Is there a shared Ulster heritage?

Michael Hall

*This publication has been funded by
independent donors from the private sector*

Introduction

In 2006 the Ulster Defence Association launched its Conflict Transformation Initiative, which seeks to address the causes of the Northern Ireland conflict and create an environment which can bring about an end to all paramilitary activity. From the beginning, the intention has been to engage the UDA's rank and file membership – and hopefully, the wider society – in the process of change. One obvious way to do this is through Michael Hall's Community Think Tanks Project. This Project, and the accompanying pamphlets which are its most recognisable product (to date 160,000 copies have been widely disseminated around the community network), has established its integrity among *all* communities within Northern Ireland, as much because the Think Tank discussions have offered a voice to many different sections of our society, and the pamphlet series has constantly informed, and challenged, its growing readership.

   Accordingly, a series of Think Tank discussions on themes pertinent to the Loyalist community have been planned, one of which will focus on cultural identity. Ulster Protestants/Loyalists have always felt that the cultural terminology used by Irish Nationalists/Republicans has either patronised their community, denigrated it, or simply air-brushed it out of consideration. Our 'Britishness' is somehow inferior to their 'Irishness'. They constantly challenge us to explain what our Britishness stands for, even though they would be deeply offended by any such questioning directed at their Irishness. Ulster Protestants are seemingly people who just haven't realised that they are Irish, but who sooner or later will come to see the error of their ways. (More impatient and less tolerant Nationalists have a more cynical approach: 'Well, if they can't see that they are really Irish, there's always the Liverpool boat!')

   As a means of stimulating discussion among participants to the proposed Think Tank looking at cultural identity, Hall, who has long promoted the concept of a *shared* Ulster heritage, was asked to write a pamphlet on this theme. We knew that the document might not necessarily accord with all the views held by our membership, but then, nor did we want it to – we wanted something which would serve to challenge not only our own membership but *all* sections of Northern Ireland society to look more closely at their cultural 'certainties', and determine whether their ingrained exclusiveness was a barrier to ultimate transformation of this society for the betterment of all.

<div align="right">**Frankie Gallagher** *Ulster Political Research Group*</div>

Is there a shared Ulster heritage?

Michael Hall

I have never thought of the two main communities within Northern Ireland as being anything other than *one* community. This I partly attribute to my secular, non-sectarian upbringing, but also because I could never actually *see* any difference – apart from the strident proclamations of religious or cultural identity. My outlook was reinforced when I became engaged in community work. For example, I would facilitate both the Falls and Shankill Think Tanks on a Friday, and once, as I was travelling from one discussion venue to the other, I reflected that if certain identifying words were 'bleeped' out of the discussions an outsider would be hard pushed to tell the difference between the two groups of people. There was the same concern with the problems of everyday living; the same intense community pride; the same expressions of hurt and pain; the same irritation at being constantly marginalised, misunderstood, misinterpreted; the same anger and sense of betrayal; the same hopes and fears; the same deep-seated desire for peace, though not peace at any price; the same determination to continue the 'fight' if that was what was required; the same disillusionment with politicians and all their shenanigans; the same openness and bluntness, but also the same preparedness to argue and debate, and search for solutions.

Having said this, I am not trying to pretend that we are not a deeply-divided society. I myself have had direct personal experience of both Catholic and Protestant sectarianism, just as I was the recipient of both Loyalist and Republican threats because of my cross-community endeavours in the early 1970s. So I am not denying that there is a great chasm between our two communities. However, it is when people try to convince me that this chasm is the product of age-old differences between 'Planter' and 'Gael' that I get most bemused. These Planters and Gaels – or, more specifically, their respective present-day 'descendants' – are, I am supposed to believe, two totally separate ethnic groupings, with nothing in common except a shared determination not to relinquish their claim to ownership over the same land and a similar intransigence in the way they set about asserting that claim. And that perception has been reinforced by many within academia. For example, one of the most comprehensive books ever written about the Troubles set the scene for the unrelenting story of tragedy and bloodshed by asserting that the Protestant community in Ulster were "aliens planted there since Stuart times".[1]

I believe this interpretation to be quite inaccurate, for both communities in Northern Ireland have far more in common than they might realise, a commonality that has very ancient roots indeed.

I make no apologies for the liberal use of quotations here; they are there for a reason. When my *Ulster: the Hidden History* was published (in 1986) by Dr Ian Adamson's Pretani Press one reviewer commented that it was aimed at "nothing less than an overthrow of current perceptions". Indeed, the work of Adamson and myself was deemed to be so much at variance with both 'received' and 'popular' opinion, we were often accused of 'making it all up'. Adamson's work in particular attracted a litany of derogatory comments: "a house of cards – half-truths and fanciful suppositions built one upon another"... "spurious authenticity" ... "concocted"... "disputed theories"... "sheer disbelief from leading academics"... "academically eccentric" – and many more in the same vein. Accordingly, Adamson and I decided to reveal to these critics where we were sourcing our information – and the reaction was now the opposite: we were accused of quoting too much! I suspect that this sudden aversion reflected the discomfiture felt within sections of academia at the sight of an array of quotes lending credence to our work. Better to keep Adamson at a distance, an eccentric "pseudo-historian", than have him appear to be expounding theories for which he could produce scholarly support; for, as W A Hanna pointed out, his "references... clearly show that far from 'concocting' anything Adamson has merely restated the views of others, mostly highly respected and reputable historians." [2]

What do I hope to achieve with this short pamphlet? Firstly, I am anxious to take up the request made of me by the UPRG, who will not only be circulating 4000 copies of this document among the rank and file of the UDA, but have enthusiastically agreed that I can distribute another 2000 on a cross-community basis. I never turn aside an opportunity to engender grassroots debate, in the hope that it might lead to inter-community dialogue. I am not expecting readers to agree with everything that is said here, I merely hope that it challenges whatever preconceived ideas they might hold about the subject matter.

The format of this pamphlet is as follows:

In **Part 1** I hope to confront the Planter-Gael question, by (i) showing that the notion that the Irish are all 'Celts/Gaels' is now considered redundant; (ii) highlighting that the inhabitants of this island have a much older, *pre*-Celtic inheritance; (iii) stressing that many aspects of this inheritance are shared with the people of Scotland (and therefore with many of the Planters); and finally (iv) that the people of Northern Ireland, notwithstanding their differing religious and cultural allegiances, and irrespective of their links with either the rest of Ireland or mainland Britain, have always exhibited a sense of regional identity which might one day be harnessed to bring lasting peace to this island.

In **Part 2** I relate a selected number of episodes from our shared history of which many people are not generally aware. I stress that these are indeed only episodes; anyone seeking a fuller history will need to look elsewhere.

Finally, as an Appendix I have added some reflections on what I once termed the 'Cruthin Controversy'.

1: Gaels, Planters and an ancient common inheritance

The Celtic Gaels

The notion that the Irish are "all Celts" (as one TV documentary maker emphatically asserted) may have done wonders for Ireland's sense of national pride and been a boon to its tourist industry, but it has taken quite a battering in recent years. Irish folklorist Kevin Danaher was among many who expressed misgivings:

> We cannot necessarily assume that because something is early Irish it is therefore Celtic. There is at least an even chance that it may be pre-Celtic. Indeed we should hesitate to regard anything early Irish as Celtic unless we can identify the same feature in a Celtic context outside of Ireland – and even then we can never be absolutely certain that both have not come from some wider pre-Celtic culture. We might even go further, and ask if we are not straining the bounds of scientific credibility by claiming that the Irish are a Celtic people? [3]

Popular opinion notwithstanding, some academics never believed that the Irish were a pure Celtic race. English historian G M Trevelyan noted:

> Cornwall, Wales and the Highlands of Scotland are inhabited by the oldest stocks: we call them, today, the 'Celtic fringe' of the island. But most of them are pre-Celtic – as also are the Irish. The Celts, late comers into western Europe, were tall men, fair or red-haired, who entered Britain and Ireland only a few hundred years before the coming of Julius Caesar. The bulk of those whom we miscall 'Celts' are for the most part dark-haired people whose ancestors had been in these islands thousands of years before the red Celt was ever heard of. [4]

This is a view now increasingly accepted by Irish historians. Liam de Paor commented:

> But was there a displacement of population, with tall, blond, blue-eyed Celts coming to take over from the small dark people (if such they were) of Mesolithic and Neolithic origin? Not at all. The Celts were, at best, the Ascendancy of their day, a minority powerful enough to impose their language. [5]

A seminar held by the Irish Association of Professional Archaeologists in 1984 concluded that any Celtic 'intrusions' were more than probably carried out by numbers "far inferior to the native population(s)". [6]

This minority status was actually acknowledged in 1906 by Eoin MacNeill, who, although a co-founder of the Gaelic League, was prepared to state that the Gaels had usurped a position in Ireland's historical legacy which rightfully belonged to those who had inhabited the island before their arrival:

> ...the hitherto current account of pre-Christian Ireland has belittled and overclouded the vast majority of the Irish people for the glorification of a dominant minority. [7]

MacNeill felt that the outcome of his own studies had been "to restore the majority to the historical place of honour from which they have been ousted for a thousand years." His optimism was premature, however, because *other* considerations were to come to the fore, as Conamara author Bob Quinn noted:

