



Ulster's Solemn League and Covenant.

Being convinced in our consciences that Home Rule would be disastrous to the material well-being of Ulster as well as of the whole of Ireland, subversive of our civil and religious freedom, destructive of our citizenship and perilous to the unity of the Empire, we, whose names are underwritten, men of Ulster, loyal subjects of His Gracious Majesty King George V., humbly relying on the God whom our fathers in days of stress and trial confidently trusted, do hereby pledge ourselves in solemn Covenant throughout this our time of threatened calamity to stand by one another in defending for ourselves and our children our cherished position of equal citizenship in the United Kingdom and in using all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland. ¶ And in the event of such a Parliament being forced upon us we further solemnly and mutually pledge ourselves to refuse to recognise its authority. ¶ In sure confidence that God will defend the right we hereto subscribe our names. ¶ And further, we individually declare that we have not already signed this Covenant.

The above was signed by me at _____
"Ulster Day," Saturday, 28th September, 1912.

— God Save the King. —



A pensive Scotland looks on

Introduction

One hundred years on from what was to be one the most defining episodes in modern Anglo-Irish history the unending flurry of colourful supplements, scholarly monographs and polemical commentaries all aimed at shedding further light on Irish Unionism's refusal to acquiesce in Liberal plans for an Irish parliament might reasonably lead one to speculate precisely how much more there is to be said about Protestant Ulster's pre-war 'stand for union'

Though certain well-documented aspects of that resistance narrative, such as the events surrounding 'Ulster Day' itself, the Buchanesque exploits of Major Fred Crawford or the tragic post-Covenant history of Sir Edward Carson's 'Citizen Army' on the Western Front have indeed become indelible parts of the collective Unionist psyche, it is probably fair to say that not all facets of the Unionist anti-home rule story will be quite so familiar to modern audiences.

Given the province's geographical situation at the eye of the home rule storm it is not entirely surprising that a good many studies of Unionist tactics during the period 1912-1914 have been distinguished by a marked '*Ulster-centrism*', an historical emphasis which, by its very nature, has at best tended to minimise and at worst, neglect entirely, the wider British and imperial context of the 'Irish question'. If, after all, Ulster was in the cockpit of the struggle, as opponents of home rule themselves sought to continually remind British audiences, government plans for an Irish legislature was a policy wholly devoid of moral or political legitimacy in the absence of a *UK-wide* plebiscite or General Election on the issue.

To recover that wider, archipelagic context of the home rule question, this publication focuses upon the one constituent of the British 'family of nations' which Ulster Unionists believed would prove most receptive to their 'kith and kin' overtures. As the one nation of the British Isles whose culture, history and

religious temperament most closely resembled that of Protestant Ulster, Edwardian Scotland, notwithstanding its strongly Liberal disposition, was naturally enough viewed by Unionists as an auspicious object of attention.

The ties which bound what historian Graham Walker has dubbed these most 'intimate [of] strangers' were of course numerous and long-established. During the 6th and 7th centuries the ancient celtic over-Kingdom of Dalriada spanned both Ulster *and* the outlying islands and western seaboard of Scotland. A thousand years later those geo-political connections would be further reinforced by James 1's sponsorship of what was to be one of the most ambitious experiments in social engineering undertaken by a modern state. Substituting an unreliable Gaelic chieftainship for a Protestant presence whose loyalty to the British crown was rather more assured the 17th century Plantation of Ulster would see thousands of Scots' colonists traverse the narrow Waters of Moyne to carve out new lives for themselves and their families in Antrim, Down and the Laggan region of north-east Donegal.

In the centuries that followed the North Channel would continue to serve as an important conduit for the ongoing transmigration of cultural values, religious ideas, commodities and peoples, so much so that one leading historian of modern Ireland, the late A.T.Q. Stewart, was led to remark that 'at the core of the Ulster problem is the problem of the Scots'. Terse yet provocative, Dr Stewart's seemingly uncomplicated observation invariably prompts the question of what precisely was 'the Ulster problem' and why were the people of Scotland deemed so critical to its resolution?



Dalriada: Cross-channel nation building

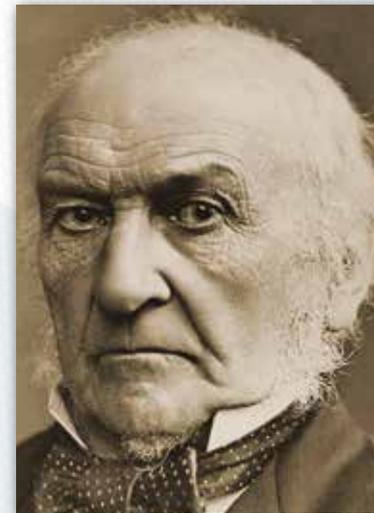
Ulster Unionism, Home rule and 19th Century Scotland

In 1886 the British Prime Minister and Honourable Member for Midlothian, William Ewart Gladstone, outlined his administration's plans for pacifying Irish national sentiment with the introduction of a Home Rule Bill, the centrepiece of which was to be the establishment of a 'two-order', unicameral Dublin legislature. Though Gladstone had envisaged the measure as providing for a strictly limited form of self-government, one that would serve to strengthen rather than diminish the Union, his assurances about the tightly-defined parameters of the proposed new assembly's legislative writ inspired little confidence amongst Irish Unionists determined to resist a measure which they viewed as a staging post towards the Union's eventual repeal.

In Ulster the Bill entrenched the already polarised divisions between the province's two national communities, with Catholics overwhelmingly supportive of the proposals and Protestants still committed to retaining the status quo. Across the North Channel, home rule would have a no-less profound impact on Scotland's own body politic. Up until 1886 Scottish Unionists had effectively lacked a galvanising cause capable of challenging Gladstone's hegemony north of the River Tweed. In the aftermath however of the 'Grand Old Man's' adoption

of Home Rule and the subsequent formation of a formidable new broad-based alliance between disenchanted Liberals and their Orange and Conservative allies all that was to change.

Beyond their geographical proximity and shared Presbyterian heritage the intimacy of contemporary Ulster Scots relations was under-girded further by a common political and commercial culture that spanned the North Channel. Archibald Cameron Corbett, the radical Unionist MP for Glasgow Tradeston was the brother of Thomas Lorimer Corbett, the Presbyterian Liberal Unionist Member for North Down. T.W. Russell, the controversial tenants' rights champion and free-thinking Unionist representative for South Tyrone was the Cupar-born son of a Fife crofter while the Belfast-born William



William Ewart Gladstone

Thompson, the future Lord Kelvin, combined his pioneering scientific researches with a political career dedicated above all else to the Union's retention, serving as President of the West of Scotland Unionist Association between 1886 and 1892.

Naturally anxious to exploit these historic ties, 19th century Unionists consciously sought to essay their pleas for the Union's retention around a 'kith and kin' narrative which invoked a myriad of religious, cultural and geo-political commonalities. In a speech to Stirlingshire Unionists in May 1886 T.W. Russell provided a flavour of this 'soul brother' trans-channel Unionism:

'What, I ask, have they [the Unionists of Ireland] done that they are to be deprived of their imperial inheritance...three hundred years ago Ulster was populated by Scotch settlers for State reasons...you are bound to remember this. The men there are bone of your bone, flesh of your flesh. The blood of the Covenanters also courses through their veins; they read the same Bible, they sing the same Psalms, they have the same [Presbyterian] church polity. Two hundred years ago, when the Empire was in peril, the descendents of these Scotch settlers, hunted from pillar to post, remembering that they belonged to an imperial race, turned 'desperately to bay' under the walls of Derry and left a by no means dishonourable record of their prowess for the historian. Indeed, the descendents of these men have made Ulster what it is today...'



T.W. Russell

Russell's emotive peroration was, indeed is, highly revealing, underlining as it does those subjective features of the Ulster Scots relationship Unionists believed would prove most effective in stirring the Scots political imagination; references to the latter's imperial contribution, the undisguised appeal to a shared Presbyterian heritage bolstered by virtue and sacrifice and an explicit appeal to the material and cultural prosperity accruing to both regions on account of Union.

Despite however what Ulster Protestants clearly took to be the imperishability of these historical bonds attracting the sort of full-blooded support believed necessary to defeat Gladstone's prospectus was to prove anything other than straightforward. Beyond the great economic metropolis of Glasgow and its industrial hinterland rural, small-town Scotland remained firmly rooted in a tradition of

popular protest against landlordism and privilege, clinging limpet-like to Gladstonian Liberalism as a secular article of faith. In both the established Kirk and the dissenting Free Churches many Scottish Presbyterians took the view that Ireland's Protestants had little to fear from a new Dublin parliament. Moreover, many imperially-minded Scots took the view that if indeed Irish Unionists were as attached to the Empire as they claimed, then surely home rule, given the anticipated federalization of His Majesty's realms, could do little conceivable harm to that connection either.

