokered by Cardinal Logue to divide eight northern constituencies between the IPP and Sinn Féin, thus averting a split Catholic vote, proved controversial. He himself won two seats for Sinn Féin.

After independence, MacNeill was appointed representative of the Irish Free State to the Boundary Commission, but its recommendations for minor rectifications were rejected and the border left unchanged. Despite his earlier assertion that 'they have rights who dare maintain them' he proved no more successful than Redmond in opposing partition. His career reflects a wider trend in advanced nationalism: a burst of artistic and creative energy in the early century was followed by a sense of empowerment, then a narrowing of focus coming up to the 1916 Rising and, ultimately, great difficulty in realising earlier ideals through politics in the Irish independent state.

Discussion on Panel One presentations

The following points were made regarding the Panel One presentations and engagement from the floor:

- The three characters discussed are exceptions to the general decline of the IPP. This is within a context where Ulster is anomalistic because Ulster nationalism has a connection with the IPP that does not exist in the other provinces.
- Given the paucity of Joe Devlin records we needed to 'put flesh on his spectre' through three sources: oral history, archival sources, and the press, although the representation in the press is slightly caricatured.
- With regard to archival sources on Devlin there are letters he sent to others, notably the interrelated correspondence with T.P. O'Connor, Bishop O'Donnell of Raphoe, Judge William Johnston, and J.D. Nugent.
- Joe Devlin was a Home Ruler and an advocate of the labour cause, though from a perspective of killing it with kindness, like Bismarck. He was the darling of the mill girls and had considerable engagement with the shipworkers' committees. Although regarded as an iconoclast by the conservative Catholic Church in England, he can be seen as a Catholic in the tradition of Leo XIII's Catholic social teaching. He felt there was no need for Catholics to vote for labour and when the 'big legislation' came in he worked against the labour interest, believing the labour interest could be addressed post Home Rule.
- While Davis, and even more so Pearse, saw history as providing incitement to rebellion, MacNeill tended to emphasise what he found in terms of intellectual sophistication of the early Irish writers, and their impressive calibre.
- The Shan Van Vocht/Ard Righ circle emphasised thinking through historical analogy and the Ard Righ soirées functioned like a Northern Abbey Theatre as a driver of cultural nationalism.
- The IPP left the cultural scene very much to Sinn Féin.

Panel Two:
The Socialist and Republican Tradition

CHAIR **Tom Hartley**
Historian and author

SPEAKERS **Dr Fearghal Mac Bhloscaidh**
AND TOPICS Author of *The Irish Revolution 1912-1923: Tyrone*
TOPIC: Republicanism in Mid Ulster, 1890-1916

Dr Marnie Hay
St Patrick's Campus, Dublin City University
TOPIC: Bulmer Hobson and the Revival of Republicanism in Ireland

Dr Margaret Ward
Visiting Fellow in Irish History, Queen's University Belfast
TOPIC: Winifred Carney: Feminist, Socialist, Republican

The Chair of the session, **Tom Hartley** introduced the discussion, welcoming the inclusion of persons 'on the wrong side of history' such as Winifred Carney and Bulmer Hobson into public discourse.



Professor Tom Hartley

Republicanism in Mid-Ulster, 1890–1916

Dr Fearghal Mac Bhloscaidh

gave his presentation, a Marxist perspective, on 'Republicanism in Mid-Ulster, 1890–1916'. He began by noting that in many respects concepts like class and ideology had become dirty words in Irish historiography. He said such notions are fundamental to understanding mid-Ulster republicanism in terms of both the objective conditions that underpinned such activism and the subjective manner in which working-class republicans expressed their politics through word and deed.

His focus was the tradition of Fenianism in Mid-Ulster, where there were about 30 Fenian cells comprising 500–600 people, in a crescent around the western shore of Lough Neagh. This was not 'patriotism as a pastime' but a serious political tradition among the working class (Comerford, 1980). These republicans consciously identified themselves as working class.

The IRB in Mid-Ulster took a democratic attitude towards an array of national and international issues, this attitude being underpinned by 'a democratic and republican social ideal' (McGee, 2005, pp. 348–9).

Their primary defiance was attitudinal – a lack of deference. Their quotidian activism was informed by and conditioned a developing political consciousness.

Fearghal Mac Bhloscaidh cited Howard Zinn's observation with regard to the movement of social protest underlying conflict between poor and rich:

We don't have to engage in grand, heroic actions to participate in the process of change. Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can transform the world (Zinn, 2002, p. 208).

He noted the convergence between the United Irishmen and the IRB:

- A durable aversion to monarchy;
- Seeking to end British rule;
- A civic concept of the nation; and
- Aversion to sectarianism plus anti-clericalism.