> At the end of the nineteenth century the 'Gaelic Revival' supplied Ireland's need for an identity other than that offered by the increasingly unpopular English. The foundation of such groups as the Gaelic Athletic Association, the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, the National Literary Society and the Gaelic League helped establish firmly the theory that the Irish were Celts and helped focus the national feeling that led to the establishment of the Republic. ... It was a means of defining – or perhaps creating – a national identity. It must have seemed a marvellous way of persuading a battered and demoralised people that they had a pedigree and potential impeccable enough to confront the British Empire. That the tactic worked is perhaps sufficient justification.[8]

However honourable the motive, there was a price to be paid:

> Once the Irish adopted 'Celt' as a working title they carried it to a logical conclusion. Not only did they base an insurrection on the idea, they founded an independent state as a result. To maintain consistency they were obliged to interpret the name racially and, as a result, any other strain that contributed to the personality of the island was regarded as alien, or at least a superficial intrusion... It is always the political urge to force a unified national image that causes certain categories of people to be excluded arbitrarily from credit for forming a peoples' culture.[8]

Quinn concluded:

> [The Irish] people must develop the confidence to dismantle the unitary myth that has served its honourable purpose and replace it with the diverse richness that lies within.[8]

More unfortunately, the idea of Irish 'Celticity' was made even more exclusive when it became synonymous with a single religious identity. As geographer Estyn Evans noted:

> The Irish people had been steadily losing their identity in losing their native language and heritage, and they were to find a new identity in the Catholic faith, which became a substitute symbolic language. The old idea that there was a common Irish identity indifferent to religious belief was thus superseded by the concept that Catholicism was the essence of Irishness.[9]

If not Celts, then who?

If we *do* accept that the Celts were only a minority among the Irish people, the obvious question is: who comprised the majority? Although archaeologists find it difficult to date the arrival of the Celts in Ireland – in *whatever* numbers they came – except to say that "they must have arrived at some time before the 4th or 5th centuries AD" [10], Ireland has been continuously inhabited since 6500 BC.

Estyn Evans believed that Ireland's prehistoric past was of paramount importance to a full appreciation of this island's historical and cultural heritage:

> The [archaeological] evidence... reveals one essential truth: that we are dealing not with mythical 'lost tribes' but with ancestral West Europeans, physically our kinsmen, who were the first Ulster farmers, pioneering in a way of life which has persisted through more than 5000 years, carrying with it attitudes of reverence for the forces of nature and leaving indelible marks on the face of the land. The landscape they helped to fashion was to be the heritage... of all later settlers, Celt and Christian, Norman and Planter.[11]

The Neolithic period was of particular importance, as archaeologist Peter Woodman noted:

> This part of Ireland's prehistory lasted nearly two thousand years and in that period some remarkable changes took place, changes which probably do more than any others to create the Ireland which enters history several thousand years later.[12]

Anyone who has visited the great stone burial mound at Newgrange in the Boyne valley could not fail to have been impressed by this remarkable reminder of our Neolithic ancestors. Michael Herrity has written:

> Newgrange is the most famous of a group of over 300 passage graves built in cemeteries throughout Ireland [which] are monuments to the most capable organisers, architects and artists ever to have entered and influenced Ireland in the whole of prehistory.[13]

This period in our island's history is important not just for the numerous stone monuments left as evidence but because the builders of such monuments were, in reality, our *predominant* ancestors. As Peter Woodman pointed out:

> The gene pool of the Irish was probably set by the end of the Stone Age when there were very substantial numbers of people present and the landscape had already been frequently altered. The Irish are essentially Pre-Indo-European, they are not physically Celtic. No invasion since could have been sufficiently large to alter that fact completely.[12]

So it is to the most ancient peoples of Ireland, not to the Celts or later arrivals, that we should direct our attention when pondering the question 'who are the Irish?' As Peter Harbinson said of the Mesolithic inhabitants:

> We can say in all probability that [they] represent the basic human stock onto whose blood-gene pool all subsequent peoples were 'grafted', so that they may truly be described as the first Irish men and women, the ancestors of the Irish people of today.[14]

Recent advances in the science of DNA have now confirmed much of the above. Bryan Sykes – often referred to as 'the world's first genetic archaeologist' – and his team from Oxford University collected DNA samples from all parts of Britain and Ireland, and he concluded:

I can see no evidence at all of a large-scale immigration from central Europe to Ireland and the west of the Isles generally, such as has been used to explain the presence there of the main body of 'Gaels' or 'Celts'. The 'Celts' of Ireland and the Western Isles are not, as far as I can see from the genetic evidence, related to the Celts who spread south and east to Italy, Greece and Turkey from the heartlands of Hallstadt and La Tène in the shadows of the Alps during the first millennium BC. The people of the Isles who now feel themselves to be Celts have far deeper roots in the Isles than that and, as far as I can see, their ancestors have been here for several thousand years.[15]

A living inheritance

Even if this more ancient ancestry for the people of Ireland is accepted, it might seem *so* ancient that it can only have been lost forever in the Irish mist. But how can it be lost if the present inhabitants are basically just the latest generations to have sprung from those ancient people (taking due account, of course, of the other strands which subsequently made a contribution to that ancestry). As P A O Síocháin said about the dolmens and cairns which dot the Irish landscape:

No longer can we look on these as cold stones from a long dead era. Warm hands once held and gave them meaning and purpose; touch them and you touch your past.[16]

H J Fleure was of the same opinion:

The megaliths are not just a matter of a vanished people and a forgotten civilisation; they belong to the core of our heritage as western Europeans.[17]

John Kelleher noted:

[We can be sure that much] of the culture that had existed continuously and strongly since prehistoric times... survives in the native population, if only below the level of consciousness.[18]

Even the Irish language must reflect this ancient inheritance. Linguist Heinrich Wagner commented:

It is likely that the [Celtic invasions] did not involve large numbers of Indo-European-speaking people, a view which has led a number of scholars, including myself, to believe that in the British Isles Indo-European language as imposed by small bands of Celtic invaders from the Continent must have been influenced strongly by the speaking habits of a predominantly non-Celtic population.[19]

David Greene was of the opinion that the Irish language was "...simply the linguistic expression of the Irish people... a language made in Ireland." [20] Thomas Markey found that hidden in modern-day European languages – which mostly stem from what are termed 'Indo-European' invasions – can be found traces of the older peoples of Europe – the *pre*-Indo-Europeans – and hence we have gained valuable insights into how their way of life and belief systems

differed from that of the newcomers. Markey found one distant behaviour remarkably resilient:

> If an accused person opts for personal penance, a hunger strike, say, then the accuser is obliged to submit to a hunger strike. This, to us, totally alien behaviour was invoked by Bobby Sands in his Northern Irish cell, where a manifestation of this custom is not as bizarre as it may at first seem. Ireland was the final stronghold of the Megalithic peoples in the West [and it] is only natural, then, that some non-Indo-European values... should manifest themselves in the Irish sagas: they are distant reflections of non-Indo-European attitudes in much the same way that Bobby Sands' hunger strike was.[21]

Perhaps our ancient heritage is not so distant after all?

It is high time that we were more honest about our *real* heritage, for such an honesty in no way denigrates the rich and vibrant legacy bequeathed to us by the Celts, but allows us to integrate that legacy into an inheritance which is much more ancient and varied than generally realised.

What about those 'Planters?'

All I have detailed so far might have encouraged the reader to view the Irish heritage from a new perspective, but it still leaves one important question unanswered: what has this ancient heritage got to do with that obstinate community in the North, who were apparently implanted here only a few hundred years ago?

Anyone who has gazed seawards from one of the headlands along the Antrim or North Down coasts and realised just how close Scotland is must surely have doubted that the first substantial contact between the peoples on either side of the North Channel could have occurred less than four hundred years ago during the Plantation.

And indeed, when we investigate the connection between the two areas more deeply, we discover just how ancient it actually is. One particular type of Stone Age grave, for example, is found in the north of Ireland *and* south-west Scotland, a fact which led Seán O Ríordáin to remark: "The tombs and the finds from them form a continuous province joined rather than divided by the narrow waters of the North Channel." [22] These 'narrow waters' would not have been the barrier we might view them as today, but would have been, in days when road networks were rudimentary and large areas were still forested, a busy route of communication and commerce.

