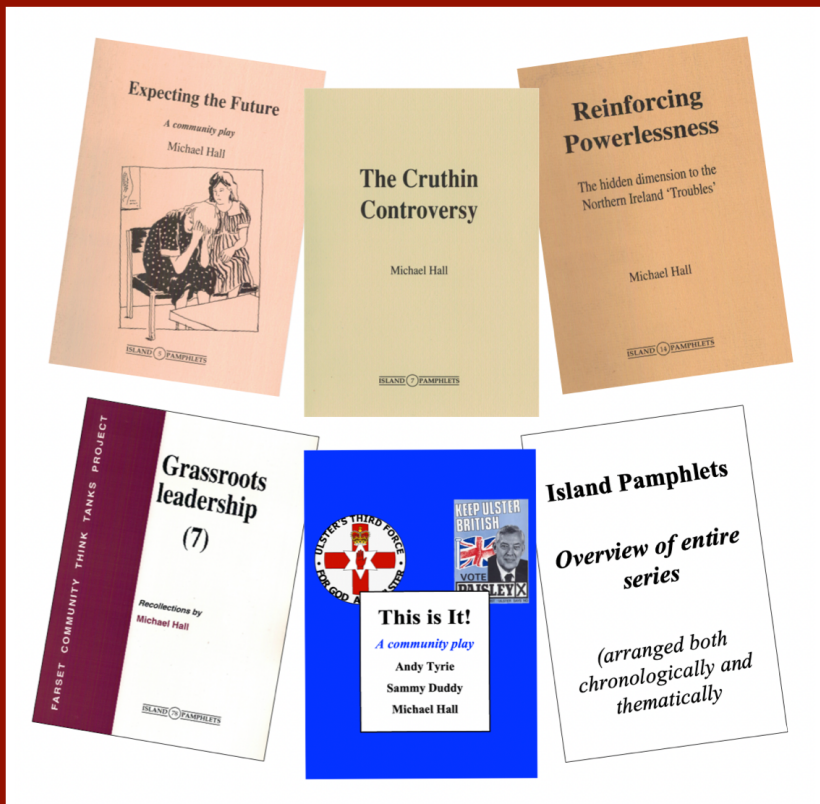


Island Pamphlets

(Selection 2)

Michael Hall



Dear Michael, I did *Expecting the Future* again and it was another marvellous success (Berenda Crellin, Tucson, Arizona)

[Hall] devotes one of his “Island Pamphlets” to the Cruthin story and the controversy surrounding it, enumerating, and then refuting one by one, the detractors’ concerns. [After] picking apart the illogicality and inconsistency of his critics Hall delivers himself and Adamson onto fairly solid ground in terms of the viability of their historical work. (Margaret E Smith, *Reckoning with the Past: Teaching History in Northern Ireland*, Lexington Books, London, 2005)

You’re much more likely to find a sharper, more contemporary political analysis and a few home truths in small publications than in books which rely on the whims and potential profit-seeking sales of big publishing companies... In a mere thirty pages this pamphlet [*Reinforcing Powerlessness*] reveals more about our society than the hundreds of academic publications churned out every year. (Dave Hyndman, *Northern Visions*, 2000)

‘Theatre Ireland’ decided to publish *This is It!* for two reasons. We were aware of its political significance in that it is a strongly positive document, looking to the future and demonstrating the constructive thinking which is being done on all sides in the north. It was also written and formally structured, to be played in working men’s clubs and to use theatre as a forum for debate in this communal sense. Any vision of theatre as a relevant and active social force is something which we wholeheartedly support. (*Theatre Ireland*, 1984)

Michael Hall’s contacts and assistance helped us to see a more rounded picture of the life and the turmoil that is in Belfast. Hall – a Belfast original – possessed impressive abilities to open doors to some remarkable people. (*Report of the Arizona Delegation to Belfast*, October 1994)

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Island Pamphlets

(Selection 2)

Michael Hall

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Foreword

Of the six pamphlets included in the companion volume (*Selection 1*) which was published jointly with this second selection, four of those titles were directly related to the deliberations of the small-group discussions – labelled ‘Community Think Tanks’ – which have formed the majority of the titles produced within the series.

For *this* volume, however, I have selected a number of titles representing some of my own writing, including two plays, a pamphlet focusing on an intriguing aspect of our shared history, and also some recollections of, as well as commentary on, a few of my community experiences.

To complete the book I have added material describing how the pamphlet series originated, along with some comments and anecdotes which reveal how the Think Tank process – complemented by the widely-disseminated pamphlets – impacted at the grassroots, whether at a personal level for the discussion-group participants, or at an *intra*-communal and *inter*-communal level.

Finally, the 140 titles produced to date are listed here in two formats: (1) chronologically, and (2) thematically, in the hope that this will be of use to those who want to delve further into the series.

Michael Hall

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A full list of *all* available titles in the series can be found on The University of Ulster's CAIN Archive, from which a large number can also be downloaded as pdfs.

<https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/islandpublications>

A complete set of Island Pamphlets is kept at **Farset Hotel** (466 Springfield Road, Belfast BT12 7DW) and anyone wishing to read or study them is welcome to do so on the premises. For further information contact:

Conferencing@farsethotel.org

Expecting the Future

A community play by

Michael Hall

with an introduction by Dr. Ian Adamson

ISLAND (5) PAMPHLETS

Written in 1983, published 1993 by Island Publications
132 Serpentine Road, Newtownabbey, Co Antrim BT36 7JQ
© Michael Hall 1983 & 1993
ISBN 0 9514194 5 5

Printed by Regency Press, Belfast

Introduction (by Dr Ian Adamson)

I first saw a performance of *Expecting the Future* six years ago in a community centre in West Belfast. My mother had been inveigled to act as one of the five pregnant women, a role she accepted with much amusement, considering that her age then was 67. The other members of the cast were teenagers, likewise unaccustomed to public acting, yet the resulting performance was memorable, not just for the talent the young people displayed but for the genuine feeling they were able to convey through their acting.

The play's author was then with the NSPCC, and among other things he and I had in common was that in our daily work – he as a social worker and I as a community paediatrician – we often had to confront a frequently ignored legacy of Northern Ireland's 'troubles' – the pain and bereavement inflicted upon so many families in our divided community.

Although the play, written in 1983, has seen a handful of public performances – in places as diverse as Larne, Cork, Tucson (Arizona) and The Lyric† in Belfast – the author insists it wasn't written with public performance in mind, but as a reading script for young people, its main purpose being to stimulate discussion on the emotional effects of our present violence upon individuals and families. The idea had originated from one such community discussion he had initiated, during which a young participant had turned to her friend and retorted: "How would *you* know? It's all right for you to talk, but you don't know what it feels like!" The author decided to describe a little of what it 'feels like' through the medium of drama.

As a community we are ever ready to expound our political stances and drive home our opinions, even spout highly questionable justifications for some of the violence, yet – except for those directly connected to each new victim – we usually have little to say about the terrible mental anguish this violence leaves in its wake, and, probably as a defence mechanism, we avoid internalising the full horror of it all.

The play has been used as a reading script by a number of youth and community groups, and the author says that what has impressed him most has been the ability of young people in both communities to readily identify with any

† The Lyric performance, in May 1998, was directed by Patricia Downey, who went on to establish the innovative and highly influential *Spanner in the Works Theatre Company*.

of the play's characters. Young girls reading it in Springhill Community House, Ballymurphy, could identify without hesitation with the grief expressed by the policeman's widow, just as teenagers from a nearby Shankill community project could readily relate to the fears of the wife left to raise her family alone as her husband faces a lengthy imprisonment for IRA activities. By concentrating *solely* on the feelings expressed by the women rather than let any local politics intrude, the play managed to transcend political differences and touch that sense of compassion which was gratifyingly common to all the young performers.

Ironically, it was only adults not directly involved with an actual performance who expressed hesitations. One remarked to the author that the background to the characters was too 'sketchy': could we not be told more about Anna's husband, he asked. To which the author had replied:

Each time a killing occurs, people often seem to want to know more about the victim before they accord sympathy, a sympathy frequently determined by community loyalties. If it isn't clear from the start that the victim was a completely innocent bystander, the questioning begins – was the victim a member of the IRA, a member of the security forces, a Loyalist paramilitary, did they fall within someone's warped sense of 'legitimate target'... ? This questioning is often a way of distancing ourselves from the horror of the death, and if we do find some reason to lessen our sympathy, it unfortunately transfers itself onto the victim's family. But why should anything we learn about the deceased affect the sympathy due to the bereaved? In the play I don't say whether Anna's husband had a reputation for being caring or uncaring, whether he was liked or disliked by people in either community. Why should I reveal anything that would simply detract from Anna's grief? No – the audience are given no such clues, they are simply confronted with the stark reality of the pain felt by those left to mourn. And if we as a community cannot empathise unconditionally with all those who are suffering in our midst, then it will be a long time before we begin to find a way out of our present tragedy.

When I heard recently that the author was still making photocopies of the play at the behest of community groups, I suggested he publish it as one of this pamphlet series. I reminded him that some of his other publications were concerned with exploring the hidden history of the Ulster people, and as this play also dealt with an often unexplored aspect of our communal tragedy, it bore its own relevance to our troubled times.

Characters:

Five expectant women:

Betty, Mary, Sally, Lily and Anna

Setting:

The TV lounge adjoining a prenatal hospital ward

Scene 1

[Two women, BETTY and MARY, are on stage. BETTY is seated, reading a magazine. MARY, uncomfortably stooping, is trying to get the TV to function.]

MARY: *[Thumping the TV]* Come back out, damn it! Come on – show yer faces – I know you’re in there! *[Another thump]*

BETTY: For Christsakes, Mary, you’ll bust the friggin’ thing! Be careful!

MARY: *[Giving the TV another thump and a shake]* If I didn’t want to hurt meself, I’d lift me friggin’ foot to it! *[Her annoyance increases]* Damn it! There’s me thinkin’ to meself I’d get seein’ all me programmes in peace, and the blasted thing . . . oh, I give up!

[SALLY has entered quietly and now sits down in an armchair. MARY backs away from the TV and goes to sit in the same armchair before discovering it is now occupied.]

MARY: Oops! Sorry, love. Wouldn’t do now if I squashed you? Don’t want an induced labour, do we? *[Laughs]*

SALLY: *[Starting to rise]* Sorry, I didn’t realise it was your seat.

MARY: Don’t be silly! Sit yerself there! They haven’t got round to puttin’ numbers on the chairs yet.

SALLY: Well, I just . . .

MARY: You just sit there. [*Plonks herself down on another armchair*] Phew!
Fightin' that bleedin' TV fair took it out of me.

SALLY: [*Quietly*] Broken then?

BETTY: [*Laughing*] Well, if it wasn't, it *is* now.

MARY: Well, damn it, here's me away from all the bloody housework, no kids
pestering me . . . all the time in the world to watch me favourite
programmes . . . ah!

BETTY: [*Distantly*] I wish I was home now. This waitin's an awful drag. I wish
it was over. I'm wondering what mess his lordship has got the house into.

MARY: Forget about 'im! Let him bloody well see what we women have to put
up with!

BETTY: Ah, I know, but still . . . I wish it was over. Stupid, I suppose – it'll
come soon enough and then I'll probably miss all these wee moments of
rest.

MARY: Isn't this your fourth, Betty?

BETTY: Aye. Aye, indeed. I said I'd stop at three, but you know how it is . . .

MARY: Don't I just! [*She turns to SALLY*] What about yerself, ah . . .?

SALLY: Sally. No . . . this is . . . [*Self-consciously*] this is my first.

[*BETTY and MARY look sympathetically at SALLY.*]

BETTY: Well, you're in the best bloody place, love, so don't you be worryin'
yerself. Well, it *would* be the best bloody place, if they didn't wake you
up so bleedin' early in the morning!

MARY: I don't like hospitals at all, Betty. They smell so . . . Oh, I just wish I
was getting out. Course, maybe it's the doctors you like? Eh, Sally, that's
probably what she's after?

[SALLY *smiles shyly.*]

BETTY: Well now, since you mention it, yon young thing this morning . . . walking along in tow behind the big cheese. Now, he was a bit of alright. I don't think he was paying attention to what the big noise was jibberin' on about – he was too busy takin' a good gander around. [*Then, looking at MARY mischievously*] Took a good look at you, he did.

MARY: Ah, come off it! Me? And me like this? [*She pats her stomach*]

BETTY: Why not? Anyway, I'm sure most husbands still find their pregnant partner attractive. Indeed, what about *your* man, Mary?

[*For the first time MARY's ebullient manner fades and she looks disturbed. BETTY stares at her for a moment, surprised, but decides to ignore it.*]

BETTY: What about yon foreign doctor? Looks quite 'distinguished', doesn't he? Would you have fancied taking him home in your courtin' days?

MARY: [*Snapping out of her mood*] Jesus, I can just picture the faces on me ma and da! They near went bananas the time I brought home a Prod – they'd have thrown a fit if I'd waltzed in with yon.

BETTY: Still, I think he's quite good-looking. He looks quite sexy with that moustache. You not think so?

MARY: Look, I can't even make out one bloody word he says. He could be tellin' me I'm expectin' quads for all I know. I just nod at 'im.

BETTY: [*Laughing*] I know, I do the same meself. But sure he probably can't make out one bloody word we say.

MARY: I don't know what foreign doctors wanna come to a place like Belfast for.

BETTY: Nor do I. Beats me. I'd love to get out of it all. Go to another country. Wouldn't it be lovely – just lovely.

[All three fall silent for a moment in reflection.]

BETTY: Mary, if you had the choice, where would you like to go?

MARY: Oh, I dunno. I've got relations in England, and down in Cork.

BETTY: Nah, I'd keep clear of relatives. *[Then, hurriedly]* Not, mind you, that I have anything against them. Just . . . well, I'd like to make a clean break. You know what I mean? Just me and Danny and the kids. To be honest, he's always at odds with the in-laws anyway, even his own lot. *[Sighs]* No, I'd love to escape Belfast. Them flats is no place to rear kids. Would you not like to get away, Mary, just you and your man?

[MARY's face suddenly looks troubled. When she speaks her voice is distant and subdued.]

MARY: I'd go anywhere with Séan . . . anywhere . . . together. I'd go tomorrow if . . . *[Her lip trembles; then, as if to divert attention, she brings Sally into the conversation]* Well, Sally, I suppose you're up to 'high-doh'? Bet you've heard enough horror stories to make you wish you weren't pregnant at all?

SALLY: 'Horror stories'?

MARY: You know, the usual. All your friends saying "I mind hear tell of the woman who had to have . . ." before it dawns on them – "Sorry, Sally, don't mean to frighten you." Then, the very next minute . . . "Did you hear of yer woman round the corner whose doctor made a mistake . . ." That type of thing, you know?

SALLY: *[Smiling]* I do. You're right, I've heard plenty to scare me, but I guess I've been too nervous most of the time, I don't really take in what's said.

BETTY: Just as well. And no doubt there's a horde of relations and neighbours just waitin' to pounce the minute you and the ba set foot inside the door, all gonna tell you the *right* way to do everything. But, if you want my opinion, you just ignore them!

MARY: Sure anyway, your Health Visitor will soon put you right. [*Then, sarcastically*] No matter what bloody way *you* feel like doin' it, she'll tell you the *correct* way! Mine bloody well took the friggin' nappy out of me hands and said, "No, not that way, dear, I'll show you how to fold it." The bloody cheek!

BETTY: You just do it all as it comes to you, Sally. Every woman knows best about herself.

[*Just then LILY half enters. She is talking back over her shoulder.*]

LILY: Come on! Come on in, Anna. They won't bite.

BETTY: Don't bet on it, Lily; you wanna seen Mary havin' a go at the box a minute ago.

LILY: Come on.

[*ANNA enters at rear. Instead of looking timid – as her hesitation might have indicated – we see on her face just a distance look, with no sparkle to her countenance.*]

LILY: Anna, this is Betty, and Mary, and . . .

BETTY: That's Sally. Sit down, the pair of youse. 'Afraid the TV's had it . . .

[*ANNA and LILY sit down.*]

MARY: But if you're looking for entertainment, I'm sure Betty will give us a rendering?

BETTY: Bloody sure I won't!

MARY: But I heard you humming something this morning?

BETTY: That doesn't mean I can sing. I was just . . . well, I read in a magazine that music can soothe the baby . . . somehow gets into your stomach . . . affects the child.

LILY: Never heard tell of that. If it's true then mine's gonna come out like

something crazy! For you wanna hear the music my ones blare. All bloody day long! Near drives me round the twist!

[Unlike SALLY, who seems 'all ears', ANNA hasn't really been following the conversation. She had picked up a magazine but seems unable even to open it, and just stares into space. MARY grimaces over at BETTY, indicating ANNA's seeming aloofness, and touches her finger to her nose as if to indicate she is a 'stuck-up snob', but BETTY just shrugs her shoulders.]

LILY: Well, what's the craic? Did I miss anything? Suppose youse were on about men?

BETTY: Oh, aye, about how we miss them an' all. Like bloody Hell!

LILY: Mine's out getting plastered. Told me he'd celebrate in advance. Shouldn't have asked my sister over to look after the kids. No-one'll see him now' till the ba's born.

BETTY: What about your husband, Sally? Come on, you're sitting there all quiet, like.

SALLY: *[Shyly]* Well, he's . . . he's quite good really. He's . . . he's going to come up and be with me when the baby's being born.

[This silences all the others momentarily.]

LILY: Well, I think it's only right that the man is there to watch the ba arrive – menfolk get it all too easy, it might let them see what we women have to go through!

BETTY: Mary, would your man come up to see the birth?

[MARY looks disconcerted; indeed, she has been so since the conversation went on to this topic. She looks flustered and rises.]

LILY: You okay?

[MARY begins to walk off-stage.]

BETTY: Did I say anything wrong? Mary, tell me if I did!

[MARY *turns around, almost in tears.*]

MARY: Séan . . . Séan was arrested a few weeks ago . . . charged with conspiracy to murder and IRA membership . . . [*She falters, but recovers*] He could get twenty years . . . [*She looks down at her stomach, over which she runs her hands slowly*] Twenty years . . .

[MARY *exits stage. All the others, including ANNA, stare after her.*]

[*Lights fade.*]

Scene 2

[*Lights go on again. SALLY and LILY are sitting in their armchairs.*]

SALLY: I just hope I'm alright. I haven't been that well the whole way through.

LILY: You'll be fine. Just don't you start fretting; there's no point in worrying yourself. Everyone's nervous in some way, but more so with the first.

SALLY: I suppose so.

LILY: Thought of any names yet?

SALLY: No, not really.

LILY: Calling it after anyone? The family, like?

SALLY: No. No . . . we wanted to avoid . . . Well, I mean, we want the child to be . . . to be different . . . [*She falters, obviously unable to articulate what she wants to say*]

[LILY *looks quizzically at Sally. She is just about to respond when MARY enters, looking rather pained.*]

MARY: Oh, Sweet Jesus, a seat, a seat! 'My kingdom for a seat' – isn't that what yer man's supposed to have said? [*She lowers herself down, with a*

half-pained, half-relieved, sigh] Awh, dear . . . that's better!

LILY: And what's got yerself in such a tizzy? You been chasing them young doctors again?

MARY: Chasin'? Christsakes, I'm tryin' to avoid them! With all the fingers that've been poked over my stomach, I feel like I've been trodden on by a herd of bleedin' elephants!

LILY: Were you examined *again*?

MARY: [*Dismissing the topic with a wave of her hand*] Ah, no matter.

LILY: But what . . . ?

MARY: Leave it. You only let things last twice as long when you talk about them afterwards.

LILY: [*Looking offended*] Well, if that's . . .

MARY: [*Laughing*] Oh, look at her! Such a face! Come on, Lily, don't be so put-out. And where's Betty and 'stuck-up' Anna?

LILY: Now, that's not fair.

MARY: Oh, alright. What about yerself, Sally; all going well?

SALLY: I hope so . . .

LILY: She's been having pains. A bit worried.

MARY: Never you mind. It'll be over before you know it. You just wait 'till you have three or four traipsin' round your feet, then you'll wish you'd become a nun.