The local IRB in Tyrone consistently opposed sectarianism. There was a strand of anti-clericalism throughout the movement – manifested, for example, in Tom Clarke's refusal of absolution prior to execution. While the movement was not representative of the working class as a whole, it embodied a tradition of opposition to plebeian Orangeism and Hibernianism. The AOH was viewed as a barrier to the progress of nationalism:



A Fenian cell in Mid-Ulster



The AOH [Board of Erin] in any shape or form is a barrier to the progress of real Nationalism as it fosters distrust and bigotry ... under the spell of the priests (McCartan, 1909).

This material is in stark contrast to much historiography about the IRB. Mac Bhloscaidh noted contemporary disparaging views from what E. P. Thompson labelled the 'articulate minority':

- In 1915, the year before the Rising, constabulary reports on a mobilisation of 500–600 IRB men were to the effect that local republicans were lacking in character and intelligence, and might be ignored with absolute safety (CI Tyrone, RIC, March 1915 CO904/96).
- David Fitzpatrick has written of post 1916 Rising Clare that the 'Castle made heroes out of nobodies and provoked savage indignation among countless families which had previously supported the new movement, if at all, only out of herd instinct (Fitzpatrick, 1998, p. 124).

He also cited the comment in Walter Lippman's *Public Opinion* (1922) that the general population were 'too stupid and ignorant' to be allowed to run their own affairs. The task was to be left to the 'intelligent minority' who must be protected from 'the trampling and the roar of [the] bewildered herd'.

Rather than historiography reflecting the bias of establishment sources, Fearghal Mac Bhloscaidh suggests it should follow E. P. Thompson's proposal for the holding of sources to Satanic light and reading them backwards (Thompson, 1978, p. 62).

A wealth of material is available on the people concerned in the form of newspapers, letters and oral reports.

There was a significant degree of manufacturing activity in Mid-Ulster and the IRB were at the forefront of the labour movement, with an emphasis on the improvement of the situation of labouring men.

The IRB were strong in strikes in Coalisland, notably in the Tyrone brickyard strike in 1924, when the resistance was against the introduction of 'scab' labour.

Republicanism in Mid-Ulster was a popular democratic movement dedicated to solidarity and mutual aid, although the goals of freedom, equality and anti-sectarianism remain unrealised. In our analysis of history it is necessary to have regard to conditions as well as to ideas.

Bulmer Hobson and the Revival of Republicanism in Ireland

Dr Marnie Hay gave a presentation on the topic 'Bulmer Hobson and the Revival of Republicanism in Early Twentieth Century Ireland'.

Bulmer Hobson and Denis McCulough were partners in Irish nationalism and the revival of republicanism, although following different roads to republicanism. McCulough was a separatist nationalist, inducted into the IRB aged 18. Hobson came to membership of the IRB via the Gaelic League and the GAA, and was of Quaker stock; his father was a Gladstonian Home Ruler.

Hobson was an admirer of the United Irishmen and a disciple of Wolfe Tone – a young advanced nationalist. Along with McCulough he was part of a cohort of new active men in the IRB who were young and sober.

In 1905 they founded the Dungannon Club as a non-sectarian republican organisation. The clubs were called after the 1782 Dungannon Convention, which had sought an independent Irish parliament. They went on to develop a network of Dungannon Clubs. These faced opposition from the AOH and the Irish Foresters due to competition to be the voice for Irish nationalism. The Dungannon Clubs also functioned as a cover for IRB recruitment. Along with McCulough and Seán McDermott, Hobson was a key figure in revitalising the IRB in Ulster.

Hobson's advanced nationalism caused him to move to Dublin in 1908, where he founded Na Fianna Éireann, the Republican scouting movement. He was close to Tom Clarke and was co-opted to the IRB Supreme Council in 1911 as Clarke and the young men, McCulough, McDermott and Hobson, took control.

Hobson was a founder of the Irish Volunteers, modelled on the inspiration of the Ulster Volunteers, in 1913, but he fell out with Clarke over the significant IPP role in the Irish Volunteers and resigned from the IRB Supreme Council. He was thus outside the IRB cabal of the MacNeill-led Irish Volunteers, and shared MacNeill's view of 1916 that the Rising was premature. Hobson favoured a guerrilla campaign.

Hobson was kidnapped and confined by the IRB at the outbreak of the Rising to prevent him spreading word of MacNeill's countermanding order. There was no Rising in the North East in any event, out of the desire not to incite the Ulster Volunteers into action, and plans for linking Ulster IRB members with Connacht proved abortive.