Around 300 BC the Greek voyager and geographer Pytheas called the inhabitants of the two islands by the same name, *Pretani*, and in the writings of the ancient Irish it is clear that they believed some of the early pre-Celtic peoples – the *Cruthin* of Ireland and the *Picts* of Scotland – to have shared a close kinship. While we are not in a position to ascertain the real extent of this kinship, scholars today certainly accept that relationships between the peoples of the two islands stretch back into a ancient past. Liam de Paor commented:

The gene pool of the Irish... is probably very closely related to the gene pools of highland Britain.... Within that fringe area, relationships, both cultural and genetic, almost certainly go back to a much more distant time than that uncertain period when Celtic languages and customs came to dominate both Great Britain and Ireland. Therefore, so far as the physical make-up of the Irish goes... they share these origins with their fellows in the neighbouring parts – the north and west – of the next-door island of Great Britain.[5]

Indeed, Bryan Sykes' DNA study referred to earlier concluded that "there is a very close genetic affinity between Scotland and Ireland." [15]

The link between east Ulster and western Scotland has proven to be, as G M Trevelyan described it, "a constant factor in history" [4]:

• It was emigrants from Ulster, labelled 'Scotti' by the Romans, who bequeathed the name 'Scotland' to their new homeland.
• Between the 5th and 8th centuries there was an Ulster-Scottish kingdom of Dalriada, encompassing territory on both sides of the North Channel. From Dalriada emerged the kings who united both 'Scots' and 'Picts' in what was to become 'Scotland'.
• The Gaelic language was brought from Ireland by such emigrants and it eventually spread throughout Scotland, a prime example of the close interrelationship between the two peoples.
• When St Columba sailed from Ulster to the island of Iona, the monastery he founded there was to prove of immense importance to the religious and cultural history of Scotland.
• There is reliable evidence of a migration from Ulster to Galloway, possibly of 6th century origin.
• In 1316 Edward Bruce of Scotland, at the invitation of the leading Irish chieftains, was proclaimed King of Ireland.
• Between the 13th and 16th centuries the importation by the Irish chieftains of large numbers of Scots mercenaries (galloglass) – many of whom were granted land in Ireland in return for their services – was to prove vital to the resurgence of Gaelic Ireland during that period.
• The Glens of Antrim were in the hands of the MacDonalds of Scotland by 1400.

These are just a few of the more obvious examples of the link with Scotland, and the importance of Ulster settlers upon the people and history of Scotland is undeniable: as the Dutch geographer Heslinga pointed out, these emigrants "gave Scotland her name, her first kings, her Gaelic language and her faith." [23] The benefits were not, of course, all one-sided. During the early Christian era the interrelationship was extremely productive. Proinsias Mac Cana has pointed out how important the connection proved to be in cultural terms:

Isolation tends towards stagnation, or at least a circumscribed vision, while conversely intercourse and cultural commerce encourage a greater intellectual curiosity and awareness, a greater readiness to adapt old ways and experiment with new ones. For such intercourse the east-Ulster region was ideally situated. It was a normal landing-place for travellers from northern Britain... and, in addition, the religious, social and political ties that linked north-eastern Ireland and north-western Britain – particularly in that period – were numerous and close. Archaeologists speak of an 'Irish Sea culture-province' with its western flank in Ireland and its eastern flank in Britain; one might with comparable justification speak of a North Channel culture-province within which obtained a free currency of ideas, literary, intellectual and artistic.[24]

In the seventh century so extraordinary was the quickening of intellectual and artistic activity, particularly in the south-east of Ulster, that Mac Cana concluded: "...one may with due reservations speak of this region of south-east Ulster as the cradle of written Irish literature." [24]

Hence, *long before* the 17th century Plantation, the peoples of Ireland (particularly those in Ulster) and Scotland had not only been in regular and close contact, but the intensity of that contact had proven of fundamental importance to the historical and cultural development of both. And there had been so much population movement across the North Channel that some of the Scottish Planters could be justly considered, as F J Bigger noted, as "only returning to their own lands like emigrants coming home again." [25]

However, even if it is acknowledged that the Scottish arrivals might indeed have had some distant relationship with the Irish among whom they were being planted, it is widely presumed that the two peoples now developed separately – an Irish version of apartheid. Yet, contrary to such a popular belief, the 'Planters' did not drive the 'Gaels' off the planted territories *en masse*. While the Gaelic landlords were certainly dispossessed, it is now realised that the entire pre-plantation population was not. Historian A T Q Stewart has pointed out:

Neither the undertakers nor the London companies found it expedient or possible to clear all the native Irish from their lands, and therefore they accepted them as tenants, violating their contracts with the Crown in order to do so. Without the Irish tenants it is doubtful whether the Scots and English planters could have made such limited progress as they had by 1641. The great concealed factor in this whole 'British' plantation is the part played by the relatively undisturbed Irish population in building the towns, fortified bawns and planter castles, and in developing the resources of forests, rivers and loughs... When we remember that the servitors and Irish grantees were actually permitted to take Irish tenants, it becomes clear beyond doubt that a very substantial proportion of the original population was not disturbed at all. Modern historical research on the plantation has thrown much light on this continuity of population.[26]

With the two communities living in close proximity, interaction inevitably resulted. Estyn Evans pointed out that "There was much more intermarriage, with or without the benefit of the clergy, than the conventional histories make allowance for." [9] There is abundant evidence of people changing their religion, with many Planters becoming Catholic and many native Irish becoming Protestant. The process of interaction still continues – many people in Ulster have 'mixed' marriages in their family trees. These days even surnames no longer guarantee a means of surmising someone's 'background'.†

Is there an 'Ulster Identity'?

Throughout its history Ulster and its people have exhibited a distinctive identity. Now, a *distinctive* identity does not necessarily imply a *separate* identity; the Ulster people have too many long-standing ties with the people in the rest of Ireland and mainland Britain to allow for that. Yet when you make mention of an 'Ulster identity' the suspicion is often voiced that your intentions are separatist. Why does it have to be viewed in that way? Family members frequently celebrate their own unique togetherness without at the same time desiring to live separately from their next-door neighbours.

So let us take a look at this Ulster 'identity' – without those who identify with either a United Ireland or the Union with Britain feeling that it necessarily threatens their deeply-held aspirations. Indeed, *both* aspirations can only be strengthened by a deeper understanding of what the people of Ulster share in common.

P L Henry described the difference between Ulster and the rest of Ireland as "one of the most deeply-rooted, ancient, and – from a literary point of view – most productive facts of early Irish history." [28] And Estyn Evans wrote: "The two communities in the north, however deeply divided by religion, share an outlook on life which is different from that prevailing in the south and which bears the stamp of a common heritage." [9]

J P Mallory and T E McNeill commented on the archaeological evidence for regional differences:

> That the entire island was not culturally uniform is continually emphasized by major cultural differences, seen in everything from megalithic tombs through Bronze Age metalwork, between the northern and southern halves of the island... During the Iron Age, however, we begin to get our first hints

---

† Ulick O'Connor, in his introduction to the writings of IRA hunger-striker Bobby Sands, commented: "Bobby Sands played soccer on the same team as many Protestant Belfast boys who later joined the UVF and were imprisoned in Long Kesh like him. It is ironic that he, who more than anyone else by his devotion to the Irish language while in Long Kesh helped to contribute to the present renaissance of the language in West Belfast, should not have a Gaelic name. (I once published a list of eleven names that could well have been those of a Protestant hockey team of boys and girls from a posh Belfast school. It was, in fact, compiled from a list of members of the Provisional IRA who had been killed in action.) You can see the influence of this mixed background in Bobby Sands' writing – Scots dialogue here and there; 'the sleekit old Brit' for instance." [27]

of political boundaries which can be seen both in terms of what we presume to be royal capitals such as Navan and Clogher and, more obviously, in the linear earthworks. The erection of defences across the Ulster border in both Monaghan and Armagh during the Iron Age suggests the development of a political frontier that separated Ulster from its southern neighbours.[10]

Even the arrival of the Celts, as Estyn Evans suggested, "reinforced an older and persistent regional distinction... Gaelic culture as a whole, like the Gaelic language, seems to have taken shape by being poured into an Irish mould, a mould having varied regional designs."[9]

Ulster's chieftains certainly considered their territory to be the real bastion of Gaelic Ireland. No-one epitomised this better than Owen Roe O'Neill, who proved himself as staunch an Ulsterman as any present-day Northern Loyalist. Owen spent more than half of his life in exile on the Continent, and whilst there he and his fellow Ulstermen associated so much together that other Irish leaders sarcastically labelled them the 'northern clique'. When he returned to play a prominent part in the 1641 rebellion he was met by constant suspicion and intrigue from the Southerners, and formed his own 'Catholic Army of Ulster'. As Jerrold Casway explained: "Rather than accept assistance from Owen O'Neill and the Ulster Irish, many Anglo-Irishmen preferred the Leinster forces... Owen and his northern army, they asserted, should remain in the north where they belonged."[29] Rinuccini, the Papal Nuncio, ascribed this animosity to "no other ends than the bad feeling which is cherished towards the men of Ulster." However, it was Owen's Catholic Army of Ulster which fought the greatest battle of the war at Benburb, the high point of the Gaelic struggle. Before the battle Owen exhorted his men with a "Caesar-like oration", in which he told them: "You are the flower of Ulster, descended from as ancient and honourable a stock of people as any in Europe."[29]

Before the rebellion collapsed, the Gaelic rebels, in one of those twists of history, for a moment found themselves in alliance with Protestant parliamentary forces against the Crown. Derry was surrounded by royalists and its commander, Sir Charles Coote, appealed to Owen for assistance. Owen's Army of Ulster marched to relieve the city.

