

Marches & murals

Linking 1916 & the present

Defining identity, marking differences
Legitimising political violence, recruiting volunteers

Note for teachers

'If Derry and the Boyne had proved the willingness of the Ulstermen to fight for their faith, then the Somme was a symbol of their willingness to fight (and die) for King and Country.'

'A divided Ireland is symbolically reunited each Easter as people parade simultaneously across the country to remember 1916.'

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Introduction

This note is intended to help teachers link work in Year 9 on the 'Ireland in Schools' unit on 1916* with the study of Ireland at GCSE, especially the SHP Modern World Study.

The Year 9 unit uses events in Ireland (the Easter Rising) and on the Western Front in 1916 (especially the Battle of the Somme) to explore political relationships within Ireland and Ireland's relationship with Britain and the Empire.

The Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme are the two recent events that are most widely used to symbolise the divergent aspirations and senses of identity between the Protestant-Unionist and Catholic-Nationalist communities.

This note shows these events help to condition conflict in Northern Ireland in two ways.

First, they are seen as defining events, events which help (a) to shape the identity of Irish nationalists and Ulster unionists respectively, and (b) to epitomise the difference between the two communities - 'Irish' as opposed to 'British'.

Secondly, these historic events, especially the 'fallen heroes', are invoked both (a) to legitimise current political violence and (b) to recruit volunteers to the paramilitary forces. In this respect, republicans and loyalists are not simply prisoners of the past but actually use the past for their own contemporary purposes.

Both themes can be seen in the marches and murals that are an integral part of Northern Ireland's political culture.

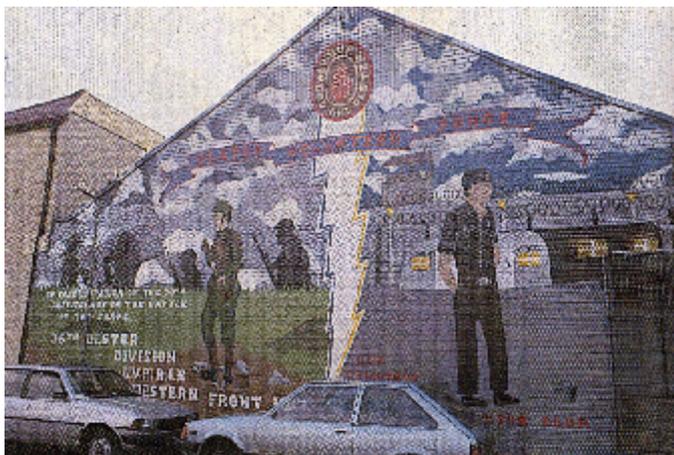
This note is taken mainly from Neil Jarman, *Material Conflicts. Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland*, Berg, Oxford, 1997, 1-85973-129-5. However, for Drumcree, it also draws upon Susan McKay, *Northern Protestants. An Unsettled People*, Blackstaff, Belfast, 2000, 0-85640-666-X.

The murals are from Bill Rolston, *Drawing Support. Murals in the North of Ireland*, Beyond the Pale Publications, Belfast, 1992, 0-95142-293-6, and *Drawing Support 2. Murals of War and Peace*, Beyond the Pale Publications, Belfast, 1998, 0-95142-297-9.

It is a matter of regret that, at present, it is possible to provide only one illustration of the banners and murals which are discussed by Jarman - the 1991 Whiterock Road mural commemorating the Easter Rising.

* *Thinking Skills Through History, Literacy and Citizenship. 1916 as a Case Study Fighting for whom? 1916: the Easter Rising & the Western Front*

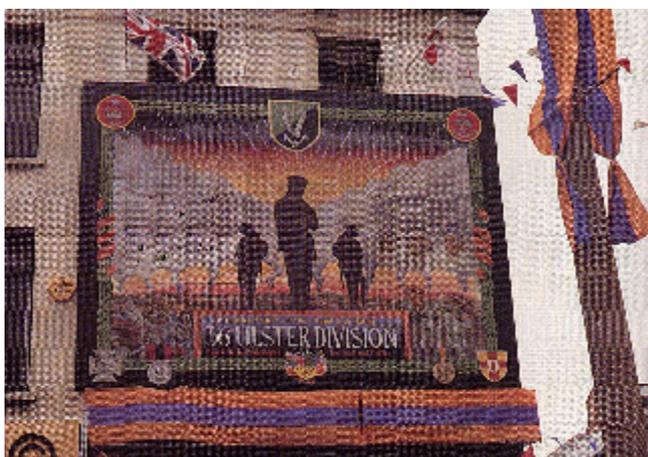
Murals 1: invoking the Somme



Craven Street, Belfast, 1986
Ulster Division at the Battle of the Somme, 1916 (left) and contemporary Ulster Volunteer Force prisoner in Long Kesh (right)