After the Easter Rising Bulmer Hobson ceased active participation in political life. He made a career as an official in the Free State's Revenue Commissioners in Dublin.



Bulmer Hobson

Winifred Carney: Feminist, Socialist, Republican

Dr Margaret Ward gave the concluding presentation in Panel Two on the topic 'Winifred Carney: Feminist, Socialist, Republican'.

Dr Ward noted that Winifred Carney was referred to as 'the typist with the Webley' in the GPO, 1916. She came from a lower middle class, very respectable background. She joined the Gaelic League and in addition to being a strong cultural nationalist was active in the labour movement. Her political views were close to Connolly's – 'Ireland as distinct from her people is nothing to me'. Also like Connolly, she was a feminist who saw politics in gendered terms.

In 1912 she became head of the of the women's section of the Irish Textile Workers' Union. She campaigned together with Connolly for the rights of the women labourers. Connolly hoped to encourage a national spirit among the mill workers.

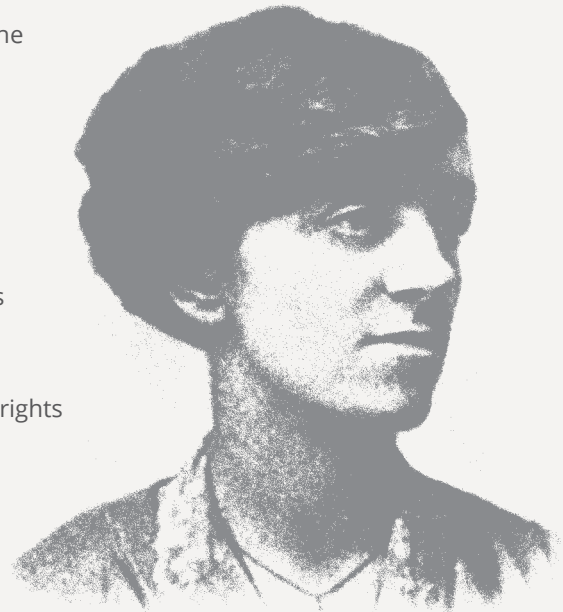
While Carney disliked public speaking, she was very well read. She had an understanding of the class nature of society and was reliable and methodical in her work.

In 1914 she joined Cumann na mBan (CNB), the women's auxiliary of the Irish Volunteers, and became friendly with Constance Markievicz. There were about 30 activists in the Belfast branch of CNB. Their activities (fundraising etc.) were a typical mix, with the notable exception that they took lessons in rifle shooting. This made them very different from other CNB branches. Carney was also active in the suffrage movement, 1912–1913.

Prior to the Easter Rising in 1916 Carney knew what was happening within the IRB camp of the Irish Volunteers. In the GPO, Carney described herself as aide-de-camp to Connolly and was among the final group to evacuate, not leaving Connolly's side. He advised her to remove her Sam Browne belt prior to the surrender but her reaction was to write her name on it to show her ownership.

She was released under the 1917 Amnesty for prisoners. In East Belfast in the 1917 General Election her literature was very different from that of the other Sinn Féin candidates, proposing a workers' republic and echoing her socialist and feminist principles. She did not have suffragist support, unlike Markievicz. She received only 395 votes and was defeated by the Labour Unionist candidate.

Carney rejected the Anglo-Irish Treaty, supported the republican prisoners and went on to participate in the resurgence of labour politics in Northern Ireland, joining the Northern Ireland Labour Party. Her shift to socialism was not surprising given her radical commitments in the past.



Winifred Carney

Discussion on Panel Two Presentations

The following points were made regarding the Panel Two presentations and engagement from the floor:

- The 1916 Rising has come to be seen as an act of elitist violence by some, but it was conceived as anti-imperialist rather than elitist.
- The material regarding Belfast CNB in the Bureau of Military History shows full support for the Rising – no equivocation.
- There was frustration at the impractical plan for the Irish Volunteers in Ulster to march to Belcoo in Fermanagh.
- The Fr Louis O’Kane Archive in the Cardinal O’Fiaich Memorial Library, Armagh, may offer source material on Ulster CNB ancillary to the Bureau of Military History.
- Men write women out of history but any revolution, if understood in social and political as well as military terms, is not possible without the support of women.