> The relief of Londonderry created a momentary atmosphere of satisfaction and celebration unique to Ulster. Owen and Sir Charles met for the first time. The native Irish Catholic general and the commander of the leading Protestant-planter stronghold in Derry toasted each other within the walls of that city. Coote paid Owen O'Neill many compliments and in his letter to the English Council of State spoke of his respect for the Ulster leader.[29]

A tract written on the Continent in the 1620s made it clear that Ireland was 'divided into two parts', North and South. A sense of regional identity was also noted by visitors to Ireland during the Williamite period. As Raymond Gillespie and Harold O'Sullivan commented:

This division was reflected in differing attitudes and native Irish Ulstermen were by no means comfortable in seventeenth century Munster. George Storey, an officer in the Williamite army, noted in 1691 that after the war the Ulstermen who had fled to Kerry and Clare during the war began to return home 'which was a little odd to see' since it was a long journey, they had no assurance of regaining their farms in Ulster and there was a real risk of retaliation from the settlers. In contrast, land in Munster was cheap and available 'but', Storey noted, 'the reason for this is plain, for there is so great an antipathy between the Ulster Irish and those in other parts of the kingdom, as nothing can be more, and the feuds amongst them greater than between either and their injured protestant neighbours'. [30]

However, despite such examples of a shared identity, it would be useless to deny that communal perceptions in Northern Ireland today are not founded on commonality, but on deep divisions. The Troubles were, in large part, the result of one community feeling deliberately separated from their southern co-religionists and the other community feeling under siege by those who threatened to separate *them* from their British heritage. Ironically, the violence which ensued only increased the impression of regional difference – when viewed from *outside* by those to whom the two communities afforded such undying loyalty. In 1978 Irish writer Dervla Murphy remarked that "In Ireland, during recent years, many Southerners have been voicing anti-Northern sentiments with increasing vehemence and frequency." [31] Why should that be so? Because the unrelenting violence, which was barbaric rather than romantic, had appalled the vast majority of people in the rest of the island. As Bowyer Bell wrote:

> The Republic wanted no part of the Troubles, no part of Northern Ireland in whatever guise... Dublin gradually accepted that Ireland was not only a divided island but also a divided society and to incorporate the latter into the former was beyond power and desire. As the Orangemen said, six into twenty-six won't go; nor, felt Dublin, should it... The majority still wanted unity but without cost and without complication. Most feared violence and the six counties were violent... For Dublin the dream now is that the North could stay silent in the margins as it did for so long – unknown, mysterious, unredeemed, and forgotten but on patriot holidays. Now the prospect of the Black North as a Green province appals all but the few faithful republicans and the romantics.[1]

On the British mainland, a distancing process had also been under way – assuming that many there cared much for this 'other part' of the United Kingdom in the first place. The Northern Irish, then, as much because of the bitterness of their own quarrel, had been steadily losing friends. How much this has been rectified by the 'peace process' remains unclear. Certainly since the 1994 ceasefires Southerners in particular have been far more open to the communities in the North.

However, the violence, while engendering an ever-deepening polarisation,

had, *at the same time*, made both communities much more aware of each other's hopes and fears, and, for those with humane sensitivities, brought an acknowledgment, mostly unspoken but nevertheless real, of the pain and suffering they had been visiting upon one another. As Dervla Murphy noted:

> More than ten years ago M W Heslinga discerned within both Northern tribes 'a sense of regional fellowship, a sense of difference from Southerners, that mixture of contempt and defensiveness that is typical of the strongly-marked provincial character'. Since then this sense of regional fellowship has been strengthened by the horrors the Northerners have been sharing even while they have been inflicting them on each other's communities.[31]

Ulick O'Connor remarked: "What is important is that there *is* a growing grassroots acceptance of the idea of a shared community."[32] Perhaps it is only by rebuilding bridges with one another *first*, that the two communities in Northern Ireland can set about repairing the damage they have each done to their relationships with those in the rest of Ireland and Britain. Furthermore, because of the pivotal position the people of Northern Ireland play in the rich cultural and historical experience of the two islands, they ultimately hold the key to a fundamental rekindling and strengthening of the unique relationships which exist between the inhabitants of these two islands.

Ian Adamson said: "We are a very fortunate people – the marvellous diversity of both Irish and British culture has been accorded to us. We should all be proud of what we are."[33] And, a final quote from Bryan Sykes' DNA analysis of the inhabitants of both Britain and Ireland:

> We are an ancient people [and subsequent invasions] have barely scratched the topsoil of our deep-rooted ancestry. However we may feel about ourselves and about each other... the strands of ancestry weave us all together as the children of a common past.[15]

2: Aspects of a shared heritage

Having hopefully established why it is that I view the two communities in Northern Ireland as having so much in common – notwithstanding their current differences and divisions – I should not need to emphasise that I see the cultural and historical episodes described below as being the *shared* inheritance of both communities.

'The Patron saint of Europe'

In 555 AD, at Bangor, County Down, Comgall of the Cruthin founded a monastery "which has given the largest number of names to Irish religious history – Columbanus, Gall, Moluag, Maelrubha, Dungal, Malachy, to name but a few." [34] As for St Comgall:

> Such was his reputation for piety and learning that multitudes flocked to his school from the most distant parts; it is well established that not less than 3,000 students and teachers were under his care at one time, including many of the most honourable in the land. The evangelistic zeal of Comgall was pre-eminent – down to the landing-place at the reef of rocks he led many a band of his disciples who were to embark on their frail coracles to spread the Gospel in European countries.[35]

One of these disciples was Columbanus, who in 589 AD set off on a great missionary journey through Europe, eventually dying at Bobbio, Italy. The monasteries he established were the inspiration for hundreds of others. Robert Schuman, the French Foreign Minister whose energies contributed so much to the setting up of the European Community, said that "St. Columbanus is the patron saint of those who seek to construct a united Europe." Pope Pius XI wrote: "The more light that is shed by scholars in the period known as the Middle Ages the clearer it becomes that it was thanks to the initiative and labours of Columbanus that the rebirth of Christian virtue and civilisation over a great part of Gaul, Germany and Italy took place." The French poet Leon Cathlin concluded: "He is, with Charlemagne, the greatest figure of our Early Middle Ages." [36]

A literary heritage

It was the scribes of the early Church who first helped commit the customs and legends of the populace to writing. I have already noted Proinsias Mac Cana's assertion that it was the cultural dynamic originating from the monasteries around Bangor which made that area of Ulster "the cradle of written Irish literature." [24] Not only that, but one of the products of that dynamic, the great masterpiece of Irish saga literature, the *Táin Bó Cuailgne* (or the 'Cattle-Raid

of Cooley'), is the *oldest* vernacular epic in western European literature. It tells of the invasion of Ulster by the combined armies of the rest of Ireland, led by Queen Maeve. The hero of the *Táin* is the Ulster warrior, Cúchulainn, who for much of the story single-handedly defends his homeland against its enemies. His death is equally dramatic: tying himself to a pillar stone so that he might die standing he is finally vanquished by his foes. The richness of the Irish sagas, and the legend of Cúchulainn, is part of the heritage of *all* the people of Ulster.

The American Connection

Severe economic pressures, increased rent demands by absentee English landlords, and government discrimination against Presbyterians as well as Catholics led, from 1717 onwards, to a great migration from Ulster to America. By the time America declared for Independence, a quarter of a million Ulster people had emigrated there, and were estimated to have made up 15% of the population. Because of their dual ancestry, these Ulster folk were to become known as the 'Scotch-Irish'. They had a profound impact on their new homeland:

> It can be said that the Scotch-Irish made three contributions to colonial America: they settled the frontier, they founded the Kirk, and they built the school. They, more than any other group, created the first western frontier. To the Ulster Scots must largely go the credit of being the first pioneers west of the Appalachians and of opening the Mississippi Valley.... In some frontier regions, notably those of Pennsylvania and the Carolinas, they outnumbered all other stocks combined.[37]

Not only were the emigrants from Ulster predominant among the pioneers – the mother of the first white child born west of the Rockies was Catherine O'Hare from Rathfriland – but they carried with them an important part of their cultural heritage, their music:

> Whatever their influence in terms of cabin and barn styles, field layout, town planning, and so on, it seems likely that the greatest and most lasting contribution of the Scotch-Irish was music. And however one may define their particular religious and ethnic identity, musically they should be considered Ulstermen, for they brought with them the mixture of Scottish and Irish tunes which is still characteristic of large parts of Northern Ireland.[38]

They were hardy, determined people, unwilling to be ordered about by British Crown agents, one of whom, James Logan, complained that "a settlement of five families from the north of Ireland gives me more trouble than fifty of any other people." [37] Their independent streak, and the hatred they had brought with them of aristocratic landlordism, was to make them determined not to be placed at such a political and social disadvantage again. This was to have far-reaching consequences in that the Scotch-Irish were to be foremost in the Revolutionary War against Britain and in the Declaration of Independence. The first armed clash in fact occurred in 1771 when Scotch-Irish settlers fought British forces on the Alamance River in North Carolina. Then in 1775 Ulster settlers at

Mecklenburg called a convention and passed Resolutions of Independence, becoming the first people to advocate publicly this course of action. Ulster settlers in New Hampshire followed suit.

In the War of Independence which followed the Scotch-Irish were to play a prominent part. While the majority of settlers were English, and many of them were in a quandary about rebelling against the British Crown, the Ulster settlers had fewer qualms of conscience and were to be enthusiastic supporters of independence. The Crown agents in America were in no doubt anyway; for them "A Presbyterian conspiracy was at the heart of the revolutionary movement. The Presbyterians were plotting independence." [37] Indeed, a Hessian captain [German soldiers who fought alongside the British redcoats] said: "Call this war by whatever name you may, only call it not an American rebellion; it is nothing more or less than a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian rebellion."