Though Irish loyalists may have looked understandably askance at the less than full-blooded response to their petitions, the numerical strength of the Unionist parliamentary alliance ensured that Gladstone's proposals mounted little in the way of practical threat to the Union's short-term survival. Having however helped thwart the 1893 Bill during the final stages of its parliamentary circuit ironically it was to be the same House of Lords, which by virtue of its rejection of David Lloyd George's controversial 'Peoples Budget' in 1909, would once again thrust the issue of Irish self-government to the forefront of British political debate.

In the two General Elections that followed the Unionist-dominated upper houses' rejection of the budget, the new Liberal leader, H.H. Asquith, found his administration's future wholly dependant on Westminster's forty Nationalist MP's. With the passage of the 1911 Parliament Act, a measure that allowed the Lords to now merely delay, rather than rebuff, legislation sent from the lower chamber, the political arithmetic of the post-1910 House of Commons meant that the scene was now set for the third, and potentially most explosive, instalment of the Irish question to date.

Pre-Covenant Politics: Sacred and Secular

Though there was little gainsaying the energies spent by Ulster Protestant in the battle for the political soul of Edwardian Scotland, from the outset of the third Home Rule Bill Unionists were nonetheless as prone to vent their frustration at the perceived apathy of their co-religionists as they were to



Herbert Henry Asquith

proclaim the ineffability of their shared ethnic and cultural heritage. In January 1913, for example, a speech by the Ulster-born firebrand preacher, J. Victor Logan encapsulated a sense of that simmering frustration when he claimed that: ‘*if the present generation of Scotsmen who wished to force Home Rule – that is to say, Rome Rule on Ireland could be lifted out of their glorious little country and set down for about three weeks in some central province of South America, they would come home cured of their growing indifference for Protestantism and cured of a desire to force Ulster under the tyranny and the foot of the Church of Rome*’.

A minister in the traditionally liberal United Free Church of Scotland, Logan’s attack was aimed not only at his own denomination’s rather ambiguous position with regards Home Rule, but at the wider Presbyterian community’s perceived indifference towards the Bill’s religious implications. In a bid to counter what some Irish Presbyterians claimed had been both the systematic propagation of the Home Rule message in Scotland and the unchecked spread of the claim that Ulster’s largest denomination was unperturbed by the prospect of Redmonite ascendancy, it was decided that a huge, Presbyterian Convention be held in Belfast. In a *Witness* editorial penned just days before the Convention, the organisers outlined the event’s primary objectives, stating:



‘*Irish Presbyterians desire to appeal in the first instance to Scottish Presbyterians, the majority of whom are descendents of those Scotch Presbyterians who were sent over some three centuries ago to colonise and develop Ulster in the interests of civilisation and the kingdom...[and] one of our resolutions makes a special reference...to Scottish Presbyterians not to desert the descendents of those sent over to plant Ulster or to leave them to the un-covenanted mercies of Mr Redmond and the Irish Romanists who continue to threaten them with the strong arm because they are true to Scottish traditions, Scottish religion and Scottish associations*’.

According to the calculations of the *Glasgow Herald* the Convention would see an estimated forty to fifty thousand male Presbyterians, (almost half of the province’s adult male Presbyterian community) descend on the city. From the platforms a number of keynote speakers, including the Convention’s organiser, Thomas Sinclair, delivered a series of pointed allusions to the tangibility of Ulster Scots kinship, recalling for example Scottish assistance for their Ulster brethren during the persecutions of 1641. Adding to the Scottish ambience of the event, one prominent United Free Church opponent of Home Rule, the Rev. Dr. Charles Salmond of Edinburgh, concluded his remarks with the prayer that as a ‘Scottish Presbyterian conversant with Irish conditions and mindful of our many ancestral

connections – John Knox, Andrew Melville, Jenny Geddes and Thomas Chalmers etc – may God shield and protect you’. In Ulster (and indeed in Scotland) the Convention was held to be an unqualified propaganda success. In an editorial befitting its then ultra-Conservative disposition, Glasgow’s staunchly pro-Union *Herald* proclaimed that if ‘Clydeside and Glasgow’ found itself in the unenviable position of Protestant Ulster ‘we should then talk and act much as our kinsfolk across the Irish Channel do’.

Impassioned as such *cri de coeurs* were as manifestations of Ulster Scots interconnectedness, such partisanship also perhaps betrayed a certain naiveté, proclaiming as they did a set of timeless, romanticized notions of cultural commonality rather than the more complex interactions between politics and culture, interactions which in a Scottish context at least tended to produce Liberal and Radical, as opposed to Unionist effects.

If the massed Unionist and Conservative forces were to prove incapable of entirely eclipsing the Liberal Party’s continuing dominance of Scotland’s political system, there were nevertheless signs that the nation was beginning to respond favourably towards loyalist Ulster’s jeremiads.

An early opportunity for gauging this perceived shift in Scottish attitudes was to be a December 1911 by-election triggered by the North Ayrshire MP, Andrew Macbeth Anderson’s appointment as Solicitor-General for Scotland. To ensure the Ulster cause was given the fullest possible hearing, the Unionist Associations of Ireland (UAI) took upon itself the onerous task of canvassing virtually every one of North Ayrshire’s electors in the run up to the contest. Naturally concerned that Unionist claims should not go unchallenged in the west of Scotland, John Redmond promptly dispatched three of his Irish Parliamentary Party MP’s to the constituency to plead the home rule case. It was to have little effect. In one of the first serious electoral blows to Asquith’s administration, the Unionist candidate, Duncan Frederick Campbell succeeded in overturning the Liberal’s slender majority and take the seat by some 271 votes. In its assessment of the result the UAI congratulated itself on the efficacy of its campaign, singling out in particular the work of its West of Scotland branch, headed by HRS Woods, in having helped swing the poll decisively in Unionism’s favour. No less ebullient were the views of the staunchly Orange *Belfast Weekly News* which proclaimed Campbell’s victory to be a decisive counterblast to any lingering notions of Scots’ apathy towards home rule, concluding that when the issue was set before the nation at a General Election ‘it will be found that the heart of Scotland is still strong for the Union’.

Instructive as this and subsequent by-elections were to be in terms of measuring how strong ‘the heart of Scotland’ in fact was for the Union, electoral contests constituted but one barometer of Scottish popular opinion. If they were to

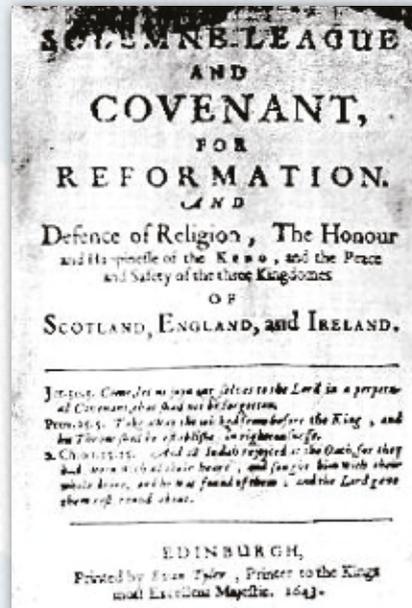
impress on Home Rulers and their Liberal allies the lengths to which the Ulstermen were prepared to go in resisting the Bill, those responsible for directing Unionist strategy duly acknowledged that their opposition now required a good deal more than fine speechifying or sporadic by-election victories. For inspiration, they once again looked to Scotland.

‘A Fine Old Document’: Ireland’s Peculiarly Scottish Call to Arms

In the wake of the great Balmoral Review of April 1912, where Sir Edward Carson had implored the 100,000 strong crowd to raise aloft their right hands and repeat after him ‘Never, under any circumstances will we submit to Home Rule’, the Unionist leader and his inner cabal began to discuss the possibility of devising a suitable oath by which to bind together the province’s loyalist resistance. The matter was left in the capable hands of Carson’s trusty lieutenant, Captain James Craig. A master tactician and practical genius par excellence, Craig however was no intellectual and by his own admission found it no straightforward matter coming up with an appropriate form of words to which the learned and un-lettered alike might subscribe. Discovering a furtive-looking Craig hunched over a desk in London’s Constitutional Club one day with pencils and paper in hand, the Belfast businessman B.W.D. Montgomery suggested that the Captain look no further than ‘the old Scotch Covenant... a fine old document full of grand phrases and thoroughly characteristic of the Ulster tone of mind at this day’. Believing that subject to certain cosmetic alterations the 1581 pledge might indeed provide a suitable template for the proposed oath, Craig set to work on transcribing a verbatim copy of the text before forwarding the document to the Ulster



B.W.D. Montgomery

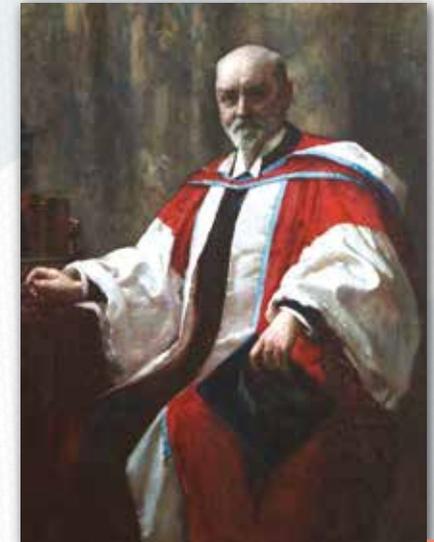


The Template

Unionist Council’s special five-man Commission for approval. On closer inspection however it was decided that notwithstanding the remarkably similar religious backdrops to the respective crises in 16th century Scotland and Edwardian Ulster, the Covenant’s florid Jacobean language was perhaps a little too turgid and historically bound up with the politics of early modern Scotland to be helpful in rallying what the Unionist MP Ronald McNeill described as a ‘modern democratic community’. In the event, Thomas Sinclair (1838-1914), a doyen of Liberal Unionist politics and the leading Presbyterian layman of his day was tasked with composing an altogether more grammatically succinct oath.