Panel Three:
Cultural Nationalism

CHAIR **Professor Fearghal McGarry**
Reader in Modern Irish History, Queen's University Belfast

SPEAKERS **Dr Catherine Morris**
AND TOPICS Writer-in-Residence, Central Library Liverpool &
co-founder of the Artist Centre for Human Rights.
Author of *Alice Milligan and the Irish Cultural Revival*
TOPIC: Alice Milligan & Feminist Community Theatre practice

Dr Margaret O Callaghan
School of Politics, International Studies and
Philosophy, Queen's University Belfast
TOPIC: Casement, Nationality and Empire

Professor Anthony Roche
Emeritus Professor, School of English, Drama and Film,
University College Dublin
TOPIC: The Reclamation of Ernest Blythe

The Chair of the session, **Professor Fearghal McGarry**, introduced Panel Three by expressing delight that consideration of northern nationalism should take place in QUB, noting that Ulster had been overlooked in the history of the revolutionary period. He further commented on the significance of Ulster not only for the development of cultural nationalism, but also for the separatist tradition, with many protagonists relocating to the South after partition. Of the various anniversaries being commemorated, he believed that partition would prove the trickiest.



Professor Fearghal McGarry

Alice Milligan and the Irish Cultural Revival

Dr Catherine Morris gave a presentation on the topic of 'Alice Milligan and the Irish Cultural Revival'.

Cultural activist, writer and arts practitioner, Alice Milligan (1866–1953) was a pioneer in the formation of Irish National Theatre. She began to have premonitions of a dramatic movement as early as 1897 when she started bringing theatre to diverse communities across Ireland and its diaspora, in places that lacked resources and dedicated venues. She staged plays and tableaux vivants ('living pictures': see below) with groups in theatre venues and school halls, on city streets and in fields (where people watched sitting on benches carved out of felled trees).

Milligan always worked collaboratively, never alone. On a break from his human rights work in the Congo, her close friend Roger Casement joined her in Antrim where they cleared fields and constructed stage sets for local Irish tableaux and drama shows. Audiences attending her performances were not passive, ticket buying, anonymous consumers but active participants in the creation of national theatre and cultural independence. Those who built the stages made the costumes; those who performed the shows sourced the props and invented stage effects out of local materials.

Looking back in 1919 at the intervention that Alice Milligan made in imagining a cultural republic, Susan Mitchell reflected that she was 'the most successful producer of plays before the Abbey Theatre started on its triumphant way' (Mitchell, 1919). Contemporaries of Milligan remember how she travelled extensively to community, schools and theatre groups. One of her letters to a newspaper editor gives a fascinating insight into her direct-action approach to finding cheap and fast ways to distribute play scripts. Milligan's conception of an Irish national theatre was not confined to a single group, place or building. She argued instead for a healthy pluralism, in which numerous literary and political organisations would collaborate in the production of Irish plays.

Milligan developed an enigmatic form of theatrical story telling called tableaux vivants in which performers enacted scenes drawn from melodrama, the nationalist press, songs, stories, contemporary political protests, legends or social life, sometimes accompanied by a live orchestra. Her plays and tableaux operated as a link between ideas of national theatre and the cultural regeneration of the Irish language as a spoken medium. But they had other elective affinities too. Drama, photography and the magic lantern were the most immediately obvious of these, but cinema and art installation are also recognizably among them.

During the 1897 royal visit to Dublin, Milligan and Maud Gonne were among a group of artist activists who projected from magic lanterns onto Dublin's city walls photographs of deprivation that they had witnessed in the west of Ireland. Another example of their agitprop mode of theatre took place in front of the General Post Office on O'Connell Street in Dublin when they performed living pictures enacting, scene by scene, public nationalist protest against the ban on Irish language postal addresses. In the years following 1916, Milligan received letters from Irish political



Alice Milligan

prisoners who recalled how their own national consciousness had been awakened by these early local experiences of cultural participation in the national theatre.

In the words of Declan Kiberd:

'Alice Milligan's life long project, in novels, poems, plays, journalism and tableaux, was to liberate the still-unused energies buried in the Irish past and to demonstrate their rich potential for her generation ... Milligan was a gifted woman who was arguably one of the greatest of all inventors of modern Ireland' (Kiberd, 2012).

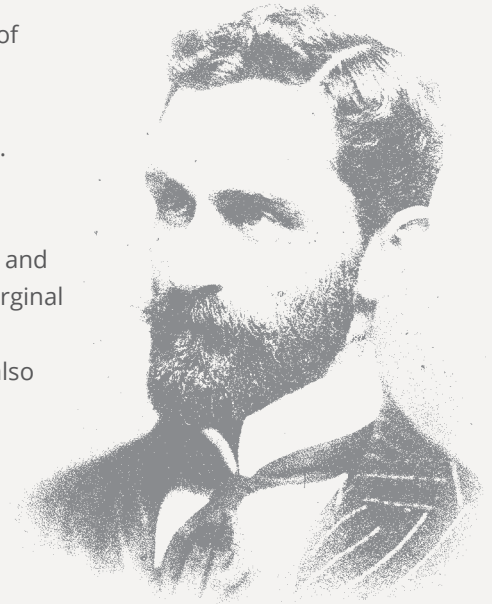
Casement, Nationality and Empire

Dr Margaret O'Callaghan gave a presentation on the topic of 'Casement, Nationality and Empire'.

