

Celebrating a shared heritage

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ISLAND (112) PAMPHLETS

Published June 2018 by
Island Publications / Farset Community Think Tanks Project
466 Springfield Road, Belfast BT12 7DW

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<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/islandpublications>

Cover photographs © Michael Hall

Printed by Regency Press, Belfast

The **Island Pamphlets** series was launched in 1993 to facilitate dialogue and debate on historical, cultural, political and socio-economic issues pertinent to Northern Ireland's grassroots communities. Most of the pamphlets are edited accounts of discussions undertaken by small groups of individuals – the '**Community Think Tanks**' – which have embraced (on both a 'single identity' and a cross-community basis) Loyalists, Republicans, community activists, women's groups, victims, cross-border workers, ex-prisoners, young people, senior citizens and others. To date 111 titles have been produced and 195,500 pamphlets have been distributed free of charge at a grassroots level. A full list of the titles (many of which are available for free download) can be found at <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/islandpublications>

Foreword

As I compile this pamphlet Northern Ireland has been without its devolved government for well over a year. The collapse of the power-sharing Executive was initially attributed to anger at a botched heating scheme which threatened to cost the Northern Ireland taxpayer a fortune over many years. However, the centrality of this issue gradually receded and was replaced by a fundamentally more divisive matter: the demand by Sinn Féin for a stand-alone Irish Language Act (*Acht na Gaeilge*), something which their erstwhile partners in government, the Democratic Unionist Party, refused to contemplate.

And over the past months vexed questions of language, culture, heritage and differing narratives of history have reasserted themselves within Northern Ireland's two main communities, as well as influencing decisions made at the ballot-box.

The legacy of a divided society

Many people within Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities view Irish language demands as the continuation of an ongoing Irish republican assault on their Britishness: a form of 'war by other means'. As evidence, they often point to a Sinn Féin booklet, presented in both English and Irish (*Learning Irish: a Discussion and Information Booklet / Ag Foghlaim na Gaeilge: Leabhrán Eolais agus Díospóireachta*) in which Máirtín Ó Muilleoir had written: "It is our contention that each individual who masters the learning of the Irish language has made an important personal contribution towards the reconquest of Ireland.... Tiocfaidh ár Lá." In the booklet, prominence is given to a lecture by Sinn Féin Cultural Officer Pádraig Ó Maolchraoibhe, during which he said:

[E]very phrase you learn is a bullet in a freedom struggle.... Make no mistake about it, either you speak Irish or you speak English. Every minute you are speaking English you are contributing to the sum total of English culture/language in this island. Every moment you speak Irish you are contributing to something that is distinctly ours. There is no in between.... The process of decolonization will have stopped half-way if, the day we succeed in driving the English from our shores, what is left behind is an Irish people possessed of the language, culture and values of the English.

A unionist participant in a Farset Think Tank discussion group listed a catalogue of concerns:

It's all a drip, drip process. Queen's University no longer plays the National Anthem on graduation days. The Crown's coat of arms has been removed from most courts in Northern Ireland. The Shinnars opposed the erection of 'Welcome to Northern Ireland' signs along the border. The list of items which Sinn Féin councillors demanded be removed from Limavady council offices ranged from a 'Charles and Di' commemorative mug to a statue of local Orangeman William Massey. In Newry they voted to name a children's play-park after Raymond McCreesh, whose gun was linked to the Kingsmill massacre. Then the removal of the Union flag from Belfast City Hall. They want symbols of Britishness out and symbols of present-day Irish nationalism in. They even refuse to accept that Londonderry is part of the United Kingdom.¹

Not surprisingly, most nationalists see matters differently. As one republican participant in a separate Think Tank discussion said:

I think Protestants/unionists fail to understand the mindset of nationalists. As a child the only dealings I had with the City Hall was going down to pay the gas bill. And it was completely alien to me and everybody from my community. All the monuments, all the statues, were seen as symbols of victories over our community: the victory of Britishness over Irishness, of Protestantism over Catholicism. We felt cowed by the system and its symbols. The City Hall had nothing to do with us. The people in the dole office treated us shabbily. I think the Protestant/unionist community assumed that before the Troubles we had bought into all that, but we hadn't, we still felt completely alienated. I mean, Queen Victoria seemed to be everywhere: her statue was prominent in the City Hall grounds, there was another statue outside the Royal [Victoria Hospital]... we noticed all these things even as children. In fact, even though the Royal was right in our midst we never thought it was 'our' hospital – it was 'their' hospital but we used it. And that takes a lot to get over. So things like changing rules

¹ A reference to Derry/Londonderry's bid to be 'UK City of Culture' in 2013. The Sinn Féin party leader on Derry city council, Maeve McLaughlin, said: "While we are a city of culture there has to be a recognition that we're not part of the UK.... [There are] tens of thousands of nationalists and republicans in this city and region who do not recognise themselves as part of the UK."

on flags and other things shouldn't make unionists fear. If anything, they should welcome it. They shouldn't see it as a sign that Catholics are trying to take over and supplant Britishness with Irishness, but that Catholics are finally being made more comfortable here.