The scion of a wealthy Belfast merchant family, from an early age Sinclair had cut a precocious figure. Having graduated from Queen’s College, Belfast in 1856 with first class honours and gold medal in Mathematics followed by a Masters Degree with further gold medals in Logic, Political Economy and English Literature three years later, it is hardly surprising that Sinclair was to be subsequently lauded as one of the most gifted students in the University’s history. Seemingly destined for a stellar career in academia or one of the professions Sinclair instead chose to channel his prodigious talents into a myriad of causes including the maintenance of Victorian Belfast’s robust economic health, championing the role of his Church in Irish public life and an impassioned advocacy of Gladstonian Liberalism. During his university career he had been exposed to the intellectually-subversive, anti-establishment philosophy of another Presbyterian Ulster Scots luminary, the Ayrshire-born Professor of Logic and Metaphysics, Dr James McCosh. Having himself been mentored by Dr Thomas Chalmers, whose name was regularly invoked in Irish Presbyterian circles, McCosh inculcated in the young Sinclair an abiding evangelical passion for the poor and un-churched together with a desire to preserve the individual citizen’s autonomy against the seemingly ceaseless encroachments of an all-powerful state.

For one so attached to the principles of Gladstonian social reform, the British Prime Minister’s 1885 *volte face* on Irish self-government was to be a



Unlikely architect of rebellion

devastating blow. The following year Sinclair forcefully spelt out the rationale behind the new Liberal Unionist creed when he proclaimed: *'we shall show to the world that come what may, Ulster will never consent to yield up her citizenship or be expelled from the Imperial Parliament to be downgraded to junior partner in a subordinate colony'*. Throughout the rest of his life, that determination to resist any attempt to coerce Unionist Ulster into 'yielding up her citizenship' would serve as the lodestar of Sinclair's entire political life's work.

Keenly aware of his own denomination's proud tradition of radical popular protest and fiercely protective of his Ulster Scots ancestry, Irish Unionism's finest wordsmith was therefore an ideal architect for drawing up this latter-day Presbyterian declaration of intent. As with Craig's early experimental efforts, Calvinist Scotland's rich Covenanting heritage was to prove instructive.

Of those sacred mobilizing contracts arguably the most famous had been 1638's National Covenant. Though primarily a Scottish document, the Covenant was also signed by large numbers of Scots Presbyterians who had settled in Ulster. In 1644 a new Solemn League and Covenant appeared aimed at preserving and extending the Presbyterian settlement throughout the three kingdoms. Like its predecessor the new declaration was also administered in various locations throughout north-eastern Ireland where it was signed by upwards of 16,000 'persons of age and understanding'.

Despite their rather dry, legalistic language, Sinclair promptly set to work on incorporating the temper of these two sources into what was to become Ulster's own Solemn League and Covenant. The final text which, in the interests of brevity, Sinclair had redacted by almost one-third, was then presented to the Unionist Council's Special Commission, pending Carson's approval. In August a copy was forwarded to 'the Leader' who was convalescing in the German spa resort of Bad Homburg. On 21 August an enthused Carson telegraphed Unionist HQ declaring 'I would not change a word of the declaration which I consider excellent'.

For all Sinclair's efforts to place a distinctly Presbyterian stamp upon the pledge, Dr (later Sir) Alexander McDowell, Moderator of the church's General Assembly remained concerned at one particular passage of the proposed Covenant; namely those phrases which he believed implied the assumption of certain actions *without* the possibility of modifying aims and objectives in accord with possible, *future* political circumstances. Anxious to forestall a potentially indefinite period



Signing of the 1638 Covenant

of loyalist resistance McDowell sought an assurance from the Covenant's sponsors that the text's validity would be modified so as to confine such opposition to the present crisis. Mindful of the political clout wielded by the church in Ulster society, Sinclair dutifully obliged and agreed to reframe the text whose final draft merely now bound adherents together 'throughout *this*, our time of threatened calamity'.

Ulster Day in Scotland

For the historian of modern Ulster Scots history, the study of northern Protestant migration remains regrettably hampered by the fact that Scotland's own census records fail to distinguish cross-channel migrants by religious affiliation. Although the majority of Scotland's Irish community were Roman Catholic, a significant influx of economic migrants from the four predominately Protestant counties of north-eastern Ireland also points towards the existence of a coherent, albeit frequently neglected community of Ulster Protestant émigrés. Most of those who crossed the North Channel during this period did so to avail of the economic opportunities afforded by the 19th and early 20th century boom in Scottish heavy industry. Though significant pockets of Ulster Protestant settlement were to be found in such regions as Stirlingshire, the Lothians and Dumbartonshire etc, Scotland's industrial geography meant that the



Clydeside's ladies 'stand by their men'



Glaswegians register their protest

overwhelmingly majority of these migrants flocked to the great commercial hub of greater Glasgow or the industrial hinterlands of north and south Lanarkshire.

Glasgow

As the self-proclaimed 'second city of Orangeism', Glasgow was an obvious focal point for Ulster Day in Scotland. Initially, the Unionist Association of Ireland had designated the Wellington Street headquarters of its West of Scotland branch as the city's sole signing venue. In the week however leading up to Ulster Day, Hugh Wood, the agent responsible for choreographing Loyalist propaganda in the west of Scotland, was notified that the numbers of Glasgow-based Ulster folk anxious to sign either the Covenant or the corresponding Women's Declaration were much greater than the UAI had first anticipated. To accommodate this expected upsurge in signatories Wood saw to it that a number of additional venues were made available, including Govan's Conservative and Unionist Rooms, the Candleriggs headquarters of the Grand Orange Lodge of Scotland as well as a number of local Orange Halls in staunchly Protestant working-class districts of the city like Camlachie and Partick. In common with Ulster Day in the province itself, the signing of the Covenant in Glasgow bore eloquent testimony to the sheer breadth of pan-class Protestant solidarity. In its coverage of the day's event, the *Scotsman* noted that 'mingling with the labourer and artisan were shopkeepers and city men, not a few clergy and representatives of the upper-classes [who] arrived in well-appointed motor cars'.

Although the *Glasgow Herald* remarked 'nothing in the nature of a general demonstration was attempted to mark the occasion', certain elements of the loyalist alliance were nonetheless clearly determined to lend an air of Ulsteresque theatricality to proceedings. Attired in their distinctive khaki uniforms and sombreros some two hundred members of the Whiteinch and Partick Irish

Unionist Club, the only one of its kind in Scotland, provided a colourful backdrop to Glasgow's signings, marching in rank from its headquarters in the east of the city to Wellington Street accompanied by fife and pipe bands to the strains of 'Scotland the Brave' and 'Highland Laddie'.

Impressive as this show of pan-Protestant fraternity undoubtedly was, not everyone was quite so enraptured as the *Herald* correspondent who described the Covenant as bearing 'testimony to the feelings which Asquith's Home Rule proposals have aroused amongst Ulster Protestants'. In its coverage of the event, the hostile *Daily Record* dismissed the scenes in Glasgow as 'a quiet day of slow signing and that from none of the signing locations was there anything reported as even resembling a crush'. The evening before Ulster Day one Liberal Home Ruler, Alexander McCallum Scott, addressed an open-air meeting in his Bridgeton constituency where he raised the question of whether or not the Unionist 'doctrine' of a minority's resisting, by force of arms, the settled will of a majority was one that 'would hold much appeal for Scottish audiences'.

Actions however spoke louder than words. When the city's signing lists were returned to Belfast for calibration, few could argue that Glasgow had not done Ulster proud. Taken together the names recorded at the city's various signing stations amounted to 7,265, just over half the total number of Covenant and Declaration signatures recorded in the whole of Scotland. Had subscription not been confined to Glaswegians born in the nine counties, that number would have been considerably higher.