The Scotch-Irish composed the backbone of Washington's Army. The Pennsylvania Line, the famous force of regular troops, was of primarily Ulster descent and Washington said, "If defeated everywhere else I will make my last stand for liberty among the Scotch-Irish of my native Virginia." A Committee of the House of Commons was told that Ulstermen made up half of the rebel army.

The Official Declaration of Independence was: written in the handwriting of Charles Thompson from Maghera; printed by John Dunlap from Strabane; given its first public reading by the son of an UIsterman, Colonel John Nixon; and among the signatories were the following, all either born in Ulster, or born to Ulster parents: John Hancock (President of the Congress), Thomas McKean, Thomas Nelson, Robert Paine, Edward Rutledge, George Taylor, Matthew Thornton, and William Whipple.

The great Seal of the United States – an eagle holding arrows and a branch – was designed by Charles Thompson after a Congressional design committee consisting of Franklin, Jefferson and Adams, broke up in disagreement. John Rutledge (brother of Edward) chaired a committee of five states which drew up the U.S. Constitution. According to Alexis de Tocqueviile, the U.S. Constitution bore Rutledge's "personal stamp. One man made it; and it was Rutledge."

Ten U.S. Presidents were of Ulster descent: Andrew Jackson, James Knox Polk, James Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, Ulysses S. Grant, Chester Alan Arthur, Grover Cleveland, Benjamin Harrison, William McKinley and Woodrow Wilson.

The eighteenth-century migration to America had been largely composed of Presbyterians from Ulster. They were the pioneers and established themselves prominently in all walks of American life. A century later an even larger exodus began from all parts of Ireland, many fleeing from a land devastated by the Great Famine. This great exodus was predominantly Catholic, and these newcomers were to be known in America as 'Irish-Americans', and were to provide part of the labour force which was to transform America into the most powerful industrial nation in the world.

The Volunteers

When France and Spain decided to support the American struggle against the British, and their ships were seen off the coasts of Ireland, the people of Belfast reacted by forming a Volunteer Company in May 1778 for defence against invasion. Towns throughout Ireland followed suit. Ulster at that time was the cradle of progressive ideas in Ireland, and many of the Volunteers were politically-conscious and democratically-minded. Although the Volunteers were Protestants, the Belfast Companies called vociferously for Catholic emancipation, and resolved: "That we invite to our ranks, person of *every* religious persuasion." Indeed, the Belfast Companies not only raised half the building costs of St Mary's Chapel, but on the day of its opening in 1784 paraded in full dress and marched to attend the Mass, which, according to the *Belfast News Letter*, was also attended by "great numbers of the other Protestant inhabitants".

The more politically-minded classes in Ireland had become increasingly disenchanted with government control from England, and the Volunteers, realising from their strength that they could easily take care of their own affairs, began to make increasingly radical demands, focused initially on the English stranglehold on the Irish economy. In 1782 elected delegates from a large number of Ulster companies met at Dungannon and produced what was in effect the Volunteer manifesto, and what was now demanded was not just Free Trade but proper legislative independence for the already existing, but ineffective, Irish Parliament.

> It was appropriate that Ulster should have provided the final impetus towards achieving legislative independence. Ulster had almost as many Volunteers as the other three provinces combined, and a much higher proportion of its population was politically active. This population was well-leavened with the yeast of the Presbyterian tradition of independence of thought... Grattan and other politicians, declaring that 'Liberty is a native of the North', echoed the popular toast, 'May the Northern lights ever illuminate the Irish nation'. Such sentiments helped to foster UIster's high opinion of itself as the arbiter of national aspirations.[39]

In June 1782 the Irish Parliament began to formally initiate its own legislation for the first time in over two hundred years, but, being hidebound by lack of proper reforms, it became meaningless and the Volunteer movement went into a gradual decline. The 'cross-community' environment continued to thrive, however. The Siege of Derry centenary commemoration, held on 7 December 1788, showed, as A T Q Stewart has pointed out, "how the celebration of the historic event might have developed in a more 'natural' way, allowing the townsfolk of both creeds to take civic pride in it." [26] An early history of the siege described how the celebrations culminated:

> ...the mayor and corporation, the clergy, the officers of the navy and army, the clergy of the Church of Rome, the gentlemen from the country, volunteers, citizens, scholars and apprentices set down to a plain but plentiful dinner in the Town Hall. Religious dissensions, in particular, seemed to be buried in

oblivion, and Roman Catholic vied with Protestant in expressing... their sense of the blessings secured to them by the event which they were commemorating.

The United Army of Ulster

The French Revolution further stimulated progressive thinking in Belfast, and following a meeting in Peggy Barclay's tavern on 1 April 1791, 'The Society of United Irishmen' was to come into being, founded by William Drennan and Samuel Neilson, and joined in October by a Dublin Lawyer, Wolfe Tone. Soon meeting government repression, the United Irishmen rapidly became a secret subversive organisation dedicated, in Tone's words, to substituting the name of Irishman for that of Protestant and Catholic, and to breaking "the connection with England, the never-failing source of all our political evils."

However, other powerful forces were also at play. Most of the land-workers lived a burdensome, precarious existence, and sectarian rivalry for land came to the surface again, with both Protestant and Catholic defence groups being formed. In September 1795 Catholic 'Defenders' attacked a notorious Protestant 'Peep o'Day Boys' tavern at the Diamond in Armagh, and were defeated in a pitched battle. From this the Orange Society was born, and this was later to become the Orange Order.

The year of 1798 was to be the 'First Year of Liberty' for the United Irishmen. They now had half-a-million members, 100,000 of them in Ulster. The rising first broke out in Wexford, but in the South the rebellion rapidly took on the character of a religious war. While the highly idealistic Ulster Presbyterians may have hoped for a struggle for political goals, the Catholic peasantry were being moved into action by their economic conditions – they were fighting an agrarian war, one with deep-rooted and well-established sectarian overtones.

Only in Ulster did the rising strive to be a truly United one, but even before it had begun there the news of the massacre of Protestants at Scullabogue on 5June led to a reinforcing of the traditional sectarian attitudes in the population.

Nevertheless, the rising in Ulster went ahead. Just as Owen Roe O'Neill before him had gathered the Northern forces together into his Catholic Army of Ulster, so now Henry Joy McCracken was made commander-in-chief of the United Army of Ulster. On 7 June this army took Larne and Antrim, but defeat was inevitable and McCracken was executed in Belfast on 17 June. By the time Wolfe Tone arrived with a French force, the rebellion was over, and Tone was captured. Rather than be hanged, the idealist, who more than anyone else was to symbolise Irish Republicanism, committed suicide.

The failure of the rising was to lead directly to an Act of Union being passed, and on 1 January 1801 Ireland became part of the United Kingdom.

Henry Joy McCracken has emerged as one of the real personalities of the period. Thomas Pakenham describes him as being

a remarkable man – in many ways the most attractive of all the original

United brotherhood in Ireland.... By birth a Presbyterian and by temperament a crusader, he had taken at once to the new philosophy of liberty and equality.[40]

Unlike most of the movement's other leaders he saw further than the purely political goals, and identified himself with a demand for social justice as well:

For him political and religious liberty, and national independence itself, were only means to that end. [He] was a gentle, idealistic man, and determined that the rising in the North, at any rate, would not be disgraced by a counter-terror in the name of liberty. And to this principle he remained true in all the horrors of the succeeding week. In contrast to the wild scenes in the South, the northern United men acted with notable restraint [during] the short-lived Republic of Ulster.[40]

Fred Heatley also presents an attractive portrait of McCracken:

Since his earliest days he had shown great sympathy with the working class and the poorer people of [Belfast]. In 1788 he organised a Sunday School in a room of the Market House to provide them with some sort of education which at the time was being denied because of their poverty. With some friends and himself as voluntary teachers, reading and writing were taught to the men, women, boys and girls who attended. The classes were non-denominational and although held on the Sabbath they 'did not presume to impart religious knowledge, but they taught their scholars how to obtain it for themselves, by which every sect might easily profit'. So recorded Mary Ann McCracken.

Unfortunately the Town Sovereign, Rev. William Bristow, interfered with the undertaking and they shortly afterwards were compelled to bring it to a close, but, nothing daunted, these social pioneers soon instituted a cheap lending library in opposition to the Belfast Reading Society, whose charges were so high that only the rich could afford to borrow their books.

It was his concern for the welfare of the underprivileged which led McCracken to the United Irish movement and to the gallows. As Mary McNeill points out in her excellent book on Mary Ann McCracken: 'Religious differences, elaborate theories of parliamentary reform and constitutional action meant little to Harry (Henry Joy), he saw only the need of human suffering, the injustice of sectarian discrimination.' [41]

Shared sacrifice at the Somme

When the First World War began it found Ireland already filled with marching men and martial rhetoric, with the Home Rule crisis threatening to develop into armed conflict. Yet, when war was declared, men from all parts of Ireland came forward in their thousands to enlist. Nationalist and Unionist leaders alike declared their support for Britain, though with different expectations as to how this loyalty would be rewarded when the war was over. Carson's Ulster Volunteer Force was transformed into the 36th (Ulster) Division, while many of Redmond's Irish Volunteers enlisted in the 10th and 16th (Irish) Divisions.