Another nationalist commented more recently:

To be honest, I never cared all that much about an Irish Language Act – I felt that it would be too expensive, using money better spent on our health service. But I experienced real anger at Gregory Campbell's efforts to deride the Irish language with his 'curry my yogurt' comments.² I just felt that here again was a backwoods Unionist deliberately belittling my community and my heritage. I have talked to many Catholics and nationalists and it is clear that Arlene Foster's stupid 'crocodile' analogy,³ coupled with Paul Givan's mean-spirited denial of funding to children wanting to learn Irish,⁴ were prime motivating factors in getting nationalists out to vote for Sinn Féin.⁵

Is this clash of cultures inevitable?

In the aftermath of the Belfast Agreement and the setting-up of the Stormont Assembly a mood of optimism *had* seemed to envelop Northern Ireland's estranged communities. It also seemed that deep-seated tribal identities were slowly breaking down. In the 2011 Census the number of people here who declared their identity as 'Northern Irish' – as opposed to 'British' or 'Irish' – was 20%; rising to 29% in the Omagh area. Yet polls taken in the aftermath of the 'flag protests'⁶

2 In the Northern Ireland Assembly the Irish sentence *go raibh maith agat, Ceann Comhairle* ('thank you') used by nationalist MLAs was parodied by the DUP's Gregory Campbell, when he said "curry my yoghurt can coca coalyer". He was barred for a day for failing to apologise.

3 DUP Leader, Arlene Foster, with reference to demands from Sinn Féin, said: "If you feed a crocodile it will keep coming back for more."

4 DUP Minister Paul Givan sparked anger among nationalists when he decided to end a bursary scheme which provided small grants for people from disadvantaged backgrounds who wanted to learn Irish. In the face of a widespread backlash he later reversed his decision.

5 In a snap Assembly election (March 2017) an extremely high turnout saw Unionist parties lose their overall majority in Stormont for the first time. Sinn Féin were the biggest winners, coming just one seat behind the DUP.

6 On 3 December 2012 Belfast City Council voted on a Sinn Féin and SDLP proposal that the Union flag, which had been flown every day on the City Hall, should not be flown at all. The Alliance Party's compromise was carried: that the flag should be flown on 18 designated days. The decision led to widespread street protests, some of which involved inter-communal violence.

revealed that the number of Catholics who now identified themselves as ‘Northern Irish’ *had dropped dramatically*. That was proof, if proof were needed, that if the ‘defence’ of a particular identity is pursued in a negative, exclusivist manner, it can actually undermine the very thing it is trying to protect.

A number of media commentators had actually voiced surprise that more than 20% of the population of Northern Ireland had indicated that they identified themselves as ‘Northern Irish only’ rather than ‘British’ or ‘Irish’. But is this *really* so surprising? And is there any basis for it in our history?

This pamphlet comprises a number of essays, written over recent years, which I hope will help to convince the reader that our two communities are not the two distinct and separate peoples they are often assumed to be.

1: ‘Britishness’ and ‘Irishness’ – a challenge *page 7*

This is a brief overview of those facets of our historical and cultural experience which reveal the close interrelatedness which has always existed between Ireland and mainland Britain.

2: Is there a ‘Northern Irish’ identity? *page 12*

In this essay the focus is on what historians have said about the close relationship shared by “the two communities in the North”.

3: A language smorgasbord *page 18*

This short essay celebrates the rich linguistic heritage belonging to the people of Northern Ireland.

4: ‘The children of a common past’ *page 23*

DNA studies reveal that we have far more in common than we ever realised.

Appendix: Ulster’s impact abroad *page 26*

Ulster’s significant input into the history of Europe and America.

Michael Hall

1: ‘Britishness’ and ‘Irishness’ – a challenge

[This document was written in 1995 at the request of the Shankill Think Tank]

Irreconcilable identities?

It is often claimed that the inter-communal conflict in Northern Ireland is unsolvable, because its roots lie in the collision between two irreconcilable national identities. However, this follows as much because of the exclusive manner in which those two identities are invariably expressed: to be Irish one cannot seemingly be British, to be British one cannot be Irish. There also abound gross misunderstandings as to what each identity entails. Gerry Adams, in his book *Free Ireland: Towards a Lasting Peace*, wrote that “The loyalists have a desperate identity crisis. They agonise over whether they are Ulster-Scotch, Picts, English or British.”¹ Now, I have never met *any* Ulster loyalists who had ever agonised over whether they were ‘English’. Such a misconception might be expected from a badly-informed foreign journalist, but not from a major player in the politics of the past twenty-five years, and is a reflection of the many misconceptions held *by each community* about the other.