[*LILY shakes her head at MARY and raises her eyes to SALLY. BETTY enters.*]

MARY: Here she is now. I thought I saw you headin' this way in front of me?

BETTY: I was, but I stopped to look in at Anna.

LILY: Youse chatting?

BETTY: [*Distantly*] Not really . . .

MARY: Not friggin' likely either! The likes of us aren't good enough for her.

LILY: Mary, that's unfair!

MARY: Unfair? I tried to chat yesterday, and the looks I got weren't ordinary.
'Cold' isn't the word!

LILY: Well . . .

MARY: Well, nothing!

BETTY: She was crying solid. There's something the matter.

[All four look subdued at this information.]

LILY: See, Mary, I told you not to be so pass-remarkable. You never know. . .

MARY: Okay, okay, maybe you're right.

[Suddenly SALLY gives an involuntary gasp and clutches the sides of her armchair tightly. MARY quickly goes over to her, but even though SALLY's eyes are closed and her face still registers pain, she indicates with her hand that she is all right. She finally relaxes and breathes deeply.]

LILY: Want us to call for someone?

SALLY: [*Somewhat breathless*] No . . . there's no need . . . it's passed.

MARY: Wasn't a contraction?

SALLY: No. Just a strange pain. But I'm fine . . . I'm fine now.

[The other three women exchange worried glances.]

BETTY: Are the doctors aware of this?

SALLY: Yes. I tell you . . . I'm okay again.

[*It is obvious SALLY doesn't wish to pursue the matter and without her noticing, LILY indicates to BETTY to cease any further questioning.*]

LILY: [*Endeavouring to sound light-hearted*] Anyway, Sally, look at it this way – the trouble they can make before they come into the world is nothing compared to what they make once they've arrived.

BETTY: You're not joking there!

[*ANNA enters, subdued looking. She sits down. There is a brief silence*]

LILY: [*Obviously stuck for something to say*] Ah . . . the ward's quiet, is it?

ANNA: [*For a moment not realising that it was she who was being addressed*]
Sorry? Oh yes, it's quite quiet.

LILY: Hope Doctor Murray doesn't wander in.

MARY: Why?

LILY: You not hear him yesterday!

BETTY: I did; God, he was wild!

MARY: [*Impatiently*] What did he say?

LILY: Comes strolling in, shouting [*Then, mimicking his voice*] "All these women were brought in early for high blood-pressure or possible complications, and not one of them in their beds! It's not a bloody holiday-camp, you know!"

MARY: Who was he shouting at? The Staff Sister?

BETTY: At everyone and no-one. Did Sister Blair say anything to you about it afterwards, Lily – I saw you talking to her?

LILY: Oh, I don't think she pays too much attention to him. Anyway, I bribed her.

MARY: You *what*?

LILY: I said I would write a wee poem for the staff dance that's coming up.

SALLY: A poem? Can you . . . did you write one?

LILY: [*Evasively*] Aye . . . well, a sort of one.

MARY: Well, let's hear it then.

SALLY: [*Quietly*] Yes, I'd like to hear it.

LILY: Well . . .

BETTY: Come on – out with it!

[*LILY fidgets in her pocket and retrieves a folded piece of paper.*]

LILY: [*Anxiously*] It's not very good . . .

MARY: Get on with it.

LILY: Well, okay. It's . . . it's called 'The Hospital Ball'*:

In the Hospital it was planned
To hire the biggest, loudest band;
Something that would thrill them all
At the doctors' and nurses' Hospital Ball.

The nurses waited with hopes so high
And each one knew the reason why;
The ball itself was nothing new
The question was – "Who's taking who?"

Then some bright spark suggested a dare
To all the nurses and doctors there;
Why not ballot the nurses and take a chance
On the perfect partner for the Hospital dance?

So into a hat the nurses' names they threw
Then each doctor a partner drew;
Some were glad and some were not
But each was stuck with their chosen lot.

* With thanks to Susan Graham, who – as in the play – wrote this poem while in a maternity ward.

On the night of the dance they dressed with care
Even the Matron she tinted her hair;
Off they went, gliding up the stairs,
Doctors and nurses, all in pairs.

By eight o'clock it had all begun,
With everyone determined to have some fun.
Except Doctor Moore, he was feeling low,
He tried hard not to let it show.
For the nurse he took to the Hospital Ball
Topped him by inches, she was so tall;
But all in all he came off best,
For he danced all night with his nose in her chest.

Doctor Brown was feeling randy,
So he brought along a bottle of brandy;
The nurse he drew was prim and proper,
But after a few she came a cropper;
She let her hair and her inhibitions unfurl,
As they waltzed around in a drunken swirl.

Now Doctor Jones he got quite tipsy
He fancied himself as a romantic gipsy;
His partner thought he had such charm
But she got a shock when he chanced his arm;
His hands were roaming quite out of place
But he soon stopped when she slapped his face.

By two o'clock things slowed down
There weren't so many people around;
Some were drunk and some were sober
Others couldn't wait 'till the dance was over.
But I'm quite sure that one and all
Enjoyed themselves at the Hospital Ball.

[The other women, excepting ANNA, applaud and express their approval. MARY glances briefly over at ANNA, but then looks away.]

MARY: I like it, I like it.

LILY: [*Embarrassedly*] Oh, it's only a silly poem.

SALLY: Will you write a poem for us, with us in it?

LILY: Well, I don't know now . . .

[ANNA *rises while LILY is talking, and somewhat lethargically moves towards the rear of the stage. MARY watches her.*]

MARY: Your poems don't suit everyone, it seems. Isn't that so, Anna?

[*It looks as if ANNA mightn't have heard this, then she turns to look at MARY.*]

ANNA: Sorry?

MARY: Not fancy Lily's poetry, then?

ANNA: [*Distantly*] I'm sorry, I wasn't really listening . . .

[*Despite BETTY's indication for her to desist, MARY seems annoyed and continues.*]

MARY: I mean, you hardly say one word to any of us. Like, we're all in the same boat, you know, aren't we? But you act as if you can't wait to get away from us, and back to your wee hubby.

ANNA: [*Staring at MARY, not malevolently, but almost resignedly*] My husband's not long buried. He was a policeman. The IRA shot him in the back of the head.

[ANNA *continues to stare at MARY for a moment, then resumes her exit from the stage.*]

[*Lights fade.*]

Scene 3

[Lights go on again. ANNA is sitting in an armchair – she is alone. For some moments she stares vacantly in front of her. Then BETTY comes in. ANNA looks up but doesn't speak.]

BETTY: Hi.

[BETTY sits down. There is an awkward silence.]

BETTY: Oh, dear, I can feel it won't be long now. What about you?

ANNA: *[Listlessly]* Probably.

BETTY: What were you brought in early for? Blood pressure? Or . . . *[She falters]*

ANNA: I'm not sure why. My doctor just said he was 'worried'. Didn't really say why.

[Another brief silence.]

BETTY: Don't mind Mary, Anna. I mean . . . she's okay really. She thought you were . . . well, you know, ignoring us. She didn't realise . . .

ANNA: No, I suppose not.

BETTY: You got kids at home?

ANNA: Two – two girls.

BETTY: Did . . . did they take it bad?

ANNA: Very, especially the oldest. She was very attached to her father. He was extremely proud of her, she was doing so well at school. *[Then, dreamily]* They were so close. You know, I used to joke with him: "What'll you say

when she starts bringing boys home? I think you're going to be jealous." But he'd just smile and say, "When that day is due to arrive, then it will arrive. Until then we should just take each day as it comes." [*Then, sadly*] You would almost think he knew, wouldn't you? There was one thing he always said – I'll never forget it: "Each day of our children's lives can never come back again. If we miss it while it's happening, then we've lost it." [*She pauses*] And now . . . now she . . . she just . . . [*For the first time ANNA's defences fail her and she seems unable to prevent her emotions coming to the surface*] She just . . . locks herself away in her room. I . . . I can hear her crying. Calling out for her "Daddy". "Daddy," she cries . . . "Daddy!" [*Her face goes taught, and she bites at her lip*] It's . . . it's breaking my heart . . . because I know how it's breaking her's! [*ANNA's head falls into her hands, and she begins to sob*]

[*BETTY is alarmed at this sudden outpouring of emotion, and for a moment is uncertain how to act. She goes over beside ANNA, kneels down and puts an arm around her shoulders.*]

BETTY: I'm sorry, Anna, I shouldn't have brought it up.

ANNA: [*Tearfully*] But why not! Everybody avoids it! I meet people in the street, in the shops, even friends – no-one mentions him now, you'd think he never existed! [*Then, calming slightly*] I can sense their heads turn after I pass, I know they're talking about him – but why can't they talk about him *to me*! It's me and the children who miss him the most! [*Angrily*] Do they think we've just forgotten him! Do they think we don't care!

BETTY: [*Alarmed*] There, there, Anna, take it easy. They probably just don't want to upset you.

ANNA: But they *do* upset me! They . . . [*Then, as if her energy has drained*] You're right, Betty, you're right. I'd probably have acted the same.

[*Short silence. BETTY doesn't know whether it is best to continue the conversation, or to avoid it, but ANNA looks as if she is set to talk on, regardless.*]

ANNA: I keep getting images. Pictures. Every night they haunt me. I can feel them coming in my sleep, and I break out in a cold sweat. I want to run into the girls' room in case they're lying there terrified too, but I can't . . . their anguish and their fear would be too much for me . . . I feel stuck to the bed.

[*Brief silence.*]

BETTY: 'Images'?

ANNA: Of Billy. [*Her eyes close and she looks as if she is going to cry again, but she recovers*] His face. When they let me see him . . . they weren't going to, but I insisted. His face . . . it wasn't really there. [*BETTY looks startled*] It haunts me . . . the holes . . . the mess. But I had to see him, I felt I owed it to him . . . to us both . . . after all we'd come through together. And I had to say a last good-bye. [*She stares distantly in front*] Funny, he had a bit of a headache when he left that evening. I'd no Disprin in the house – he was a bit annoyed at that, I remember. Said he'd get some in a shop while he was on duty. They . . . they found a packet clutched tightly in his hand when he was rushed to hospital. [*ANNA notices that BETTY is staring warily at her*] You think I'm crazy? I'm not, at least I hope not. You . . . you just . . . remember these things. Big things. Little things. When he was being lowered into the grave, Laura – she's the youngest – pushed through all the mourners and shouted: "Daddy, get up! See all the flowers everyone has brought you!" [*ANNA bursts into tears again and BETTY and she cling to each other*] Bastards! Why him! Why did he have to die! Why can't we have him back!

[*The sobbing continues for a while then the two women separate. ANNA searches for a tissue and dries her eyes.*]

ANNA: Betty, you'd be better in a chair, you can't be comfortable kneeling there. [*Then, trying to smile*] Doctor Murray'll be shouting at us if he sees you down there.

BETTY: Ah, forget about him. He'll not dare shout at *me*!

ANNA: [*Firmly*] No, please, sit up. I'll be okay. Honest.

[BETTY *reluctantly stands up and goes back to her armchair. Both women sit subdued for some moments.*]

BETTY: [*Warily*] Do you want to talk any more?

ANNA: [*Sighing*] Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't. Right now I suppose I don't mind. But . . . [*Falters*]

BETTY: [*Encouragingly*] Yes?

ANNA: It's just that 'talking' . . . 'words' . . . it all seems so distant. The doctor did try to talk to me, and Billy's seniors, and of course my relations . . . but I seemed to hear them all as if in a dream.

BETTY: You were still in shock.

ANNA: No – I mean yes, I was then – but no, it's just that putting it all into words is impossible. I suppose that's why people avoid it. But it's more than not knowing the right words to say. It's just that . . . [*She suddenly stares at BETTY*] There *are* no words, it has *nothing* to do with words!

[BETTY *looks uncertain as to what to say, and remains silent.*]

ANNA: I could try and describe what it's like?

BETTY: [*Apprehensively*] Well, look Anna, if you'd prefer not to dwell . . .

ANNA: [*Sighing*] Whether I dwell on his death or not doesn't seem to be within my control. Sometimes I don't know if it's *his* death that upsets me the most, or *our* loss. Can you see the difference? Does that sound selfish?

BETTY: No, of course not.

ANNA: You know, I can only tell you now what it's like, because at this moment I'm not feeling it in its intensity; I just feel numb again. [*She pauses*] And yet those feelings are always there . . . just below the surface of my thoughts, waiting. I'll be pottering about the house . . . my mind won't be on anything in particular, and then . . . maybe the words of a song on the radio, or even for no real reason at all . . . something will spark it

off again and this terrible sensation comes over me. It gathers around me like a fog . . . I can't prevent it coming; there's no way to escape it. You feel a horrible . . . a horrible 'draining' . . . as if everything in your body and mind is draining inwards. Your limbs become totally weak, you feel like jelly, ready to collapse. And then . . . then the panic comes. [*A look of fear passes over her face*]

BETTY: It's okay, Anna; it's okay.

ANNA: Your body seems like a blanket wrapped too tightly around you, suffocating you. And everything around you seems to be closing in on you as well, and you run from the house into the backyard, trying to suck in enough air to drown your growing panic. . . but it's all in vain, your whole being seems to be caught in its suffocating grip. [*ANNA is gripping the armchair tightly, her knuckles white, her face strained*] Then the tears come, choking tears mingled with your lost cries . . . crying out for him, for yourself, for the children, and at *all* grief, *everyone's* grief . . . Bitterness and helplessness . . . anger and pleading . . . Then something else creeps up on you . . . an awareness that all this grief cannot change what had happened – *nothing can be reversed* . . . and worse, that you are doomed to a future of such remembrances. It's the fact that you can feel the grief reach out for you *beyond today*, into your very future, that causes the worse feelings of dread. You scream to yourself: how will I ever survive it! Oh, my God! [*ANNA almost falls off the armchair, as she collapses forwards*. BETTY quickly gets to her side and supports her] Oh, my God! [*ANNA's voice is almost hoarse now, heart-rending in its anguish*] What'll I tell the child! Sometimes I feel I want it – it might be a boy, and Billy would've loved a son. But other times . . . I just wish it wasn't there. How can I watch it growing up, knowing someday I'm going to be asked: "Where's my daddy?" [*In a panic now*] What'll I say! What'll I say! [*Then, getting more agitated*] Suppose someone else tells the child: "The IRA blew your daddy's head away!" Oh, my God . . . could I not even have had just one more day with him! Just one more hour! Why did it have to happen to us! [*As ANNA's anguish intensifies BETTY looks*

increasingly alarmed] You know, if I hadn't been busy watching that silly film before he left the house, we could have had all that time to talk. I could have held him close, I could have . . . [ANNA's *inner torment is now painfully on display*] The blood was a terrible mess . . . his hair was matted together . . . like spikes [BETTY *gets up and goes quickly to rear of the stage*] . . . It was red, but not really red . . .

BETTY: [*To someone off-stage*] Could you get a nurse, quickly!

[BETTY *returns to ANNA.*]

ANNA: . . . dark red . . . like . . . what'll I say to the child, what'll I say! What if the child finds out before I'm ready to explain everything . . .

[BETTY *endeavours to get ANNA to stand. ANNA looks up at BETTY, as if in a daze, but allows BETTY to help her to her feet. They walk to the rear of the stage.*]

ANNA: What'll I say . . . what'll I say . . .

[*The two women exit.*]

[*Lights fade.*]

Scene 4

[*When lights go up, BETTY, LILY, SALLY and MARY are sitting in their armchairs. SALLY seems pained; the others are looking at her concernedly*]

LILY: You don't look well at all, Sally.

SALLY: [*With a detectable strain in her voice*] I feel so funny inside.

BETTY: [*Trying to joke*] Not half as funny as you look on the outside.

MARY: [*Reproachingly*] Be serious, Betty.

BETTY: Sorry, Sally, I didn't mean to . . .

SALLY: It's okay, Betty . . . it's my fault too, I can't relax, I've too much on my mind.

BETTY: Well, don't tell Lily what's on your mind or it'll end up in one of her poems.

SALLY: [*Trying to cheer up*] Indeed, I'll have to be careful.

LILY: We're all far too bloody serious at the moment. Let's see . . . let's . . . ah . . .

MARY: What you are scheming now?

LILY: Let's help Sally pick a name for the ba. [*To SALLY*] You still not decided on a name yet?

SALLY: [*Quietly*] No.

BETTY: [*To LILY*] Have you?

LILY: Yes. [*Then, mischievously*] If mine's a boy, he'll be called . . . Cuthbert.

BETTY & MARY: Cuthbert!

BETTY: Jesus, I can just see you shoutin' all over the Lower Falls: "Cuthbert, come in and stop throwing stones at the Army!" [*She mimics an 'upper-class' voice*] "Come in I say, Cuthbert! This minute!"

SALLY: [*With a depressed tone*] You don't think it'll still all be going on when they grow up . . .

[*Everyone seems sobered by this thought, but LILY tries to prevent the mood changing.*]

LILY: [*Quickly*] Enough! What about a name, then?

BETTY: What would your relations like, Sally?

SALLY: [*Shaking her head sadly*] Maybe this is the wrong subject too.

MARY: [*Puzzled*] Why?

SALLY: My relations are one of my biggest problems. [*The others look at her quizzically*] You see . . . I'm . . . we're a mixed marriage. [*Then, sadly*] We had so much trouble getting married, you wouldn't believe the half of it.

BETTY: Both sides expecting you to bring the child up as . . . ?

SALLY: [*Interrupting with a forcefulness that surprises everyone, even herself*] It's going to have nothing to do with either side! [*Then, a little embarrassed at her outburst*] I mean . . . I'm sick of what both sides here are doing to each other. [*Firmly*] I want our child to be 'different'. I want it to . . . see beyond all this mess. [*Almost in tears now*] 'Cause it makes me so sad. All the killing . . . I get so . . .

[*Suddenly SALLY gives a sharp cry of pain and doubles over. As quickly as they can, MARY and LILY get to her side. They immediately lift her up and begin supporting her to the rear of the stage.*]

MARY: [*To off-stage*] Nurse! Quickly!

[*All three exit the stage, but MARY soon reappears.*]

MARY: [*To off-stage*] You going to stay with her, Lily?

[*MARY sits down. Both she and BETTY look glum.*]

BETTY: Poor Sally. God, I hope she'll be alright.

[*MARY doesn't answer. There is silence for a moment.*]

BETTY: You know, no matter how much we may laugh and joke, everybody's got problems of their own. I used to look at people and say, 'She's landed on her feet alright,' or 'That one is sittin' pretty: she doesn't have my worries.' But not now. I've seen too much happening all around me. I walk down the street now looking at passers-by, and say to myself: every *one* of these people is hiding some sadness. [*Almost talking to herself*] Sometimes you can see it in their faces, sometimes you can't. But even behind the happiest-looking face, I know some anxiety or upset must hide. [*She pauses and stares at MARY who is looking pensive*] Take poor

Anna. [*Both women's eyes meet*] I mean, once you get to know her she's okay really. It's a pity you and she didn't hit it off in the . . .

MARY: [*Interrupting, speaking firmly*] Look, Betty, I was wrong. Okay, I misjudged her. I thought she was just a bit of a snob. I was wrong, I admit it.

BETTY: But you still avoid her? I suppose just because she's a . . .

MARY: No, Betty, now *you're* wrong. Oh, I know what you were going to say. Her husband in the police, and mine in the IRA. [*Musing*] It's funny, isn't it, but those facts should have us . . . have us at each other's throats – isn't that what people would expect? And yet . . . yet the truth is . . . it's not like that at all. God, how absurd! People like my husband killed *her* husband; people like her husband were ready to kill *my* husband. [*Shakes her head, and speaks in a tormented voice*] Jesus, this bloody country! [*Then, calmer*] No – the truth is different. Under it all, what really matters is that she's a mother, and I'm a mother. Her children will face life with no father, so will mine – I mean, by the time Sean gets out, they could all be up and away. [*She looks extremely sad*]

BETTY: But why can't you talk to her then?