Albertbridge Road, Belfast, 1988
'But Never Heart Forget', commemorating the Ulster Division which suffered severe casualties at the Battle of the Somme, 1916

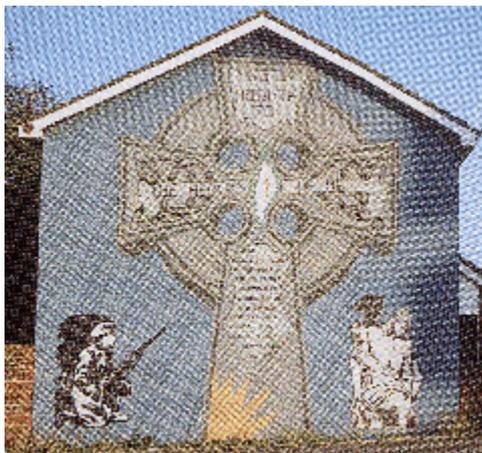


Donegall Pass, Belfast, 1990
Memorial to the Ulster Division and the Battle of the Somme, 1916

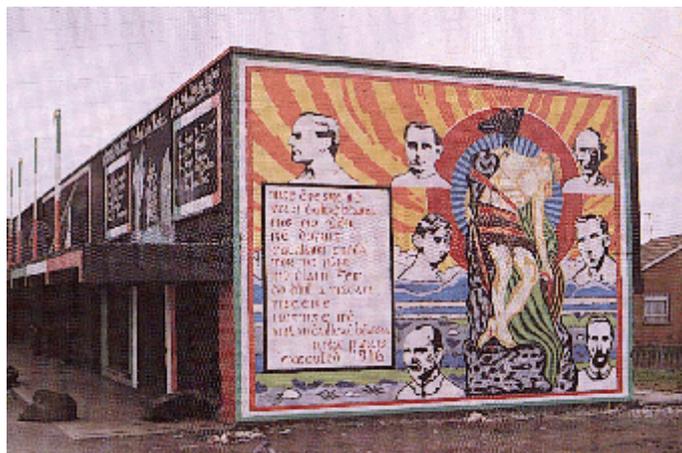


Dunloy, County Antrim, 1987
Soldiers of the Ulster Division in action at the Battle of the Somme, 1916

Murals 2: invoking the Easter Rising



New Lodge Road, Belfast, 1993
 Memorial to dead members of the IRA, with Celtic cross, armed republican, Cuchulainn, Easter lily and sunburst



Monagh Road, Belfast, 1988
 Commemoration of Easter Rising, 1916, with (centre) Cuchulainn, mythological Celtic warrior, dying upright, portraits of the seven signatories of the Proclamation of Independence (1916), and words of poem 'Mise Eire' (I am Ireland) by Patrick Pearse



Whiterock Road, Belfast, 1991
 'Éirí amach na casca 1916-1991' (Easter Rising)
 75th anniversary of Easter Rising, with portraits of signatories of the Proclamation of Independence, and phoenix rising from the flames and sunburst



Beechmount Avenue, Belfast, 1990
 'Free Ireland', with manacled hand, Easter lily, shields of four provinces of Ireland, and burning General Post Office, Caisc (Easter) 1916

The Battle of the Somme

Contrasting the Somme with the Rising

For unionists the formation of the 36th (Ulster) Division from the ranks of the UVF exemplified their faith in their British identity. Unionist resistance to Home Rule was further bolstered by the contrasting actions and experiences of republicans and unionists in 1916.

The Easter Rising in Dublin was regarded by unionists as a stab in the back to Britain, an action that stood in stark contrast to the tragic, but heroic, slaughter of the Ulster Division at the Somme in July 1916, this willing sacrifice being the strongest possible indication of Protestant loyalty and their irredeemable Britishness. Opposition to Home Rule was no longer couched solely in references to seventeenth-century battles or in abstract politico-religious ideals; it was securely anchored in the events of the recent past.

If Derry and the Boyne had proved the willingness of the Ulstermen to fight for their faith, then the Somme was a symbol of their willingness to fight (and die) for King and Country.

After 1918, the World War, condensed into the single event of 'the Somme', was introduced into Orange mytho-history as a contemporary equivalent to the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. The ultimate sacrifice made by so many Ulstermen provided further justification for their resistance to Home Rule and enhanced their determination to remain part of the United Kingdom.