Just as questionable is the attempt to deny that the other community’s identity is valid. To quote again from Adams: “There are no cultural or national links between the loyalists and the British, no matter how much the loyalists scream about their ‘British way of life’.” Not only is this comment quite inaccurate, but even a brief overview of different facets of our shared history can reveal the extent of the ‘cultural and national’ links which have existed, not only between “the loyalists and the British”, but between *all* the inhabitants of Ireland and those on the British mainland.

A common inheritance

- Identical Stone Age burial monuments exist in the northern half of Ireland and south-west Scotland, of which Séan O Ríordain commented: “The tombs and the finds from them form a continuous province *joined rather than divided* by the narrow waters of the North Channel.”² [*Italics added*] Archaeologists have labelled these tombs the ‘Clyde-Carlingford cairns’ to signify the close relationship between the two regions.
- Not only was the North Channel between Scotland and Ulster a constant point of contact between the two islands, but the entire Irish Sea is seen by

some scholars as providing for more complex patterns of social interaction than first believed. As archaeologist John Waddell suggested: “Perhaps we have greatly underestimated the extent to which this body of water linked the two islands in prehistoric times.... Maybe we should consider the Irish Sea as a “great land-locked lake”, to use Dillon and Chadwick’s phrase.”³

- The prehistoric link between the two islands also suggests a shared kinship. As Irish historian Liam de Paor commented: “The gene pool of the Irish... is probably very closely related to the gene pools of highland Britain.... So far as the physical make-up of the Irish goes... they share their origins with their fellows in the neighbouring parts of the next-door island of Great Britain.”⁴
- It was settlers from the north of Ireland, labelled ‘Scotti’ by the Romans, who bequeathed the name ‘Scotland’ to their new homeland.
- From the 5th to the 8th centuries the Ulster-Scottish kingdom of Dalriada encompassed territory on both sides of the North Channel. From Dalriada emerged the kings who united Scots and Picts in what became Scotland.
- The Gaelic language was brought from Ireland by such settlers and it eventually spread throughout Scotland, a prime example of the close interrelationship between the two islands. In more recent times the influence has been in the opposite direction and much of the distinctive vocabulary of the North of Ireland is of Scots origin, including words such as *skunder* (sicken), *thole* (endure), *byre*, *corn*, *dander* (stroll), *lift* (steal) and *mind* (remember).
- St. Patrick was an immigrant from Britain whose influence on Irish history and culture has been profound.
- When St. Columba sailed from Ulster to Iona, the monastery he founded there proved of vital importance to the religious and cultural history of Scotland. As the Dutch geographer Heslinga wrote, it was settlers from Ulster who “gave Scotland her name, her first kings, her Gaelic language and her faith.”⁵
- The cross-fertilisation between east Ulster and northern Britain gave rise to what Proinsias Mac Cana described as a “North Channel culture-province within which obtained a free currency of ideas, literary, intellectual and artistic.”⁶ It was this artistic environment – centered in the scriptoria of the more progressive monasteries – which directly led, according to Mac Cana, to east Ulster becoming “the cradle of written Irish literature”.

- One of the products of that creativity – the *Táin*, or ‘Cattle Raid of Cooley’ – is the *oldest* story, written in a vernacular language, in western European literature.
- Some of the ancient annals of early Irish history concern themselves as much with events in Scotland as with those in Ireland.
- Even in the great Irish sagas major characters such as Cúchulainn and Deirdre regularly commute between Ireland and mainland Britain.
- At the Battle of Moira in 637, reputedly the greatest battle ever fought in Ireland, the over-king of Ulster, Congal Cláen, had in his army – according to Colgan – contingents of Picts (Scottish), Anglo-Saxons (English) and Britons (Welsh).
- In 1316, at the request of Ireland’s Gaelic chiefs, Edward Bruce of Scotland was proclaimed King of Ireland.
- Between the 13th and 16th centuries the importation by the Irish chieftains of large numbers of Scots mercenaries (the gallowglass) – many of whom settled in Ireland – was to prove vital to the resurgence of Gaelic Ireland.
- The Plantation is the best-known period of major population movement between Britain and Ireland, but it was not the first such movement, nor was it the last – those of Irish descent have made a significant contribution to the present population of Great Britain.
- Rather than the modern Irish Republic being the embodiment of traditional Gaelic aspirations, “the concept and the institutions of the modern nation-state were, ironically, imported from England.”⁷
- Irish Republicanism owes much to the radical ideals of Scottish Presbyterianism.
- Despite the conflict which has perennially soured Irish-British relationships, Irishmen have long maintained links with the British Army, epitomised at Waterloo where it is estimated half the British Army were Irishmen. This close connection was also evidenced in the First World War, during which some 50,000 Irishmen died fighting in the British Army. And in the Second World War 80,000 Southern Irishmen volunteered to join the British forces.
- Irish writers of English descent (the Anglo-Irish), alongside those of native Irish descent writing in English, have established one of the most vibrant branches of English literature (with a roll-call of names that includes