She advised that Casement should be understood in the context of the drama of activity in Ireland from 1886 to 1905. She referenced his high public profile as a consequence of his work on the Congo and Putumayo. He enjoyed access, connections to fellow campaigners and a range of networks, and he had knowledge of high political intrigue. He was not a marginal crank but a partial insider.

Casement made a sustained critique of imperialism. He also understood Ireland to be at the core of the British imperial project. Speaking to Stopford Brooke in 1907, Casement locates his analysis of Ireland in the context of British imperial policy:

Neither Liberal nor Tory has any feeling about Ireland except as Englishmen – that it was brought into existence for their benefit – and since that is a bit crude they have invented the term 'Empire' to represent them and their aims (O'Callaghan, 2012).



Roger Casement

After Gladstone's 1893 (Second) Home Rule Bill passed the House of Commons but fell in the Lords, Home Rule was off the agenda until 1911, when there was a Liberal Government with the IPP holding the balance of power. In 1894 Rosebery had distanced the Liberals from Home Rule, insisting that there would have to be a majority for Home Rule in England, the predominant partner for the Home Rule cause, and not just a majority within the United Kingdom. Casement believed that the Lords would always veto Home Rule and that retention of Ireland was a key tenet of an imperialist and bipartisan British foreign policy – a Tory imperial and foreign policy to which the Liberal front bench now adhered.

Although most of Casement's prolific political writings have been destroyed, a copy of his political writings on Ireland, annotated by him, survived. This gives an apocalyptic view of Ireland in the past and looking to the future. His economic analysis of Irish history was based on Elizabethan spoliation, land appropriation, and the eighteenth-century suborning of the possibility of an Irish nation by trade restrictions, and is the topic of extensive correspondence and exchanges with historian Alice Stopford Green. He intersperses his text with commentary on contemporary poverty in Ireland, and enlistment in the British forces as a temptation for young Irishmen.

He views the British position on Ireland as essentially that portrayed by Edmund Spenser:

To represent the island as a poverty stricken land inhabited by a turbulent and ignorant race whom she has with unrewarded solicitude sought to civilise, uplift and educate has been a staple of England's diplomatic trade since modern diplomacy began (Casement, 1958, pp. 22–23).

What pushed him into revolution was the combination of the opportunity of an international war, the manipulation and mobilisation of unionism against Home Rule and what Casement himself calls 'Balfourism and Crime': a manuscript that detailed the role of Dublin Castle in constructing the Parnellism and Crime case, which was used by the Tories for propaganda purposes to render nationalism and crime as identical.

The Reclamation of Ernest Blythe

Professor Anthony Roche gave a presentation on the topic of 'The Reclamation of Ernest Blythe'.

Professor Roche began by expressing his thanks to Dr Ian Walsh, from the National University of Ireland, Galway.

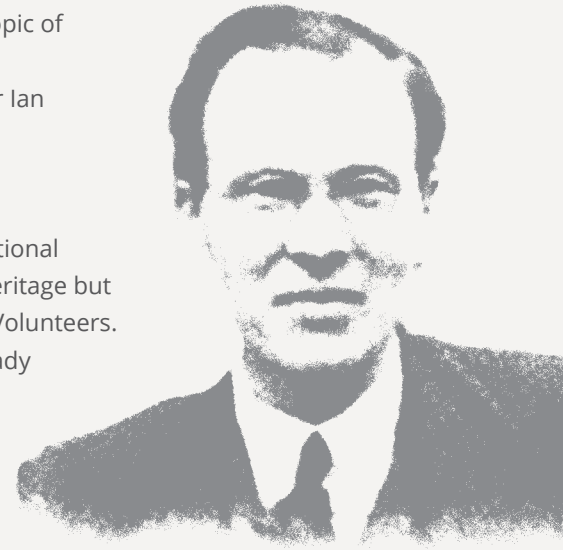
Ernest Blythe was an Irish nationalist with a strong commitment to the Irish language. He spent 26 years as Managing Director of the Abbey Theatre, serving an additional five years on its Board. He was of Northern Protestant heritage but joined the IRB and the Gaelic League, and later the Irish Volunteers. He did not participate in the Easter Rising as he was already in prison. He was considered too dangerous to remain in Ireland so had been deported to England, where he was imprisoned for failure to report to the police as stipulated.

