

'Orangeism and Protestant Politics,' University of Ulster at Jordanstown (Belfast), 8 November 2002

This event, sponsored by the ESRC, Council for Canadian Studies in the U.K., and University of Ulster, took place at the University of Ulster, Jordanstown campus. The forty-odd delegates included interested members of the academic community in Northern Ireland and Scotland, Parades Commission, journalists and Orange Order. Media interest was considerable and a large number of interviews took place over the course of the day with organisers, speakers and members of the Orange Order.

Speakers included (with their papers):

Dr. Eric Kaufmann (U. Southampton) – Who spoke on Orangeism in Comparative Perspective, examining trends in Northern Ireland Orangeism in the 1966-2001 period. A significant 1/3 decline in membership was noted for this period, despite the advent of the 'Troubles.' This pattern, argued the author, could only be understood against the background of declining voluntary association membership: a western trend documented in the USA by Robert Putnam. As evidence, the trajectory of Orange membership in Canada, Scotland and Northern Ireland (male, female and junior) was considered, along with trends in two other fraternities, the Odd Fellows and Masons. These corroborated the thesis that Northern Ireland Orangeism is unexceptional in its trajectory – and illustrated how important events in the Northern Ireland conflict merely made a temporary impact on the long range trend in Orange membership.

Rev. Gordon McCracken (former Deputy Grand Master, Grand Lodge of Scotland, now a private author) – Rev. McCracken delivered a paper on Scottish Orangeism in the Twentieth Century. The paper drew upon his insights as former deputy Grand Master as well as detailed research from internal Scottish Orange documents. McCracken theorised that while the world wars reduced membership, postwar growth was strong in the case of both conflicts. He also considered the activities of the Orange & Protestant party of the inter-war period, suggesting that this entity was created and deliberately terminated by the Orange elite; it was not a united Orange project which foundered on the rocks of hostile public opinion. McCracken also suggested that the recent, post-1982 decline in Scottish Orangeism owes much to a perception amongst some that the Order was powerless to stop the papal visit which took place that year. He suggested that a similar response to Orange failure was evident in 1878 and 1929 when the Order failed to prevent pro-Catholic bills from being passed.

Professor David Fitzpatrick (Trinity College Dublin) – 'Orangeism in Northern Ireland, 1921-72.' Professor Fitzpatrick addressed the high politics of the Order during the Stormont period. Fitzpatrick began by noting the membership overlap between the UUP and Orange Order, evident in Harbinson's claim that all Northern Ireland first ministers and virtually all MPs were members of the Orange Order. However, Fitzpatrick suggested at least four possible explanations for this pattern, including the one given by Harbinson and Haddick-Flynn (that this demonstrates Orange Order control over the UUP. Other possible explanations included 1) The UUP used

Orangeism to suppress dissident movements, as with landlords and grandees in the 19th c who had tried to direct the Orange tenant vote; 2- Orange membership might have been providing a union card, a token for entry into public life; or 3 - The Order was providing a moral or spiritual centre for Unionism - that to be a Unionist was more than just a political opinion, but a whole brotherhood. Fitzpatrick's examination of the intensity of Orange and political participation – signified by attendance at grand lodge meetings and the individual's role in public life – showed a mixed pattern: some MPs were active Orangemen, but for the most part, UUP MPs were either not members of, or were merely limited participants in, the affairs of Grand Lodge, suggesting a distance between their fraternal and political lives. Finally, Fitzpatrick intimated that Orange influence over the UUP is more tenuous in the post-Stormont period.

Dr. Donald MacRaild (Northumbria) – 'Orangeism in the Northeast of England, 1886-1918.' Dr. MacRaild examined the surviving records of Orange lodges in the far north of England, focusing primarily on the Northeast. His analysis suggests that Orangeism was overwhelmingly an Ulster-Protestant immigrant phenomenon in the northeast, and never attained a membership in excess of a few thousand. Few marches took place and those that did were unspectacular. Likewise, the Order had a limited impact on local politics in a part of Britain that returned few Unionist/Tory MPs. Even when the tide of Unionism surged, as in 1913, when a massive crowd of 15000 welcomed Carson's visit from Ireland, it was clear that Orangemen formed but a small minority of this agitation.

Mr. Clifford Smyth (Ulster Society) – Mr Smyth, well-known commentator on Orange events for BBC Northern Ireland, delivered a disquisition on 'Orange history and folklore.' The talk ranged over 2000 years and explored the relationship between Orangeism and the Ulster-Protestant people, charting the ways in which history has been used and abused – particularly by Orangeism's detractors. Mr Smyth opined that Ireland had always been a divided society in which the descendants of today's Ulster-Protestants played a vital role. Many Orange myths and symbols can be traced further back than 1688, and, in whatever guise, form a potent part of what it means to be British-Protestant in Ulster today.

Commentators included:

Dr. Dominic Bryan (Queen's University and author of *Orange Parades*) – Who considered the decline in Orangeism as linked to a rise in independent marching band and paramilitary activity. He added that Civic Unionism held promise as an alternative approach to Unionist identity in Ulster – a dispensation in which Orangeism could play an active part.

Ruth Dudley Edwards – journalist and author of *The Faithful Tribe*. Ms. Edwards provided a lively critique of the Orange leadership, whom Ms Edwards suggests has failed to navigate the challenge of the current political and social situation in Northern Ireland, and is thus responsible for the decline in Orange membership.