Lanarkshire

If, on account of its sheer size, civic importance and huge Irish-born community, the great commercial and industrial *entrepot* of Glasgow predictably supplied the Ulster resistance with the largest number of cross-channel Covenant signatories outside of the province, the complexion of Scotland's industrial geography ensured that the pledge would be met with an equally enthusiastic response in other regions of the country with high concentrations of Irish Protestant exiles. With its extensive network of coalfields and iron works, one such Covenant 'hot-spot' was to be the heavy industrial powerhouse of Lanarkshire. Two months before the Covenant's launch the county had played host to a massive anti-Home Rule demonstration when an estimated 40,000 Scottish brethren descended upon the town of Coatbridge to vent their outrage at the government's Irish policy. Though now a predominantly Catholic town, 19th century Coatbridge was home to a thriving Protestant migrant community. As Donald MacRaild has noted, by the middle of the 19th century almost half of Coatbridge's mineral miners were Irish born, with Protestants outnumbering their Catholic co-nationals by some

two – one. In common with many other areas of the country that played host to large numbers of Ulster men and women, Coatbridge's exiles retained a keen identification with the 'old country', a fact underlined by the designation of one of the region's largest lodges as Coatbridge LOL 133, 'Loyal Sons of Ulster'. Like their fellow Ulstermen in neighbouring Coatbridge, Motherwell's Irish fraternity were equally keen to assert their cherished Ulster identity with one lodge, composed almost exclusively of South Tyrone loyalists employed at the Gartsherrie-based James Baird's and Sons, assuming the title of 'Killyman True Blues'. Staunch Presbyterians with a typically paternalistic Victorian concern with the spiritual welfare of its 10,000 strong workforce – the overwhelming majority of whom were Protestants – Baird's were enthusiastic Orange patrons, providing bunting and flags for the Lodge's yearly 'Twelfth' celebration, not to mention unapologetic advocates of the Unionist cause.



James Baird: Orange patron

Despite the fact that the Covenant's impending launch had not been publicised in Lanarkshire's press in the run up to Ulster Day, industrial Monkland's loyal 'sons (and daughters) of Ulster – estimated by the *Glasgow Herald* to number somewhere in the region of 5,000 – gave the scheme their whole hearted support. In Motherwell five hundred signed the pledges whilst Coatbridge was to be the scene of the single largest Scottish signing outside of greater Glasgow, providing some 987 signatures.

In neighbouring Bellshill, also home to a sizeable Ulster migrant population, a further three hundred ascribed their names to the document. One prominent Bellshill signature was that of Donaghadee-born entrepreneur, Francis Dobson Dorrian. Having left his native County Down as a youngster Dorrian eventually made his name and fortune in Lanarkshire's thriving coal industry. An active member of his local Orange Lodge, Dorrian's commercial acumen was matched by a similarly successful career within the country's loyal institutions. Having served Grand Lodge in various posts throughout the 1930's his rise within Orangeism would culminate in 1946 with his promotion to the Grand Mastership of the Grand Lodge of Scotland upon the retirement of Lt. Col. Archibald McInness Shaw.

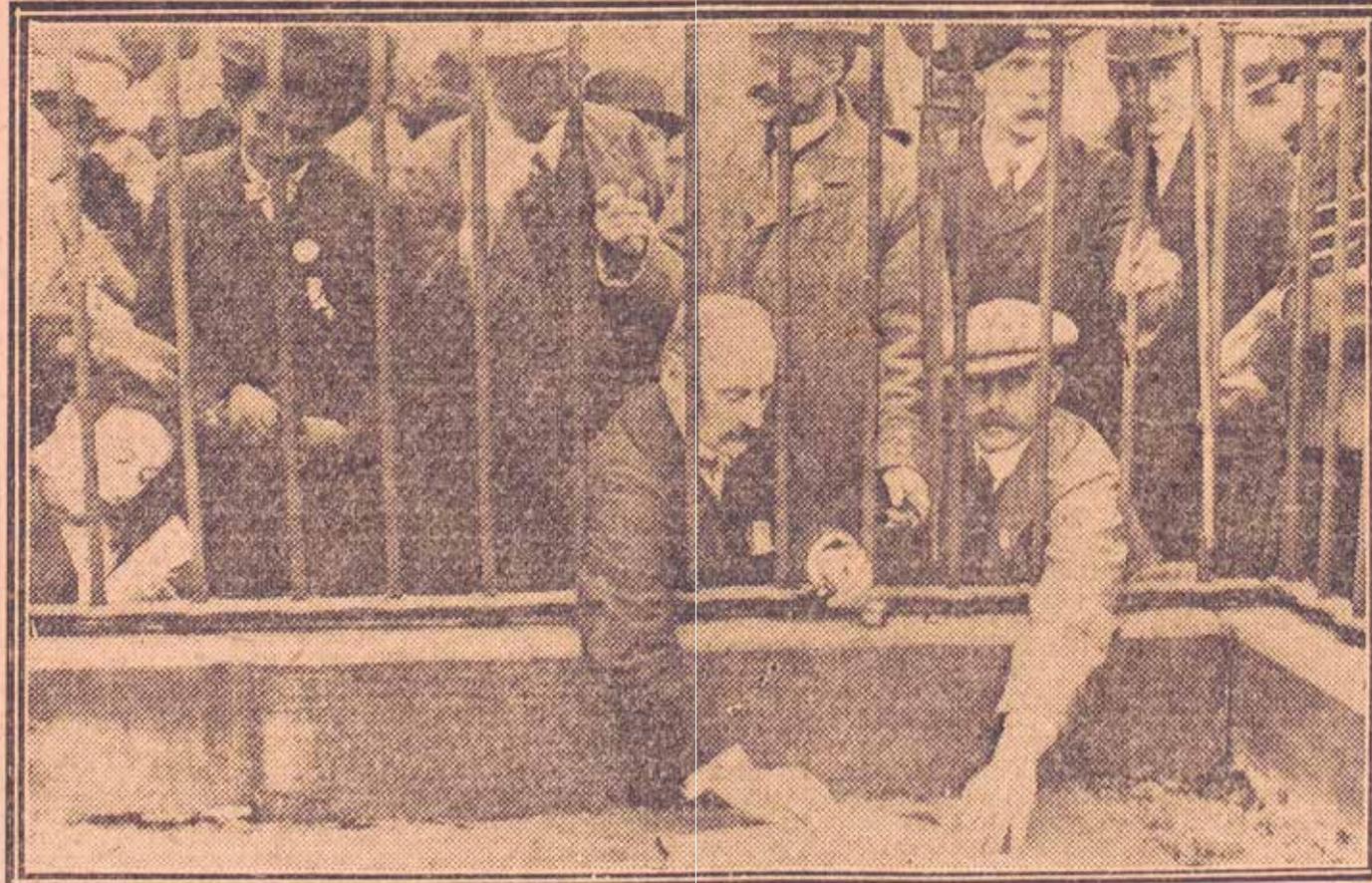
The West and Central Lowlands

Throughout the central lowlands of western Scotland the migratory pull of the region's manufacturing and industrial infrastructure led the Unionist Associations of Ireland to provide signing facilities in other centres of Ulster Protestant settlement including Renfrewshire, Stirlingshire and Dumbartonshire. Given their well-founded reputations as traditional strongholds of native Orangeism, the West Renfrewshire shipbuilding and port-towns of Greenock and Port Glasgow provided further boons for the Covenant organisers. In the latter, which, like Coatbridge was home to a 'Loyal Sons of Ulster' district lodge, some 515 Ulster folk signed the Covenant. In Greenock the 856 signatures amassed at the town's three signing stations accounted for just over 6% of the Scottish total.

In the western coastal towns of Ayr and Troon, resorts with an enduring appeal for generations of Ulster day-trippers, Irish-born residents also made clear their desire to identify with the Covenant initiative. The smaller Troon, home to around one hundred and fifty Ulster exiles, provided ninety signatures and Ayr one hundred and eighty eight. In the nearby parliamentary division of Ayrshire North, the presence of the Baird's-owned Kilwinning Iron Works provided the scheme's sponsors with a further pool of prospective Covenanters. Throughout Ayrshire's three parliamentary divisions, the county, (including the town of Kilmarnock), supplied some 1,824 names to the overall Scottish total.

Given the clear correlation between the industrial expansion of central, lowland Scotland and the steady influx of cross-channel Protestant migrants to the west of the country, it was understandable that the UAI should seek to extend an opportunity for identifying with the cause at home. However, even in those regions of Scotland without a significant concentration of Irish Protestants, the Covenant's organisers were just as adamant that no stone be left unturned in terms of underlining the depth of Ulster Scots hostility towards Home Rule. Two examples of the movement's determination to exploit even the most numerically insignificant vestiges of unionist support were to be found in Fife and Tayside. As an essentially rural county with little in the way of industrial infrastructure the four signatories who recorded their protests in the eastern coastal town of Kirkcaldy underlined Fife's unattractiveness as a destination for Ulster Protestants. Despite its having a relatively flourishing Orange culture in the early 19th century, the sole signature of Limavady-born Peter Suran in Broughty Ferry attested to an even smaller Ulster Scots presence in historical Forfarshire.