Few could have realised that within four years 50,000 Irishmen would give their lives in the conflagration which ensued. Even fewer could have predicted the full horrors of trench-warfare, which saw men slaughtered in their tens of thousands in massive battles to take and retake hundreds of yards of ground. One such was the Battle of the Somme, which cost an estimated 1,100,000 German, British and French casualties – dead, wounded and missing.

On the morning of 1 July 1916, after five days of intense bombardment on an eighteen-mile front, 100,000 men left their trenches and struggled across no-man's-land. By the end of the day 20,000 British soldiers were dead, with another 40,000 wounded or missing.

The 36th (Ulster) Division had been given the objective of capturing the German trenches beside the River Ancre, near the village of Thiepval. What made this task particularly difficult was that the battlefield was overlooked by the notorious Schwaben Redoubt, a formidable system of trenches and fortified machine gun posts. And yet capture it they did. Although the Ulstermen had achieved a remarkable success nothing was done by the military command to turn this to tactical advantage, and the exhausted men could only wait for the inevitable counter-attack or listen to the sounds of their injured and dying comrades. At dusk a powerful counter-attack by fresh German troops drove them back to the second German line, which they held all next day, tattered and exhausted, until eventually relieved. Four VCs and many other decorations were awarded for bravery.

> They had lost over five thousand five hundred officers and men. The Inniskillings lost more than any British regiment of the line has ever lost in a single day. Of the 15th Royal Irish Rifles, only 70 men answered their names that night of the 1st of July. [42]

The dead accounted for half of these casualties.

During the Battle of the Somme, other battalions of Irishmen and Ulstermen fought elsewhere along the battle front, particularly in the 16th (Irish) Division. This Division included five Ulster battalions and the 6th Battalion The Connaught Rangers, which contained over 600 Ulstermen recruited mainly from West Belfast. During the battle the 16th (Irish) Division is most prominently identified with the assaults on the villages of Guillemont and Ginchy in September.

In June 1917 took place the Battle of Messines, the first completely successful single operation on the British front. But there was another important ingredient to it, as H E D Harris explained:

> It is also memorable to Irishmen as largely an all-Irish achievement; two of the three divisions in the attacking line were Irish, the 36th on the right and the 16th in the centre of IX Corps, a unique line-up of Irish fighting men, and the largest in modern history. They showed to the world the sight of nearly 30,000 Irishmen shoulder to shoulder, men of all four provinces, and the only rivalry that existed between them was that of gallantry. In his book *As from Kemmel Hill*, Andrew Behrend wrote: "I should like to put on

record one further memory of the Battle of Messines. However little it interested me then, it fascinates me today; that during this battle and for weeks before, the 16th (Irish) and the 36th (Ulster) Divisions lived and fought side by side, got on with each other splendidly and at times even pulled each other's chestnuts out of the fire ...".[43]

Although the First World War was supposedly a 'war to end wars', it was soon followed by another, a conflict in which Ireland again made its contribution:

During the Second World War, though their country was neutral, more than 80,000 Southern Irishmen fought with great valour under the British Flag. There were also 38,000 volunteers from Northern Ireland and some 4,500 were killed. Ireland also produced some of the finest military captains of the War, most of them from Ulster. During 1940, when the United Kingdom stood alone against the might of Nazi Germany, Winston Churchill committed the leadership of the British Army to the great Ulster generals Sir John Dill, Alan Brooke, Claude Auchinleck, Bernard Montgomery and Harold Alexander.[44]

The war effort also helped forge a new bond between the communities in Northern Ireland, as Jonathan Bardon noted:

Churchill was at pains to acknowledge Northern Ireland's contribution... 'But for the loyalty of Northern Ireland and its devotion to what has now become the cause of thirty governments or nations, we should have been confronted with slavery and death...' Catholics and Protestants alike felt proud when General Eisenhower saluted them from the steps of the City Hall. Particularly after the fall of France, Belfast's geographical position and industrial capacity gave the city a vital, if unforeseen, role to play in the Second World war.... In addition, the horrors of the Blitz, by throwing together people from both communities, had reduced sectarian animosity in the city to its lowest level since the founding of Northern Ireland.[45]

Sources
 1. J Bowyer Bell, *The Irish Troubles: A Generation of Violence*, Gill & Macmillan, 1993.
 2. W A Hanna, 'More annals of Ulster', *Fortnight*, January 1994.
 3. Kevin Danaher, 'Irish folk tradition and the Celtic calendar', in *The Celtic Consciousness*, Dolmen Press, 1981.
 4. G M Trevelyan, *A Shortened History of England*, Penguin, London, 1974.
 5. Liam de Paor, 'The People of Ireland', in *The People of Ireland*, edited by Patrick Loughrey, Appletree Press/BC, Belfast, 1988.
 6. J P Mallory, 'The Origins of the Irish', *The Journal of Irish Archaeology*, II, 1984.
 7. Eoin MacNeill, 'Where does Irish History Begin', *New Ireland Review*, 25, March 1906.
 8. Bob Quinn, *Atlantean*, Quartet Books, 1986.
 9. E Estyn Evans, *The Personality of Ireland*, Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 1981.
10. J P Mallory & T E McNeill, *The Archaeology of Ulster from Colonisation to Plantation*, The Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University of Belfast, 1991.
11. E Estyn Evans, 'Ulster's First Farmers', *The Neolithic and Earlier Bronze Ages in the*

North of Ireland, Humphrey Case and Arthur ApSimon, Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University, Belfast, 1970.

12. Peter Woodman, 'Prehistoric Settlers', *The People of Ireland*, edited by Patrick Loughrey, Appletree Press/BBC, Belfast, 1988.

13. Michael Herrity, *Irish Passage Graves*, quoted in P A O Síocháin (source 15).

14. Peter Harbinson, *Pre-Christian Ireland*, Thames and Hudson, 1998.

15. Bryan Sykes, *Blood of the Isles*, Bantam Press, London, 2006.

16. P A O Síocháin, *Ireland–A Journey into Lost Time*, Foilsiúcháin Eireann, Dublin.

17. H J Fleure, 'Prehistoric elements in our heritage', *Bull. John Ryland Lib.*, 18, 1834.

18. John Kelleher, 'Early Irish history and pseudo history', *Studia Hibernica*, 3, 1963.

19. Heinrich Wagner, 'Near Eastern and African connections with the Celtic world', in *The Celtic Consciousness*, Dolmen Press, 1981.

20. David Greene, *The Irish Language*, Dublin, 1966.

21. Thomas L Markey, 'The Language of Stonehenge', *L.S.A.*, Univ. of Michigan, 1988.

22. Séan P O Ríordáin, *Antiquities of the Irish Countryside*, Methuen, 1973.

23. M W Heslinga, *The Irish Border as a Cultural Divide*, Assen, 1971.

24. Proinsias Mac Cana, 'Mongán Mac Fiachna and Immram Brain', in *Eriu*, Vol. XXIII, Dublin, 1972.

25. F J Bigger, 'From Uladh to Galloway and From Galloway to Uladh', *The Red Hand Magazine*, vol. 1 no 3, November, 1920.

26. A T Q Stewart, *The Narrow Ground–Patterns of Ulster History*, Pretani Press, 1986.

27. Ulick O'Connor, introduction to *Skylark Sing Your Lonely Song*, Bobby Sands, Mercier Press, 1988.

28. P L Henry, *Ulster Dialects*, Ulster Folk Museum, 1964.

29. Jerrold I Casway, *Owen Roe O'Neill and the Struggle for Catholic Ireland*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984.

30. Raymond Gillespie and Harold O'Sullivan, Introduction to *Borderlands*, The Institute of Irish Studies, The Queen's University of Belfast, 1989.

31. Dervla Murphy, *A Place Apart*, Penguin, London, 1978.

32. 'An Ulster Republic', *Irish Times*, 18.04.84

33. Quoted in Sharon Campbell, 'Radical View', *Radio Times*, 8–14 July, 1989.

34. Mary Ryan D'Arcy, *The Saints of Ireland*, The Irish American Cultural Institute, Minnesota, 1974.

35. *The Illustrated Road Book of Ireland*, The Automobile Association, 1970.

36. Ian Adamson, *Bangor–Light of the World*, Pretani Press, Belfast, 1979.

37. *The Ulster-American Connection*, The New University of Ulster, 1981. Contributions by E. Wright and M A Jones.

38. W H A Williams, 'Irish Traditional Music in the United States', *America and Ireland: 1776–1976*, Greenwood Press, USA, 1980.

39. *The Volunteers, 1778-84*, Educational Facsimiles 141-160, Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (from introduction by Peter Smyth).

40. Thomas Pakenham, *The Year of Liberty*, Panther Books, 1972.

41. Fred Heatley, *Henry Joy McCracken and His Times*, pamphlet.

42. Brigadier R J C Broadhurst, *Battle of the Somme*, 50th anniversary booklet.

43. H E D Harris, *The Irish Regiments in the First World War*, Mercier Press, 1968.

44. Ian Adamson, 'The Fighting Irish', in *Sacrifice on the Somme*, Michael Hall, Farset.

45. Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 1993.