MARY: Why? I'll tell you why. Because I'm afraid. [*BETTY looks at her quizzically*] Yes – afraid. Look – we're all in here to give birth! But what's lingering at the back of our minds? It's *death*! Anna's lost a husband. I feel bereaved. And God knows, we're all dreading hearing anything about Sally. Go on, admit it, I can friggin' sense it! Every time she has a pain I feel it's *me* that's suffering it. And we can't say anything to her except, "Don't worry, it'll be alright." Christ, we don't even friggin' believe it ourselves! [*She sighs deeply*] Maybe I'm imagining things. Or maybe it's just this damn country! This stupid, bloody country would get anyone down. [*MARY begins to cry, but tries not to show it, endeavouring to wipe the tears away surreptitiously. BETTY pretends not to notice. After a short silence MARY resumes*] No, I don't talk to Anna because I'm afraid of her getting upset, and then *me* getting upset.

BETTY: It might do you both good?

MARY: Would it? Look how many thousands of people are being upset in this country, and what good's it doing? Damn all! [*Then, apologetically*] I'm sorry, Betty, I know you didn't mean it that way. It's just that . . . Well – I'm in here having another ba, and children are the most precious thing in the world to me. And yet, they're the thing that terrifies me most. [*Then, seeing BETTY's puzzled look, she smiles*] Not what you're thinking, though they can be real terrors. I mean . . . [*Getting serious again*] I have a real fear of anything ever happening to them. [*Musing, almost absent-mindedly*] You know, when they're asleep, I still creep into their rooms and listen for their breathing. Sometimes when I can't make it out, I have to bend over them, and listen . . . holding my breath until I can detect theirs. God, the older ones would look at me funny if they knew. [*Laughs*] I've been near caught on a couple of times.

BETTY: I know just what you mean. I'm not as bad as you now but I mind all the times when they were babies and I'd be upstairs every twenty minutes checking. Near drove Danny up the walls – and then I found out he did it too, any time I was out.

MARY: When they'd get upset over something really silly and unimportant – like last week when Anne lost one of her gloves on the way back from school – and they'd come in crying, I'd tell them that it didn't matter. But as I'd be comforting them . . . as I'd brush away their tears and try to reassure them . . . I'd get this awful feeling of dread, knowing of all the deeper hurts that could lie ahead of them. Or when they were toddlers and had woken up alone in the dark, and with the TV blaring it had been some time before we'd realised . . . I'd go upstairs and the wee arms would be reaching out, the little lips trembling, panic in their eyes, and the crying – once it had stopped – replaced, for what seemed like ages, by these deep shaking sighs. I'd get so frightened that somewhere, at some time in the future, they could be in real pain or danger . . . needing me so badly . . . and I wouldn't be there to comfort or protect them. A mental picture of them crying alone would tear into my heart. I'd even begin to feel their hurt,

their fear . . . [*She looks directly at BETTY*] I suppose this all sounds really stupid?

BETTY: [*Shaking her head negatively*] No, not in the least.

MARY: My life is so tied in with theirs, I know I would die if anything happened to them. I fear that as if I fear my own death . . . as if it *is* the same death. I look at them and find it impossible – totally impossible – to imagine that they cannot reach *every* age – their eighth birthday, their tenth Christmas . . . Then I remember that countless numbers of children around the world die every year before they even reach the age my ones are . . . and I know that *nothing* is promised for ever, *nothing* is for sure. [*She pauses for a moment*] A neighbour's child used to go to school with Anne, but was killed in a road accident a year ago. Sometimes I see the neighbour staring out her window over at our house – at the same time every day, the time Anne comes skipping home from school. She just stares and stares, without moving. Sometimes I'm so busy fussing round Anne, before it dawns on me – sort of creepy like – that she's still standing there, motionless. [*Another pause*] But . . . but sometimes the curtains are closed – this is three in the afternoon, mind you – and I feel this terrible urge to go over and comfort her. Why should I assume she needs comforted? 'Cause I know the pain I'd feel, and I know I'd have to shut it off, close out all the memories . . . [*MARY looks near tears*] I'm silly getting in this mood. [*Tries to laugh*] Oh, I wish it was all over and I was going home. [*Then, quietly*] Though I'm dreading how I'm going to manage . . . without Séan.

[*LILY has entered at back of stage as they talk. For a moment they don't notice her, and she makes no effort to move towards a chair, but remains there, looking 'shattered'. Eventually BETTY does notice and stares at her, before suddenly bringing her hands up to her face, as she guesses the reason for LILY's demeanour.*]

BETTY: No! No! Say No! [*She shakes her head and fights back the tears*]

[*This sets off LILY, who bites at her bottom lip as she stumbles out her words.*]

LILY: [*In anguish*] She's lost it! She's lost it!

[*As if in a dream LILY goes towards an armchair, and sinks into it, sobbing. Her head falls into her hands. MARY goes over, kneels beside her and puts her arm round her. For a moment LILY is too upset to say anything; then finally she looks up.*]

LILY: She had such hopes for that child. Remember how funny it sounded when she said she wanted it to grow up 'different'? To be beyond all the bigotry here. A 'child for the future', she said to me afterwards . . . And the child was stillborn. [*Now shouting, half-angry, half-tearful*] What future has this country! Has it any! This bloody country doesn't deserve children! There's no . . . [*Then, more subdued*] Look at us! Except for our families, who gives a shit that we're in here! Politicians wouldn't look sideways at us; nobody's gonna ask us onto the 'box' to give our opinions . . . and yet . . . *we* hold all the cards. [*The other two stare at her, perplexed*] Can't you see! The future's here alright . . . it's being born to us in that friggin' delivery room down there! [*Then, in anguish*] Oh, Sally, Sally!

[*LILY begins sobbing again. For some time her sobbing is the only sound. The others look devastated. Then ANNA comes slowly on to the stage. She is breathing deeply – obviously experiencing contractions – and is indicating to someone off-stage that she will 'be with them in a minute'. Finally the others realise she is there, and look up.*]

ANNA: Mine's on its way. I'm . . . I'm off now. I . . . I heard about Sally. I . . . [*Falters*]

BETTY: [*Trying to sound cheerful*] You'll be alright, Anna. Keep some places for us in the maternity ward, won't you?

[*ANNA smiles faintly. She is standing close to where MARY is kneeling. As she turns to depart MARY gently touches her arm.*]

MARY: We'll be thinking of you, Anna.

ANNA: [*Quietly*] Thanks, Mary.

[*ANNA exits the stage.*]

[*Lights fade.*]

[***Curtain***]

The Cruthin Controversy

Michael Hall

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The Cruthin

Our Predominant Ancestors

The first settlers arrived in Ireland around 6500 BC during the Mesolithic Age, archaeological evidence suggesting that they came from Galloway in south-west Scotland or Cumbria in northern England.¹ These first settlers were hunter-gatherers, but after 4000 BC, during the Neolithic Age, farming was introduced and man began clearing the thickly-wooded Irish countryside. The Neolithic Irish also erected numerous stone burial monuments, surviving examples of which still retain the power to inspire and impress with their enigmatic grandeur.

Some of these structures reveal a close connection with Scotland – one type, the *court cairn*, is found in the north of Ireland and south-west Scotland, a fact which led Seán O Ríordáin to conclude: “The tombs and the finds from them form a continuous province joined rather than divided by the narrow waters of the North Channel.”²

These Neolithic inhabitants of Ireland, far from being an obscure people lost in the mists of our distant past, were, in reality, the *predominant* ancestors of the Irish people of today. As archaeologist Peter Woodman explained:

The gene pool of the Irish was probably set by the end of the Stone Age when there were very substantial numbers of people present and the landscape had already been frequently altered. The Irish are essentially Pre-Indo-European, they are not physically Celtic. No invasion since could have been sufficiently large to alter that fact completely.³

This fact must seem greatly at odds with the popular belief that the Irish are a predominantly *Celtic* people, yet scholars have increasingly come to accept that when the Celts arrived in Ireland they probably did so in numbers “far inferior to the native population(s).”⁴

The ‘Isles of the Pretani’

Around 330 BC the Greek geographer and voyager, Pytheas, gave us the earliest reference to the British Isles, calling them the ‘Isles of the Pretani’, the *Pretani* thus becoming the oldest inhabitants of Britain and Ireland to whom a definite name has been given.

Were these Pretani part of the incoming Celtic minority, or part of the *pre-*

Celtic population? If the latter, it is possible they were direct descendants of the Neolithic Irish, for up until the Celtic intrusions there is no evidence of any major immigrations into Ireland after the Neolithic period. Eoin MacNeill, co-founder of the Gaelic League, believed them to be pre-Celtic. In *Saorstát Éireann Official Handbook* he wrote:

While the Celts were still newcomers to Ireland and Britain, the inhabitants of both countries were known to them by the name Pretani or Qreteni. From Qreteni came their old name in Irish – Cruithin... Later on, before A.D. 300, a new name, Scotti, began to be used in Latin for the people of Ireland, and a new name, Picti, for the people formerly called Pretani, then inhabiting the northern parts of Britain...

Irish traditions amply confirm the evidence of Greek writers that Ireland was once a country of the Pretani, Cruithin, or Picts. Our own writers, in the seventh century and later, show that in their time there were numerous families, including many of high degree, in every quarter of Ireland but especially in Ulster and Connacht, who were recognised to be of Pictish descent. The problem ‘Who were the Picts?’ has long been under discussion.

Ancient and firm tradition, in Britain as well as Ireland, declared them to be quite a distinct people from the Gaels and the Britons; and some who have sought to solve the problem have ignored the existence of a large Pictish element in Ireland. The view of the late Sir John Rhys appears most reasonable, that, whereas the Celts came from Mid-Europe and belonged to the ‘Indo-European’ linguistic group, the Picts belong to the older peoples of Western Europe.⁵

Although some of the views held by historians such as MacNeill are now deemed to be “out of fashion with many modern scholars”⁶, his depiction of the Cruithin differs little from that presented by eminent scholars today. In a contribution to a modern textbook on Irish history, Francis Byrne wrote:

The earlier, non-Indo-European, population, of course, survived under the Celtic overlordship. One group in particular, known to the P-Celts as *Pritani* and to the Irish as *Cruithni*, survived into historical times as the Picts or ‘painted people’ of Scotland. The Cruithni were numerous in Ulster too, and the Loíges of Leinster and possibly the Ciarraige of Connacht and north Kerry belonged to the same people.⁷

Alongside this assertion that the Cruithin were pre-Celtic, is the suggestion that they shared an affinity with the Picts of Scotland. Although such a suggestion is

contested by some academics, it was one frequently made by the ancient Irish themselves, as Ian Adamson has summarised:

...when medieval Irish writers referred to [the Cruthin] it is clear they considered them to inhabit both Ireland and Scotland. One writer stated that ‘thirty kings of the Cruthin ruled Ireland and Scotland from Ollam to Fiachna macBaetáin,’ and that ‘seven kings of the Cruthin of Scotland ruled Ireland in Tara’ (*secht rig do Chruithnibh Alban rofhallnastair Erind i Temair*) – thereby identifying, as T F O’Rahilly notes, “the Cruthin of Ireland with those of Scotland.” Others refer to Scotland as the ‘land of the Cruthin’, while in a poem written in the eleventh or twelfth century the author tells us that the *Cruthnig* made up a section of the population of Scotland. The Annals of Tigernach, The Pictish Chronicle, St Berchan, the Albanic Duan, the Book of Deer and John of Fordun plainly show that the name Cruthin was applied to the inhabitants of both Scotland and Ireland.^{8[E]}

Academics who discount any link between the Irish Cruthin and the Scottish Picts often point out that while ancient texts written in Irish may have used the label ‘Cruthin’ to signify both peoples, texts written in Latin never used the word ‘Picts’ for the Irish Cruthin. However, this could be a product of the efforts by ancient Gaelic genealogists not only to disassociate the Irish Cruthin from the Scottish Picts, but to dispense with the name ‘Cruthin’ and provide the Cruthin with a Gaelic ancestry instead. As T F O’Rahilly explained:

The combined influence of Bede, Mael Mura, and the genealogical fiction of Ir, caused *Cruithni* to lose favour as the name of a section of the Irish population. This disuse of *Cruithni* as a name is doubtless connected with the rise of a new genealogical doctrine which turned the Irish Cruthin into Gaels and thus disassociated them from the Cruthin of Scotland. Nevertheless the fact that there were Cruthin in Ireland as well as in Scotland was, as might be expected, long remembered; and so it is not surprising to find writers occasionally suggesting, in defiance of Mael Mura, that the Cruthin of both countries formed one people in remote times.⁹

While there is no actual proof of any ethnic affinity between sections of the population in Ireland and Scotland, circumstantially there is much that would make it a strong possibility: the close proximity of the two areas; the archaeological evidence of contact dating back to the Stone Age; the fact that population movements across the North Channel have been a *constant* feature throughout history; and the belief held by some scholars that both the Irish

Cruthin⁷ and the Scottish Picts¹⁰ were pre-Celtic peoples.

As Liam de Paor concluded:

The gene pool of the Irish... is probably very closely related to the gene pools of highland Britain.... With that fringe area, relationships, both cultural and genetic, almost certainly go back to a much more distant time than that uncertain period when Celtic languages and customs came to dominate both Great Britain and Ireland. Therefore, so far as the physical make-up of the Irish goes... they share these origins with their fellows in the neighbouring parts – the north and west – of the next-door island of Great Britain.¹¹

Struggle for Dominance

Despite the Celts being a minority within the population, they began to wield an enormous amount of influence and power. Whatever the reasons for this – military prowess, superior weapons, tactical skills, or even the dynastic way they parcelled out their conquests – they gradually came to dominate large areas of the island, aided by alliances forged with sections of the indigenous people.

That the Cruthin continued to play an important role in Irish political and military affairs is well documented in ancient texts, especially with regard to the constant struggle for control of Ulster. The attempts by one of the most dynamic of the Celtic dynasties, the Gaelic Uí Néill, to dominate the North – opposed fiercely by the Cruthin in alliance with the Celtic Ulaid – is evidenced by the numerous battles listed in the ancient annals.

For example, in AD 563 at the battle of Móin Dairi Lothair (Moneymore) seven Cruthin kings were slain, the compiler of the *Annals of Ulster* also recording the event in verse:

Sharp weapons stretch, men stretch,
In the great bog of Daire-lothair –
The cause of a contention for right –
Seven Cruithnian Kings, including Aedh Brec.
The battle of all the Cruithni is fought
[And] they burn Eilne.
The battle of Gabhair-Lifè is fought,
And the battle of Cul-dreimne.¹²

Another battle is recorded between the Cruthin and the Uí Néill near Coleraine in 579, and in 637 occurred the mightiest clash of all – the battle of Moira, described by Sir Samuel Ferguson as the “greatest battle, whether we regard the

numbers engaged, the duration of combat, or the stake at issue, ever fought within the bounds of Ireland.”¹³ The Ulstermen on that occasion were led by the Cruthin over-king of Ulster, Congal Cláen. No doubt the Ulstermen were hoping to undo some of the Uí Néill gains, and probably felt they had good prospects of doing so, especially when, as Francis Byrne pointed out,

...we remember that the Ulaid and Cruthin were still powerful in County Londonderry and possibly still ruled directly in Louth as far as the Boyne in the early seventh century; that they cherished memories of their former dominance over all the North; that they considered the Uí Néill recent upstarts...¹⁴

However, the Ulstermen were defeated, and Congal died in the battle.

In another confrontation at Leth Cam (near Armagh) in 827 the Uí Néill king, the Cruthin king, the Ulaid king and many princes of Ulster were killed. By this time the label ‘Cruthin’ had been superseded by the names of individual septs, and the main body of Cruthin were known as the Dál nAraidi.

Ironically it was not until 1364, after the Gaelic chiefs had destroyed the first Anglo-Normans to set foot in the North, that a Uí Néill chief could at last style himself ‘king of Ulster’.

Europe’s Debt to Bangor

Not all the Cruthin owe their fame to positions of kingship or deeds on the battlefield. In AD 555 St Comgall, perhaps the most illustrious of all the Cruthin, founded a monastic school at Bangor (County Down), which was to achieve great historic importance.

Such was his reputation for piety and learning that multitudes flocked to his school from the most distant parts; it is well established that not less than 3,000 students and teachers were under his care at one time, including many of the most honourable in the land. The evangelistic zeal of Comgall was pre-eminent – down to the landing-place at the reef of rocks he led many a band of his disciples who were to embark on their frail coracles to spread the Gospel in European countries.¹⁵

An early text – Adamnan’s *Life of Columba* – not only depicts a meeting between Comgall and another famous religious personality, St Columba, the latter a prince of the Uí Néill, but gives a clear indication that the Cruthin were still perceived as having a distinct identity:

At another time [Columba] and the abbot Comgall sit down not far from

the fortress [of Cethirn], on a bright summer's day. Then water is brought to the Saints in a brazen vessel from a spring hard by, for them to wash their hands. Which when St Columba had received, he thus speaks to the abbot Comgall, who is sitting beside him: 'The day will come, O Comgall, when that spring, from which has come the water now brought to us, will not be fit for any human purposes.' 'By what cause,' says Comgall, 'will its spring water be corrupted?' Then says St Columba, 'Because it will be filled with human blood, for my family friends and thy relations according to the flesh, that is, the Uí Néill and the Cruthin people, will wage war, fighting in this fortress of Cethirn close by. Whence in the above-named spring some poor fellow of my kindred will be slain, and the basin of the same spring will be filled with the blood of him that is slain with the rest.' Which true prophecy of his was fulfilled in its season after many years.¹⁶

One of Comgall's disciples was Columbanus, who in 589 set off on a great missionary journey through Europe, eventually dying at Bobbio, Italy. The monasteries he established throughout his travels were the inspiration for hundreds of others. Robert Schuman, the French Foreign Minister whose energies contributed greatly to the setting up of the European Economic Community, said that "St. Columbanus is the patron saint of those who seek to construct a united Europe."

An Important Legacy?

The Cruthin, therefore, hold a prominent position in our history:

- They are the first people in Ireland to whom a definite name can be attached.
- It is accepted that they once comprised the majority of the population in large areas of Ulster.
- They were to the forefront in the interminable warfare which took place during Ulster's early history.
- They produced several important historical personages, one of whom was to have a lasting impact not only upon Irish but upon European history.
- The Cruthin were among those settlers from Ulster, labelled 'Scotti' by the Romans, who migrated across the North Channel and gave Scotland its name. Their descendants in turn were undoubtedly among those Scots who came to Ulster during the 17th century Plantation. They are an integral part of the multi-faceted connection between the peoples of Scotland and

Ireland, which, when properly explored, might help to unify the presently-divided communities in Ulster, and even bridge the gap between the peoples of our two islands. [This theme is explored in greater depth in the pamphlets *Ulster's Scottish Connection*¹⁷ and *Ulster's Shared Heritage*¹⁸.]

An impressive pedigree, it would seem, and one which surely must have accorded the Cruthin a prominent place in our historical heritage. And yet the excellent Ulster Museum makes no mention of them, nor the exciting new visitor's centre at Navan Fort, possibly Ulster's most important antiquity. And, until recently, many books on Irish history paid them scant attention, if not ignoring them completely.

It is Dr Ian Adamson who has been primarily responsible for bringing this forgotten aspect of our heritage to the attention of the general public. Yet the work of Adamson and myself is deemed to be so much at variance with both 'received' and 'popular' opinion, we are often accused of making it all up. A review of my *Ulster: The Hidden History*¹⁹ said that it was "naive [and aimed] at nothing less than an overthrow of current perceptions"²⁰, while Adamson's work has attracted a litany of derogatory comments: "a house of cards – half-truths and fanciful suppositions built one upon another"²¹ ... "spurious authenticity"²² ... "concocted"²¹ ... "disputed theories"²³ ... "sheer disbelief from leading academics"²⁴... "academically eccentric"²⁵ ... and many more in the same vein.

The matter has engendered surprising emotions from among a profession usually thought of as being somewhat sedate and aloof. One prominent academic, while in a mini-bus with other academics, launched into a tirade against Adamson that was hysterical rather than historical, during which he informed his astonished colleagues that if any of them owned copies of Adamson's books "they should go home and burn them all!"

Advisors to the Northern Ireland Office have apparently informed officials there that the 'Cruthin theory' is either eccentric or a form of Loyalist extremism.

One local author almost published a ludicrous falsehood about my own book which she said had been relayed to her by 'a reliable source', without either this author or her source having felt any need to check the facts with me.