In contrast to the examples of Glasgow and Lanarkshire, north of the River Forth such communities were constituted on an altogether more modest scale. Yet even here, the discernible outlines of tightly-knit Irish migrant communities ensured a



Signing the Ulster Covenant on Saturday on the Covenanters' Stone in Greyfriars Kirkyard. (Lemon.)

Of all Scotland's Ulster Covenant signings arguably the most dramatic was that which took place in the kirkyard of Edinburgh's iconic Greyfriars Church.

Determined to replicate the scenes witnessed in Greyfriars almost three centuries earlier, John Bamford, head of the Ulster propaganda and electoral machine in the east of the country, encouraged his followers to sign the pledge on the very headstone used by Presbyterians to sign the National Covenant of 1638.



Broxburn: Still beating the Orange drum

broad geographical diffusion of support for the pledge.

During the earliest phase of anti-Home Rule agitation, James Craig had addressed an audience in Bannockburn in Stirlingshire. As a location laden with clear historical resonances of medieval Scotland's own 'fight for freedom', there was of course nothing random in this seemingly most unlikely of venues. Indeed, the impression that Bannockburn was to prove something of a 'hot-spot' for pro-Ulster resistance is one borne out by the contents of a telegram received by Carson in February 1914 from would-be Volunteers in the district informing the Unionist leader that in the event of the government's martial coercion of the province, 'a large number of men from this district would be prepared to make their way to Ireland to swell the Ulster ranks'. In the county town of Stirling some one hundred and fifty Ulstermen marked Ulster Day by filing into the town's Orange Hall to register their support for the Covenant.

In other regions of the central lowlands such as West Lothian, where the mid-Victorian boom in the country's shale oil industry had transformed the once agricultural heart of eastern Scotland into a veritable klondike of pit villages and speculative oil works, a coherent Ulster Protestant social grouping was also to be found. In common with the much larger migrant communities of Clydeside and Lanarkshire, Ulster-born residents of towns such as Bo'ness, Armadale, Uphall and Broxburn made considerable contributions to the industrial, social and political life of their host society. In the shale mining town of Broxburn, (where, according to the *West Lothian Courier* 'the Unionist cause [was] flourishing'), a raft of institutions, including no less than five Orange lodges (one of which, the 'Hearts of Oak' had been founded by an Ulsterman), a Unionist Association, a Woman's Unionist Association and a branch of the Protestant Progressive Society



Laying a marker

provided an array of social outlets for the region's thriving Ulster born community. Perusing the lists of those two hundred and forty three Broxburnians who signed the pledge in the town's Alexandria Hall, diligent Covenant students will doubtless be forgiven for raising an eyebrow on encountering the names of two rather unlikely Ulster Covenanters - one John Redmond and his brother, Willie!

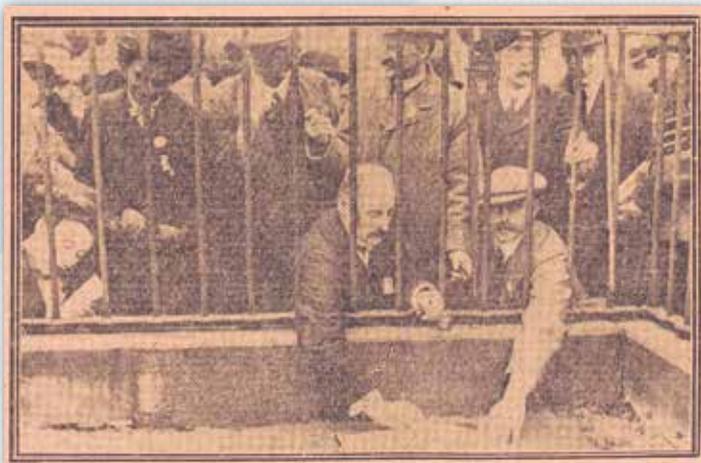
In marked contrast to Glasgow, where it was estimated Ulster-born Protestants made up almost a quarter of the city's Irish population, the overwhelming majority of Edinburgh's Irish were of southern Catholic extraction. Determined that the Scottish capital would not be outdone by its larger neighbour, John Bamford, the UAI's Eastern divisional chief-agent sought to compensate for the city's relatively small number of prospective signatories by proposing to have the pledge signed in one of the nation's most revered historical locations. Fully aware of the emotive symbolism of administering the Covenant in Greyfriars Kirkyard, Bamford encouraged prospective subscribers to do so on the sacred 'through stone', the very headstone on which 17th century Presbyterians had registered their opposition to what they saw as the iniquities of an un-covenanted polity. Unfortunately for Bamford, however, this elaborately staged piece of political theatricality did not quite go exactly to plan. As proceedings were getting underway the unwelcome appearance of the Church's caretaker threatened to bring down a hasty curtain on the historical re-enactment. Informed that he did not have the permission of the city's authorities to use the church's grounds, Bamford duly ushered the crowd outside the graveyard, curiously leaving pens, ink and signing forms on the 'through stone'. To avoid any suggestion of illegality, Bamford simply instructed the would-be Covenanters to place their arms through the railings, thereby signing *on* Greyfriar's property whilst remaining technically *outside* the jurisdiction of the graveyard itself! In total, some forty six manually dextrous Ulster folk signed the document in this fashion. In addition to those who were effectively told to 'Get off the Grass' in Greyfriars, a total of 560 Ulster migrants signed the pledge in the Scottish capital.

Reflecting on the Greyfriars incident, J.M. Hogge, the Liberal MP for Edinburgh East denounced the historical symbolism of the signings as an affront to the hallowed memory of Scotland's covenanting past, describing the events of the 28

September as ‘not only an act of sacrilege but a total travesty of the Home Rule perspective’. In Falkirk Hogge’s Liberal colleague, J. Murray Macdonald was no less contemptuous of what Unionists claimed were the analogies between the 17th Century Scots Covenants and its latter-day Ulster ‘equivalent’. Unlike those who had rallied behind the former on account of the genuine wrongs inflicted upon Presbyterian Scotland, Macdonald believed the Ulstermen were signing a ‘covenant of rebellion before any injustice had been done to them or even threatened’.

In Ireland itself, Home Rulers were quick to denounce any equivalency between the Ulster Covenanters and their Scottish ‘predecessors’. In the view of the South Down Nationalist MP, Jeremiah McVeagh, the UAI’s choice of Greyfriars represented a wholesale ‘degradation of one of the most hallowed names in Scottish history’.

Given the emotive traction which episodes such as the ‘Killing Times’ and the signing of its own national Covenants clearly continued to exert upon latter-day Scotland’s national consciousness, the Unionist strategy of framing its anti-Home Rule strategy through recourse to that past was always likely to produce impassioned responses. Buoyed by the cross-channel reaction to the Covenant, Unionists where, however, hardly minded to heed the carping of Radical or Nationalist critics. In a speech delivered to the Mid-Lanarkshire Women’s Unionist



Historical passion play or farce?

Association in the wake of Ulster Day, the Ayrshire MP, Sir George Younger, again reiterated the now well-rehearsed refrain of Ulster Scots connectivity by hailing the latter day Covenanters thus:

‘The same Scottish blood runs through their veins as ran in the veins of the men who signed the Solemn League and Covenant in Scotland many years ago and when these men said a thing, rest assured, they meant it!’.

In a number of signing centres throughout Scotland, Ulster Day became in effect ‘Ulster week’. In common with the policy adopted in other parts of the United Kingdom it was decided that a number of signing centres be kept open for a further seven days to accommodate those who had been unable to sign their protests on 28th September. When Wood and Bamford eventually returned the completed lists to Unionist HQ for calibration, the figures suggested that the ‘Heart of Scotland’ indeed remained strong for the Union.

By signing either the Covenant or the female Declaration some 14,171 men and women of Ulster birth had declared their resolve never to recognise the authority of the proposed Dublin legislature. If these statistics accounted for a mere 3% of the overall total number of signatures worldwide, the fact that Scots-domiciled subscribers made up just over 61% of all Covenant signatories outside of the province itself surely goes some way to justifying the *Scotsman*’s conclusion that ‘In Scotland alone, outside of Ulster itself, can the spirit animating the men and women who have signed the Covenant be fully appreciated’.



J.M. Bamford

The Aftermath of Ulster Day

Not content with resting on their laurels, the Unionist leadership promptly set about building on the momentum generated by British reactions to their Solemn League and Covenant. Having led the ‘show piece’ signing at Belfast’s City Hall, where he was duly accorded the sort of reception typically reserved for visiting monarchs, ‘King Carson’ proceeded to the city’s port to board the appropriately named *SS Patriotic* bound for Liverpool. The following day he addressed the largest anti-Home Rule demonstration to date outside Ireland, where a crowd of some 100,000 gathered in the city’s Sheil Park to express their solidarity with the Ulster resistance.