Spenser, Congreve, Goldsmith, Swift, Sheridan, Wilde, Yeats, Synge, Shaw, O’Casey, Beckett and Heaney). As Robert McCrum noted:

In a remarkable way the Irish have made English their own, and have preserved qualities of speech and writing that many Standard English speakers feel they have lost.... In the fusion of the two traditions, Anglo-Saxon and Celtic, it is sometimes said that Irish Gaelic was the loser. The language was certainly transmuted into English, but it found, in another language, ways of expressing the cultural nuances of Irish society, of making English in its own image.⁸

- The history of the Labour movement has also linked the working-class peoples of the two islands, as did some of its most prominent leaders: such as Larkin, who was born in Liverpool, and Connolly, who was born in Edinburgh. During the 1913 Dublin lock-out, for example, English workers organised food-ships to help ameliorate the suffering of their Irish comrades.

This list could easily be extended, but it should be sufficient to refute the assertion that “Protestants need to be encouraged to recognise that the common history they share with their Catholic fellow countrymen and women in the common territory of Ireland is *quite foreign to any British experience.*”¹ [*italics added*] On the contrary, both Irish Protestants *and* Irish Catholics have a history which is not ‘foreign’ to the historical and cultural experience of Britain, but an integral part of it. An honest recognition of this need not threaten either Britishness or Irishness, but enrich both, and serve to promote a more inclusive identity. Gusty Spence made such a point when a loyalist delegation visited the USA:

We were addressing this gathering of people with Irish ‘connections’ and when I told them I was proud to be British but also proud to be Irish, one man remarked, in an irritated tone, “Why is it that you loyalists can’t make up your minds what you are!” I asked him: “I take it you are American, sir?” “How perceptive,” was the gruff response. “I take it you are also proud of your Irish roots?” “I am indeed,” was the more cautious reply. “Then if you can be proud of your ‘Irish-American’ heritage, are we not entitled to be proud of our dual heritage?” The man nodded and sat down.

Our mixed background

There are many in Northern Ireland today who still cling to the notion that each

community has somehow managed to emerge from centuries of history relatively free from any ‘contamination’ by the other. By playing their ‘own’ music, their ‘own’ sports, their ‘own’ language, and sustaining a host of other more subtle ‘differences’, they imagine that the two communities have managed to remain two distinct and separate tribes. The reality of our history tells quite a different story.

The document ended with the following challenge from the Shankill Think Tank:

We challenge Ulster Loyalists to redefine their Unionism. Instead of remaining trapped by exclusivist definitions they should have the confidence to celebrate their link with the peoples of Britain in a way that transcends religious or cultural differences within Northern Ireland. We challenge them to develop a Unionism which is truly inclusive of *all* sections of our people.

We challenge Irish Republicans to redefine their Nationalism. Instead of remaining trapped in exclusivist definitions they should have the confidence to celebrate *all* the facets that make up this island’s heritage and not suggest that some are ‘alien’ and hence inferior. Their Nationalism must become truly inclusive. No longer must they assert that a sizeable section of the people living in Ireland can only be considered Irish once they relinquish their Britishness.

Furthermore, we challenge both Loyalists and Republicans to acknowledge that over the centuries each community has imbued many of the other’s attributes, to the extent that the heritage of both traditions has increasingly become a shared one. We challenge Loyalists to acknowledge the Irish component of their heritage, and Republicans to acknowledge the British component of theirs.

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- 6 Proinsias Mac Cana, ‘Mongán Mac Fiachna and Immram Brain’, in *Eriu*, vol.XXIII, Dublin, 1972.
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2: Is there a ‘Northern Irish’ identity?

A shared inheritance

The communal divisions (cultural/religious/political) which exist in Northern Ireland today are assumed to date back to the collision between ‘Planter’ and ‘Gael’, compounded because Planters and Gaels are deemed to have been two quite distinct and separate peoples, with little in common except their shared animosity. However, 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 only four hundred years ago during the Plantation. And indeed, when we investigate the connection between the two areas more deeply, we discover just how close and ancient it actually is. As Irish historian Liam de Paor noted:

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.¹

Indeed, an extensive DNA study by Bryan Sykes concluded that ‘there is a very close genetic affinity between Scotland and Ireland.’² [discussed further on pages 24,25]

However, even if it was to be conceded that the Scottish arrivals might have had some distant kinship 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 belief, the Planters did not drive the native Irish off the planted territories *en masse*. While the Gaelic landlords and their followers were certainly dispossessed, it is now realised that the entire pre-plantation population was not. Historian A T Q Stewart 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.³

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.”⁴ 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 Northern Ireland today have ‘mixed’ marriages in their family trees. Even surnames do not guarantee a means of surmising someone’s background, a point Ulick O’Connor made in relation to IRA hunger-striker Bobby Sands:

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.⁵

Is there a Northern Irish Identity?