Professor Roche suggested that Blythe's career warrants partial reclaim. In popular memory he is the Minister for Finance who reduced old-age pensions from ten shillings to nine shillings a week, in the June 1924 Old Age Pensions Act. Blythe's most munificent act as Minister for Finance was to vote the Abbey Theatre an annual subsidy of £850 in the financial year 1924-5, making it the first theatre to receive a government subsidy in the English-speaking world. The subsidy was subsequently increased to £1,000.

During his 26-year tenure as Managing Director of the Abbey Theatre, Blythe twice secured funding for the Peacock. When the Abbey Theatre burned down in 1951 not a single day's work was lost, even when it had to move to the Queen's Theatre. Blythe's abiding interest was a commitment to drama in the Irish language. It has been claimed that he did not really care what was staged in English. In promoting Irish language plays he was attempting to put Government policy in place. But plays in Irish did not attract audiences, so Blythe introduced Christmas pantomimes in Irish – which proved hugely popular and gave latitude to players such as Jack McGowran to expand their range.

It was said that there was 'a grim, grey similarity' between all the plays in English produced during Blythe's tenure in the Queen's Theatre. Professor Roche argued that some worthwhile plays in English were produced under Blythe's long stewardship, latterly by Brian Friel, John B. Keane and Hugh Leonard. In the 1940s there were, for example, four plays produced by Elizabeth O'Connor, including a feminist comedy. In 1961, a play by a District Court judge from Co. Kerry, Richard Johnson, entitled *The Evidence I Shall Give* ran for 87 performances. It focused on the case of a Reverend Mother seeking to have a 13-year-old girl transferred from an orphanage to an industrial school because of her alleged indiscipline.

Professor Roche concluded by saying there is more than enough evidence to alleviate the negative recollection of Blythe.



Ernest Blythe

Discussion on Panel Three presentations

The following points were made regarding Panel Three presentations and engagement from the floor:

- The presumptive identity allocation of individuals tends to be based on the post-partition configuration of community identity.
- However, Alice Milligan and Ernest Blythe were champions of Irish nationalism through their dynamic cultural activities, and the national cultural movements were Protestant-led in many instances, with Yeats being a significant influence. (Yeats appointed Blythe to the Abbey Board.) Casement was also a Protestant.
- Many Protestant women joined the Gaelic League, and the Church of Ireland played a significant role in the translation of the Bible into Irish. However, only a minority of Protestants crossed the Rubicon to nationalism.
- Is Roger Casement on a par with Ernest Blythe as a cultural nationalist?
The categories of cultural and political nationalism are somewhat arbitrary. Casement travelled with Milligan in her cultural enterprises and sought funds for the Irish language movement whereas Blythe was not himself an artist.
- Casement was a magnet for artists – see for example Lavery's monumental painting *High Treason: The Appeal of Roger Casement, The Court of Criminal Appeal*, 17 and 18 July 1916.
- The Abbey Theatre did stage some plays by Northern playwrights, e.g. George Shiels, and there were a number of joint productions of Joseph Tomelty plays between the Abbey and the Northern Theatre.

Panel Four:
Ulster Unionists' response to Northern Nationalism

CHAIR **Councillor Colin McCusker**
Ulster Unionist Party General Secretary

SPEAKERS
AND TOPICS **Dr Martin Mansergh**
Deputy Chair of the Irish Government Expert Advisory Group
on the Decade of Centenaries
TOPIC: Personal Observation

David Fitzpatrick
Fellow Emeritus of Trinity College, Dublin
TOPIC: Frederick MacNeice in Carrickfergus:
Home Ruler or Unionist?

Dr Kyle Hughes
Lecturer in British History, Ulster University
TOPIC: Ulster Unionists and the Ancient Order of Hibernians

Councillor Colin McCusker, the Chair for Panel Four, affirmed that the Ulster Unionist Party had not been afraid to engage with, and challenge, Irish nationalism. He described himself as 'a confused and confusing unionist' given that he is proud to be both Irish and British. As an example of this identity, he said, he would support the Republic of Ireland team should they play England in the UEFA Euro 2016 tournament.



Councillor Colin McCusker

Personal Observation

Dr Martin Mansergh gave a personal observation on the topic of Ulster Unionism's response to Northern Nationalism.