Upon leaving Merseyside, the Carson road-show made its way to Glasgow where the Unionist leader was scheduled to give his first ever speech north of the Tweed. Citing not only the sheer scale but the barely contained triumphalism which had greeted his appearances in Liverpool, some historians have inferred that the altogether more muted tone of the welcome afforded Carson on Clydeside spoke volumes for the strategic importance of the two cities and their respective attachment to the loyalist cause.



F.E. Smith

Upon closer inspection however these rather simplistic assessments are rendered somewhat less credible. Whilst it was certainly true that both cities shared a number of important traits in common, including large Irish immigrant communities, periodic manifestations of sectarian friction and well-established traditions of militant Orangeism, in terms of their respective civic and municipal cultures, Liverpool and Glasgow were nonetheless very different political entities. Unlike Liverpool, where a distinctive strain of Conservative populism fused with a no less virulent brand of Orange extremism to produce a flourishing proletarian 'Tory Democracy', Glasgow, for all its ghettoisation and sectarian atavism, remained a fundamentally Liberal city. Furthermore, any comparative assessment regarding the supposed fervency of Liverpool support and Glaswegian inertia are conclusively undermined when it is remembered that a mere 945 signed either the Covenant or Declaration on Merseyside compared with the 8,700 who did so in Glasgow.

Such nuances were distinctions hardly lost on the one time Liberal Carson. In sharp contrast to some of the speeches delivered at Shiel Park, such as that of FE Smith, who had claimed a flotilla of ships had been requisitioned to escort some 10,000 Liverpoolian volunteers to Ireland in the event of civil war, Carson's speech at the St Andrews Hall was of an altogether more measured nature. Addressing a 5,000 strong crowd, the Unionist leader carefully developed his arguments around the dire social and economic repercussions of Irish self-government. In its coverage of both the main gathering itself and the overflow meeting attended by some 2,000 in the nearby Berkeley Hall, the *Glasgow Herald* found it noteworthy that Carson 'deliberately refrained from any reference to the religious differences which separated North-east Ulster from the

South'. Clearly minded to place the Ulster crisis within a secularised context to which Edwardian Glaswegians could easily relate, the paper's special correspondent remarked that 'it was with no little pride that the great audience in the St Andrews Hall listened to the stately American-like progress of Ulster's capital city, a city that has emulated the municipal enterprise of Glasgow itself and between which so many mutual interests exist, both commercially and industrially'. For all its self-proclaimed brio therefore about being the 'second city of Orangeism', Carson had the political common sense to realise that Glasgow was perhaps not the place for talk of paramilitary mobilisation and Loyalist Armadas!

More subdued as the trip to Glasgow clearly was in contrast to that of Liverpool, Carson was nonetheless clearly delighted by the city's response, confiding to his friend, the formidable Theresa, Marchioness of Londonderry that the Glasgow event 'was the most magnificent and enthusiastic I have ever seen'.

Though Carson had declared to his supporters on Clydeside that from now on Unionism's rallying cry would be 'the Covenant and nothing but the Covenant', Home Rule's opponents recognised that preventing the Bill's passage into law would also call for an intensification of their appeal to the British electorate. To force that general plebiscite which Unionists were confident would deliver a knock-out blow to Asquith's government, the UAI therefore set about upping the ante of its already effective campaigning and propaganda work on the British mainland.

As previously noted, the result of the 1911 North Ayrshire by-election had provided Unionists, still reeling from their disastrous showing at 1910's General Elections, with a welcome 'shot in the electoral arm'. An even greater boon however had been the party's unlikely pre-Covenant success in Midlothian. The seat, which the *Times* described as a 'constituency hallowed by memories of Mr Gladstone' was justifiably considered one of the most prized jewels in the crown of Scottish Liberalism. As the Radicals had retained the seat at the December



We shall overcome: But how?



Taking the message to the masses

1910 election with a comfortable majority of just over 3,000, the victory of Major John Hope in September 1912 was hailed by jubilant Unionists as the clearest indication yet of how Scotland's political tide had begun to swing decisively against Asquith and his Redmondite allies. Pointing out the impact which the 'Irish question' had on the election's outcome the *London Evening Standard* acclaimed Major Hope's victory as 'essentially a defeat for the Home Rule cause' and proof positive that the 'appeals of Ulster have not fallen upon deaf ears in Scotland'.

In an age of instantly accessible social media, mass communication and highly professionalised political machines, it is of course tempting to dismiss the UAI's propaganda crusade as somewhat rudimentary by 21st century standards. For its time however that campaign was to prove a remarkably innovative one, utilizing as it did some of the most up-to-date techniques in logistics and political communication, focusing on mass-messaging rather than the more time-consuming tactics of individual, door-to-door canvassing. A revealing example of this switch in emphasis would be the introduction of a fleet of 'anti-Home Rule vans', fitted out with so-called magic lanterns display shows and loudspeakers. These vans, which were usually manned by a four-man team consisting of a driver and three speakers, had the obvious advantage of being mobile and thus capable of reaching hitherto inaccessible parts of the country. Arriving at their pitch some hours before the main event was scheduled to get underway, the projector's operators would proceed to open up the backdoors to reveal a visual slide-show whilst images of the King and other suitably rousing prints were projected by a 'magic lantern' display unit operated from the front of the vehicle.

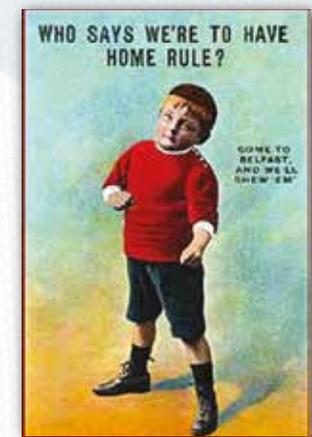
Alive not only to the cognitive immediacy of the visual image, the UAI's strategy

would also prove suitably amenable to local sensitivities and conditions, an example of which was to be its response to the seasonal migration of large numbers of Scottish city dwellers to the western coastal resorts of Dunoon, Millport, Troon, Ayr and Portpatrick etc. As the holiday period usually began at the beginning of July and lasted throughout the summer months, the Unionist Associations of Ireland took the decision to suspend its metropolitan activities 'for the duration' and dispatch its entire network of Clydeside-based speakers, canvassers, magic-lantern teams and anti-Home Rule propagandists to holidaying Glaswegians on the west coast.

As with so many features of contemporary, trans-channel Unionism, political tourism was anything but one-directional. Not content with merely bringing the anti-Home Rule gospel to Scots in their own backyard, Ulster's Unionists took the view that first hand experience of the material contrasts between northern and southern Ireland would be a pivotal element in convincing Scotland of the moral righteousness of their cause.

The typical itinerary of these trips, which interleaved education, propaganda and recreation – and which were targeted ostensibly at pro-home rule Scots – would see the touring party taken firstly to some of the less salubrious districts of inner-city Dublin before making their way slowly through the under-developed, rural midlands where travellers could see for themselves the 'backwardness' and overall 'degradations' of the nationalist south. To throw these scenes into even sharper relief the tourists would then be whisked off to Belfast to be greeted by the Lord Mayor, and provided with a sumptuous dinner at City Hall before being shown round those industries which had fuelled the city's economic and commercial success. Anxious that political tourism should be of an 'educational' rather than purely 'excursive' nature there was clearly little doubting the considerable propagandistic significance Unionists attached to these trips. In June 1914 the Scottish Unionist Association's Eastern Divisional Branch voted to allocate the sum of £250 specifically for the purposes of political tourism and by the end of that same month, organisers recorded they had received deputations from practically every constituency in Scotland.

In addition to organising open-air meetings, magic lantern shows and political recreation, the UAI was also assiduous in disseminating the loyalist message



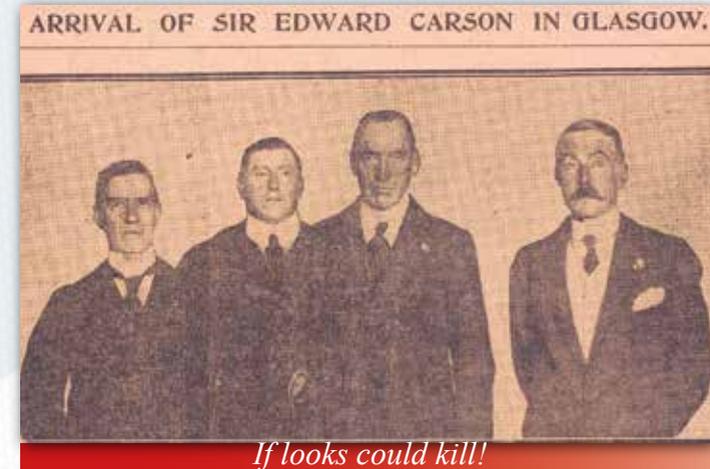
Come to Belfast!

through much more traditional yet no less effective means. In terms of gauging the electoral temper of contemporary Scotland there was little gainsaying the sterling work undertaken by John Bamford and Hugh Wood's teams of canvassers and election agents. By the time the Joint Committee suspended its activities in August 1914 Bamford's and Wood's twenty-strong team of 'pulse-takers' had canvassed over 205,000 wavering Scottish voters in some fifty constituencies, convened almost 4,000 meetings and distributed upwards of six million books, pamphlets and leaflets.