Even if the reader accepts – grudgingly or otherwise – that the present-day descendants of the Planters and Gaels *might* have a more common ancestry than is popularly believed, how does that relate to a specifically *Northern Irish identity*?

The reality is that 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. 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 threatens their deeply-held aspirations. Indeed, *both* aspirations can only be strengthened by a deeper understanding of what the people of Northern Ireland 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.”⁶ 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.”⁴ Even the arrival of the Celts, as 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.”

Ulster’s chieftains certainly considered their territory to be the true bastion of Gaelic Ireland. No-one epitomised this better than Owen Roe O’Neill, who was 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 noted: “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.”⁷ 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.”

† Many readers will undoubtedly point out that ‘Northern Ireland’ and ‘Ulster’ are not coterminous. But even in Donegal some years ago local newspapers were complaining that Donegal was the ‘forgotten county’ of Ireland, and many people there felt a deep estrangement from Dublin.

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.⁷

However, one cannot deny that today's reality is that community perceptions in Northern Ireland are not founded on commonality, but on deep divisions. The Troubles were, in large part, the result of one community feeling forcibly 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 writer Dervla Murphy remarked that, “In Ireland, during recent years, many Southerners have been voicing anti-Northern sentiments with increasing vehemence and frequency.”⁸ 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 (in 1993):

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.⁹

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 quarrel, had been steadily losing friends. How much this has been rectified in recent years by the ‘peace process’ remains unclear.

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.⁸

Ulick O’Connor remarked: “What is important is that there is a growing grassroots acceptance of the idea of a shared community.”¹⁰ Such an idea is nothing new. The Siege of Derry centenary commemoration, held on 7 December 1788, showed, as A T Q Stewart 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.”³ 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 shared sacrifice made by Protestants and Catholics during the First World War was repeated during the Second World War. Of the 38,000 volunteers from Northern Ireland some 4,500 were killed. The war effort helped forge a new bond between the two communities, as Jonathan Bardon noted:

Catholics and Protestants alike felt proud when General Eisenhower saluted them from the steps of the City Hall.... 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.¹¹

The people of Northern Ireland are the product of a shared cultural and historical inheritance, one which has constantly thrown them together just as frequently as it has managed to drive them apart. Certainly a 'British' and an 'Irish' identity both exist – but so too does an 'Northern Irish' identity.

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3: A language smorgasbord

The people of Ireland are renowned for their gift of storytelling, for the lyrical construction of their daily talk, and their unique literary achievement. This fondness for the ‘word’ is rooted deep within the population. The ancient poets, who preserved the oral traditions of the people, carried considerable status within the community. As Francis Byrne said: “There can be little doubt that the influence which they exerted so effectively for over a thousand years was rooted in ancient belief in the power of the word.”¹

English, Irish and Scottish dialects have all contributed significantly to the multifaceted linguistic heritage of the Ulster people. As Estyn Evans said of the Protestant Northerners: “They’ve inherited a material culture and an idiom that has the stamp of this country on it. And I like to think of a very paradoxical figure: an Orangeman from the Bannside, waving a British flag and pouring scorn on the Englishman because he can’t get his tongue round a good Gaelic place-name like Ahoghill.”²

English

The varieties of English spoken in Ireland have their origins in the Elizabethan period. This was the most vibrant period of the English language – it encompassed Shakespeare and his contemporaries – and the ‘English’ that the Irish adopted and adapted still preserves many 17th century peculiarities of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar, and is far closer to that rich heritage than the English of modern Britain.³

Hiberno-English has both a northern and a southern version, due to the dialect differences in the original Gaelic of the two areas. The pervasive influence of Gaelic upon our pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and idiom is still quite evident in daily speech. “He’s in bed with the leg”, “he is after writing”, “there’s a great buying on the cows the day”, “it’s mad in the head you are”, “she has a desperate cold on her”: many of these turns of phrase arise from a literal translation of the Gaelic.

Irish/Gaelic

Irish nationalists are well aware and proud of their linguistic inheritance, but many people from a Protestant/Unionist background remain unaware of – or even express antagonism to – their co-equal ownership of that inheritance, let alone their own

community's historical role in preserving and reviving it.

Irish Gaelic was taken to Scotland by Irish settlers and developed into Scots Gaelic, which became widely spoken throughout Scotland. Indeed, one writer remarked that twenty generals speaking little English, from the Scottish Gaeltacht, fought at Waterloo. And, as Padraig Ó Snodaigh noted: 'When one examines the origins of the planters one can only conclude that most of the Scottish ones must have come from Gaelic or bilingual areas.'⁴ Furthermore, as Estyn Evans pointed out: 'Paradoxically it is much-planted Ulster that has the highest proportion of Gaelic place-names among the four provinces.'⁵

It was said that as "late as 1716 ten per cent of the Presbyterian clergymen in Ulster could speak and preach in Irish."⁴

In the 1780s and 90s it was radical Presbyterians in Belfast who took the initiative in efforts to preserve the Irish language and Irish culture. The United Irishmen's newspaper, the *Northern Star*, produced the first Irish language magazine, *Bolg an tSolair*, in 1795, in order to prevent "the total neglect and to diffuse the beauties of this ancient and much acclaimed language".