Appendix: What about the Cruthin?

Some readers might have noticed that up to now I have made no mention of what some have called the 'Cruthin thesis'. This is because I wanted to show that an appreciation of our shared heritage is not dependant on any one specific attribute, the Cruthin or otherwise. However, not only is it a fascinating aspect of that heritage, but so too is the controversy which has surrounded it.

When Ian Adamson's book *The Cruthin* first appeared it was obvious that his subject matter was totally unknown to the general public, and seemingly to a large section within academia, some of whom reacted with surprising hostility.

Once it became clear that 'Cruthinism' was an 'issue', an assortment of reviewers and critics rushed into print with their opinions. Some openly admitted that it was an area of history they knew little about – "I am not qualified to gauge the factual basis of Adamson's thesis"[1], or "I am not in a position to quarrel with the historical accuracy of this account..."[2] – yet this did not stop them from launching into their 'critiques'. It was as if anyone who was anybody in intellectual circles felt a need to have said something about the subject, perhaps even to have said it with flair and panache: "somewhere in the heaven of lost reviews hovers the one I should have liked to have written."[1]

I have given a detailed response to many of these attacks elsewhere.[3] However, a few examples here might reveal something of their nature.

One academic, while on a minibus trip, launched into a tirade against Adamson which was 'hysterical' rather than 'historical', during which he informed his astonished colleagues that if any of them owned copies of Adamson's books "they should go home and burn them all!"

H J Morgan, of the Department of Irish Studies and co-editor of *History Ireland*, began his 'refutation' (in *Fortnight* magazine) with a personal attack: "Dr Ian Adamson is a hospital doctor, not a doctor of philosophy. He has, therefore, no training as a scholar. He is a *pseudo*-historian...."[4] Apart from the offensive tone this was also questionable logic, given that so many scholarly disciplines have been enriched by the work of laymen or those who had not come up 'through the ranks'. Indeed, another academic expressed dismay at Morgan's use of "insinuation and innuendo", pointing out that "personal attacks seldom convince the discerning reader".[5] Aside from that, Morgan's claim that he could "easily demolish this tenuous thesis..." proved embarrassingly unfounded.

The BBC once inveigled Adamson and myself to contribute to a radio programme[6] about the Cruthin, but only after we had secured a number of assurances which we hoped would make the programme enlightening and educational. The producer reneged on *every one* of them, and an opportunity to engender purposeful debate on the topic was squandered for the sake of a bit of controversy.

In 1989 one of Farset's many cross-community projects sought to promote the historical legacy of Columbanus and his impact on European history. The project had the enthusiastic support of Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich, who had written a biography of Columbanus. Part of the project involved taking a cross-community group of teenagers to Europe to follow in the footsteps of Columbanus. We confidently applied for funding, believing that here was a project which: (i) was cross-community in its composition; (ii) was dealing with an aspect of Ulster's heritage which belonged to both communities; and (iii) was trying to direct our usually parochial concerns outwards, by involving a European dimension. However, our application was unsuccessful, and we were left feeling that no-one was really interested in helping the communities in Northern Ireland to raise their vision outwards. However, I make mention of this project because of our collaboration with Tomás Ó Fiaich. In 1979 the Cardinal had written to Adamson regarding *The Cruthin*, saying: "There is not all that much I would be inclined to disagree with in it and even in cases where I might not see eye to eye with you I think it is more a matter of different interpretations – equally justifiable – of the same material." [7] Cardinal Ó Fiaich was not only an extremely warm and likeable individual, but, in contrast to many of our academics and reviewers, was eager to engage in constructive dialogue on all aspects of our history. His close interest in our endeavours was ample proof that it is possible for people from different backgrounds to explore our history in a manner which endeavours to encompass *all* the traditions which have contributed to this island's historical legacy. Indeed, who knows where his collaboration with us might have led if it had not been ended by his untimely death at Lourdes.

Or am I being naive – perhaps any collaboration would have been sabotaged by those within academia? A few years before the Cardinal's death, Adamson, while leaving the BBC studios after a radio debate, mentioned to the prominent academic who had been his adversary that scholars like Ó Fiaich (who had been Professor of History at St Patrick's College, Maynooth) supported his work. "Cardinal Ó Fiaich?" replied the academic, "He *used* to be a good scholar." The Cardinal had clearly been associating with the 'wrong' type of people.

One person who pursued 'Cruthinism' with almost religious zeal was Richard Warner. But over-zealousness can make people rush their critiques, leaving glaring inconsistencies. As one example, when Adamson's book *The Ulster People* was published, and featured in a *Belfast Telegraph* article, Warner wrote to the newspaper[8] with a vehement refutation of comments made in the article about the series of ancient linear earthworks collectively known as the 'Black Pig's Dyke', still visible at various places along Ulster's southern boundary.

Warner attempted to take Adamson to task for speculating about matters for which he insisted "there is no evidence". One must assume that Warner was opposed to all such speculation. However, he was also a member of the Navan Research Group which published the academic journal *Emania*. One issue contained the results of an investigation into a section of the Dyke by Aidan

Walsh, Curator of Monaghan County Museum, which, according to the editor, provided "our first solid evidence for both the construction and dating of this monument". In the article,[9] Walsh, as he was entitled to do, made various speculations on the basis of his investigation. It is interesting to contrast some of these with Warner's forceful denunciation of those by Adamson.

Warner asserted that "there is no evidence that the various pieces of earthwork ever formed a continuous boundary", and that "there is no evidence that they were built at one time". There may indeed be no solid evidence, but Aidan Walsh felt confident enough after *his* survey to propose: "We can now begin to think of a frontier composed of various scattered earthworks and we can begin to suggest that they might be linked together in time and origin."

Warner stated that "there is no evidence of a palisade on top". He omitted to point out that there is, however, evidence of a palisade *adjoining* the Dyke. In the portion investigated by Walsh, a third line of defence was discovered which "was composed of a timber palisade which paralleled the earthwork itself... This palisade was sizeable [and] could have stood up to 3-4 metres in height."

Warner also asserted that "there is no evidence of a war between Ulster and the rest of the country in 100 BC". Yet Walsh felt able to speculate: "Perhaps we are dealing here with a series of extraordinary events in the centuries before Christ with a war extending across the land starting at the boundaries of a kingdom and culminating with the destruction of its capital."

Warner may have heartily disagreed with the speculations of his fellow academic, but interestingly he did not see fit – as far as I am aware – to dash to the local newspapers with a vigorous denunciation of Walsh's pronouncements. The 'Black Pig's Dyke' is actually of no concern to me here; I simply relate this anecdote because it provided us with a fascinating lesson about academics: those within the club can speculate as much as they want – but not outsiders.

There is another aspect to Warner's letter which merits comment. He stated that the "general thesis of [Adamson's] book... is that archaeology proves that Ulster had a separateness in ancient times that is, somehow, relevant to the politics of today." Yet, not only is it *not* the "general thesis", but discussion of archaeology only takes up a few pages. Being able to tell the difference between an actual book and a snappy journalistic review is normally part of the academic approach – but can seemingly be dispensed with when dealing with Adamson.

As I said, the interested reader will find more such anecdotes elsewhere[3]; it is time now to hone in on the crux of the matter. Let us look at the main points of Adamson's 'thesis', and what other scholars say about these.

The Cruthin were a pre-Celtic people, prominent in the North of Ireland.

Was Adamson alone in saying this? Hardly. Respected Irish historian Francis J Byrne clearly had no problem with such an assertion. He wrote:

The earlier, non-Indo-European, population, of course, survived under the

Celtic overlordship. One group in particular, known to the P-Celts as *Pritani* and to the Irish as *Cruithni*, survived into historical times as the Picts or 'painted people' of Scotland. The Cruithni were numerous in Ulster too, and the Loíges of Leinster and possibly the Ciarraige of Connacht and north Kerry belonged to the same people.[10]

Other academics have been more dismissive. Charles Doherty remarked:

> ...if there was some memory of the Cruthin as being pre-Goidelic or pre-Celtic or whatever, there is no way of getting at it now from the sources and those who would try to use it that way are really picking and choosing material that suit their thesis.[6]

He is suggesting that the most logical assumption is that the Cruthin were *not* pre-Celtic, and that to see them otherwise requires a deliberate 'picking and choosing' of material. Surely the opposite is the case? The supposed 'Celticity' of the Irish has come under such devastating attack in recent years that it is now generally accepted that *most* of the Irish population were *not* Celts, and it is *those wishing to see them as Celts* who have to do the 'picking and choosing'.

Adamson's theories as to the origins of the Cruthin have also been dismissed by some archaeologists as "hardly discussable since the Cruthin as a distinct ethnic group are archaeologically invisible, that is, there is not a single object or site that an archaeologist can declare to be distinctly Cruthin." [11]

This is surprising logic. The Cruthin had a definite name for themselves; are referred to repeatedly in the Irish annals; are identified in Adamnan's *Life of Columba*; and are mentioned in that great saga of the Ulster Cycle, the *Táin* – yet because they are "archaeologically invisible" theories about them, it appears, are "hardly discussable"? This seems especially ironic when we consider that, apart from the legacy of their language, there is *no* real evidence as to when the *Celts* arrived in Ireland, *no* real idea as to their numbers, and when even the notion that the Irish were 'Celts' only originated in the 19th century (the ancient Irish never called themselves Celts) – yet for years academics not only felt able to 'discuss' the Celts at great length but developed a minor industry writing books about them.