In the thirty three by-election contests held between 1911 and the outbreak of war in 1914 – ten of which took place in Scotland – the UAI would prove highly effective agents. In November 1913 James Kidd marginally failed in his attempt to wrestle West Lothian, a seat hitherto reckoned to be 'un-winnable' by the Unionist hierarchy, from Liberal control. Amongst Kidd's team of canvassers were two Aberdeenshire ex-Radicals who, it was claimed, had undergone a 'Damascene conversion to Unionism during a visit to Ireland'. Despite the Liberals' victory in Linlithgowshire Unionists were far from despondent. For the defeated Kidd, opposition to an Irish parliament remained the most effective weapon in Unionism's armoury, remarking that *'even the most prominent of Radicals here have admitted that the election result damns Home Rule. Others acknowledge that Linlithgowshire has illuminated the position of Scotland in such a way that any general election fought on the issue will see an extraordinary change in this country'*.

Subsequent by-elections seemed to confirm that Kidd's upbeat assessment of the Unionist movement's prospects at a future General Election were not entirely without foundation. During the South Lanarkshire by-election of November 1913 Ulster Unionists distributed copies of the Irish Presbyterian *Witness* magazine to every voter in the constituency, whilst the victorious Unionist candidate, William Watson, was reported as having confined his 'election addresses almost exclusively to the question of Home Rule'. In the aftermath of the party's success the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association similarly alluded to the decisive role played by the UAI's propagandists in Watson's having retaken the seat.

In February 1914 the party's success in the Edinburgh dockland's seat of Leith, the first Unionist victory there since 1832, merely confirmed the remarkable sea change which had taken place in Scottish attitudes towards Ireland. Initially sceptical about the potential for an electoral upset – given the Joint Committee's assessment that 'the Unionist organisation in the constituency [was] very poor – for almost eighteen months the UAI's teams nonetheless diligently set about converting Leith's electorate, canvassing almost five thousand voters and



organising over seventy meetings during the course of the campaign. On the day of the poll, the avowedly pro-Unionist *Times* reported that the Labour Party's candidate was failing to capture the imagination of Edinburgh's electorate ostensibly 'on account of his advocacy of home rule'. In that respect the Liberal candidate fared little better. Throughout the contest Radicals were taken aback to discover that 'large teams of Ulster canvassers had 'been assiduously working religious objections to Home Rule for all they were worth with the result that over and over again Home Rule's supporters... came across Liberals, strong Church people', who entertained serious reservations about the wisdom of an Irish parliament. On the back of a 9.1% swing G.M. Currie, the Unionist candidate (whose wife was a direct descendent of Governor Walker, the hero of the Siege of Londonderry) romped to victory, further bolstering Loyalist claims that Asquith's administration had squandered the sympathies of Scotland's electorate. The result in Leith provides an unequivocal riposte to political historian, Michael Fry's rather debatable assertion that 'Ireland was not an issue which the weakened Unionists could use to win over large blocs of voters'. In a nation whose collective temperament remained solidly Protestant there is surely much more to recommend the view of another historian, Professor Alvin Jackson, whose claims that Ulster indeed provided an important, galvanising stimulus for Scottish Unionists in the period 1912-1914 represents arguably an altogether more judicious appraisal of the Irish question's continuing traction within the nation's political discourse.

In the absence of a single-issue General Election or referendum on the issue, quantifying precisely how far Scots opinion had in fact swung in Ulster Unionism's favour is of course problematic. Adamant that a discernible post-1911 sea change had indeed taken place, the *Glasgow Herald* opined that the nation's continued support for Asquith's government was now entirely illusory. Acknowledging that five out of six Scottish MP's were Liberals, the paper

conjectured that ‘no reasonable person truly believed five-sixths of the Scottish people favour the Union’s repeal or the domination of Ireland’s Protestant population by Mr Redmond’s party’.

If Unionist victories in those by-elections where Home Rule was given centre stage provided some substance to the *Herald’s* claim that by 1912 Scots’ support for an Irish parliament was essentially chimerical, the welcome afforded Sir Edward Carson during his second ‘Grand Tour’ of the country in mid-1913 provided further pointers towards the much altered political mood of Edwardian Scotland.

As it had in October 1912, Glasgow again served as the principle backdrop to the Unionist leader’s Scottish assault. In contrast however to the carefully measured pitch of the Unionist message in the wake of Ulster Day, an unmistakable new belligerence was clearly discernible. At his reception in Glasgow’s Constitutional Club on 12 June one of Carson’s fellow speakers, the Belfast MP, Robert Thompson, remarked in rather blood-curdling fashion that if Ulster were to be coerced ‘...the streets of Glasgow would also soon be dyed red with human blood’. Later that evening Carson himself alluded to the potential for bloodshed in Ireland by encouraging the six thousand strong assembly who had packed the St Andrew’s Hall to ‘*keep on to the end, even if it comes to the necessity of using violence*’. Due to the demand for tickets Carson, as he had done eight months previously, was forced to address a further two thousand people at an overspill meeting in the nearby Berkley Hall. From here, Carson proceeded to make his way to the city’s Conservative Club, a journey which, though relatively short, took almost an hour to complete so great were the crowds lining Granville, Renfield and Sauciehall Streets to catch sight of the great man.

In Edinburgh a crowd of three and a half thousand filled the city’s Synod Hall to greet the Unionist leader. Like Glasgow, the nation’s capital was a city renowned for its enduring attachment to the Liberal creed. However, even in this once seemingly impenetrable fortress of Radical orthodoxy, a great many Scots were patently becoming a good deal more receptive to Ulster’s ‘kith and kin’ jeremiads. Introducing Carson the meeting’s Chairman, Avon Clyde, noted that ‘amongst the Scots of North Britain, the Scots of Ulster [have found] themselves at home amongst friends, friends whose sympathy... was practical and active’. When he emerged from the meeting Carson was greeted by an ‘honour guard’ of some several hundred members of the Unionist Workers League. Escorted from the Synod Hall to the Caledonian Station Hotel, on arrival the Unionist chief was again mobbed by a 7,000 strong crowd of well-wishers which *The Scotsman* described as positively ‘throbbing with enthusiasm’. If there remained some doubters, such as one former Lord Provost of Glasgow, who lamented the fact

that the ‘great Presbyterian democracy of Scotland did not sympathise more heartily with the Ulster people’, the cumulative effects of Carson’s reception in Edinburgh and Glasgow, the huge response of Ulster exiles to the Covenant initiative and the success of Unionist candidates at a number of critical by-elections throughout the period would seem to provide a fairly conclusive reproof to these charges of cross-channel indifference.

‘Covenants, without the Sword, are but Words’

Following the precedent laid down by the Ulstermen in 1912, April 1914 was to see the launch of a new British Covenant. The brainchild of the great imperial administrator and Unionist apologist, Lord Alfred Milner, the new pledge was aimed at affording those Britons whom, by accident of birth, had been prevented from signing the Ulster Covenant an opportunity to identify themselves with the province’s struggle against Home Rule. Of the two million who it was estimated signed Viscount Milner’s declaration at the outbreak of war 102,000 would do so in the west of Scotland. Combined with the fourteen thousand plus who had earlier subscribed the Solemn League and Covenant the strength of the indicative of what historian the translation of a broad, sentiment into a forceful [which] existed throughout in many cases, by ties of



Impressive and revealing as a measure of Anglo-Irish Unionist leadership as a result of the legislation’s parliament something more elaborate shows of mass, albeit pacific, strenght were now required to derail home rule’s increasingly assured passage into law. After all, as the great 17th century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes noted in *Leviathan*, ‘covenants, without the sword, are but words’. To ensure that their Solemn League and Covenant was more than just mere words in January 1913 the Standing Committee of the Ulster Unionist Council announced that the various Clubs and Orange ‘militias’ which had been engaged in drilling and military exercises throughout the nine counties since early 1911 would now be formally united under a single command structure known as the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF).

On the recommendation of Lord Roberts of Kandahar, in August 1913 Lt.