The first Belfast Harp Festival was held in 1792 in an effort to "revive and perpetuate the ancient music and poetry of Ireland". The second Harp Festival, held in 1813, was organised by Edward Bunting. Between 1792 and 1807 Bunting had collected melodies from different parts of Ireland and so was prominent in preserving much of Ireland's traditional music.

In 1797 Bunting produced his first volume of traditional melodies from his headquarters – the McCracken household in Rosemary Lane, off High Street, where "in the bosom of rationalist Presbyterian Belfast the Renaissance of Irish music took place, the precursor by a century of the Irish Gaelic revival."⁴

Prominent Orangeman Dr R R Kane, who was an Irish-speaker, is said to have signed the minutes of the Lodge of which he was the Master in Irish.⁴

The first book to be printed in Irish Gaelic was a translation of the Calvinist *Book of Common Order* published in Edinburgh for the use of Presbyterians.

In his Foreword to Padraig Ó Snodaigh's book, *Hidden Ulster: Protestants and the Irish Language*, Cosslett Quin (retired Church of Ireland clergyman who was President of Oireachtas na Gaeilge in 1972 and 1973) wrote:

Mr. Pádraig Ó Snodaigh... has been digging in our family graveyard, and has disinterred many interesting facts about our ancestors, which it is impossible either to refute or ignore. We are reminded that this Gaelic heritage is one which we share with the psalm-singing Sabbatarian Gael of the Highlands and islands of Scotland, as well as

with Irish Catholics of Saxon, Welsh and Norman ancestry. ... The Church of Ireland is reminded that three or four centuries ago we produced the first Gaelic Bible in days when the Scottish Gaels were still reading and writing standard literary Irish... We see also that Muiris Ó Droighneáin does not exaggerate when he tells us that: ‘It was the Protestants who played the main part in language activities at the beginning of the 19th century’ and observes that ‘it was a strange, unnatural sight when the Catholics began slowly and shyly to join in the work’. He also points out (see his work on the *History of Modern Irish Literature*) that the Fenians officially – with a few exceptions – not only ignored, but discouraged that work.⁴

Ó Snodaigh quotes Ulster Unionist Belfast city councillor Chris McGimpsey who, in a speech delivered in Kilkenny in 1993, said that his forebears lost “our native tongue” by the beginning of the 19th century, adding that for him his “interest in the language is more that of a homing pigeon returning to the roost than that of an outsider who has discovered something alien which attracts him”.⁴

Heinrich Wagner, after spending over twenty years compiling a linguistic atlas of Gaelic dialects, found that “each major dialect ... is dependent on its geographical position... [and the] dialects of the old province of Ulster are almost as close to the dialects of Southern Scotland as they are to other Irish dialects.”⁶

The Ulster Gaelic dialect was to decline not only a result of the intrusion of English, but, ironically, as a consequence of the rise of Irish nationalism. The main problem for the early Irish nationalists was that there was no single ‘caint na ndoine’ – language of the people – to promote as *the* ‘Irish Language’, but rather an extensive range of local idioms and grammatical forms. However, with the creation of the Irish Republic, de Valera requested that a standardised form of Irish be produced. The outcome was a reformed spelling, and a reformed grammar, which was largely composed of forms selected from Munster and Connaught Gaelic, with many Ulster Gaelic words ignored.⁷ †

Ulster-Scots

While numbers of the Scots settlers who came over during the Plantation period

† The situation regarding such neglect seems to be improving. Gordon McCoy (Irish Language Education Officer), commenting on a draft of this pamphlet, informed me that “many resources for primary schools are now produced in dialects, including non-standardised Ulster terms”, as it is felt that children “should recognize their own speech in written texts”.

spoke Gaelic, others spoke Scots, the language of the Scottish Lowlands and the court language of Scotland. These Ulster-Scots settlers generally adopted the old Gaelic place names in Ulster but they also added new names, incorporating Ulster-Scots words such as brae [hillside or slope], clabber [soft mud], flush [boggy ground], pad [path], knowe [small hill], loanen or loaney [lane].

Indeed, much of the distinctive vocabulary of the North is of Scottish origin, including such words as crib, skunder (sicken), thole (endure), thrawn, byre, corn, dander (stroll), lift (steal), scallion, farl, lug, oster and mind (remember).