Who are these 'advisors' and what expertise do they claim; *what* is the real basis of the intense academic antagonism; and *why* do 'reliable sources' feel the necessity to deal in falsehoods? To help explore such questions, the second part of this pamphlet will be an analysis of the controversy which has surrounded 'Cruthinism', as one writer labelled it²², for this controversy has become as fascinating a story as that of the Cruthin themselves.

The Controversy

‘Revisionism’ or ‘Rediscovery’?

When Ian Adamson first wrote about the Cruthin, it was obvious that his subject matter was totally unknown to the general public. Popular awareness of Ireland’s past was a collage of themes, personalities and dates – the Celts, St Patrick, the Vikings, Gaelic chiefs and English conquerors, Plantation and Rebellion, William and James, 1690 and the Boyne, 1916 and the Easter Rising or the Somme, Independence and Partition... but no Cruthin. Even to those with a knowledge of, or training in, Irish history, Adamson’s thesis appeared to be so out of step with accepted thinking that it was deemed either a complete fabrication, or a skilful attempt to rewrite our past. Graduates in History from Queen’s University, Belfast, dismissed our work as “pure revisionism”, while lecturers wrote of “the revisionism inherent in the Cruthin thesis”²⁶. Now, a charge of ‘revisionism’ is usually engendered by a belief that the thesis being presented is simply an attempt to remould history to make it conform to a new perspective. But *was* what we were revealing really all that new or even revised?

In the first part of this pamphlet I quoted from Eoin MacNeill’s contribution to *Saorstát Eireann Official Handbook*, which was published in 1932. I could cite similar examples from the same period. Indeed, it is possible to go back even further, over 100 years in fact, to the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*²⁷, which not only makes clear reference to the Cruthin but speaks of their ethnic affinity with the Scottish Picts. The Cruthin, therefore, were never concocted by Adamson; on the contrary, the numerous references to them by other scholars provides, as W A Hanna pointed out,

...indisputable evidence that Adamson did not conjure up the Cruthin as an early pre-Celtic people in Ireland, that he was not the first to suggest that some of them emigrated from Ulster to Scotland, and that he did not invent the theory of their return.⁶

However, between the period during which those earlier references were written, through the traumatic birth of modern Ireland and up until quite recently, things *had* changed. Mention of the Cruthin had disappeared from many history books (including the edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* currently held in Belfast Central Library) – a *revision*. Mention even of a significant pre-Celtic

population inhabiting Ireland alongside the Celts was ignored, the majority of the Irish people were now apparently all Celts – a *revision*. Any suggestion of an ethnic affinity between the ancient inhabitants of Scotland and Ulster was sidelined – a *revision*. ‘Revisionism’ had indeed been undertaken, *not* by Adamson, but by sections of the academic elite. Adamson had simply endeavoured to bring this hidden aspect of our shared heritage to the attention of our divided community.

Some might contend that even if Adamson and I have not revised history as such, we are simply resurrecting notions about our past which have long since been abandoned. That this is patently not the case should become clear in the exploration which follows.

Academic Distaste for ‘Popular Historians’

1989 saw the publication of a new history of Ulster written by leading academics. According to the editors the volume had its origins in “a demand from both teachers of history and the general public for an accessible and up-to-date history of the province. Though recent years have seen the publication of a number of scholarly monographs dealing with aspects of Ulster’s past, *the last general history of the province was published in the 1950s*.”²⁸ [my italics]

According to the editors, then, a great vacuum in books on Ulster’s history aimed at a general audience has seemingly existed for decades. No acknowledgement here of Adamson’s *The Cruthin*, or *The Identity of Ulster*, or my own *Ulster: The Hidden History*, even though two of these titles were specifically ‘general histories of the province’, both of which went into reprint and, in local terms at least, became best sellers (as well as being far more ‘accessible’ to the general public than the academic volume with its £18 cover price). The truth is that the editors *were* well aware of these books, and also that the “demand from the general public” *was* being met – the problem was that this was originating not from within academia, but from among – using the description of one of their contributors – ‘popular historians’, which in rough translation means ‘non-professionals’.

Richard Warner, from the Department of Antiquities at the Ulster Museum, acknowledged the root of the problem when he admonished his fellow scholars: “It is an absolute obligation on professionals to make [their interpretations of] history available to everybody else so that they can absorb it and assimilate it as part of their history. If the professionals fail to do that then they have only themselves to blame when the non-professionals take up the history wrongly.”²⁹

The ‘professionals’ had indeed been ignoring Adamson. As Peter Carr pointed out: “Liberal academia... kept its distance. Adamson after all was distinctly non-U, an outsider, a prole, a mere BA.”²⁰ Academia would have preferred that the vacuum had been filled by themselves: to them Adamson was indeed an outsider and the writing of history is best left in the hands of professionals. As Richard Warner unabashedly asserted on behalf of his fellow academics: “Well, I hate to sound arrogant, but [it is] the job of people like me to know when history is likely to be correct or historical interpretation is likely to be correct or incorrect.”²⁹

Well, to be honest, it *does* sounds arrogant, but we could live with that – if it was simply a matter of academic sensitivities and professional/non-professional jealousies. The problem is that academia has had plenty of opportunities to fill the vacuum, but, for whatever reasons, has not only kept its distance from Adamson, but has kept its distance from the communal tragedy which has been going on with unabated intensity outside its ivory towers.

One academic admitted this to us privately: “For twenty years now our two communities have been murdering each other, supposedly *over their history*, and what have our academics done about it? Absolutely nothing! They’ve washed their hands of any responsibility, content to collect their salaries, their bursaries, their grants... just sat on their backsides and observed events with an aloof cynicism, without the slightest suggestion that *they* could play any role confronting it. The general public has received more history lessons from gable-wall muralists than from the whole of academia.”

Academic Dilemma

That academics hoped that ‘Cruthinism’ might just disappear was pointed out by Brian Lambkin: “The initial reception of *The Cruthin* by the community of scholars in early Irish history did little to alleviate the sense of exclusion. It was largely ignored. Understandably, scholars felt themselves faced with a dilemma: to engage with the debate opened up by Adamson would be to give it a spurious authenticity...”²²

I would contend that, contrary to a supposed concern with ‘spurious authenticity’, academia was more troubled that an outsider had caught them so unprepared. They knew that much of the history Adamson was dealing with *was* authentic – even if they quarrelled with his particular interpretations – the problem was that having someone outside their club reveal it was a poor reflection on themselves and their outdated fixations. Academic vested interests were now under the spotlight, and for some it was an unaccustomed

experience, as one reviewer witnessed:

I remember, several years ago, listening with astonishment to a leading archaeologist telling a persistent questioner at a public lecture, in suitably polite and academic language, to think what he was told to think. The questioner's fatal error had been to raise the subject of the Cruthin.³⁰

When Adamson in his most recent books began to substantiate his analysis by numerous quotes from eminent academics it drew a surprising rebuke: "...it would be easier to accept his overall thesis if it were less dependent on selective extracts from other historians."³¹ I suspect that this aversion to the use of such extracts had little to do with acceptance, but reflected the discomfiture felt within sections of academia at the sight of an array of quotes apparently lending credence to Adamson's thesis. Better to keep Adamson at a distance, an eccentric "pseudo-historian"²¹, than have him appear to be expounding theories for which he could produce scholarly support; for, as W A Hanna pointed out, his "references... clearly show that far from 'concocting' anything Adamson has merely restated the views of others, mostly highly respected and reputable historians."⁶

Into the Fray...

Once it became clear that Cruthinism could not be ignored, it attracted an assortment of reviewers and critics into battle against it. Sometimes their motive was less than clear; indeed, some openly admitted it was an area of history they knew little about – "I am not qualified to gauge the factual basis of Adamson's thesis"³¹, or "I am not in a position to quarrel with the historical accuracy of this account..."³² – yet this did not stop them from launching into their critiques. It was almost as if 'anyone who was anybody' in intellectual circles felt a need to have said something about the subject, perhaps even to have said it with flair and panache: "Somewhere in the heaven of lost reviews hovers the one I should have liked to have written."³¹

'Confronting the issue...'

While reviewers and assorted armchair critics dabbled in the controversy almost from its first appearance, mainstream academia was more reluctant to become involved in any frontal attack, preferring to snipe occasionally from the sidelines. Indeed, as Brian Lambkin pointed out: "It took until 1989... for an established scholar to confront the issue in a popular book and demonstrate the flaws in Adamson's hypothesis."²² Lambkin's reference is to a contribution by Charles

Doherty in *Ulster: An Illustrated History*, the academic volume already referred to, though whether any flaws were indeed demonstrated is highly debatable.

Doherty begins by pointing out that: “Some popular historians have claimed that the Cruthin were the original [pre-Gaelic] population group to occupy the north-east... who held out against Gaelic ‘invaders’...” He disputes this ‘interpretation’, saying that “much of this theory is derived from the work of the late T F O’Rahilly whose historical conclusions have been questioned by archaeologists and historians. In particular, O’Rahilly’s thesis on the chronology of the invasion has been subject to serious revision and, consequently... his views on the ethnic makeup of early Ireland are no longer accepted.”³³

Doherty seems to be trying to negate Cruthinism by making it appear dependent upon O’Rahilly’s disputed ethnic analysis. However, Adamson found O’Rahilly’s work invaluable *not* because of the latter’s views on the ‘ethnic makeup’ of the Irish, but because of his astute analysis as to how the ancient Irish historians had submerged the distinctive identity of the Cruthin.

Doherty himself endeavours to blur any such distinctions among the ancient Irish: “... it is dangerous to assign racial origins to any particular tribal group in early Ireland. Such was the degree of homogenization of the various peoples of prehistoric Ireland that by the opening of the historical period they had all gone ‘native’...”³³

Ironically, despite the attempts to downgrade any distinctive Cruthin identity, academics can easily reverse the process when it suits and suddenly *rediscover* such distinctions and differences. For example, when Richard Warner wished to counter the suggestion that the people in control of Emain Macha (Navan) were all Cruthin (something which was never claimed by Adamson), he was quite adamant in his response:

The Ulaid became the tribe in historic times living in County Down called the Dál Fiatach, and all the historians of that time made a *clear distinction* between [them] and the Dál nAraidi of County Antrim who were Cruthin. It was *absolutely clear* that the Dál Fiatach of County Down and the Ulaid of Navan were *Érainn*. They belonged to *exactly the same ethnic grouping* as the people in the south, who [according to the early myths] they were apparently fighting. *The fact is* that the people in Navan... and the Cruthin were *totally different*.²⁹ [my italics]

Although Doherty goes on to talk of the Cruthin as if he had no dispute with Adamson (he says they “formed the bulk of the population in the reduced over-kingdom of the Ulaid”, that their name “implies an ancient population group”,

and he even makes mention of their “most powerful king”, Congal), it is evident his main disagreement with Adamson is whether the Cruthin can be labelled pre-Gaelic. As he explained on a radio programme:

... if there was some memory of the Cruthin as being pre-Goidelic or pre-Celtic or whatever, there is no way of getting at it now from the sources and those who would try to use it that way I think are really picking and choosing material that suit their thesis and not examining the evidence on its own part.²⁹

Doherty seems to be suggesting here that, going by an ‘examination of the evidence’, the Cruthin can not be categorised as pre-Celtic, and, indeed, that to do so would require a deliberate manipulation – the “picking and choosing” – of this evidence. But surely *the opposite is the case* – that it is *far more likely* that the Cruthin *were* pre-Celtic, and it is those wishing to see them as *Celts* who have to do the ‘picking and choosing’. The supposed Celticity of the Irish has come under increasing attack within academia; indeed, most scholars now accept that the Celts were only a small minority in Ireland (their numbers being “far inferior to the native population(s)” as archeologist J P Mallory noted⁴), whereas the Cruthin, far from being a minority, composed, as Doherty himself admitted, “the bulk of the population in the reduced over-kingdom of the Ulaid”? How then is it possible for the Celts to be only a ‘small minority’ *and* ‘the bulk of the population’ *at the same time*? Academics repeatedly assert that Adamson is confused as to who the Cruthin *were* – we could equally contend that academics are just as confused as to who they *were not*.

Adamson and myself have actually *no problem* accepting that Irish society became thoroughly homogenized; our contention has always been that the Irish were basically a pre-Celtic people, to whom a Celtic minority made a significant political and cultural contribution. Indeed, we would readily agree with Richard Warner that:

Throughout [some 700 years of the Early Iron Age] the mass of the Irish people remained racially unchanged. Whatever they were at the end of the Bronze age they were still, with a small but important addition (partly at least from the Celtic world), when they entered the early medieval period.³⁴

Rather than *our* analysis – that this ‘unchanging mass’ was pre-Celtic – being under threat, we feel it is the attempt by Doherty and others to distance the bulk of the Irish from their pre-Celtic inheritance which should prove the more difficult assertion to sustain.

“Hardly Discussable”?

Adamson’s theories as to the origins of the Cruthin have been dismissed by some archaeologists as “hardly discussable since the Cruthin as a distinct ethnic group are archaeologically invisible, that is, there is not a single object or site that an archaeologist can declare to be distinctly Cruthin.”³⁵

This is surprising logic, to say the least. The Cruthin had a definite name for themselves; are referred to repeatedly in the ancient Irish annals; are clearly identified in Adamnan’s *Life of Columba*; are mentioned in that great saga of the Ulster Cycle, the *Táin*; and it is widely accepted that they formed the bulk of the population over a sizeable part of Ulster – yet because they are “archaeologically invisible” theories about them, it appears, are “hardly discussable”? This seems especially ironic when we consider that, apart from the legacy of their language, there is no real evidence as to when the *Celts* arrived in Ireland, no real idea as to their numbers other than the probability that they only constituted a small minority, and when even the notion that the Irish could be called Celts only originated in the 19th century (the ancient Irish never thought of themselves as Celts) – yet for years academics have not only felt perfectly able to ‘discuss’ the Celts at great length but have developed a minor industry writing books about them.

Archaeologists Mallory and McNeill concluded that: “when the Cruthin of Ulster emerge in our earliest texts they bear Irish names and there is not the slightest hint that they spoke anything other than Irish.”³⁵ ‘Not the slightest hint’? Surely it is not as clear-cut as that. When Columba went to convert the Scottish Picts he is said to have been accompanied by the Cruthin abbot of Bangor, Comgall, whose possible role – according to some scholars – was to act as an interpreter. And, as Richard Warner cautioned: “We should take heed of O’Rahilly’s claim that as late as the sixth century ‘Irish’ (that is, the language we call Irish) was not the only language spoken in Ireland.”³⁴

Brickbats over the ‘Wall’

When Adamson’s book *The Ulster People* was published, and featured in a *Belfast Telegraph* article, Richard Warner wrote to the newspaper³⁶ with a refutation of comments made about the series of ancient linear earthworks collectively known as the ‘Black Pig’s Dyke’, still visible at various places along Ulster’s southern boundary.

Warner attempted to take Adamson to task for speculating about matters for which he insisted “there is no evidence”. One must assume that Warner is

opposed to all such speculation. Yet, a glaring inconsistency exists. Warner is a member of the Navan Research Group who publish the academic journal *Emania*. One issue contained the results of an investigation into a section of the Dyke by Aidan Walsh, Curator of Monaghan County Museum, which, according to the editor, provided “our first solid evidence for both the construction and dating of this monument”. In the article, Walsh, as he is entitled to do, makes various speculations on the basis of his investigation. It is interesting to contrast some of these with Warner’s forceful denunciation of those by Adamson.

Warner asserts that “there is no evidence that the various pieces of earthwork ever formed a continuous boundary”, and that “there is no evidence that they were built at one time”. There may indeed be no solid evidence, but Aidan Walsh felt confident enough after *his* survey to propose: “We can now begin to think of a frontier composed of various scattered earthworks and we can begin to suggest that they might be linked together in time and origin.”³⁷

Warner further states that “there is no evidence of a palisade on top”. There may not have been a palisade *on top*, but Warner omitted to point out that there is, however, evidence of a palisade *adjoining* the Dyke. In the portion investigated by Walsh, a third line of defence was discovered which “was composed of a timber palisade which paralleled the earthwork itself... This palisade was sizeable [and] could have stood up to 3-4 metres in height.” In a separate investigation Chris Lynn also uncovered evidence of a palisade at the ‘Dorsey ramparts’ further to the east.

Warner also asserts that “there is no evidence of a war between Ulster and the rest of the country in 100 BC”. Yet Walsh felt able to speculate: “Perhaps we are dealing here with a series of extraordinary events in the centuries before Christ with a war extending across the land starting at the boundaries of a kingdom and culminating with the destruction of its capital.”³⁷

Warner may indeed heartily disagree with the speculations of his fellow academic; the interesting point is that he did not see fit – as far as I am aware – to dash to the local newspapers with a vigorous denunciation of Walsh’s pronouncements. I suspect, therefore, that speculation *per se* is not the problem – the problem for Warner, as it is for other academics, is Adamson and his Cruthin.

There is one final aspect to Warner’s letter which merits comment. He states that the “general thesis of the book... is that archaeology proves that Ulster had a separateness in ancient times that is, somehow, relevant to the politics of today.” Yet, not only is it patently *not* the “general thesis”, but discussion of

archaeology only takes up an extremely small part of the book. I suggest that readers of Adamson's book bear in mind Warner's assertion that it is "the job of people like me to know when... historical interpretation is likely to be correct or incorrect,"²⁰ and judge for themselves whether his 'interpretation' of *The Ulster People* is 'correct or incorrect'.

'Deceptions of scholars'

The September 1993 edition of *Fortnight* magazine carried an article entitled 'Deceptions of demons' which presented itself as an authoritative 'refutation' of Adamson's theories. Its author, H J Morgan, formerly of the Department of Irish Studies and currently co-editor of *History Ireland*, began his 'refutation' with a personal attack on Adamson: "Dr Ian Adamson is a hospital doctor, not a doctor of philosophy. He has therefore, no training as a scholar. He is a pseudo-historian who distorts history for propaganda purposes."²¹ Apart from being extremely offensive language this is also a highly questionable piece of logic. Given that so many scholarly disciplines have been greatly enriched by the work of laymen or those who had not necessarily come up 'through the ranks', I would imagine other academics were astonished by Morgan's assertion. Some were certainly not appreciative of his tone: one expressed regret at Morgan's use of "insinuation and innuendo", pointing out that "personal attacks seldom convince the discerning reader"⁶.

However, leaving that aside, here is Morgan's gripe: "[Adamson's] theory is nonsense and Adamson has a brass neck in expounding it. It is not an argument based on ascertainable facts but is, rather, a house of cards – half truths and fanciful suppositions built one upon another. A number of points can easily demolish this tenuous thesis..."²¹

Although I was greatly intrigued, and eagerly anticipated a challenging read, I was to be extremely disappointed. Let me go through Morgan's points:

First, the Ulaid who ruled Ulster at the time of the cattle raid [of Cooley – *The Táin*] were *not* the Cruthin. The latter were a subject people of the Ulaid. There is even a reference in *The Annals of Ulster*, under AD 668, of a battle between the Ulaid and the Cruthin at Belfast.²¹

This 'point' seems to suggest that Adamson was *not aware* that: (i) the Ulaid and the Cruthin were different groupings; (ii) the Ulaid were in a position of dominance over the Cruthin; and (iii) the two groupings had even fought together at present-day Belfast. I can best respond by quoting directly from

Adamson's *The Ulster People*:

The Ulaid, according to Francis Byrne, “most probably represented a warrior caste of La Tène Celts from Britain, wielding an overlordship over indigenous tribes.” Among these ‘indigenous tribes’, who obviously still formed the majority of the population, the most important and the most populous were the *Cruthin*. These pre-Celtic peoples shared in the over-kingship of Ulster, particular those Cruthin later known as the Dál nAraidi... though at times the strains within the alliance would lead to open warfare (it was a battle between the Cruthin and Ulaid, recorded in the *Annals of Ulster* as having been fought at the ‘Fearsat’ in 667 which gave Belfast its first mention in history).^{8[E]}

Can Morgan not read? I am assuming he had the courtesy, indeed the professionalism, to read *The Ulster People*; after all it had been available for two years and it would be highly reprehensible for someone who sets such high store in “training as a scholar” to have ignored his adversary’s current work, especially when his attack was aimed on such a personal level.