His own more distant family supported the Union. But looking at things from the opposite perspective, he commented that former leaders of the Unionist Party might award him a fail grade in his understanding of unionism. He noted that the course of the Plantation did not involve wholesale displacement. 'Unruly Ulster Scots' were brought in towards the making of a mixed plantation, growing up together in one nation. The settlers were in the prime position but fusion did not come to pass. National communities are self-defined.

How to define one nation? Certainly government had a wish not to see the lower classes united. After 1691 Ulster Protestants were secure but not equal, and this led to emigration to America on a large scale. Protestantism took a defensive form. The foundation of the Orange Order in 1795 provided a kind of moral sanction for the subjection of Catholics.

The Union was of great benefit to North East Ulster economically but not to the rest of Ireland. In Ulster, religious conservatism blocked Home Rule and in 1885–86 Ulster was the hard core of the Union.

The population across the nine counties of Ulster were nearly evenly divided between Protestants and Catholics. While Ulster Covenanters in Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan were prepared, reluctantly, to release Carson from his pledge for the greater good, Lloyd George queried privately 'Who would die for Tyrone and Fermanagh?'

Ulster nationalists were also vulnerable at times of heightened dissent. Nationalists realised they could not persuade unionists, but believed the British Government should. Ulster unionists had to keep two nationalisms in their sights, in the North and on the island. Social and economic life was congealed by icy gusts of sectarianism. There was a deep distrust about involving Catholics in the structures of the state.

Post-war, the welfare state and the strength of the Northern economy meant there was little threat from the Republic of Ireland.

There were significant shortcomings to majority rule, but exaggerated comparisons do not assist understanding and mutual accommodation. Nothing can be used to justify any paramilitary campaign subsequent to partition.

It took a long time to establish relationships between North and South and no one wants to lose them. But the prospect of continuing partnership within the EU can no longer be the model in the event of a United Kingdom decision to leave the EU.



The GPO, Dublin

Frederick MacNeice in Carrickfergus: Home Ruler or Unionist?

David Fitzpatrick gave a presentation on the topic of 'Frederick MacNeice in Carrickfergus: Home Ruler or Unionist?'

Frederick MacNeice, the rector of Carrickfergus and later the Bishop of Cashel & Waterford and Bishop of Down, Connor & Dromore, was the father of Louis MacNeice, the poet.

Although a member of the Orange Order and chaplain to Orange Lodges, he declined to sign the Ulster Covenant. He was an extremely active public unionist and Orangeman, while at the same time he was portrayed as a Home Ruler. He did not deny that he had been a Home Ruler before the First World War.

There were dramatic changes in the perception of unionism in the North post 1922. It became more sectarian and conservative.

Frederick MacNeice held a diversity of ideas and attitudes. He was a conciliator who played a significant role in limiting the lethal riots of the twenties and thirties in Belfast.

MacNeice believed signatories of the Covenant were moved by different motivations. He was able to assert his independence before a packed congregation, many of whom were contemplating physical force, precisely because his active unionism gave him immunity.

He had strong views on the Romish threat. He denounced the *Ne Temere* decree and saw Redmond as a puppet of the Hierarchy. He also viewed Home Rule as lessening individual liberties, and he was deeply opposed to violence and to armed threat to the forces of the crown.

On the first anniversary of Ulster Day (28 September 1912) in 1913 he invited his congregation to rejoice that they were Irish, but also part of the wider community of empire. He hoped Government would withdraw the Home Rule Bill but pointed out that if the people of the United Kingdom approved Home Rule then unionists had to accept that.

He had an aversion to partition, believing that an intensification of antagonisms within Ireland and within Ulster would result from it. He was also concerned for the position of Protestants outside Ulster, and at the prospect of a deliberate separation from brethren in a crisis – his perspective was informed by his background in Co. Galway. He allied his position on southern unionism with that of Sir Horace Plunkett.

He believed that while it was necessary for unionists to do all in their power to sustain loyalty, Home Rule was not necessarily incompatible with the Union. Not all Covenanters were partitionists, and Home Rule could be the lesser evil – better to live within an Irish State than to become an Irish fragment within a British state.

It is quite wrong to automatically categorise unionism as sectarian prior to 1914. Unionism was fluid. What might end up as the best route forward was changing from day to day. In considering the evolving position of unionism vis-à-vis Home Rule, it is necessary to situate ourselves within that time.



Frederick MacNeice

Ulster Unionists and the Ancient Order of Hibernians

Dr Kyle Hughes gave a presentation on the topic of 'Ulster Unionists and the Ancient Order of Hibernians'.

The AOH is a useful prism through which to look at the unionist opposition to nationalism more generally. It originated in America in the 1830s; by the end of the nineteenth century it was the largest Irish-American society. Disparate branches in Ireland and Britain united under the banner of the 'Board of Erin' in 1905. The Board of Erin constitution committed it to the IPP, and Joe Devlin was elected as national president in 1905. The AOH had a Ribbonism heritage (both real and imagined).