The word ‘craic’ is not in fact Irish, but Ulster-Scots. It first appeared in an Irish language dictionary in 1927 and is derived from the Ulster-Scots word ‘crack’ (or ‘crak’) and is also used in Scotland and the north of England.⁸

In the early part of the 17th century much education in Ulster was carried out in Scots. Government officials in Dublin Castle had to employ clerks with knowledge of Scots to handle the correspondence from Ulster.⁸

The Ulster-Scots also expressed their language in a vibrant literary form:

For over 150 years from 1720 scores of Ulster-Scots folk poets published poetry in their own tongue. Notable among them were men such as Samuel Thomson, the ‘Bard of Carngranny’ and James Orr, the ‘Bard of Ballycarry’. Poems in Scots and Ulster-Scots also appeared regularly in the *Belfast News Letter* and in the *Northern Star*, the newspaper of the United Irishmen. ... Ulster-Scots was once spoken freely throughout Belfast but the use of the language declined in the 19th and 20th centuries.⁹

Looking to the future

There are many official organisations promoting either Irish (Gaeilge) or Ulster-Scots. Dr Ian Adamson OBE promotes the fact that Gaelic and Scots are specific languages, with variants in Scotland and Ireland, and endeavours to support both through the Ullans Academy (Ulster-Scots or Ullans), and the ULTACH Trust (Ulster Gaelic or Gaedhlig).

There are also important community-based initiatives which strive to bring our smorgasbord of language riches to a broader grassroots audience, one of the most significant being Linda Ervine’s efforts to promote the Irish language (Gaeilge) within Protestant working-class East Belfast.

Just recently, the *Belfast Telegraph* had an article on young Irish and Ulster-Scots musicians coming together for the first ‘Remembering Bunting’ festival in

Belfast. The CEOL band is made up of twenty teenagers from Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann branches and members of the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association.

Sean Ó Roideain, from Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, said that a lot of familiar music would have disappeared without Bunting's efforts. He added:

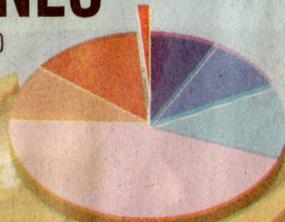
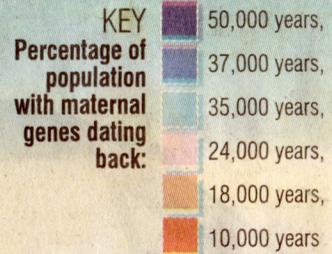
There are a lot of tunes which have crossed over between the Catholic and Protestant communities, and there are a lot of English and Scottish tunes in Irish traditional music. There are also a lot of Irish tunes in Scottish music. It's a bit of a myth to think of two separately sealed communities as there has always been coming together.¹⁰

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BRITAIN'S STONE AGE GENES

Most British families can trace their genetic ancestry back more than 24,000 years to Stone Age settlers – not, as many think, to more recent invaders such as Celts or Normans



SCOTLAND

The minimal impact foreign invaders had on the British gene pool is shown in the smallest segment of the pie charts

Recent invaders 3,000 to 900 years ago

CELTS

ROMANS

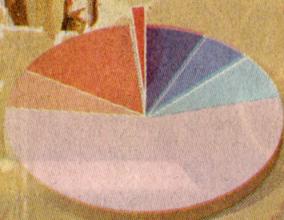
VIKINGS

NORMANS

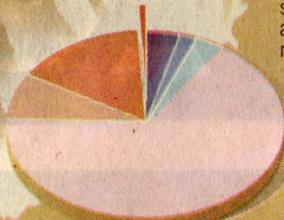
Evidence from a 10,000 year-old North Yorkshire settlement showed our genetic ancestors lived on smoked meat, baked apples and a form of chewing gum made from the tar in birch bark

Pickering

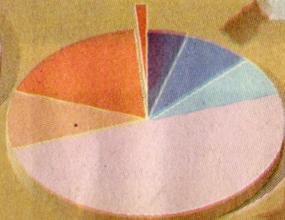
Cheddar



IRELAND



WALES



ENGLAND

4: ‘The children of a common past’

Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou MacDonald recently said: “I seek a new and agreed Ireland, in which you can comfortably be Irish or British, or both or neither.”

A major problem of our history, however, is that ‘Irishness’ and ‘Britishness’ have rarely sat ‘comfortably’ alongside one another. Those holding fiercely to one identity have more often denigrated the ‘other’ identity than endeavoured to see its potential richness. Gerry Adams was dismissive of the ‘other’ community’s professed identity when he wrote: “There are no cultural or national links between the loyalists and the British, no matter how much the loyalists scream about their ‘British way of life’.”¹ Similarly dismissive was the prominent Unionist politician who said he did not consider himself an Irishman because he didn’t “jig at the crossroads”, while another dismissed Irish as “a leprechaun language”.