Let us proceed to Morgan’s next point:

Second, it is highly unlikely that Cú Chulainn was one of the Cruthin because his lands were in Co Louth and Cooley, the home of the Brown Bull, is also in Co Louth.²¹

Morgan seems to be suggesting here that Cúchulainn’s lands in Co Louth were not considered *Cruthin territory*. However, not all scholars would agree with him on that point. Eoin MacNeill wrote:

...when Ireland emerges into the full light of written history, we find the Picts a very powerful people in east Ulster, Cuailnge itself, the home of the Brown Bull, and the neighbouring plain of Muirtheimhne, Cú Chulainn’s patrimony, being now Pictish territory.³⁸

An ancient text also links the Conaille of Louth alongside the other main Cruthin septs to the legendary Ulster warrior, Conall Cernach: “ ‘The clans of Conall *cernach*’ are the Dalaradians, the *úi Echach ulad*, the *Conaille* of Murthemny, and ‘the seven Soghans’.” (L.L. 331:3)

Admittedly, uncertainty does exist, Byrne pointing out that there was disagreement among the genealogists as to the actual ethnic origins of the Conaille.¹⁴ Yet although they were firmly linked to Ulster, it is doubtful that they were of the Ulaid, for the annals record repeated attacks upon them by the latter, and after Matudan of the Ulaid plundered the Conaille in 949 he was slain by the

Conaille's immediate neighbours, the Cruthin of Iveagh. Was this just coincidence, or were the Iveagh Cruthin avenging an attack on their own?

However, even if we cannot say with certainty that the Conaille of Louth were Cruthin, what about Cúchulainn himself – or, more correctly, his legend? The ancient Irish writers were always at pains to glorify the dominant Gaelic ruling class, yet, as R A S Macalister pointed out:

Those whom the chronicler wishes to exalt are fair, with long flowing hair. Those who are abased, in positions or morals, are as a rule dark, with closecropped or 'rough' hair. There is, however, one remarkable exception to all these rules. The great Ultonian champion, Cú Chulaind, is described as being very dark, and close-cropped.³⁹

Eoin MacNeill also commented on this anomaly:

Cú Chulainn, according to one tradition preserved by Dubhaltach, belonged to a non-Gaelic tribe called Tuath Tabhairn, and it will be remembered that he is once described as 'a small dark man'. 'Thou little elf!' his charioteer used to call him, to provoke him to do his utmost in the fight.³⁸

So here we have a hero who is small and dark – quite unlike the tall blond Celtic heroes – who apparently is not a Gael, but yet is not of the Ulaid either: "The MS Harleian 5280 tells us categorically that Cú Chulaind was exempt from (the 'sickness' of the Ulstermen), *ar nar bó don Ulltaib do*, 'for he was not of the Ulaid'."³⁹

Adamson's contention that there is circumstantial evidence linking the legend of Cúchulainn to the pre-Celtic population, as likely as not the Cruthin, is just as valid, indeed probably more so, than Morgan's bland assertion that such a link is "highly unlikely".

To continue with Morgan's 'refutation':

The term 'Cruthin' is Gaelic for 'Briton', but the British tribe with whom Adamson most frequently conflates the Cruthin are the Picts. The problem with this claim is that the Picts lived in the eastern parts of Scotland, from Fife up to the Orkneys, and none of their highly-distinctive standing stones or high crosses has ever been found in Ulster.²¹

Historian Charles Doherty was likewise emphatic that "there is no archaeological evidence to suggest a Pictish connection"³³. However, lack of archaeological 'evidence' is hardly the most conclusive of yardsticks, as Mallory and McNeill

revealed with regard to a later episode in Ulster's 'Scottish connection':

History records how towards the end of the 5th century AD Ulstermen began conquering and colonizing south-western Scotland to form the kingdom of Dál Riata which spanned the northern region of the Irish Sea... despite the fact that we believe we know when all this took place, *there is really not a shred of archaeological evidence to prove that it did happen.* [my italics].³⁵

Although academics would contend that there is "no archaeological evidence" to suggest a Pictish connection, and that the Cruthin are "archaeologically invisible", they themselves appear to have a remarkable ability to see into the remote past. Richard Warner said of any possible population movement across the North Channel: "...we are talking about a movement of ordinary people and these ordinary people were not the people who were moving in ancient times. It was only the kings who were moving about in ancient times."²⁹

Anyway, to return to Morgan's 'critique'. His final comment is that "rather than dabbling in pre-history... the easiest way to throw out Adamson's theory is to show that the 17th-century settlers were not the descendents of the Cruthin. One-third of the planters were lowland Scots; one-third was English. The other third was, in fact, Gaelic..."

Again I ask: can Morgan not read, or is he *deliberately* misrepresenting Adamson? Adamson *never* said that all the planters were descendents of the Cruthin, and has not only detailed the *mixed* background of the newcomers, but challenged the popular notion that the Planters were even all Protestants. He makes it clear that while "*many*" of the Planters, "particularly those who came from areas in Scotland which in previous centuries had been populated by immigrants from Ulster, may be justly considered as returning to the home of their ancestors"^{8[E]}, at the same time:

...there were also elements of Brittonic stock from Strathclyde, with smaller elements of Norse, 'Norman', Anglo-Saxon, Dalriadan and Pictish stock as well... Furthermore those 'English' settlers planted by the Puritan Lord Deputy Sir Arthur Chichester were mostly from Lancashire, Cheshire and Devon and thus basically of Brittonic stock. The third element consisted of Londoners, twelve Companies of whom were given most of the county of Coleraine, whose name they changed to Londonderry. Most of them did not find the area to their liking, and soon returned to London....^{8[A]}

Neither must it be assumed that all the settlers were Protestants, since there were Scottish Catholics as well, some of whom, such as the Hume family of Derry, were ultimately of English origin... M. Perceval-Maxwell has confirmed that... one of the most successful parts of the Scottish Plantation was led by Roman Catholics... The new Scots settlers differed from the English in language on two counts. Firstly there was a significant group who spoke Gaelic and it seems that Scottish Gaelic speakers were intelligible to the Irish at this period.^{8[D]}

Need I proceed any further? After having the effrontery to begin his ‘refutation’ with personal abuse and the assertion that he could “easily demolish this tenuous thesis”, it is astonishing that Morgan failed to do his research properly, and revealed himself unable to substantiate such a pretentious claim, even if he was, as he himself admitted, only “dabbling in pre-history”. It was regrettable that *Fortnight* magazine, which has an excellent track record for genuinely authoritative articles, gave up valuable space to this seriously-flawed diatribe.

A Wasted Opportunity

My experiences in cross-community work throughout the present ‘Troubles’ have convinced me that the media constantly play a negative role in events, showing little imagination or sense of responsibility. Hence, when I was approached by BBC Radio Ulster to take part in a programme about the Cruthin (*The Cruthin—A Common Culture*²⁹) I refused, as did Ian Adamson. However, the producer, Louis Edmondson, was persistent, and mainly because we found him a very likeable person we relented and agreed to take part – on certain conditions. My primary hesitation stemmed from a suspicion that the media were more interested in the *controversy* surrounding the Cruthin, rather than any real concern with exploring our belief in the shared heritage of the Ulster people.

The producer assured us that the ‘controversy’ would *not* be his primary concern, though he would obviously be making mention of it, as we had to admit that our work *had* stirred up controversy. He further assured us that the programme would be ‘balanced’. I finally insisted that I hear a recording of the programme *before* it went out – as much because there had been so much rubbish spouted (both from political and academic sources) about what we had *never* said – otherwise my contribution was to be deleted.

Not to our great surprise, no-one ever appeared with the promised recording, and, as far as we were concerned, the commitments given about maintaining a

balance and minimising the controversy were not kept. I wrote to the producer with my analysis of his programme. Of its 55 minutes duration, academic critics of Cruthinism were allocated 34.7% of this time; Young Unionists with their own interpretations 8.0%; interludes of music and readings 36.2%; a neutral archaeologist 2.1%; and Adamson and myself 16.5%. The portion given over to the academic critics and the Unionist interpreters was *primarily* concerned with the controversy – a full 42.7% of the programme, which, considering the 36.2% of musical interludes, did not leave much time for anything else.

Nor did we see much evidence of balance. The Unionist interpreters and the academic critics were permitted to air their positions *well before* Adamson was brought in (somewhat surprisingly, given that he was the main exponent of ‘Cruthinism’); indeed, he did not make an appearance until the 22nd minute, almost half way through the programme! Up until then he had not even been mentioned – the academics had addressed their criticisms to what “Unionists are saying”, what “Unionists are trying to project...” or lamenting that “Unionists [are] using and abusing history...”, ample proof of the fixation, by the academics and the producer, with the controversy. Then, to end the programme, “the final word”, rather than being given to Adamson (as might have been expected, considering his primary role in the subject) was deferentially left to his most bitter academic critic. All in all, hardly what I would define as ‘balance’.

In truth, the broken promises did not unduly annoy us – after all, we should have known better. Far more disappointing was that an opportunity to present a properly researched programme – with an academic critique *included* – which went *beyond* the fixation with any controversy and created greater awareness among the public about this aspect of our shared heritage, was completely wasted.

Columbanus – A Suitable Case for Treatment?

On the same radio programme, Richard Warner, as one of the academic critics, categorically stated that the Cruthin were “rather minor and they are rather unimportant and they made very little influence on Irish power or politics”.²⁹ Now, apart from giving the impression that Warner viewed the Cruthin with some distaste – why else would he endeavour to squeeze *three* separate derogatory comments (“rather minor”, “rather unimportant”, “very little influence”) into *one* short sentence? – the statement was also remarkably inaccurate. For even if we were to consider *just one* of the Cruthin – the abbot Comgall – Warner’s assertion appears quite ludicrous.

I have already made mention of Comgall and his monastic foundation at

Bangor, “which has given the largest number of names to Irish religious history – Columbanus, Gall, Moluag, Maelrubha, Dungal, Malachy, to name but a few.”⁴⁰ I also pointed out that one of Comgall’s disciples, Columbanus, who departed from Bangor in 595, left an indelible mark on the history of Europe. Pope Pius XI wrote: “The more light that is shed by scholars in the period known as the Middle Ages the clearer it becomes that it was thanks to the initiative and labours of Columbanus that the rebirth of Christian virtue and civilisation over a great part of Gaul, Germany and Italy took place.”^{8[B]} The French poet Leon Cathlin concluded: “He is, with Charlemagne, the greatest figure of our Early Middle Ages.”

All this had stemmed directly from the energies of the abbot Comgall, a representative of the Cruthin, who are now apparently regarded by a professional scholar as “rather minor and... rather unimportant and they made very little influence on Irish power or politics”!

Even if the Cruthin had thrown up no major historical personages such as St Comgall or Congal Cláen, academics, including those antagonistic to Adamson, now accept that the Cruthin formed “the bulk of the population”³³ of Ulster following its contraction under the pressure of Uí Néill territorial expansion. To assert that the bulk of the population – the ordinary people – are “rather minor” in their country’s history is pure elitism. Furthermore, Warner’s ‘interpretation’ of the Cruthin as being ‘minor and unimportant’ highlights once again that his claim that it is “the job of people like me to know when... historical interpretation is likely to be correct or incorrect”²⁹ is somewhat suspect.

To highlight the difficulties we have repeatedly faced when trying to promote a cross-community awareness of our shared heritage, I will stay for a moment with the story of Columbanus, for he seemed an ideal subject for a cross-community venture, and in early 1990 the Farset Youth & Community Development Project decided to design a suitable initiative.

This initiative (which had the enthusiastic support of Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich, who had written a biography of Columbanus) was to have three components: (i) a video would be made by Farset detailing the significance of Columbanus; (ii) an essay competition in the schools would select a group of teenagers – from both traditions – who would spend part of their summer vacation travelling across Europe, following in the ‘footsteps of Columbanus’; and (iii) I would write a book on the wider story of Ireland’s religious heritage – exploring not only the story of Columbanus and the history of the early church,

but the dolmen-builders, the Elder Faiths, and even the fascinating survival today, alongside Christian beliefs, of pagan superstitions, such as rural respect for ‘fairy thorns’. The book was to be aimed at a popular audience and would be extensively illustrated.

The book proposal was submitted to the Cultural Traditions Group of the Community Relations Council for financial assistance. We felt confident such support would be forthcoming, for here was a project which: (i) was cross-community in composition; (ii) was dealing with an aspect of Ulster’s heritage which belonged to the whole community; and (iii) was trying to direct our usually parochial concerns *outwards*, by involving a European dimension – the young people’s trip was scheduled for 1992, a significant year for the European Community. Yet, to the dismay of project members, the application was turned down. I wrote to the Cultural Traditions Group seeking an explanation, and was told: “In relation to ‘The Steps of Columbanus’, the Publications Group decided that it was not the kind of publication that they wish to support.”⁴¹

Although there were other problems, from this moment on our hopes for the project began to unravel, and although a rough pilot video was made, the idea had to be shelved, another wasted opportunity which had floundered as much because of a lack of vision from those in a position to assist.

[Perhaps no-one is interested in helping the people of Ulster look outwards – the academic volume referred to earlier²⁸ made no mention of either Comgall or Columbanus, let alone their contribution to European history.]

“He used to be a good scholar...”

I remarked that the Columbanus Project had the support of Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich. In fact, he had been a supporter of our work for some time. In 1979 he wrote to Adamson about *The Cruthin*, saying: “There is not all that much I would be inclined to disagree with in it and even in cases where I might not see eye to eye with you I think it is more a matter of different interpretations – equally justifiable – of the same material.”⁴²

Unlike many academics and reviewers, Cardinal Ó Fiaich had no difficulty seeing the cross-community purpose behind our work, and wrote, for the second edition of Adamson’s *Bangor: Light of the World*: “I deem it a high honour to be invited to write this foreword to it... I hope that [this] new edition will have a wide circulation... It provides that most unusual thing at the present time – a book about the religious history of Ulster, of which both Protestant and Catholic, both Nationalist and Unionist, can be equally proud.”^{8[B]}

Cardinal Ó Fiaich was not only extremely likeable as a person, but, in contrast to many of our academics and reviewers, was eager to engage in constructive dialogue on all aspects of our history. He had taken part in a series of BBC Radio Ulster lectures, his own contribution, ‘The Celts’, being printed in *The Irish News*.⁴³ However, in his lecture he said: “The Picts in the north and other Pre-Celtic peoples left few traces. Apart from the surviving field monuments their legacy is found only in museums.” While I thought his lecture excellent, I felt I had to take issue with him over the veracity of that comment, and *The Irish News* published my response⁴⁴ (see **Appendix 1**), in which I suggested that the pre-Celtic population and their legacy, rather than leaving few traces, remained as a vibrant part of the Irish heritage. While many of our academics might have disdainfully ignored such criticism, Tomás Ó Fiaich was of a different calibre, and when we next met told me I had been right to take him to task. When the lecture series eventually reappeared as a book, he had even amended that passage to read: “The Picts in the north and other pre-Celtic peoples were overthrown. No doubt they still formed a strong element in the population but they were assimilated in language and culture.”⁴⁵

His close interest in our endeavours was ample proof that it is possible for people from different backgrounds to explore our history in a manner which, while not losing anything to objectivity or accuracy, endeavours to encompass all the traditions and peoples who have contributed to this island’s historical legacy. Indeed, who knows where his collaboration with us might have led if it had not been ended by his untimely death at Lourdes.

Or am I being naive – perhaps any collaboration would have been sabotaged by our academic elite? A few years before the Cardinal’s death, Ian Adamson, while leaving the BBC studios after a radio debate, mentioned to the prominent academic who had been his adversary that scholars like Tomás Ó Fiaich (who had been Professor of History at St Patrick’s College, Maynooth) supported his work. “Cardinal Ó Fiaich?” replied the academic, “He *used* to be a good scholar.”

The Cardinal had obviously been associating with the wrong type of people.

Interpretations at the Extremes

It has to be admitted that the use (and misuse) of the work of Adamson and myself by sections of the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community has contributed greatly to the unease with which Cruthinism has been viewed.

The way some Loyalists have interpreted the story of the Cruthin undoubtedly has its roots in the trauma experienced by the Protestant community over the past

quarter century, with former certainties eroded and old loyalties rebuffed. To the feeling of being under siege from Catholic/Gaelic/Irish nationalism has been added the fear of an eventual betrayal by Britain. To counter this twin-edged threat, Cruthinism was seized upon by some Loyalists as a “we were here first” counterbalance to the rampant Republican assault, and as a possible alternative identity to replace any severance of the link with Britain.

On top of this need for a substitute identity was often added blatant misinterpretation. Some within the Loyalist community seemed to imagine that, by some miracle, the present Protestant population were all direct descendents of the Cruthin, and likewise the Catholic community were all direct descendents of the Gaels. In this way, no doubt, ancient battles could now be fought against present enemies.

Patient work is going on to rectify such misinterpretations and the hope is that our efforts will eventually set matters straight. Indeed, it must be said that many individuals within the Protestant community, including some considered hardline, have shown a genuine willingness to embrace the cross-community basis of Cruthinism, and, despite the constant efforts by academia to thwart our efforts, we feel confident in the eventual outcome.

The Irish Nationalist/Republican interpretation is also indicative of their community’s identity needs and ‘certainties’. Suggestions that the Irish may not be pure Celts after all, and that the northern Protestants have roots in Ireland long predating the Plantation, have not been that warmly received by many staunch Nationalists. Indeed, they have been more than willing to collude with the misinterpretations of Cruthinism purveyed by some Ulster Loyalists. In that way it can be denigrated more readily, and any perceived threat neutralised.

When I completed the first draft of *Ulster–The Hidden History* in 1986, I gave copies to individuals in both communities, requesting feedback as to how my theme of a *shared* history was viewed. My discussions with Republicans revealed that, even when their suspicions as to the purpose behind such a history were allayed, any talk of a shared history was still something of a distraction, and played little part in the Republican consciousness. The Republican movement already had its ‘history’ and considered it quite adequate. Indeed, the only ‘shared history’ Republicans felt necessary was one which encouraged the Protestant community to join with them in a United Ireland.

The current Republican assessment of Cruthinism seemingly adjudges it to be either a cry from the heart for Protestants to rediscover their Irish identity or

a right-wing Loyalist counterbalance to Irish Nationalism. Within this dichotomy Republicans ignore the more obvious interpretation – that Cruthinism is just what we have always stressed: an aspect of our history which reveals not only what the two Northern communities hold in common, but what the people of our two islands hold in common. It is clear that such an interpretation of our ancient history makes uncomfortable reading for many, Loyalists *and* Republicans.

Ironically, if ‘Cruthinism’ was allowed to develop without political manipulation or academic hindrance, *both* communities could gain from it, without it threatening any deeply-held beliefs. Republicans could strengthen *their* case by convincing the Protestant community of their obvious Irishness, while Loyalists could help convince their Catholic fellow-countrymen that *they too* have ancient links with mainland Britain. Eventually, both traditions might come to see themselves as complementary rather than as antagonistic, and new social and political arrangements might be more easily developed which could give tangible structure to this new understanding.

The Wheel Comes Full Circle

Brian Lambkin hinted at a change in academic perception: “What is encouraging is that Adamson, on the evidence of his latest book, *The Ulster People*, is in touch with recent scholarship and sees himself less as an outsider.”²² But we would contend that Adamson has never been *out* of touch with scholarship (see **Appendix 2**), it is certain sections within academia who have been out of touch, and are only now being forced to change tack. Let us assess the current situation:

Books on Ulster’s history rarely appear now without mention of the Cruthin. Admittedly some of the authors rarely lose an opportunity to take a swipe at Adamson, but the Cruthin are no longer denied – an ancient people have finally come of age. The debate now centres on *who* they actually were, *not* on whether they ever existed other than in Adamson’s fertile imagination. The fact that they once formed the majority population in parts of Ulster is granted, even by academics with a distaste for Cruthinism. Books now make mention of the Battle of Moira and its main protagonist, the Cruthin over-king of Ulster, Congal Cláen. Even the abbot Comgall and the importance of his monastic foundation at Bangor to European history must surely make a reappearance – notwithstanding a conspicuous absence in the first major academic history of Ulster published since the 1950s.