The Somme in Orange parades

The connection between the two battles, the Somme and the Boyne, was paraded for the first time on the morning of 12 July 1919, when Hyde Park LOL 1067 unveiled their new banner portraying King William on one side and the 'Battle of the Somme' on the other. The elevation of the Somme into the iconography of the Orange Order confirmed its near-sacred status in popular memory.

The Somme & Drumcree

The Somme figures prominently in the Drumcree dispute, in the birthplace of the Orange Order.

Annually, around 1 July, the Orange Order holds parades to commemorate the Somme. Among these Somme commemorations is the Orange Order's annual march down Portadown's Garvahy Road.

Members of the County Armagh UVF joined the Ulster Division. At the Battle of the Somme some 400 Portadown men were killed, many of the Orangemen among them wearing their sashes as they went over the top. In 2000 the editor of the *Portadown Times* showed a journalist a frame scroll in his office, listing 'the names of the fallen' in World War One. 'That is a great commentary on Portadown', he said. He pointed to names which were obviously Catholic.

Trooper Thomas Lavelle from Obins Street - the poppy wasn't a political symbol to him, or to Private Patrick McVeigh of the Tunnel or Private Francis McCann. In 1914 these people paraded down to the railway station in Portadown never to be seen again. But Catholics wouldn't be seen now at the war memorial.

This Catholic refusal to recognise past common sacrifices fuelled Protestant resentment in Drumcree. As one woman, whose ancestor, 'Orange Dan', was one of the originators of the Orange Order, told the same journalist:

Why should the Orangemen bend the knee and beg to do something they've done for two hundred years? Soon it will be that every parade that passes a Catholic house will be stopped. I heard on a programme the other night a lady in Londonderry and she actually shuddered at the idea of standing at the war memorial. Now, she has two uncles who had fought, one of them a Protestant lost an arm

and the other a Catholic was killed. Yet she shuddered at the thought of standing for the Queen at the memorial. Why should she? John Hume's uncle fought at the Somme. Some of those ones on the Garvagh Road, their ancestors probably fought there too. They should recognise it. That parade from Drumcree is to commemorate the Somme.

Indeed, in 1998, one leading Orangemen described the scene at Drumcree as reminiscent of a war, reminding 'me of the Battle of the Somme when many of our brethren died so that we could live in neighbourliness.'

The Easter Rising

Republican commemorations

There are five major annual republican commemorations. The birth of Theobald Wolfe Tone, a leading figure in the United Irishmen rising of 1798, is celebrated in June in Bodenstown, Co. Kildare; the Easter Rising of 1916 is commemorated with parades throughout Ireland; Bloody Sunday, 30 January 1972, is marked by a parade in Derry; the 1981 Hunger Strikes by parades in early May; and the anniversary of the introduction of Internment in 1971 is commemorated each year on the second Sunday of August.

Prominence of Easter Rising commemorations

The Easter Rising is the seminal historical event for modern republicanism and is the most important of these commemorations. It was the event which led to the formation of an independent Irish state, but also left the problem of a partitioned island. Sinn Féin and the IRA claim the inheritance of the leaders of the Easter Rising and the right to complete the process of removing the British state presence in Ireland. The day commemorates the heroic failure of 1916; but by extension it also commemorates all those men and women who have died for the ideal of an independent Ireland.

After independence, the Rising and its leaders were widely commemorated and celebrated as the inspiration of the new state. Since the onset of the Troubles, Easter has become more closely identified as a republican, rather than a more generally nationalist, commemoration. In Dublin, the state has scaled down its support for the occasion; but it remains the most widely observed anniversary, and is marked by parades and assemblies all across Ireland. *A divided Ireland is symbolically reunited each Easter as people parade simultaneously across the country to remember 1916.*

Easter parades in Northern Ireland

In the newly created Northern Ireland, small commemorations were held in nationalist communities, but widespread public displays of support for Irish nationalism were not welcome. The 1922 Special Powers Act and, from 1954, the Flags and Emblems Act were used to constrain nationalist displays; but bans were often ignored. Instead, the parades were effectively confined to strongly nationalist towns like Newry or Armagh or to the Falls Road, where the tricolour flew freely out of sight of unionist eyes.

At the 50th anniversary in 1966, parades were held in towns across the north, and at a special commemorative rally in Belfast an estimated 50,000 people lined the route to watch the representatives of the Trades Council, trade unions, the INF, the Gaelic Athletic Association, numerous nationalist clubs and members of the Old IRA parade to Casement Park.

Organisation and symbolism

In Belfast the main parade is organised by the National Graves Association, is held on the Falls Road on Easter Sunday - from the junction of Beechmount Avenue to Milltown cemetery, about a mile. The area is decked with orange, white and green bunting; but the main visual impact is made by two murals that flank the assembly point.