The historic criticism of unionism in Ulster suggested that 'the Ulster perception of Home Rule may seem ludicrously extreme in retrospect' (Foster, 1988, p. 470), but as Bew noted, 'devolution does not just switch off the question of separatism' (Bew, 2012).

An examination of the unionist perception of the AOH is useful for illustrating the problem as to whether it was conscious of the different strands of nationalism.

The rise of the AOH was swift and meteoric. It was an influential organisation supporting the IPP. It had a strained relationship with the Catholic Hierarchy and was often viewed as Tammany Hall reborn. Connolly described it as spreading 'like an ulcer throughout Ireland, carrying social and religious terrorism with it' (Connolly, 1911).

For unionists in Ulster the AOH was a portent of Home Rule. They could cite the priestly connivance of Bishop O'Donnell of Raphoe's endorsement of the AOH, and the AOH-led intra-IPP intimidation of the 1909 'Baton Convention', and garnish these with tales of ritual and oaths borrowed from Ribbonism and of Joe Devlin pulling strings with funding from Irish America. In this scenario the AOH was the puppet master and the IPP was the puppet.

The defensive strand in southern unionism asserted that the United Irish League ruled Ireland and the AOH apparently ruled the League. 'There will be no peace in Ireland until the Order is dead and buried' (Ashtown, 1907, ix).

At by-elections in England during the Ulster crisis an oath, purporting to be the AOH oath, was circulated, including pledges to 'wade knee deep in Orange blood' and to 'massacre a Protestant whenever an opportunity serves'. Devlin challenged Thomas Hickman on this fake oath on 22 January 1913 in Westminster, but its tenor was familiar – the expression of deeply embedded neuroses.

The AOH got a stimulus from the National Insurance Act of 1911, which gave it approved society status. This was despite an attempt to bar sectarian organisations from the remit of the Act, because of the belief that that would allow the Order to administer and capture funds, and in effect to use a government subsidy to fund opposition. In fact the AOH did benefit greatly from the Act, and the period 1910–14 was its most influential period, despite constant allegations of chicanery.

After the AOH's brief spell in the political limelight it was downhill all the way after 1914. Unionists knew the value of good propaganda, and the AOH filled the role of bogeyman very well from 1905 to 1914.



*Emblem of the
Ancient Order of
Hibernians*

Discussion on Panel Four Presentations

The following points were made regarding Panel Four presentations and engagement from the floor:

- Some branches of the AOH were set up as burial societies but sometimes they were set up as cover for illegal Ribbonism: a route for old Ribbonmen to come out.
- The Irish National Foresters (INF), a contemporary of the AOH, was an offshoot of the British Association of Foresters. There appear to be two branches of the INF extant, in Carlow and Warrenpoint.
- Doctors and lawyers joined the AOH after it became a friendly society under the National Insurance Act 1911, giving it a more middle-class profile.
- The joint membership of the EU by Ireland and the UK has been very important for developing and sustaining relationships. The Prime Ministers and civil servants meet regularly.
- Barriers went up between North and South post-1922. A Brexit vote to leave the EU will disrupt all the progress in recent years. That is regrettable but we have to deal with the challenges democracy throws up.
- Louis MacNeice had a problem dealing with his father. But later in life he was defensive of his father, portraying him as someone who saw the writing on the wall with regard to Home Rule. Louis presented himself as coming from an exciting background in order to create a more attractive persona in an English context. In the end his tribute to Frederick is in his poetry.
- In the mid-1930s Bishop MacNeice made some very courageous interventions with regard to sectarian riots in Belfast.

Conclusion

Professor Mary E. Daly, President of the RIA, closed the conference.

She remarked that the 1966 Irish state commemorations of the Rising had stayed very much within the boundaries of the state, with Ulster overlooked. However lessons were learnt and the Ireland 2016 programme, and this conference in particular, aimed to cross borders and explore the complexities of history.

Shifting the locale to Belfast for this conference had greatly enriched it. Nationalism was strong in Ulster; however, the complexity and diversity of the history of northern nationalism has been reduced due to the more recent perspectives on 'the Troubles'. But this diversity needs to be re-examined and articulated, especially in the context of contemporary Northern Ireland and the North/South relationship.

Professor Daly advised that podcasts and a report of the conference would be issued in due course and thanked the organisers, panel chairs, speakers and participants for their attendance and valuable engagement.



Professor Mary E. Daly

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Further information

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