The probability that the Irish people are of predominantly pre-Celtic stock is also firmly on the agenda. Adamson certainly cannot claim credit for this – a sustained assault on the notion of a pure Celtic race has been underway for some time – yet Cruthinism has helped force the issue to the surface among our academics. Jonathan Bardon, in his *A History of Ulster*, acknowledged the new reality: “Scholars are coming increasingly to the realisation that Celtic civilisation was not the creation of a separate race but a language and a way of life spread from one people to another. Archaeological enquiry does not show evidence of formidable invasion.”⁴⁶

A pre-Celtic cultural and genetic relationship between the peoples of Ireland and Scotland is now accepted as a strong probability – even if not attributed to the Cruthin and Picts, though not all academics are averse to such a suggestion. In the latest edition of the *Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland*, Donnchadh Ó Corráin, in his chapter on ‘Prehistoric and Early Christian Ireland’, remarks:

What is interesting, too, is the mixed racial and linguistic background of the rulers of Ireland – Britain and Ireland share languages, dominant aristocracies, and whole local populations such as the Cruithin of Ireland and Scotland (where they are known to Latin writers as Picti).⁴⁷

Will Ó Corráin be pilloried as was Adamson – after all, he has committed two cardinal sins: he has not only dared to accord a prominent place to a people who are supposedly “rather minor and rather unimportant”, but has linked them with the Picts of Scotland. Or will our academics now bow to the inevitable? Has the wheel finally begun to turn full circle?

Cross-Community Hope

Adamson, in the preface to *The Cruthin* made his appeal to both communities quite explicit: “It is my purpose... to give [the people] back the history which has been denied them for so long, for they are the Ancient Kindred of Ireland as well as Britain. In so doing I hope that their origins will provide for them a basis of common identity rather than the cause of that running sore which is ‘The War in Ireland’.”^{8[A]}

Yet academics like H J Morgan endeavour to assert that Adamson’s “view of Ulster history” is “exclusivist and supremacist”²¹, and journalists allege that his work is “vaguely reminiscent of the Blut und Erde ideology of German nationalism which ended in the gas chambers.”²⁵ Many others certainly did not see it that way, including scholars such as Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich and Professor René Fréchet (founder of the Institute of Irish Studies at the

Sorbonne, who died in 1992 before his translation of *The Ulster People* was completed)†. How can such a disparity of views exist? My belief is that such allegations bear little relation to what Adamson is *really* saying but have their origin in academia's own hidden agenda, and the deferential acceptance accorded academic opinions within the media.

However, the surest way to assess the veracity of such allegations – and reflect on the purpose being served by them – is for readers to judge for themselves. We are confident that those who read *The Ulster People* will concur with the view expressed in it that this history is, if anything, an *attack* on exclusivist views. As Adamson is at pains to stress:

In many ways a cultural battle is now on, in which interpretations of history are right to the forefront. It is a battle in which narrow and exclusive interpretations, which served to consolidate each community's supposed hegemony of righteousness, are under attack from a much broader and inclusive interpretation of *all* the facets which go to make up our identity. A positive outcome of this battle might just help to drag the Ulster people away from their obsessions with distorted history and the divisive attitudes of the past.^[8E]

Not content with his 'supremacist' allegation, H J Morgan also stated that "what must be realised is that there are no prior or exclusive claims; that we are a mixed race today as in the past," as if no-one else has 'realised' this, least of all Adamson. Yet Adamson has been saying it all along:

In the South the time had come, as Bob Quinn suggested, when the Irish people "must develop the confidence to dismantle the unitary myth that has served its honourable purpose and replace it with the diverse richness that lies within."⁴⁸ In Northern Ireland, a dislike of anything 'Irish', and a subservience to 'English' history within the schools, had left the Protestant community there not only unaware of most aspects of Irish history, but, more significantly, without any real understanding of the history of their own province. Yet Ulster's historical and cultural heritage was not only extremely rich and varied, but contained within it the proof of the common identity of the Northerners. Slowly, as contemporary flawed history was called into question and a new awareness emerged, the facts of their history, rather than dividing them, offered the hope of uniting the Ulster people at last.^[8E]

† In a letter to Adamson (13.01.92) Professor Fréchet wrote: 'Dear Ian, *The Ulster People* has moved me profoundly. I think you have written a great book, which I should greatly wish to translate.'

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Appendix 1

‘Time to credit pre-Celts for making of the Irish’

(article appearing in *The Irish News*, 05.01.87)

Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich’s recent article ‘The Celts’ in *The Irish News* was fascinating and authoritative.¹ However, while his celebration of Ireland’s Celtic heritage was perfectly legitimate, I feel it was misleading in its exclusiveness. I refer specifically to his statements: “The Picts in the north and other Pre-Celtic peoples left few traces. Apart from the surviving field monuments, their legacy is found only in museums.”

It seems to me that rather than having been relegated to the dusty shelves of museums, the ‘legacy’ of Ireland’s pre-Celtic inhabitants is very much alive, not only because of its ancestral importance to the make-up of the unique Irish personality, but because it is still evident in our folk ways, and deep relationship with the land.

Mainly because the inhabitants of this island adopted the Gaelic language there has been the erroneous inference in many quarters that the Irish people are a purely Celtic race. Yet no-one would dare claim that we have become an ‘English’ race, just because we have now adopted the English language.

As Cardinal Ó Fiaich pointed out, it is futile to try and speculate as to the numbers of Celts who arrived here, but at least we can suggest their *relative* size in comparison to the population they found already established.

In his summation of the deliberations of a gathering of highly eminent academics in 1984, J P Mallory stated that it was more than probable that the Celtic immigrations into Ireland “were carried out by populations numerically far inferior to the native population(s).”²

The Celts obviously had a military prowess and capability disproportionate to their small numbers, that allowed them to gain a commanding superiority (in much the same way that a handful of Englishmen were able to dominate the whole Indian subcontinent), but they did not evict the indigenous people.

As Eoin MacNeill wrote: “The notion that the migratory conquests of antiquity resulted in the displacement of one population by another is one of the favourite illusions of popular history.”³

Furthermore, T W Rolleston had suggested that because of their warlike proclivities, the Celtic warrior chiefs “perished in far greater proportion than the earlier populations whom they had themselves subjugated.”⁴ I would suspect, however, that these warrior chiefs, like all military castes or ruling establishments, were just as content to let the ordinary people perish as cannon fodder in the endless battles on their behalf.

If we accept that the Celts were only a small minority in Ireland, then, in terms of our actual ancestry, we obviously owe more to the pre-Celtic inhabitants.

As Estyn Evans suggested: “If it were possible to sort out the genes of the Irish people, I would hazard a guess that those coming from English settlers would exceed those deriving from ‘the Celts’, and that those coming from older stocks would constitute the largest proportion.”⁵

So, having highlighted the likely numerical inferiority of the Celts who reached Ireland, we are left seeing our primary heritage as due, not to a genetic basis after all, but to aspects of their culture.

Cardinal Ó Fiaich listed many of those aspects most commonly believed to derive from the Celts, including “our most outstanding native saints and missionaries, the majority language until the Famine, a splendid native music and one of the richest folklores in the world.” But let us look a little closer at these.

The Irish language has been described by scholars as ‘bizarre’ in its composite make-up, and Professor David Green said: “Irish is a language made in Ireland; it is neither Indo-European nor Celtic, Pictish or Hamitic, but simply the linguistic expression of the Irish people.”⁶

Not all of the greatest saints and missionaries were Celts. At St Comgall’s great monastery of Bangor, from where Columbanus and Gall set out on their great missions to Europe, Francis Byrne points out that “Comgall and the early abbots had been Cruthin.”⁷

The *Cruthin*, Byrne points out elsewhere, were part of “the earlier, non-Indo-European population [who] survived under the Celtic overlordship.”⁸ Ian Adamson has elaborated further on the legacy we owe to the Cruthin people.

Many academics see most Irish folk mores as basically pre-Celtic, and much of our rich assortment of unique folk customs, superstitions, and folk lore probably dates back to a pre-Celtic past. Such folk memories and beliefs have persisted even to this day with remarkable force, having proved impervious to the religions of the Celts and the Christians and even to the new religion of materialism.

As Evans mused in *Irish Heritage*: “A venerable thorn, pink-flowering, stands under my window as I write and casts its shadow into the Senate Room

of the University. But no one will remove it or even lop its branches, and the story goes that when the buildings were being erected the plans had to be changed in order that the thorn should not be interfered with. If a lone tree surrounded by half a dozen scientific departments has claimed such respect it can be imagined in what awe the country thorns are held!”⁹

Our traditional music, too, is felt by some to have very deep roots in our ancient past.

All the new groups that set foot in Ireland during the last two millennia, while obviously engendering some local adaptation, were still to a large extent absorbed into Irish life and personality. The Vikings and the Anglo-Normans stand out most in the popular imagination. But so too do the descendants of the 17th century Planters, for despite all their vociferous claims to ‘true Britishness’ they are more ‘Irish’, albeit of a distinctly Northern variety, than they ever were ‘British’. And if they refuse to see that, at least the mainland British themselves are not deluded.

Yet somehow the Celts, despite being “numerically far inferior” to the indigenous inhabitants, are frequently said to have ‘absorbed’ or ‘assimilated’ the majority population. Why were the Celts the exception then? Is it just the legacy of their language? Or does it just reflect the way the Irish romantically like to see it?

Is it not more probable that the already-established peoples in many ways absorbed the Celts, or at least were an equal partner in the cross-fertilisation of ideas and customs.

Evans asked: “Did the Celts conquer Ireland, or did Ireland conquer the Celts?” He painted an alternative scenario when he suggested that there had been “a reluctance in Ireland to see Gaelic society as evolving from the adjustment of a conquering aristocracy to a novel and difficult environment occupied by an obstinate and strongly conservative native population. In many parts of the country, especially among the hills, these would probably have far outnumbered the newcomers. The popular conception of the Gael as a noble creature – every Irishman’s ancestor – living in splendid isolation relieved by grand periodic assemblies seems to be the joint product of the national revival and of the Romantic movement.”⁵

The places the Celts selected as power bases had also been revered by the indigenous people from Neolithic times. Were the Celts forced to incorporate, or bow down to, local sensitivities, just as the later Christian church, unable to remove many folk customs, had to incorporate them into Christian practice, and make Holy Days of pagan festivities?

I am not trying here to deny a vital, invigorating and innovative role to the Celts and their imagination, I merely feel we should recognise that their input was only one part of a ‘shared’ heritage, shared with the needs, customs, creativities and capabilities of the masses of the long-established pre-Celtic people. The Celts in their great sagas talk derisively of the subject peoples, but we must not fall into the same trap.

In many ways, the whole issue is about how we look at history. Is history made by a few ‘great’ men, politicians or armies, or is it made by the constant but hidden efforts of ordinary people? Did Belfast’s renowned image of industriousness belong solely to the managerial establishment, or did it not really belong to the generations of families who provided the manpower from among the huddled rows of working-class housing?

This question of to whom belongs the real legacy of our history – to the rulers or the people – led R A S Macalister to make the following speculation: “Christianity ever brings its message of freedom to the serf: through its influence, the enslaved aboriginal folk, the Picts, were at least partially relieved from the burden of oppression that had crushed them down to the dust. Is it a mere coincidence that this emancipation is synchronous with the sudden manifestation of art? Have the Celts been usurping a glory which is not theirs? Are the Ardagh Cup and the Gospel of Kells the thanks-offerings of a people long enslaved, and come to their own once again?”¹⁰

I contend that rather than dismiss our pre-Celtic heritage as ‘lost’ or only to be found in museums, a new reassessment must be made. Such a new awareness should only serve to highlight just how ancient and multifaceted our rich and unique heritage really is, and strengthen the cultural pride that belongs to all the Irish people, a people reckoned to be one of the longest settled populations of western Europe.

Michael Hall

- 1 Tomás Ó Fiaich, ‘The Celts’, *The Irish News*, 01.12.86.
- 2 J P Mallory, ‘The Origins of the Irish’, *The Journal of Irish Archaeology*, II, 1984.
- 3 Eoin MacNeill, *Phases of Irish History*, Gill and Son, 1919.
- 4 T W Rolleston, *Myths and Legends of the Celtic Race*, Constable, London, 1985.
- 5 Estyn Evans, *The Personality of Ireland*, Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 1981.
- 6 David Green, *The Irish Language*, Dublin, 1966.
- 7 Francis Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings*, Batsford, 1973.
- 8 Francis Byrne, ‘Early Irish Society’, *The Course of Irish History*, The Mercier Press, 1984.
- 9 Estyn Evans, *Irish Heritage*, Dundalgan Press, 1942.
- 10 R A S Macalister, *Ancient Ireland*, Methuen, 1935.

Appendix 2

“Scholars are coming increasingly to the realisation that Celtic civilisation was not the creation of a separate race but a language and a way of life spread from one people to another. Archaeological enquiry does not show evidence of formidable invasion” (**Jonathan Bardon**, *A History of Ulster*, The Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 1992, p. 9)

“[The gene pool of the Irish] is probably very closely related to the gene pools of highland Britain. [And within that area] relationships, both cultural and genetic, almost certainly go back to a much more distant time than that uncertain period when Celtic languages and customs came to dominate both Great Britain and Ireland. Therefore, so far as the physical make-up of the Irish goes... they share these origins with their fellows in the neighbouring parts – the north and west – of the next-door island of Great Britain.” (**Liam de Paor**, ‘The People of Ireland’, in *The People of Ireland*, ed. Patrick Loughrey, Appletree Press/BBC, Belfast, 1988, p. 187)

“The gene pool of the Irish was probably set by the end of the Stone Age when there were very substantial numbers of people present and the landscape had already been frequently altered. The Irish are essentially Pre-Indo-European, they are not physically Celtic. No invasion since could have been sufficiently large to alter that fact completely.” (**Peter Woodman**, ‘Prehistoric Settlers’, in *The People of Ireland*, ed. Patrick Loughrey, Appletree Press/BBC, Belfast, 1988, p. 25)

“But was there a displacement of population, with tall, blond blue-eyed Celts coming to take over from the small dark people (if such they were) of Mesolithic and Neolithic origin? Not at all. The Celts were, at best, the Ascendancy of their day, a minority powerful enough to impose their language.” (**Liam de Paor**, ‘The People of Ireland’, in *The People of Ireland*, ed. Patrick Loughrey, Appletree Press/BBC, Belfast, 1988, p. 189)

“At any rate there can be no doubt at all of the extraordinary continuity of tradition exemplified at sites such as Tara and Knowth. This is in itself a strong argument for the survival of large elements of the megalithic peoples and their beliefs in Ireland under the later Celtic overlay.” (**Francis John Byrne**, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, B.T. Batsford Ltd, London, 1987, p. 56)

“The first people to establish the bloodline of the British and Irish people... were made up of only a few hundred, possibly a couple of thousand, hunter-gatherers who settled in here more than 12,000 years ago. Yet we can see clear signals today of their presence in our genes. Science rarely gets much closer or more personal than this. In fact, it now appears that around half our gene pool is based on the DNA that we have inherited from our Stone Age ancestors.” (**Robin McKee**, *The Face of Britain*, Simon & Schuster, London, 2006, p. 200)

“[To] many historians, the Celts simply never existed. They point to the Welsh academic and patriot Edward Lhuyd and blame him for triggering the whole Celtic fantasy. [The vision Lhuyd created for the Welsh] was taken up with equal energy in Scotland and Ireland, and has never abated. Unfortunately, this vision is largely nonsense.” (**Robin McKee**, *The Face of Britain*, Simon & Schuster, London, 2006, p. 50)

“The earlier, non-Indo-European, population, of course, survived under the Celtic overlordship. One group in particular, known to the P-Celts as *Pritani* (Welsh *Prydyn*) and to the Irish as *Cruithni*, survived into historical times as the Picts or ‘painted people’ of Scotland. The *Cruithni* were numerous in Ulster too, and the *Loíges* of Leinster and possibly the *Ciarraige* of Connacht and north Kerry belonged to the same people.” (**F.J.Byrne**, Early Irish Society”, *The Course of Irish History*, edited by T.W. Moody and F.X Martin, The Mercier Press, Cork, 1984, p. 44)

“[T]he bulk of the population comprised in the reduced over-kingdom of Ulaid were the people known as *Cruthin* or *Cruithni*.” (**Francis John Byrne**, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, B.T. Batsford Ltd, London, 1987, p. 108)

“More numerous and powerful in the archaic period, however, were the peoples known as *Cruthin* or *Cruithni*.... Adomnán in his ‘*Vita Columbae*’ refers to them as *Cruithini* and *Cruthin populi*, while in the annals the term is used of them down to 773, after which it is dropped in favour of the term ‘*Dál nAraidi*’. This abandonment of ‘*Cruthni*’ may have something to do with the fact that the term is a Q-Celtic borrowing of ‘*Priteni*’, the name of the oldest recorded inhabitants of the British Isles, better known under their Latin nickname ‘*Picti*’. Irish authors writing in Latin, such as Adomnán, invariably used the term ‘*Picti*’ to denote the Picts of Scotland but in Irish the term ‘*Cruthin*’ was used of both the Picts and their Irish cousins, and though the ‘origin legend’ of the Picts is relatively late in date we can assume with a reasonable degree of certainty that the connection that it presupposes was still a folk memory in the historical period.” (**Dáibhí Ó Cróinín**, ‘Ireland 400–800’, in *A New History of Ireland Vol I, Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, ed. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín [under the auspices of the Royal Irish Academy], Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 212–213)

“[A] newly published study by an international team led by researchers at Liverpool John Moores University and the University of Aberdeen is helping to shed new light on the origins of the Picts. A team of archaeologists and biological anthropologists have conducted the first extensive analysis of Pictish genomes. Dr Adeline Morez stated: ‘Our findings support the idea of regional continuity between the Late Iron Age and early medieval periods and indicate that the Picts were local to the British Isles in their origin, as their gene pool is drawn from the older Iron Age.’ Dr Linus Flink added: ‘Our results show that individuals from western Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and Northumbria display a higher degree of [DNA affinity] with the Pictish genomes, meaning they are genetically most similar among modern populations.’ ” (**Liverpool John Moores University** 28.04.23)

Reinforcing Powerlessness

The hidden dimension to the
Northern Ireland 'Troubles'

Michael Hall

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Introduction

On 27 November 1995, after weeks of almost daily warnings from Sinn Féin sources that the Northern Ireland ‘peace process’ was in ‘crisis’, this item appeared on *Teletext*:

Mayhew Praises People Power

People power would prevent a return of IRA violence, the Northern Ireland Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew said. Responding to Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams’ claim that conflict was inevitable without talks, he said the “passionate determination” of [ordinary] people would keep the ceasefires intact.

Sir Patrick was, in my opinion, quite correct to assume that the vast majority of people here fervently desire peace, and equally justified in surmising from this that a return to violence hardly seems possible with so many opposed to it. However, the *reality* is that the very people with the greatest desire to see genuine peace emerge – the ordinary citizens of Northern Ireland – are the ones *least empowered* to see this process through to a satisfactory conclusion. Instead, power over our future remains firmly in the hands of all those, whether government ministers, faceless bureaucrats, local politicians, or the vast army of assorted professionals and middlemen – and not forgetting the paramilitaries – who have so manifestly failed us in the past.

It is not that ordinary people have made no effort to contribute positively to this society’s welfare – quite the opposite. Throughout the past twenty-five years of violence countless individuals and grassroots groups, in a multitude of ways, have striven to effect positive social change within their own localities and to create conditions for dialogue between our divided communities. These efforts, often involving much time, energy and personal risk, have largely gone unrecorded and unacknowledged, yet cumulatively must surely make up the *real* ‘hidden history’ of Northern Ireland’s tragedy.

Throughout our turmoil these individuals and groups have constantly pitted their energies against manipulative bureaucrats, struggled frustratingly for never-appearing resources, stood up bravely to uncaring paramilitaries, and constantly striven to overcome the doubts and apathy of friends and neighbours. Sometimes their efforts met with limited success, but more often than not they were ignored, frustrated, sidelined – often quite deliberately – by those with control over resources and decision-making.