The larger of these murals depicts a manacled hand clenching an Easter lily over a map of Ireland; above it a phoenix rises from a flaming GPO, and in the corners are the shields of the four provinces of Ireland. The mural surrounds a small plaque commemorating local IRA volunteers who have died in the Troubles, while on the back yard wall are the unacknowledged words of Padraic Pearse: 'The fools, the fools, they have left us our Fenian dead, and while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace.'

This quotation is taken from a speech that Pearse made in 1915 at the funeral in Dublin of O'Donovan Rossa, and prophetically refers to the importance of the rebel dead as a continuing inspiration for the living to continue the struggle for Irish unity. Each Easter the commemoration of the sacrificial execution of the leaders of the Rising condenses within it a general acknowledgment of all those who have given, and continue to give, their lives for Ireland.

The parade begins around two o'clock and takes half an hour. A large crowd of onlookers gather at the departure point and a smaller number of people watch the procession, a few thousand strong, pass by. The parade is led by a colour party wearing uniform black jacket, trousers or skirt and white shirt. At the head is, the Irish tricolour, followed in the second rank by James Connolly's Starry Plough, the sunburst flag of the Fianna, the republican youth wing, and a blue flag with a gold trim bearing the words *Óglaigh na hÉireann*, the Irish name of the IRA. Finally, the flags of the four provinces of Ireland. No other flags or banners are carried.

At the republican plot in Milltown there are two memorials. The original cross was erected in 1912 to commemorate the Fenians of 1867. Next to it is the contemporary County Antrim memorial. Two interlocking blocks, which form a cross when viewed from above, list all the IRA volunteers and Sinn Féin members from the area who died in various campaigns since 1916, along with the names of known dead from the United Irish rebellion of 1798, two men killed in Emmet's 1803 rising, and the Fenians of 1867.

Against this backdrop, the proceedings at Milltown follow a form that dates back at least as far as the 1966 anniversary, and probably to well before this. A general introduction and welcome is followed by a reading of the 1916 Proclamation of Independence and then a decade of the Rosary. Wreaths are then laid by, or on behalf of, Sinn Féin, the IRA, republican prisoners, the Gaelic Athletic Association and the National Graves Association. This is followed by the playing of a lament by a solitary piper, as all flags are slowly lowered.

The proceedings end with a number of speeches. Easter is used not only to encourage the resolve of republican supporters but also to make public statements in response to the broader political situation. In 1994 Gerry Adams spoke as part of the moves towards peace following the Downing Street Declaration of December 1993, and in 1995 Martin McGuinness spoke in Belfast for the first time. Speeches are also made by a representative of the IRA: these reiterate their support for Sinn Féin and their resolve to continue the armed struggle. The speaker is hidden from view, but the numerous RUC officers in the vicinity make no attempt to stop the speech or to intercept the speaker; nobody attempts to take photographs during the speech, and all television cameras are conspicuously turned away from the platform.

Other commemorations of sacrificial death

Easter remains the most prominent and widespread commemoration in the republican calendar; but the practice of celebrating the desire for national and political aspirations through commemoration of sacrificial death is much more widespread. As well as the major anniversaries, numerous smaller events are held across Ireland throughout the year as republicans gather to remember individuals who have died in the struggle for Ireland. These local commemorations extend the tradition of the Easter memorials, and the contemporary struggle is thus personalised and exemplified through the actions of individuals.

An unbroken chain of struggle

The frequent repetition of public remembrance ensures that the resolve to continue the struggle is maintained. To give up or to compromise without achieving substantial gains would mean that these men and women had died in vain. The ritual of the Easter commemoration and the names on the County Antrim memorial allude to a sense of an unbroken chain of struggle, which extends from the rebels of 1798 through to the most recent IRA volunteer interred in Milltown - a continuum that each generation must honour and extend until Ireland is free.

Two forms of remembering

Republican and loyalist organisations have a broad similarity in their use of public parades for commemorative events, but there is a substantial difference in the structure and form of the parade between the two communities.

Differences in form

Loyalist events are characterised by military-style presentation of loyalist events, with a rigid separation of participants and spectators and the division of participants into distinct, independent groups. By contrast, the republican parades are much more open affairs. There is little formality, no structured dress code, and no separation by gender or age. Anyone can participate in a republican parade. People join in as individuals and as supporters of a common ideal, rather than as part of a formal group.

Although both commemorations include brash paramilitary-type bands, republican parades do not move with the same militarised step as those of the loyalists. Instead, they have a more relaxed and informal air about them. The crowd that follows the colour party includes large numbers of women and girls and even babies in prams, who are largely excluded from participating in Orange parades.