The Cruthin played an important role in Ulster's political and military affairs.

Francis J Byrne noted:

> [The] bulk of the population comprised in the reduced over-kingdom of Ulaid were the people known as Cruthin or Cruithni.... The Cruthin on occasion usurped the over-kingship of Ulaid: more often than not they bore the brunt of the wars against the Uí Néill. They became bold enough to claim that they, and not the Dál Fiatach, were the *fír-Ulaid*, the 'true Ulstermen'...[12]

This is well documented in the ancient texts, especially with regard to the constant struggle for control of Ulster. For example, in 563 AD at the battle of Móin Dairi Lothair (Moneymore) seven Cruthin kings were slain. Another

battle is recorded between the Cruthin and the Uí Néill near Coleraine in 579, and in 637 occurred the mightiest clash of all – the battle of Moira, described by Sir Samuel Ferguson as the "greatest battle, whether we regard the numbers engaged, the duration of combat, or the stake at issue, ever fought within the bounds of Ireland." [13] The Ulstermen on that occasion were led by the Cruthin over-king of Ulster, Congal Cláen. No doubt the Ulstermen were hoping to undo some of the Uí Néill gains, and probably felt they had good prospects of doing so, especially when, as Francis Byrne pointed out,

> ...we remember that the Ulaid and Cruthin were still powerful in County Londonderry and possibly still ruled directly in Louth as far as the Boyne in the early seventh century; that they cherished memories of their former dominance over all the North; that they considered the Uí Néill recent upstarts...[12]

The Cruthin shared an ancient kinship with some of the people of Scotland.

Although such a suggestion is contested by many academics, it was one frequently made by the ancient Irish themselves, as Ian Adamson has summarised:

> ...when medieval Irish writers referred to [the Cruthin] it is clear they considered them to inhabit both Ireland and Scotland. One writer stated that 'thirty kings of the Cruthin ruled Ireland and Scotland from Ollam to Fiachna mac Baetáin,' and that 'seven kings of the Cruthin of Scotland ruled Ireland in Tara ' (*secht rig do Chruithnibh Alban rofhallnastair Erind i Temair*) – thereby identifying, as T F O'Rahilly notes, "the Cruthin of Ireland with those of Scotland." Others refer to Scotland as the 'land of the Cruthin', while in a poem written in the eleventh or twelfth century the author tells us that the *Cruthnig* made up a section of the population of Scotland. The Annals of Tigernach, The Pictish Chronicle, St Berchan, the Albanic Duan, the Book of Deer and John of Fordun plainly show that the name Cruthin was applied to the inhabitants of both Scotland and Ireland.[14]

Charles Doherty was emphatic that "there is no archaeological evidence to suggest a Pictish connection".[15] However, lack of archaeological 'evidence' is hardly the most conclusive of yardsticks, as Mallory and McNeill revealed with regard to a later episode in Ulster's 'Scottish connection':

> History records how towards the end of the 5th century AD Ulstermen began conquering and colonizing southwestern Scotland to form the kingdom of Dál Riata which spanned the northern region of the Irish Sea... despite the fact that we believe we know when all this took pace, there is really not a shred of archaeological evidence to prove that it did happen.[11]

Richard Warner asserted that the Cruthin were "rather minor and they are rather unimportant and they made very little influence on Irish power or politics". [6] Now, apart from giving the impression that he regarded the Cruthin with some distaste – why else would he endeavour to squeeze *three* separate derogatory comments ("rather minor", "rather unimportant", "very little influence") into

one short sentence? – the statement was also remarkably inaccurate. For if we were to consider *just one* of the Cruthin – St Comgall – then Warner's assertion appears questionable. Moreover, even if the Cruthin had thrown up no major historical personages many academics accept that they formed "the bulk of the population" of Ulster following its contraction under the pressure of Uí Néill expansion. To assert that the bulk of the population – the ordinary people – are "rather unimportant" in their country's history is simply academic elitism.

It has to be admitted that the use (and misuse) of the work of Adamson and myself by some sections of the Protestant community contributed greatly to the unease with which 'Cruthinism' was viewed. The way some Protestants interpreted the story of the Cruthin undoubtedly had its roots in the trauma experienced by the Unionist community as a result of the Troubles, with former certainties eroded and old loyalties rebuffed. To the feeling of being under siege from Catholic/Gaelic/Irish nationalism was added the fear of an eventual betrayal by Britain. To counter this twin-edged threat, 'Cruthinism' was seized upon by some Protestants as a "we were here first" counterbalance to the rampant Republican assault and as a possible alternative 'identity' to replace any severance of the link with Britain. (There was also a resentment on the part of many within academia at the UDA's support for Adamson's work; the UDA's East Belfast headquarters was once sarcastically dubbed 'the University of Gawn Street'. How dare plebs dabble in history; that's the preserve of us professionals!)

Some years ago, when giving talks to Protestant community groups about our common heritage I invariably had to spend time countering the misperceptions which had arisen. I had to explain that this was *not* an anti-Celtic/Gaelic crusade, but an effort to create a broader understanding of our *shared* inheritance, and that the Cruthin 'thesis' was *not* a 'we were here first' concept. I found that my most effective point was made when I offered the following analogy: "Are you all telling me that in ancient times two massive bubbles descended from the heavens upon the inhabitants of Ulster, and one of them somehow managed to imprison all the Cruthin, keeping them pure until they eventually became present-day Ulster Protestants, while the other imprisoned the Gaels and kept them hermetically sealed until they turned into today's Catholic community?" The response was invariably the same: "Well, since you put it like that...." In fact, I found that many working-class Loyalists were not only quite willing to accept the concept of a shared heritage, but actually seemed reassured by it.

But, finally, let us move to the current situation.

The probability that the Irish people are of predominantly *pre*-Celtic stock is now firmly on the agenda, given added weight by DNA analysis of the peoples of the British Isles. Books on Ulster's history rarely appear now without mention of the Cruthin. Admittedly some of the authors rarely lose an opportunity to take a swipe at Adamson, but the existence of the Cruthin is no longer denied.

The fact that they once formed the majority population in parts of Ulster is also increasingly accepted. Even St Comgall and the importance of Bangor monastery to European history must surely make a reappearance – notwithstanding a conspicuous absence in a major academic history of Ulster published in 1989.[16]

A pre-Celtic cultural and genetic relationship between the peoples of Ireland and Scotland is also accepted as a strong probability – even if not attributed to the Cruthin and Picts, although not all academics are averse to such a suggestion. In the *Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland*, Donnchadh Ó Corráin remarked:

> What is interesting, too, is the mixed racial and linguistic background of the rulers of Ireland – Britain and Ireland share languages, dominant aristocracies, and whole local populations such as the Cruithin of Ireland and Scotland (where they are known to Latin writers as Picti).[17]

Will Ó Corráin be pilloried as was Adamson – after all, he has committed two unpardonable sins: he has not only dared to accord a prominent place to a people who were supposedly "rather minor and rather unimportant", but has linked them with the Picts of Scotland.

To be honest, although the subjects of history, culture and identity fascinate me, it deeply concerns me the way they dominate our lives. We really need to view such matters more objectively, so that we can all focus on the far more pertinent realities of everyday life, both local and global. My hope is that we can begin to do so sooner rather than later.

Sources

1. Oonagh Warke, 'Red hand me down', *Books Ireland*, March 1993.
2. P.B., *New Ulster*, The Journal of the Ulster Society, March 1987.
3. Michael Hall, *The Cruthin Controversy*, Island Pamphlet No. 7, Island Publications,1994.
4. H J Morgan, 'Deceptions of demons', *Fortnight*, September 1993.
5. W A Hanna, 'More annals of Ulster', *Fortnight*, January 1994.
6. *The Cruthin–A Common Culture?* BBC Radio Ulster, 12.07.89.
7. Letter from Tomás Ó Fiaich to Ian Adamson, 02.02.79.
8. *Belfast Telegraph* 22.01.92
9. Aidan Walsh, 'Excavating the Black Pig's Dyke', *Emania*, No. 3, Autumn 1987.
10. Francis J Byrne, 'Early Irish Society', in *The Course of Irish History*, ed. by Moody and Martin, Mercier Press, 1984.
11. J P Mallory & T E McNeill, *The Archaeology of Ulster from Colonisation to Plantation*, The Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University of Belfast, 1991.
12. Francis J Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings*, Batsford, London, 1973.
13. *The Battle of Moira*, Samuel Ferguson's 'Congal', edited by Ian Adamson, Pretani Press, Belfast, 1980.
14. Ian Adamson, *The Ulster People*, Pretani Press, Belfast, 1991.
15. Charles Doherty, 'Ulster before the Normans: ancient myth and early history', *Ulster: An Illustrated History*, Batsford, London, 1989.
16. *Ulster: An Illustrated History*, edited by Ciaran Brady, Mary O'Dowd and Brian Walker, Batsford, London, 1989.
17. Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Prehistoric and Early Christian Ireland', *The Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland*, edited by R F Foster, Oxford University Press, 1993.