With regard to ‘their British way of life’, it is ironic that even many in the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community struggle to define it in any depth. I once asked a community group in Belfast’s Shankill Road to describe their sense of Britishness, and the replies centered around ‘our flag’, the [11th Night] bonfires, Loyal Order marches, and the Royal family. My question “but what else?” met with surprisingly little response. I felt it was ironic, that here, in what was once described as ‘the heart of the Empire’, no-one could articulate the sense of what their Britishness stood for, in the way that, for example, Nelson Mandela did when recalling his schooldays in Natal:

Britain is the home of parliamentary democracy.... I was brought up in a British school, and at the time Britain was the home of everything that was best in the world. I have not discarded the influence which Britain and British history and culture exercised on us. [Visiting Britain] had this excitement because I was visiting the country which was my pride.

Or Mahatma Gandhi, when he said in a speech in April 1915:

I discovered that the British Empire had certain ideals with which I had fallen in love, and one of those ideals is that every subject of the British Empire has the freest scope possible for his energies and efforts and whatever he thinks is due to his conscience. ... I am no lover of any

government and I [have] said that government is best which governs least, and I have found it is possible for me to be governed least under the British Empire.

The unconcealed hatred that some Irish republicans harbour towards ‘the Brits’, and the equally denigratory way some Ulster Protestants view many aspects of Irishness, is almost akin to racism. And yet, as I will try to show over the next few paragraphs, any such ‘racism’ is based on completely false foundations.

Some Irish republicans will go apoplectic at the phrase ‘the British Isles’, their [mis]understanding being that it stems from the desire of a ‘British’ (specifically ‘English’) political entity to claim unwarranted sovereignty over the island of Ireland as well as mainland Britain. But let us look at the origin of the phrase.

Between 300 and 330 BC the Greek geographer and voyager Pytheas sailed past these islands as far as Norway and Iceland, and wrote of his voyage in ‘Concerning the Ocean’. In that document he provides us with the earliest historical mention of these islands, calling them *Pretanikai nesoi* (Isles of the Pretani), a name the people used themselves, but the meaning of which will never be known. Pretani is the Irish word for the most ancient inhabitants of these islands to whom a definite name can be given. In Julius Caesar’s time ‘Pretania’ became ‘Britannia’.

Hence the *origin* of the term ‘the British Isles’ comes *not* from any *English* desire for conquest or control – for the political entity called England had still not come into existence – but from the Irish themselves.

(And it is for this reason that Ian Adamson and Helen Brooker, who have formed Pretani Associates, do not talk of a *shared* identity, but of a *common* identity.)

Bryan Sykes, in his book, *Blood of the Isles*² (“the very first book to be written about the genetic history of Britain and Ireland using DNA as its main source of information”), noted, with reference to the relationship between the people of Ireland and Scotland (and focusing on DNA inherited through the maternal line):

[T]here is a very close genetic affinity between Scotland and Ireland....
[We] can confidently conclude that the [two populations] have the same underlying genetic origins.... [This similarity] makes it impossible to detect any genetic effect of the Ulster plantations.

Elsewhere he writes (with regard to ‘the genetic bedrock on the maternal side’):

By about 6,000 years ago, the pattern was set for the rest of the history of the Isles and very little has disturbed it since. ... I 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 people of the Isles who now feel themselves to be Celts have far deeper roots than that and, as far as I can see, their ancestors have been here for several thousand years.

More importantly for our strife-torn history, he adds:

However we may feel about ourselves and about each other ... just a little way beneath the surface the strands of ancestry weave us all together as the children of a common past.

I come finally to the graphic which is spread across the inside cover of this pamphlet. This graphic accompanied a newspaper article entitled ‘Britons stand united on the DNA map’.³ Authors Lois Rogers and John Harlow, commenting on the first genetic map of the British Isles, undertaken by Oxford University, noted that whatever the *cultural* difference between the various peoples within the ‘British Isles’

in genetic terms at least, there is no difference between us – we are all ancient Britons. Those who claim to be descended from marauding bands of Celts or Anglo-Saxons will be disappointed by this research. [For their claim ignores] the much more powerful inheritance of the ancient Britons, whose genes have overwhelmed all subsequent residents of the British Isles.... [T]he little physical differences – the Nordic or Celtic characteristics, such as red hair or green eyes – which suggest the invaders played a small role in our genetic make-up [were] probably transmitted down the male line.

Geneticist Stephen Oppenheimer made the observation that “genes have no bearing on cultural history.”⁴ As an example he noted that although there is no significant genetic difference between the people of Northern Ireland they have been fighting each other for centuries. He said it would be wonderful if an awareness that the British and the Irish are genetically much alike might improve relations, “but I somehow think it won’t”. Wouldn’t it be good if we could prove him wrong?

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Appendix: Ulster's impact abroad

'The Patron saint of Europe'

In 555 AD, at Bangor, County Down, St Comgall 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."¹ 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.²

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."³

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' (although 'Scots-Irish' is nowadays the preferred spelling). 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.⁴

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.⁵

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.”⁴ 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.”⁴ 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 Ulsterman, 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 Tocqueville, 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.

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