Loyalist parades are essentially triumphal expressions of a collective determination, a celebration of strength in unity and in brotherhood. Republican parades, on the other hand, commemorate the continued resolve in defeat and the determination to carry on the fight. The followers mourn the dead, draw strength from their sacrifice, and show that their heroes did not die in vain. This suggests something of the two historical traditions that are being drawn on in the contemporary commemorative practices: women are always sidelined by the march to war, but are always prominent at the resulting funeral ceremonies.

Differences in substance

These different practices emphasise two opposing senses of communal or ethnic identity and destiny that are grounded in an essential and exclusive sense of difference. This is made most explicit in the commemorations of the Somme and Easter, the two recent events that are most widely used to symbolise the divergent aspirations and senses of identity between the Protestant-Unionist and Catholic-Nationalist communities.

The Somme commemorations confirm that Ulster is Protestant and British, and Catholics are excluded as Catholics, since all the loyal orders remain exclusive to Protestants.

The Easter parades are, theoretically, open to anyone who wants to walk: nationalist and republican groups proclaim a non-sectarian and universalist ideology, and welcome supporters of all faiths (apart from the AOH, which is a specifically Catholic body). However, in practice the Easter parades are scarcely less exclusive than the Somme parades.

Exclusive republican symbolism

In a society where every aspect of life is potentially indicative of one or the other community, the structure and form of the Easter commemorations indicate a distinctly Catholic activity. The location and timing, as well as the more obvious religious symbols of the commemoration, the rosary and the Easter lily, enhance the identification with a religious anniversary. These features were continued by the republican movement when it claimed the inheritance of the event.

The religious sense of Easter is also connoted in the name for the events of 1916: it is not called a rebellion, a revolution or even an uprising, but simply The Rising. The Rising in Ireland coincides with the rising of Christ after the Crucifixion. The event is commemorated on Easter Sunday, as part of the Christian calendar, rather than on a Monday or every 24 April, as part of the secular

calendar. Thus the republican cause draws on long-standing and deeply felt religious codes for legitimacy.

Easter is commemorated and personified through the identities of the individuals who signed the Proclamation of Independence, who were executed as martyrs to the cause of Ireland and who today are honoured as vainly concealed, secularised modern-day saints.

Recent republican murals devoted to the hunger strikes drew quite clearly on religious iconography, and in particular Pieta-type imagery when depicting the plight of the men in the H Blocks. Their leader, Bobby Sands, like the seven signatories of the Proclamation before him, has become abstracted into the idealised hero figure, whose life and death represents the embodied virtues of the nationalist ideal.

In this he follows in the path not only of Pearse and Connolly, but also of Wolfe Tone, Robert Emmett and the Manchester Martyrs before them, whose memorials can be found in provincial towns throughout the south as martyrs to the cause of Ireland. The personal suffering and willing sacrifice of these individuals gives them moral authority over, and leadership of, the community of followers.

Loyalist symbolism

In contrast to this focus on individual heroes, the loyalist commemoration of the Somme is enacted through remembering and honouring the entire community of individuals involved. Although occasional references are made to the Ulster Protestant soldiers who received the Victoria Cross during the First World War, essentially the event is viewed as a collective sacrifice.

Immediately after the war some Protestant leaders were celebrated above others, and Carson is still widely lionised; but other figures of this era receive scant recognition nowadays. The individuals who fought and died may be remembered locally or on lodge banners; but, as with the numerous Orange worthies, they are no more than first amongst equals.

For the Protestants authority remains invested in the community of the faithful, collectively.

Using the past - forgetting similarity, remembering difference

Loyalist and republican traditions are rooted in a common ground and two distinct pasts. A shared history is used and re-worked to enhance the identity of each community and to mark it as emphatically different from the other. While the broad view of these commemorative practices suggests the similarity of such features as the parades, music and visual displays, many of the details serve to stress the distinctiveness of two identities rooted in opposing religious and political ideals.

The events of 1916 are commemorated in a way that builds on and strengthens their existing concepts of Protestant/Unionist and Catholic/Nationalist identities. But no less important an aspect of public commemorations are those inconvenient features of the past that contradict widely held assumptions or at least provoke awkward questions, and thereby rub against the grain of official and popular understanding and memory. These are the events, or facts of history, that are written out of the dominant literature, erased from public commemorations and forgotten by popular memory. Ireland is no different from other countries in this matter.

Function of public commemorations

Social memories do not draw on some unquestioned mass of empirical facts, but sift through the confusion of the past for evidence that serves to substantiate existing beliefs. Public commemorations help convert those selective details into unquestionable history. In Ireland popular memory and written history both forget the awkward, grey areas and mutually sustain the social truth of irreconcilable difference and antagonism between Protestant and Catholic.