For some years now I have been trying to encourage various community activists to record their experiences, but with little success. Some are too busy confronting present needs, some still doubt the importance of their efforts, some are disillusioned, others simply worn out. Yet our society is at such an important crossroads – where ordinary people must finally decide where *they* want to go – that I feel compelled to make a start at describing how powerlessness is reinforced at the grassroots, even if I have had to make use of many of my own experiences. Nevertheless, I believe that the recounting of actual experiences is far more effective in shedding light upon the various processes at work than any amount of theory.

1: Safeguarding a professional monopoly

“What business is it of theirs?”

Many professionals fail to recognise the deep chasm which exists between the community and those within the professions, partly because this chasm has become so second-nature it is often only revealed under specific circumstances.

While working as a social worker for the NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children), I received an urgent request to go to an estate in West Belfast. A young boy who had been left unattended was seen leaning precariously from an upstairs window, and concerned residents had gathered outside in the street. The next-door neighbour had then startled this gathering by proclaiming: “It’s time something was done about this family – from what I hear through the wall I think the father is interfering with the daughter!” This pronouncement – as one can imagine – fanned an anger among the assembled residents, and it was then that one of them decided to telephone me (I was known in the estate because of my attachment to the nearby community centre).

By the time I arrived the police had just taken the child into their charge, and had gone to the father’s workplace – not at this stage to pursue the allegations, but to prevent him from walking unsuspectingly into the angry gathering. The police had already involved Social Services, so responsibility for the case fell to them rather than to me. However, I felt it necessary to do something about the seething anger of the residents and invited them to accompany me into the community centre.

Once inside I had to listen to a barrage of angry voices as individuals competed with one another in detailing just what should be done to “that bastard” once hands

were laid upon him. This continued for some ten minutes until, for no apparent reason, the anger subsided and the tenor of the comments became calmer. Someone said: “Look, we don’t know whether yer woman next door was hearin’ right. She might have got it wrong.” Another voice added: “Aye, there’s been no hint of anything amiss up till now. Maybe she just heard words raised in argument... you know how teenagers can act up.”

These and other comments of caution were now followed – somewhat more surprisingly – by spontaneous suggestions of support. “Look, maybe they’re having a difficult time... we should be talkin’ here about what we can do *for* them, not *to* them.” “They’re not long in the estate, perhaps they feel a bit out of it – we could try and chat to them more.” “Lily, what say you and I take turns looking after the kids once a week to let the pair of them [the parents] get out for the evening.”

I was astounded, not at the turnaround in the threats which had been voiced – for I had expected sanity to prevail once emotions subsided – but at the generosity of the residents in offering unconditional support to the family, *without waiting* for the matter of the allegations to be resolved. It was as if they realised they had overreacted and now wished to make amends and behave supportively, the way they felt neighbours should. The matter was discussed further; then, speaking with the assent of most of those present, one resident put the following proposal to me:

Would you tell the social worker that we are willing to help in any way we can. He doesn’t need to tell us anything about the family, but we would like him to call into the community centre and introduce himself. Even if he feels there is nothing we can do, at least we’ll know who to contact if problems arise, and it will help us prevent another angry crowd gathering in the street.

At the subsequent case conference, although the police investigation had revealed nothing to substantiate the allegations, the situation was felt to need monitoring and a Social Services social worker was assigned to the case. When asked whether I wanted to add anything to the proceedings I said I wished to present the ‘community perspective’, noting a few bemused glances being exchanged as I did so. I duly passed on to the social worker the request made by the neighbours.

On a visit to the community centre a few weeks later one of the residents reminded me of this request, saying: “That social worker has driven in and out of the estate a couple of times, but has never come near us.” When I contacted the social worker, he asked me to apologise to the residents and explain that he had been extremely busy. A few weeks later I was asked the same question; I again contacted the social worker and received the same apology. This time, however, when I was relaying this to the residents, one of them halted me in mid-sentence:

“Don’t waste your time – they’re not effin’ interested! People like us are of no importance to them!”

So I phoned Social Services again and pursued the matter more determinedly, until the truth came out. It was exactly as those in the community had suspected: “Why should our worker have to go to speak to them – it’s not really any of their business.” It was quite obvious that the community were considered to be the people who *suffered* social problems, not the people who *solved* them – that was solely the job of professionals.

‘Social worker’ – a misleading job title?

I often felt that the label ‘social worker’ was a misnomer. A more accurate description is ‘*case* worker’, for although social workers accepted that each ‘client’ suffered from ‘social’ problems, they invariably treated these clients as strictly *individual cases*, with little effort made to find a *social* answer to their problems. Often, social workers made visits from their offices to peoples’ homes the way the U.S. Cavalry must have made sorties out of Fort Laramie – conscious that their journey was taking them through Indian territory, but hoping that contact could somehow be avoided. This might seem somewhat exaggerated, but it was my experience that social work management in particular was mostly blind to the strengths and capabilities *already existent within* working-class communities – it seemingly required professionals to import the required expertise from outside – even when the development of such community strengths might help to alleviate the burden faced by hard-pressed social workers.

One of my cases was a young woman with five children – her husband being in prison. Whenever things got on top of her, she simply abandoned her abode and either squatted in an empty house or dumped herself upon relatives until she was rehoused. Indeed, she had been rehoused so often by the Housing Executive they understandably refused to consider her any more, and on subsequent occasions of homelessness she and her children had to be accommodated, at Social Services expense, in hotels. When even this broke down, the Executive finally relented – *for the last time*, they insisted – and the family were again rehoused. However, everyone knew that it was only a matter of time before the cycle would be repeated, and apart from taking the children into care, which we did not really want to do, no-one knew how to break it, least of all myself.

But people in the community knew. She was invited to join a fledgling women’s drama group, and, after some persuasion, hesitantly agreed. Within a very short time a remarkable transformation had occurred. She gained considerably in self-

esteem, and – because the group held their meetings in one another's houses – began to keep her home clean and tidy, rather than let a mess pile up from which previously she would have run away. The children gained too, for they realised that this time they might be staying put and so made a proper effort to find friends. Within a short time I was able to close our file on the family, and all thanks to a *community intervention*, rather than to any case-work skills.

An undervalued resource

When I joined NSPCC it was undergoing a period of self-examination. Its centenary was approaching and it was attempting to redefine itself, especially in relation to its big brother, the Social Services. In such periods of questioning all options can seem equally viable, and I was permitted to develop my own 'community-orientated approach to social work'. I built up close links with numerous community groups in Belfast and Newtownabbey, operating an informal surgery for some of them at selected times each week. These groups benefited from being able to provide an on-site social worker as part of their community outreach, and the close working relationships I developed with some of the groups helped to dispel much of the antagonism with which social workers had invariably been viewed. On visits to the groups I would often sit down with the mostly young volunteers and explore how *they themselves* could best tackle the numerous problems they encountered.

I soon discovered ample evidence for what I had long believed – that each community possessed an untapped mine of strengths and abilities. Time and again I encountered individuals – from young people to senior citizens – whose commitment, energy, understanding, and ability to empathise often exceeded that possessed by many trained social workers. All that these community volunteers required was a little guidance and support – yet all they too often received was avoidance and professional aloofness.

In one estate a number of young women – all single-parents – had formed a group for mutual support, and one day informed me that, because I had helped some of them with their problems, they in turn wanted to help some of the families I visited. I explained that, for reasons of confidentiality, the families on my caseload might not accept their assistance. However, I asked them, surely they already knew families with *similar* problems – what was to stop them offering assistance to those families?

We then explored just what *was* stopping them, and it was obvious they were wary of "what we might find", and anxious that they might not know how to

handle it. What would they do, for example, if someone admitted to harbouring fears of injuring their child, or displayed deep-seated emotions? At least by getting involved in my cases, they could safely leave such problems to me. More earnest discussion followed, at the end of which the group and I worked out the following agreement: they would identify suitable families and offer assistance, and if accepted, would engage those families on the understanding that should they need advice I could be contacted at any time. Should real problems surface, they would suggest to the family that I become involved directly. It was also understood that if there was any suspicion of child abuse I would *have to* investigate, whether the family agreed or not.

In the event, these young women rarely needed to contact me, and in subsequent progress meetings I was surprised not only by the range of problems they had begun to tackle, but by the natural abilities they had been able to utilise. And all it had taken was the assurance that professional help was at hand should problems arise – this had been the catalyst which permitted these natural abilities to emerge.

Not to everyone's liking . . .

As I repeated this approach with other groups, it was made known to me that other professionals (though not from within my own agency) were observing me with disapproval. I was informed I was 'taking a risk' entrusting serious matters to 'non-professionals'; I was demeaning my years of university training by imagining social work skills could be imparted to community volunteers in half-hour 'chat' sessions; I was consorting with well-known community activists whose strident pronouncements against the prevailing social and economic conditions could cause my employers embarrassment; my presence was adding credibility to groups who might have overt political agendas; I was allowing community groups to dictate my workload. . .

It did not seem to matter that these community volunteers were well aware just what constituted a 'serious' matter, and were actually more willing than they had previously been to request professional assistance, because it now seemed less threatening and more supportive. It did not seem to matter that groups who genuinely cared about people's social needs were inevitably developing a realistic appreciation of political and economic realities, and were not in any mood to stick their heads in the sand, a habit perfected by so many professionals. Or that these community groups actually helped me devote *more* attention to the work I was trained for, because while the groups referred difficult cases to me, they in turn accepted *from* me all those tasks which had previously taken up an inordinate

amount of my time – benefits, housing, debt and other such matters. No, what really seemed to be at the root of all this professional antagonism was that there was a danger of revealing that the emperor had no clothes, that social work skills were not something magical known only to the initiated, but were a combination of common sense reasoning and natural ability given direction by proper training. One professional even complained to me: “These young people could end up imagining they could do our job better than us.” What a shock that would be!

“They would need to be under our control. . .”

Despite the efforts to present this antagonism to my community involvement as a ‘professional’ critique, it was difficult not to conclude that what was really at issue was the *power* relationship between professionals and non-professionals, and the desire, evident in most professions, not to lose control over a jealously-guarded monopoly.

Before I joined the NSPCC the organisation used to employ ‘women visitors’, who took on many of the time-consuming support tasks which invariably arose during work with families, thereby releasing the NSPCC worker for more skilled tasks. Time and again during staff meetings my older colleagues would lament the demise of this service, and newer recruits like myself could readily sympathise with them, for even during periods when we were trying to cope with high caseloads, an inordinate amount of our time was still tied up with routine support tasks.

After having spent six years building up good working relationships with numerous community groups, some of those groups were now expressing a desire to expand that link to the further benefit of the community. Few groups, however, were in a position to offer much by way of practical support, except for Farset Youth and Community Project, situated along the West Belfast interface, and one of the largest providers of ACE [Action for Community Employment] jobs in Belfast. Farset’s manager, Jackie Hewitt, had pondered hard about my workload predicament, and finally put the following proposal to me:

Farset will employ between ten and twenty ACE workers on tasks similar to those undertaken by the ‘women visitors’ you told me about. They can help children with their homework; accompany mothers on shopping trips; sit and chat with people who are feeling lonely or depressed; baby-sit to give hard-pressed mothers a break; do a bit of housework or gardening if it helps brighten up someone’s home; try to develop a support-network for families... *You* identify what the needs are, and *we*’ll

meet them. To keep them fully occupied, these workers will obviously have to respond to other requests from the community, but their *primary* role will be to respond to NSPCC needs.

I was delighted, not only because I could envisage the sigh of relief on the part of my colleagues, but because here was tangible evidence that a community-orientated approach to social work *could* result in highly productive relationships being developed with those working at the grassroots. I was soon to be brought back to professional reality. Management informed me that while the scheme had great merit, it was not possible to proceed with it, for a very simple reason: “Those workers would really need to be under *our* control, not under the control of a community group.”

I felt deeply disappointed; the NSPCC was doing excellent work in the community, but like other agencies, it did not seem able – certainly at that time – to countenance practical arrangements whereby its relationship with the community could be based upon a genuine and not a pretend partnership. (Shortly afterwards, when management asked me to relinquish my community outreach, I resigned.)

I remain convinced that the very people who are experiencing social problems are ultimately the best ones to tackle them, and the sooner professionals discard their ‘them and us’ mentality and begin to work on a basis of genuine equality with the community, the more realistic are our chances of overcoming our social, economic – and ultimately our political – problems. I believe it *can* be done, and there is a growing awareness of the need for such an approach. [Indeed, in the last few years the NSPCC – which always had a strong foothold in our communities through its extensive network of playgroups – has initiated, to complement its Child Protection Service, a number of community-based projects which actively encourage user-group participation.]

2: “Politics is better left to people like us”

‘They should be horsewhipped out of the borough!’

I have mentioned the fear many professionals have that community groups are too prone to become involved in political issues. This is a fear shared by many within the establishment. Government spokesmen, politicians, church leaders and assorted professionals, who frequently lamented the inability of working-class people to come together and cease killing one another, became decidedly less

enthusiastic when ordinary people *did* come together but turned the spotlight upon the social, economic and political inequalities for which those in the establishment were ultimately responsible.

When the radical young members of the Rathcoole Self-Help Group in 1985 accused Unionist politicians of having little real concern for the welfare of the people in this large Protestant working-class estate, local Unionist politicians were outraged. Up until then Rathcoole had always provided a compliant electorate – easily lulled into acquiescence with slogans like ‘This we will Maintain’ and ‘Ulster says No!’ Yet here were these young loudmouths kicking up a stink on social issues! One local councillor expressed this outrage in no uncertain terms; labelling the group as ‘subversives’ he asserted: “I think there is only one answer. That is to get a big horse-whip and whip them out of the borough once and for all.”

When a community education project was initiated at Conway Mill on the Lower Falls, it was made clear by the organisers that *any issue* relevant to the lives of ordinary people could be discussed there, and *anyone* could be party to, or even initiate, those discussions. Protestants would have been more than welcome to take up this challenge, although the sectarian geography of Belfast militated against such an opportunity being properly utilised. Many of the debates and seminars which did take place understandably focused on social and political issues pertinent to the people of the Lower Falls, and, naturally enough, were attended by many shades of community and political opinion within the Nationalist community – including the Republican movement.

However, just as their counterparts in Rathcoole discovered, this was not the type of debate those in the establishment had in mind in their appeals to the community. This was not ‘peace and reconciliation’ – this was agitation and subversion. Some of these venues soon found themselves stigmatised in an attempt to silence them, ‘political vetting’ being part of this. Political vetting had its origin in a Parliamentary statement on 27 June 1985 by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Douglas Hurd:

I am satisfied that there are cases in which some community groups or persons prominent in the direction or management of some community groups, have sufficiently close links with paramilitary organisations to give rise to a grave risk that to give support to these groups would have the effect of improving the standing and furthering the aims of a paramilitary organisation, whether directly or indirectly.

Although no specific charges were ever made, several community organisations on both sides of the divide – including Conway Mill Education

Project on the Catholic side and Glencairn Community Centre on the Protestant side – had their funding withdrawn. While political vetting did not prevent constructive work continuing at such venues – despite greatly curtailed resources – it militated against them being able to extend any debate in an effective cross-community manner. Indeed, the insinuation that these centres were fronts for paramilitary organisations – notwithstanding the fact that such allegations were never substantiated – made them suspect to the ‘other’ community, even to the extent that death threats were received.

Not only have community groups been effectively silenced in this way, but whole communities have been stigmatised, with the people of West Belfast in particular – whether in the Shankill or the Falls – made to feel increasingly marginalised, even at times criminalised. This distancing process not only allowed those in the establishment to avoid having to respond to the *real* needs of these communities, but hampered ordinary people from initiating purposeful debate on the root causes of the problems facing them, the communal divide included. Then again, perhaps that was always the intention.

‘Bred’ into politics

Few have been more eager to prevent the voice of the people being heard than our politicians. Certainly they want that voice to be strident when raised at *their behest* or whenever the big drum is beaten, but *not* when it is raised independently. Whatever might seem to divide local politicians, they appear united in their concern to ensure that political power does not seep outside their own control. At a public debate in 1994, a well-known Unionist politician, stung by criticism from the floor, proclaimed: “It’s not for you people to be spouting politics.” Then, indicating his supposed SDLP adversary with whom he was sharing the platform, he continued: “Politics is better left to people like us.” And recently a prominent member of the Orange Order unashamedly expressed the ludicrous opinion that “some people are bred to lead”.

Power always acts to reinforce itself

When Unionist politicians condemned the British and Irish governments for ignoring them in the discussions which led to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and more recently the Framework Proposals, they were only experiencing a removal from decision-making processes which ordinary people experience daily.

The process is at times quite transparent. One example (out of many I could give) occurred some years ago when a group of people from the Shankill Road,

trying to defuse a potentially dangerous situation developing with regard to Loyalist prisoners, asked for a meeting with the Northern Ireland Office, but were refused. However, it was suggested to the group that if they co-opted a couple of local councillors to their cause – who could ‘legitimately’ represent their case – then the government officials would meet these councillors instead. But why are some forms of representation deemed ‘legitimate’ and others not? The answer is simple – some fall outside accepted structures of power. The councillors represented the *acceptable* face of politics, and meeting them forestalled any need to accord legitimacy to *unofficial* representations originating from within the community – that would set a bad precedent. For in the final analysis, *power always acts to reinforce itself*.

Our politicians are eager to protect their monopoly even when people in the community are striving to overcome those divisions which the politicians have manifestly failed to address. Describing a ‘strange rapprochement’ which came into being in the 1970s between Republican and Loyalist prisoners, former Loyalist prisoner Gusty Spence explained the fate of this rapprochement when confronted by the political establishment:

Deprivation knows no boundaries – Falls or Shankill – and both groups realised that they faced an even greater degree of deprivation within the confines of Crumlin Road jail. How to ameliorate that bare human existence and the lack of dignity, became the burning question amongst the leadership of the combined paramilitary organisations. We decided to deal with the immediate problems and resolved to leave other considerations aside, so long as there was no concession of principle on either side. There was also at that time a ‘no conflict’ policy agreed, so that if tension was to rise, for whatever reason, discipline would hold and the source of the tension would be investigated, and the offending party strictured in a non-physical way, and justice would be seen to be done.

The paramilitary representatives attempted to export this co-operation to the outside world through the medium of a downtown office, wherein welfare groups interested in paramilitary prisoners could meet and maximise their welfare efforts on behalf of those people in whom they had an interest, and heaven only knows where such co-operation could have led Northern Ireland!

Devious and unenlightened publicity, coupled with sensationalism, went a long way towards thwarting our efforts, and petty politicians scoring various sectarian points make it easy for that little dictator Roy Mason to

instruct his prison governors to ensure that there was no opportunity for prisoners' representatives to liaise and resolve the many problems they faced. Subsequently, practical co-operation between paramilitants came to an end, and what had been an important breakthrough was allowed to die.¹

This is not an isolated example. The entire history of our past 25 years of 'Troubles' is littered with the efforts of ordinary people who have constantly endeavoured to work for dialogue and accommodation, only to see those efforts thwarted by a political establishment which could not tolerate the development of a process that was not only in contradiction to its own vested interests but was outside its control.

Incapable of taking us into our future?

The Republican and Loyalist ceasefires, while welcomed across our entire community, posed a real dilemma for certain politicians. With the gun seemingly taken out of politics a great opportunity for them to utilise their political skills suddenly presented itself. However, the question many in the community were asking was: could they deliver? Some went further and asked a more fundamental question: did they *want* to deliver? Even now, well into the second year of the cessation of violence there is little sign among our politicians of any move towards meaningful dialogue. *Monologues*, yes: with Nationalists and Republicans telling us all what *they* want, and Unionists and Loyalists telling us all what *they* want – but no real *dialogue*.

Many in our two communities assume – somewhat over-optimistically, I believe, given all the evidence to the contrary – that our politicians will eventually be capable of sorting things out – after all, isn't that their job? The truth is that the people could easily be abandoned yet again and left to face the inevitable consequences of a slide back to uncertainty and perhaps renewed violence. And rather than being relieved to be able, at long last, to put their political skills to the test, many of our politicians are still steeped in the politics of retrenchment. They almost rejoice when negative occurrences are seen to vindicate their caution – in truth, they probably welcome such situations because they prevent people from seeing the poverty of their ideas. Yet while they seem incapable of moving this society forward, they continue to prevent the devolution of political power into the hands of those – the ordinary people – who could, and have the desire to, do something about it.