General Sir George Richardson, a retired Indian Army officer was appointed General Officer Commanding of the new Citizen's Army whose numbers had, by that stage, swelled to almost 57,000. The formation of the Volunteers reflected the increased sense of urgency underpinning the Unionist resistance during the latter stages of Home Rule's parliamentary circuit, a reality not lost on their counterparts across the channel.



Rev James Brisby

In the course of its 1913 Scottish campaign the tangible bellicosity of the Ulster Unionist message can hardly have failed to impress upon mainland audiences the critical phase into which the anti-Home Rule campaign was now entering. As with so many aspects of the Ulster cause it would be an appeal to which many Scots dutifully responded. Taking their cue from the example set by their Ulster brethren cross-channel sympathisers promptly began to set in motion their own plans for what Lord Milner had described as 'that terrible contingency' by placing the country's own embryonic volunteer movement onto a more formal footing.

For legal and security reasons this network of pro-Union militias were euphemistically labelled 'Athletic Clubs'. In his history of Scottish Orangeism William Marshall has speculated that it remains unclear as to whether or not Grand Lodge gave the Clubs its 'official blessing' or simply turned a blind eye to the mobilisation. In early 1914 however the County Tyrone-born Grand Secretary of Grand Lodge (Scotland) intimated that the Clubs were in fact established at the Order's behest, an allusion born out by an entry in the Order's Minute Books which revealed how Grand Lodge had discussed the formation of such militias as early as December 1912 and had taken the decision that every District Lodge should provide the necessary 'facilities to enable drilling etc'.

Predictably Glasgow again found itself in the vanguard of this pro-Ulster militancy. By January 1914 the city had mobilised an estimated two thousand volunteers into six companies – Cowcaddens, Calton, Kinning Park, Partick, Rutherglen and Clydebank – under the command of former Black Watch officer, Captain George Webb. Instrumental in helping muster this Glaswegian Ulster Scots fraternity was the redoubtable figure of Ballymoney-born cleric the Reverend James Brisby. A charismatic former Congregationalist and Baptist preacher who had settled in Glasgow at the turn of the century, Brisby was in many ways the archetypal Ulster Scots ecclesiastic, a caste Lord Rosebery had earlier described as 'carrying the Shorter Catechism in one hand and a revolver in the other!' Though surprisingly well-regarded by a number of Catholic representatives on the Glasgow School Board, a body on which he was to sit until

1928, and deemed theologically moderate enough to eventually take his large Bridgeton congregation into the Established Kirk – historians have generally acknowledged Brisby's role as one the driving force behind the city's paramilitary mobilisation during the third home rule crisis.

In keeping with the now common-place 'soul-brother' tone adopted by Ulster loyalists when addressing Scottish audiences, Brisby drew distinct parallels between the present crisis and Scotland's own Covenanting past. Addressing Glasgow's UVF contingent in the City Halls in early 1914 Brisby proclaimed '*blood of their blood, bone of their bone, their cause, their aspirations, their religious hopes and political ambitions were the same as ours and [we] are, in honour, bound to identify with them*'.

In February 1914 Colonel Hickman, the radical Tory MP and 'military attaché' of Lord Willoughby de Broke's British League for the Support of Ulster and the Union (BLSUU), went north to inspect the Glasgow and Hamilton battalions of the UVF and to discuss with local commanders the increasingly urgent matter of 'arms and ammunition'. That the Scottish volunteer movement seemed to be readying itself for a potentially bloody outcome to the Ulster crisis was underlined by the Colonel's inspection of the Lanarkshire Club's recently-formed ambulance and nursing corps together with his remarks that he was heartened to see 'that in Scotland there were so many men and women ready to shed their blood' for the sake of the province.

Like their contemporaries in Ireland, the leaders of Scotland's own 'People's Army' viewed the gathering storm in Ulster as now demanding a good deal more



Scotland's volunteers rally to the Ulster standard

than empty gestures. In March 1914 the Rev Brisby, determined to allay any lingering suspicion that Ulster's Covenant 'was but words', organised an impressive show of Glaswegian paramilitary strength. In all some five hundred volunteers from the city's six Athletic Clubs marched to Glasgow's City Hall to be presented with colours by the Rev. Dr Cooper, Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Glasgow University. According to the *Glasgow Herald* 'perfect order prevailed and the men, who appeared well-trained, marched with military precision. A special guard of about thirty men, armed with rifles, protected the new colours'.

As with the geographical diffusion of support for the Covenant itself, backing for the Athletic Clubs was by no means confined to the Orange citadels of Glasgow and Lanarkshire. By March 1914 the *Belfast Weekly News* reported that the number of men enrolled in the nation's pro-Ulster militias stood somewhere in the region of nine to ten thousand, with battalions and companies having been formed not only in areas with a strong Ulster diasporic presence, such as Blantyre and Dalry in Ayrshire, but in parts of the country with comparatively few Protestant émigrés such as Falkirk, Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Inverness. When the scale of this Caledonian resistance is contrasted with similar developments in that other bastion of mainland Orangeism, Liverpool, (whose own UVF commanders could muster a mere 1,500 men in total), Scotland's contribution to the cause again provides a compelling counterblast to claims, such as that of historian Tom Gallagher, that the 'response from Scotland for a Unionist jihad was distinctly feeble'.

Whether it was through participation in the drilling activities of the country's Athletic Clubs, through support for Unionist anti-Home Rule candidates at by-election contests or subscription to the province's Solemn League and Covenant, it was clear that a great many Edwardian Scots were passionately motivated by the prospective plight of their Ulster kinsmen. Far from remaining impervious to the political crisis unfolding across the Waters of Moyne the evidence points towards an unreserved and enthusiastic identification with Protestant Ulster's struggle against Irish Nationalism. If today the desire of many, perhaps even a majority of Scots, to repeal the political union their forbearers strove to uphold is indicative of the now very different political and constitutional concerns exercising modern Ulster and contemporary Scotland, the sense of identification forged between the two regions during the period 1885-1914 attests to the fact that this was not always so. In casting their gaze pensively across that narrow stretch of sea dividing north-eastern Ireland from the great Presbyterian democracy of Scotland, Ulster Unionists were able to take considerable solace from the discovery that during this most critical of junctures, blood would indeed prove to be thicker than water.

Chronology of Ulster Scots Resistance

- 1799 – Scotland's first Orange lodge established in Maybole
- 1836 – Formation of Grand Orange Association of Scotland.
- 1878 – Belfast Scottish Association established.
- 1883 – Glasgow and Down Benevolent Association (renamed Glasgow Ulster Association) established as an associational nexus for Protestant Ulster émigrés.
- 1886 – April British Prime Minister and Midlothian MP, W.E. Gladstone introduces Irish Home Rule Bill. August - disaffected 'Whigs' break ranks to form a new Liberal Unionist Party. Scotland's most influential daily broadsheets, The Glasgow Herald and The Scotsman, recant their former liberalism.
- 1900 – Andrew Bonar Law, Canadian-born son of the Ulster Scots manse and bitter opponent of Home Rule elected Unionist MP for Glasgow Blackfriars.
- 1910 – In December Captain John Gilmour (East Renfrew) and Sir John Younger (Ayr Burghs) become the first Scottish Orange representatives elected to Westminster.
- 1911 – In May, Bushmills' HRS Woods and Coleraine's John Bamford appointed Chief Divisional Agents of the Ulster Unionist propaganda machine in Scotland. December Captain DF Campbell wins North Ayrshire by-election in the first major electoral setback for Asquith's government.
- 1912 – Presbyterians stage huge anti-Home Rule Demonstration in Belfast explicitly aimed at appealing to Scottish

co-religionists. Asquith introduces now home rule Bill. 40,000 Orange brethren descend upon the Lanarkshire town of Coatbridge to vent their hostility to the scheme. September sees Major John Hope takes Gladstone's old seat of Midlothian. On 'Ulster Day' over 14,000 Scottish-based Ulstermen and women sign the Solemn League and Covenant. In the wake of the signings, Sir Edward Carson visits Glasgow and Edinburgh. In December Scotland's Grand Lodge raises the issue of quasi-paramilitary preparations in anticipation of potential civil war in Ireland.

- 1913 – In June Carson undertakes second major speaking tour of Scotland, addressing huge audiences in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Inverness, Dundee and Perth. In December Unionist candidate William Watson overturns large Liberal majority to re-take South Lanarkshire, contest is dominated by home rule.
- 1914 First public appearance of Scotland's UVF contingent in Glasgow city centre. In February Unionists record spectacular by-election victory in Edinburgh-Leith. Liberals concede Home rule is again a decisive factor in the contest. In March, Glasgow's six 'Athletic Clubs', (pseudonym of the country's UVF movement), are presented with official colours at staged show of defiance in Glasgow's City Halls. Belfast press estimates numbers enrolled in the clubs are in the region of 9-10,000. In May Lord Milner's British Covenant is signed by some 102,000 Scots sympathetic to the prospective plight of Protestants under a Dublin parliament.

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