Popular view of the Rising and the Somme

The importance in stressing the Catholic nationalism of Ireland or the loyal Protestantism of Ulster is to maintain an entrenched resolve behind the barricades of an essential identity. This means that greater emphasis has been placed on the differences between the two communities than on exploring what exists of a shared past.

The Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme are important in so far as they emphasise the irreconcilably different aspirations of Protestants and Catholics.

While the Protestant community were sacrificing their young men against German guns, the Catholic rebels were acknowledging the support of 'our gallant allies in Europe' as they rose up to stab Britain in the back.

Alternatively, the Irish nationalists were following heroic precedents in their legitimate aspirations to a God-ordained, independent nationhood, which had been constantly thwarted by the threats of violence by an undemocratic minority, who merely wished to maintain their discriminatory privileges.

'Ignored facts'

However, when one considers some of the ignored facts about the war years, the simple symmetry of the polarisation is difficult to sustain.

Catholics fighting in the First World War

The events of Easter 1916 have eclipsed the nationalist and Catholic contribution to the Great War. Remembrance of that contribution would only undermine the unity drawn around the independent Irish state, and obscure the clarity of the sense of distinction between Britain and Ireland.

On 20 September 1914, just two days after the Home Rule Bill had become an Act of Parliament,

John Redmond, leader of the Irish Party and of the nationalist Irish Volunteers, encouraged the organisation's 170,000 members to support the war effort. The 10th and 16th Divisions were recruited from the nationalist population and sent to England for training. In Ulster in 1915 Catholics volunteered in proportionately equal numbers to Protestants, and by autumn 1915 81,408 Irishmen had volunteered for the British Army. Some 27,000 were members of the Ulster Volunteer Force and 27,000 members of the Irish Volunteers. Only a minority of the membership of either the Ulster Volunteer Force or the Irish Volunteers ever joined up; but altogether over 200,000 Irishmen enlisted in the British forces during the war. Seventeen Catholic Irishmen won Victoria Crosses in the first 15 months of the war.

In Ireland, however, until the last few years the war has only been commemorated by unionists. Some memorials were erected in the south, but not with the public prominence they received in the north. The building of a National War Memorial in Dublin dragged on through the 1930s:

Today, the Irish National Memorial is in a sorry state ... the bleak granite, decapitated columns, broken-down hedges, rotted pergolas, damaged fountains and empty pavilions are aptly evocative of a long abandoned battlefield. Neglect verging on desecration symbolises the persistent indifference to the War and its legacy of successive administrations, anxious to guard the people from historical awareness lest they remember too much

An official change of attitude has meant that the memorial has recently finally been repaired and completed, although the war is still not regarded as an appropriate event through which one should remember one's Irish identity.

Limited contemporary support for the Rising

Republicans also refuse to confront the facts that support for the republican cause only became substantial after the defeat of the Rising, and that in the north republicans were largely unimpressed with Dublin's plans for their role in the Rising, and did nothing. Sinn Féin claimed over 70 per cent of the parliamentary seats in 1918, but they still gained less than 50 per cent of the vote, while Catholic Belfast remained supporters of the constitutional nationalist position.

Loyalist disloyalty

The nationalist contribution to the war is no less an inconvenience for the loyalists, who would ideally include all Catholics within the rebel camp, and see themselves as the paragons of Irish loyalty.

In turn this position, which emphasises the sacrifice on the Somme in 1916, allows them to forget or ignore the uncomfortable facts of 1914: that while the Irish Party was working through Parliament for Home Rule, loyalists had been on the verge of an armed rebellion against the Government; that they were unwilling to accept the will of the democratic majority in Parliament; that they had imported arms from Germany to support their effort; and that they had provoked a mutiny amongst the British army officers in Ireland in support of their cause.

The Protestant tradition of opposing locally unpopular Government decisions by the threat of armed rebellion is scarcely less time-honoured or widely documented than that of the nationalist community; but that opposition has always been clouded by fervent expressions of loyalty.

The Somme and loyalist paramilitaries

Militarism alone is seen as insufficient to establish the broader morality of the contemporary loyalist paramilitary cause. However, once the sacrifices of today are seen to match the sacrifices of 1916 then the cause is ennobled and the paramilitary campaign can legitimately map itself on to the heroic history of Ulster.

The UVF claim of the Somme dead that 'Not just today, seventy-five years on, but for ever more shall their name liveth ... Ne Obliviscaris', and contemporary paramilitary groups remember the fighting heroes of the past. At the same time, they also intend that the volunteers of the contemporary campaign will be remembered 'at the going down of the sun, and in the morning'.

Honouring the dead - murals

The practice of honouring the dead on murals is an extension of the wider process of legitimising paramilitary activities that began with the adoption of the 1912 UVF emblems, and of the battle of the Somme as the epitome of the courage, heroism and military prowess of the Ulstermen.

It is the Somme that provides the imagery and rhetoric for many of the memorial murals. One of the earliest of these was a UVF mural in Ballysillan, north Belfast, dating from 1986, which commemorated the dead and the imprisoned members of the organisation. The design was based on the UVF banners carried on parades, but with the list of campaigns fought in the First World War replaced by the names of UVF volunteers.

Another common image is derived from the Somme mural on Donegall Pass. This painting features three silhouetted figures mourning their fallen comrades; their heads are bowed and their hands rest on their weapons. This is the pose the guard of honour adopts at the state Armistice Day commemorations. This representation of sorrow has subsequently been used on a number of murals to the paramilitary dead. Two figures flank the memorial to UDA leader John McMichael at Roden Street, while a single figure mourns UVF gunman Brian Robinson in Woodvale; on Hopewell Avenue two figures mark the memorial to Red Hand Commando member Stevie McCrea.

In a further comparison between the sacrifice on the Somme and the sacrifice for modern Ulster, the Hopewell Avenue mural quotes and adapts lines from Laurence Binyon's poem 'For the Fallen', which is the standard eulogy at First World War commemorations:

For he shall not grow old
As we that are left grow old
Age shall not weary him
Nor the years condemn
At the going down of the sun
And in the morning
We will remember him.

This process, by which the paramilitary groups compare themselves and their dead with those who fell at the Somme, has been made more explicit elsewhere - in a communique issued by the UDA Inner Council on 1 July 1991

At this time of year when Ulster Loyalists everywhere commemorate and celebrate the sacrifices and victories throughout our proud history in general, but in particular at the siege of Londonderry and the great battles of the Boyne and the Somme. Let us not forget those, who during our present conflict, have made the supreme sacrifice, and those who have sacrificed their liberty, in our struggle.

Honouring the dead - bands and banners

As well as appearing on murals, McMichael, Robinson and McCrea are also commemorated by bands and on banners carried at Orange parades. While the Orangemen commemorate the sacrifice of Protestant martyrs for their faith and for the 'Glory of God', and remember the men of the 36th Ulster Division who died for King and Country, the paramilitary fight is fought for Ulster alone.

Another memorial, painted in 1991 in Percy Place to 'Councillor and Assemblyman George Seawright' (who was expelled from the DUP after suggesting that all Catholics should be incinerated, and later killed by the Irish People's Liberation Organisation) is symbolically linked to the Somme by a bunch of red poppies, but contextualised with the lines 'In remembrance of all those who have given their lives and their freedom in the struggle to keep Ulster Protestant'.

Private William (Billy) McFadzean

The linking of paramilitary casualties with the losses of the 36th Ulster Division in World War I is most clearly shown in a 1996 mural in East Belfast.

The mural shows two portraits, one of the 1916 Somme hero, Billy McFadzean (left), the other of William Miller (right), a member of the UVF shot by the RUC in 1983, with a bowed soldier, the legend 'UVF East Belfast, For God and Ulster' and the emblems of the Young Citizens Volunteers (the junior wing of the UVF) and the UVF. Unfortunately, only this small illustration is available at present.



This is just one of several murals featuring Billy McFadzean. In the Mount Vernon Park mural below on the left Billy is flanked by a roll call of battle sites from World War I. The mural below right was painted on the end wall of a block of flats and was paid for (£1,500) by the residents of the Clonduff area of East Belfast, about two miles from Billy's home. The bottom right hand corner is a copy of the telegram that was sent to his parents informing them that he was killed in action.



The Rising and the IRA

The past and present also merge in republicanism with its unbroken chain of sacrifice.

The phoenix

For example, the Hunger Strike memorial in Derry's Shantallow estate, and the Sands memorial in Twinbrook, symbolically situate the Hunger Strikes within the wider republican tradition, by including a prominent representation of a phoenix rising from the fires of death.

The phoenix was adopted into Irish politics as the emblem of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (the Fenians), who appeared in the 1860s and were centrally involved in the 1916 Easter Rising. The phoenix symbolises the process of rebirth from the ashes of defeat and thereby the indestructibility of the republican cause. It affirms the inevitability and certainty of continued risings until a United Ireland is obtained. Its historical resonance therefore is to link the IRA with their nineteenth-century counterparts. But it also resonates with the early years of the Troubles, as it was the rioting and burning of Catholic houses in the lower Falls area that brought about the rebirth of the IRA itself from an almost moribund position in 1969.

Just as republicans proclaim that the Irish people cannot be defeated, so the IRA rose from the ashes of previous defeated armed rebellions. The phoenix is one of a number of symbols that the republican movement uses to situate itself and its activities historically.

Easter lily

With its white petals, orange stamen and green leaves, this lily replicates the Irish tricolour. These days paper lilies are widely worn at Easter time as a symbol of remembrance of the Rising, but they also reaffirm a link with the Church. Although this lily was adopted as a symbol by Cumann na mBan, the republican women's movement, in the 1920s, the white lily also has a long association as a Christian symbol of the Virgin, and as such is used to decorate churches at Easter time.

The Rising in murals

These and many other republican symbols are brought together on murals to the Easter Rising, the seminal historical event for modern republicanism.

One of the most vibrant of these is on the Whiterock Road. Here the seven signatories to the proclamation of Irish Independence, along with the Countess Markievicz (the first woman elected as a Westminster MP, but also an acknowledgment of the role of women within the republican movement) appear over the date 1916, which is painted in huge flaming numbers. The Dublin GPO, headquarters of the rebels, burns in the corner, while on the apex of the gable the phoenix rises from the flames, beside the Starry Plough, symbol of the Irish Citizen Army, and an orange sunburst, a symbol used by the Repeal Association in the 1840s, the Fenians in the 1870s and the Irish Volunteers in 1914, and now the symbol of the Fianna Éireann, the republican youth movement.

1916 and the Provisional IRA

While republicans claim a long ancestry of rebellion, the Provisional IRA claim legitimacy for their present armed struggle by arguing that they are the direct inheritors of the Irish Republic proclaimed in 1916 by the Provisional Government. The moral position of the Irish Republican Army, its right to engage in warfare, is based on: (a) the right to resist foreign aggression; (b) the right to revolt against tyranny and oppression; and (c) the direct lineal succession with the Provisional Government of 1916, the first Dail of 1919 and the second Dail of 1921.

The subsequent Governments of the Republic are derived from the 1922 Dail, which, republicans

claim, betrayed the ideals of the 1916 declaration by approving the 'Treaty of Surrender' with Britain, and have therefore forfeited both their legitimacy and the support of the IRA. Easter 1916 provides the historical legitimacy, the ideology, the heroes and the models of activity for the contemporary republican movement.

Importance of Patrick Pearse & James Connolly

The ideology, a combination of nationalism and socialism, is derived from, and embodied in, the persons of Pearse and Connolly.

The first, a poet and schoolteacher steeped in Catholicism and the Celtic revival, invoked the rejuvenating power of a blood sacrifice: 'the old heart of the earth needed to be warmed with the red wine of the battlefields'. The second was a socialist, trade union organiser, Marxist political theorist and founder of the Irish Citizen Army. But, like Pearse, Connolly recognised that 'as of mankind before Calvary, it may be truly said without the shedding of Blood there is no Redemption'.

Pearse and Connolly, iconic heroes of 1916, have been adopted as models of the revolutionary in action. They are retained as the ancestors of the contemporary republican icon, Bobby Sands, who, like Connolly, went to his death knowing that although he might be certain to fail, he would inspire others to take up the challenge.

The resort to armed rebellion at Easter 1916 is seen as justified by the eventual success in achieving at least a partial self-rule in the face of a wavering British support for Home Rule. It is as the inheritors of the republican tradition that the IRA claim themselves justified in continuing the armed struggle.

Armed struggle in murals

Although a number of paintings do emphasise the armed struggle, paramilitary figures are not a dominant image on republican murals.

On the Falls Road a gunman in a balaclava representing 'Freedom's Sons' and 'D Company, 2nd Battalion, Belfast Brigade' stares out from amongst the shields of the four provinces (which are linked by razor wire), the tricolour and the Fianna sunburst. On the South Link in Andersonstown a mural entitled 'Ireland's Soldiers of Freedom' depicts IRA Volunteers, encompassed by republican symbols, in action poses.

Like the paramilitary figures on loyalist murals, IRA Volunteers pose in a landscape of emblems and symbols, in which harps, rifles, tricolours, the phoenix and larks, the symbols of tradition, are used to legitimise their activities.

As a counterpart to these celebrations of the gun, however, the sacrifices of these often anonymous volunteers remain an important link in the symbolic chain. The importance of the dead, as an example to others, is recalled on the Beechmount Avenue mural, in a quotation from Padraic Pearse: 'The fools the fools the fools! they have left us our Fenian dead, and while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace'.