A ‘risen people’? The dead weight of the paramilitaries

Of course, to claim that it has only been our politicians who have prevented the emergence of real politics here would be grossly inaccurate. Leaving aside the horrific quarter-century of murder and its unbearable legacy of grief and heartache, the prolonged existence of paramilitary organisations within both communities has had a devastating impact upon normal community life. The sense of total helplessness in the face of all that has happened within communities was poignantly expressed by one mother whose son succumbed to the lure of Loyalist paramilitaries and received a 20-year sentence for being linked to one of Northern Ireland’s worst atrocities:

People think you don’t care or you don’t feel. I’m a mother and I have borne two sons into this world. I never ever reared one to carry a gun or be a terrorist. It has been a living hell for all my family and I know a hell for the relatives of the victims of the attack. Everyone in Northern Ireland just seems to be born a victim.²

Nothing better highlighted the paramilitary-induced powerlessness of ordinary people than the horrific rape which occurred in the Divis Flats area of Belfast in June 1990. Over a period of two hours up to nine members of a Republican paramilitary organisation subjected a young woman to repeated rape in an electric cable box, before dragging her to another location to brutally assault her again. As if this was not enough, when the victim managed to escape she was recaptured and subjected to further violent assaults.

But while obviously the worst aspect of the whole affair was the horrendous ordeal the woman went through, the reactions of the residents revealed just how powerless and demoralised local people had by then become. *The Irish News* reported:

One woman said: “The screaming was horrific. It was so bad I knew someone was being attacked. But there is so much fighting going on here at different times none of us who heard realised exactly what was happening. We are very afraid of some of the gangs that are preying around these flats.”

Another woman who witnessed the attack in Albert Street was still in a state of shock last night. A friend said: “The screaming went on for about two hours. When they brought the poor woman out into the open, this woman saw what was happening but she was so frightened she couldn’t go out. She has no telephone and couldn’t call for help and she was terrified that something would happen to her, especially with a gang

like that. Since then, she has been unable to sleep and can't go out on her own anymore. She's in a dreadful state of shock.”³

These are not the ‘risen people’ of Republican propaganda, but a people brought to their knees by repeated assaults upon their dignity, so long perpetrated by sectarian and uncaring bureaucrats from without and now compounded by self-appointed ‘defenders’ from within. Admittedly, no analysis of paramilitarism can ignore the very specific circumstances which led to the creation of these organisations, or the fears which led normally humane communities to give support to those whose deeds were in total violation of that humaneness, but at the same time it cannot be denied that paramilitarism has added its own weight to the powerlessness now experienced by ordinary people living in those areas in which such organisations hold sway.

3: Jobs for the Boys

The new service industry

Some years ago when I took some foreign visitors around the community network they were surprised by the low morale they found everywhere. Even indefatigable stalwarts admitted to feeling more frustrated and disheartened than they had felt for some time. And this state of affairs was not attributable to the continuing violence – for that was an ever-present reality they had long refused to allow deflect them from their community commitment. No, their disenchantment was borne out of *frustration* at the mazes those with control of funding were making them go through, *annoyance* at the plethora of careerists they were now having to contend with, and *anger* at the bureaucratic obstacles being constantly put in their path. And all of this the direct product of what must surely be the fastest growing service industry of recent years, an industry directly sustained by Northern Ireland's inter-communal problems.

A burgeoning bureaucracy of specialists had mushroomed, all eager to protect their own corners and often only willing to enter into dialogue with the community if the community accepted a subservient role. ‘Professional’ community workers, researchers, analysts, government advisors, funders, funding experts, statisticians, conflict resolutionists, development officers, consultants, inter-agency specialists... and all of them finding (and frequently creating) some career

niche for themselves directly between the providers of resources (including American and European money) and the supposed recipients, the embattled working-class communities.

With this new aristocracy becoming increasingly influential and powerful, local initiatives were all the more easily bypassed, and bureaucracy and manipulation gradually began to erode grassroots energy and confidence. Rather than helping ordinary people tackle problems themselves, more and more ‘jobs for the boys’ were created, and these new middlemen infiltrated all aspects of community life, in an insidious process which only served to reinforce the power of the professionals and diminish that of the community.

Billy McKeen, a community activist from Highfield estate in West Belfast, voiced his disenchantment:

While it can suit professionals to intrude upon the work done by street-level activists, they jealously prevent any possibility of the reverse happening. Community work has been largely highjacked by such professionals who often redefine a community’s problems to suit *their* departmental needs, personnel capabilities and career interests. Those needs may *not* be those of the community, resulting in a flurry of activity and impressive policies which are nevertheless meaningless at street level. Rather than finding solutions to community disadvantage, this often serves to institutionalise and reinforce it. In the process more realistic cures are placed beyond the reach and power of those working at street-level.

Street-level activists are clearly viewed as ‘non-professional’, while statutory workers (and some at voluntary level) claim differing degrees of professionalism. This leaves professional social workers and community workers not only free to gatecrash into all aspects of community work, but often to assume control. This in turn results in the isolation and alienation of the street-level activists, not only from these professionals, but – as a result of their diminished credibility – even from their own community. It is not surprising, therefore, to those with any knowledge of ground-level realities, why this professional ascendancy has engendered intense grassroots resentment, and my own experience in Highfield estate is undoubtedly a reflection of what happens elsewhere.

Middle-class people who previously would have been unable to find the bloody place were given wide-ranging responsibility for Highfield’s welfare. The BAN project, set up by Lord Melchett, was an attempt to

open avenues for disadvantaged area groups. The only thing the well-meaning Peter Melchett omitted from his plan was an instruction for agencies to act honestly. In the event, the inexperienced community negotiators proved no match for the agency careerists, whose only aim in life seemed to be promotion. Some of these careerists can best be described as snobs. It was constantly evident to those from the community that they couldn't handle the culture shock of having to negotiate with people from the working class. We found their arrogance completely distasteful. Unless proper credibility is accorded to street-level activists, and the community is genuinely brought into the decision-making processes, then many attempts to counter community disadvantage will founder under a tide of professional and institutional realities.¹

Assisting the 'worthy poor'

When government and other agencies *did* decide to make resources available to the community, it was rarely given directly to grassroots activists. As journalist Anne Cadwallader noted with regard to Sally McErlean, a mother of six and member of West Belfast Parent Youth Support Group, when the latter made a submission to the Opsahl Commission:

Mrs McErlean's submission was more evidence that the authorities are still not prepared to give money to 'ordinary people' with no formal qualifications, who don't fit in with their concept of the 'worthy poor'. The poorhouse mentality is with us yet. Money instead goes to properly-constituted boards, to churches, to groups who take children on holidays to the USA. It is not entrusted to 'ordinary people' like Sally McErlean who don't appear 'suitably qualified'.⁴

Even when it was realised that money *would* have to go to grassroots projects, not infrequently it provided the opportunity to create more 'jobs for the boys'. Some community groups found that before their funding application was granted it had to be preceded by a consultant's appraisal, ostensibly to establish that money was not being wasted. But do these consultants really know what they are looking *for*, or even what they are looking *at*? Might the *real waste* of money not start with them? When advertising a Channel 4 programme on management consultants in the UK, *Radio Times* said:

Each year over three billion pounds is spent on management consultants. But are the words they speak so valuable? Do their insights really provide a solid basis upon which companies can prosper or are

they just expensive quacks peddling remedies that companies could work out for themselves? *High Interest* discovers that much of their work is used for surface gleam... or [to] impress the government.⁵

What these consultants *do* seem to know a lot about is how to make money. Many projects originating from the energies of unpaid – or poorly paid – community activists have created lucrative spin-offs not only for consultants but solicitors, architects, builders.... When, as voluntary co-ordinator of a large cross-community residential project, I found myself involved in a heated exchange of letters with a building firm because government money was slow to materialise, not once did the builders express any support for the aims of our project. To us it was a time-consuming and energy-draining attempt to confront the communal divide; to everyone else it was just another commercial contract. (It must be acknowledged, however, that many individuals within the professions *have* acted honourably in their dealings with the community.)

And, leaving aside the consultants and others, what about the organisations through whom much of the funding is channelled? Are they really all that knowledgeable about grassroots reality? More importantly, are they really willing to confront grassroots problems in a serious way? Some of the community representatives who gathered for the *Life on the Interface* conference openly voiced their disapproval at the intrusion of the churches and other ‘acceptable’ bodies into the funding equation. With reference to Action for Community Employment [ACE] schemes the conference report stated:

ACE was also seen as a way of increasing the isolation of genuine community groups, in that the government bureaucrats always endeavoured to keep ACE schemes in the hands of ‘respectable’ organisations, in particular the churches. Church control of ACE schemes was mentioned as a problem by both communities, but particularly within the Catholic community. Conference participants pointedly expressed the Catholic community’s real sense of resentment and betrayal at the way their church dominated ACE work. The Catholic church leaders were accused of being more interested in control rather than genuine economic development, and a few participants claimed that church schemes had knowingly duplicated already-existing community-based schemes, with the result that needed funds were diverted to the church schemes, completely undermining the struggling community ones. Many ACE jobs,

including those run by the churches, were seen as purely cosmetic, designed to look good in the short term rather than create long-term benefits.⁶

‘Maintaining a high standard’

There seems to be no limit to the openings which can be created by professionals for themselves. One has only to attend some of the conferences on community ‘themes’ organised by the academic elite to realise that conference attendance is for some an end in itself, a means to self-advancement for others, or a useful vehicle to expound pet theories – with often very little about real issues apparent in the proceedings.

Ironically, the lack of participation by ordinary people or community activists at such conferences is not seen as a source of embarrassment, but readily justified, as the minutes of one organisation dealing in community relations made abundantly clear:

Mr . . . suggested that a different audience could be targeted, since those at grassroots level interested in community relations were not being reached. The group, whilst acknowledging that the previous conferences were directed towards a minority (mainly from academia), seemed to feel that this was justifiable in order to maintain a high standard.

‘Maintain a high standard’? What is it that these people are primarily interested in – with seriously tackling our communal divisions, or merely organising showpieces of ‘intellectual’ debate? The *Interface* conference already referred to took place without a single academic in sight, and yet got closer to the reality of ‘community relations’ than countless conferences dominated by professionals.

And if servicing the Northern Ireland situation did not provide enough career opportunities, it seems that for many in academia the whole world is now their oyster, as the media announced in January 1994:

Northern Ireland is to become an international training centre for peace work. A United Nations backed centre, based at the University of Ulster, will train diplomats, academics, and help officials for humanitarian operations in the world’s war zones. The initiative, expected to cost £7m over the next five years, is being funded by the United Nations, the European Commission and the Northern Ireland Office.⁷

It will be interesting to see just *who* will provide the expertise which underpins

the training offered by this initiative. Those grassroots activists who have been tirelessly confronting our communal divisions for years? Somehow I very much doubt that – *their* existence is rarely taken under consideration by the academic elite, the documents *they* circulate about their efforts not infrequently resurface in other people’s ‘original’ work, usually without acknowledgement. Unfortunately, the measurement of expertise has all too often been shown to have little to do with actual experience at the grassroots, and more in having presented some theoretical paper which impressed those within the academic establishment.

At a public meeting a few years ago a prominent academic working in the field of conflict studies admitted that his university faculty *already* had a copious amount of research documents gathering dust on its shelves. Before any more money is pumped into this field, it would be worthwhile to know if questions have ever been asked as to whether the *right research* had been, and was being, undertaken, and whether it was being undertaken by the *right people*.

The new ‘altruistic’ entrepreneurs

At meetings of the Shankill Think Tank *prior* to the ceasefires, a regular complaint was that the Protestant middle class had disowned and deserted the Protestant working class. The middle class was deemed to be more interested in looking after itself – the working class could stew in its own juice. Then along came the ceasefires, accompanied by talk of massive injections of British, European and American funding as part of the ‘peace dividend’. Community activists remarked upon a new phenomenon: various professional organisations as well as some entrepreneurial businessmen were now approaching community groups and expressing a desire to ‘help the community’ develop new projects. Suddenly working-class areas were no longer out of bounds, especially when they were being targeted with massive amounts of money, and it soon became apparent that some people were not looking for money to fit the projects, but projects to fit the money.

Some years ago I had the misfortune to be introduced to a local entrepreneurial businessman, who, in addition to his main occupation, had diversified into the bridal market. He asked me to do some extensive typesetting for which he never paid me. I admit I was completely taken in by him: he insisted that he and I were quite ‘similar’ in many ways, for he “knew what it was like to be self-employed, and the difficulties there could be”; and, showing me a photograph of his young daughter, proclaimed that, like myself, he too was “basically a family man”. When I later perused the extensive printout I obtained from the Enforcement of Judgements Office – which revealed that creditors had been chasing this character

to the tune of £10,000 – I wondered whether he had already planned to add to my family’s ‘difficulties’ even as we talked together.

I mention this experience because it provided me with a valuable insight into similar approaches often utilised by some of those who profess an interest in ‘helping the community’, particularly the pretended – and often quite convincing – identification with the community’s needs, when in reality the motivation is self-advancement. Many professionals *are* genuinely interested in helping the community, but unfortunately many others are simply careerists and photo-opportunists. As a minimum safeguard, there should always be structures in place whereby all outsiders can be made fully accountable to the communities they seek to serve.

4: As others see us . . .

Just another stopover

For all the attention the Northern Irish direct towards their communal problems, it often seems insignificant when compared to the attention directed at these problems by others. Throughout the past twenty-five years of violence a horde of outsiders has been scurrying around within our midst. As J Bowyer Bell pointed out, the conflict

transformed the province for years to come into a social science laboratory for theories and models. Northern Ireland became a site for survey research, for conflict and peace theory, for psychological testing, and often merely an example to deploy in distant academic arguments.... Much the same was true for all the ideologically dedicated, just as was the case with the analysts concerned with violence and political modernization or social mobilization or the psychology of childhood trauma. Peace Studies departments, political scientists, those concerned with civil disobedience or conflict studies or small-group relations or game theory, all had cause to be interested. No academic journal was complete, it sometimes seemed, without an Irish article. And in time whole issues would be dedicated to nothing else. Everyone had a special perspective, a special methodology, an ox to gore. The advocates of the Fourth International and political deconstructionism were as one. Ireland offered each vindication and opportunity.⁸

Due to our unique problems this society – particularly working-class areas – plays regular host to visitors of all descriptions: journalists seeking dramatic news coverage; documentary producers looking for that controversial edge; authors assimilating background material for their latest novels; ‘conflict resolution’ theorists out to put in a bit of grassroots practice before retreating to the realms of academia; do-gooders fixated with peace to the exclusion of injustice; student revolutionary tourists out to see where the action is; researchers padding out their theses; foreign experts here to tell us Paddies where we have all gone wrong; individuals with troubled consciences who express righteous indignation and promise the earth to community groups only to disappear into the mist and never be heard of again. . .

It must be acknowledged, however, that there have been numerous visitors who arrived with a refreshing openness, admitting that they just wanted to observe the situation at first-hand and meet people from both communities, some making regular return visits and in time gaining the friendship of many people at the grassroots.

‘Great work in Northern Ireland’

Some individuals and groups flagrantly manipulated our situation. A few years ago, for example, a group of Americans arrived on a fact-finding visit, and were accommodated and looked after by a large cross-community organisation in West Belfast. The members of the group were likeable, concerned individuals and people from both communities willingly offered them time and hospitality.

However, near the end of the group’s stay, their leader took me aside and told me that, while he was more than happy with the programme drawn up for him, he felt there was something amiss with it. It was too ‘safe’, he said; the community groups he was meeting were already committed to cross-community contact and did not need any ‘outside persuaders’ to encourage them to work for peace and reconciliation. Could I arrange something a bit more realistic – in other words, meetings with groups closer to those engaged in the conflict, people to whom they could add their own small bit of persuasion. I accordingly arranged that they meet for an hour with Andy Tyrie at UDA headquarters, and although Sinn Féin cancelled a meeting arranged for the full group, the Americans visited the Republican Press Centre in small groups.

The following year, when a member of the Irish host organisation was himself in the USA discussing a youth exchange scheme, he happened to mention the name of the American group leader and received the response: “Oh yes, we heard

about the great work he did while he was in Ireland.” As to what this great work entailed, he was told:

[He] appeared on the media here, promoting the new ‘conflict resolution’ organisation he was setting up, and mentioned that while he was in Northern Ireland last year he had visited opposing paramilitary groups and helped resolve a few problems between them.

Did he indeed!

An official in the Community Relations Council recently told me of one foreign academic he knew who had spent a short period here pursuing his interest in conflict resolution. Some time after the academic’s departure, the CRC official happened to come across a paper written by this academic for a conference abroad, and was astounded at the assertions being made – seemingly this academic had single-handedly established a conflict resolution programme here which would eventually solve all our problems! The claim bore no relation to the work he had actually been engaged in and was a blatant attempt at self-advancement.

As others see us . . .

Before I recount some examples of how outsiders ‘see’ us, I should point out that some sections of our community apparently remain quite invisible. I was once asked to meet with a group of American Protestants, who, somewhat ironically, admitted that it was “only on this visit that we’ve really seen something of the Protestant community.” Had they been too busy on their first visit, I asked. “First visit?” they responded, “this is our fifth.” My imagination boggled at the thought that people could come here so many times and repeatedly miss an entire section of our community.

Another group of visitors once told me with great enthusiasm that they had now gained a much better understanding of *both* communities, and could see that Loyalists and Republicans suffered similar harassment, and were equally at the mercy of a manipulative legal system (this was at the height of the ‘supergrass’ trials). They felt they had now got the full picture. “Have you also spoken to any of the victims?” I asked. “Oh yes, we’ve spoken to Republicans and Loyalists who were arrested by . . .” “I don’t mean them, I mean *their* victims,” I said. They looked around one another blankly, then turned to me: “No, I guess we haven’t. Do you think we should?”

Those individuals and groups who *did* manage to gain a broader perspective of the situation here often did not arrive at this perspective spontaneously, but through a learning process in the course of which imported stereotypes were

found to be decidedly wanting. One such organisation was the Dutch charity Pax Christi Kinderhulp which every summer for the past 21 years has taken 120 disadvantaged children – selected by the NSPCC – to stay with host-parents in the Netherlands, and all paid for by extensive fund-raising in Holland. However, the longevity of the organisation's involvement has been due as much to their preparedness to adapt to the peculiarities of our problems and to acknowledge that these problems have no quick-fix cure.

Their learning experience was highlighted during the fifth year of their involvement. That year they brought a sizeable group of volunteers and organisers – 22 in all – to Northern Ireland for five days of fact-finding and motivation. During their stay they were taken to see the areas in Belfast and Derry where most of the children came from; they visited community centres and spoke to people in both communities; they walked in the Mourne Mountains and were drenched in Irish rain (to their credit, the Dutch generously termed it 'Irish mist'); they visited famous watering-holes such as the Crown Bar and Kelly's Cellars; they attended folk music sessions in Belfast and Downpatrick; and, most importantly of all, were reunited with some of the children who had gone to Holland on the first holiday scheme five years previously.

On the last night of their stay everyone met for a final evaluation. Near the end of the discussion, I told the Dutch that we really appreciated all the efforts they were making on our children's behalf – and without exception the children had all benefited from their experience in Holland – but now that we had so many Dutch *here* in Northern Ireland it was an ideal opportunity to share and explore some fundamental issues. "In particular," I said, "I am curious to learn about your personal motivations in wanting to bring our children to Holland."

After a short silence, one woman ventured a response: "We are taking them out of a bad environment and showing them a good one...." Other responses followed: "We want them to feel positive things about themselves, not negative things." "By bringing them into our homes we are hoping that contact with our own children will be a positive influence." There were other comments in the same vein, and I waited for a moment before responding.

"This place must be a bit of a dump, then?"

The Dutch were taken aback. "What do you mean!"

"Well, according to what you are saying, it would seem that our children must *escape* this society if they are to experience anything positive – it doesn't appear to have much of value of its own to offer? Indeed, perhaps you didn't experience much that was positive during your visit?"

A chorus of denials greeted my remarks. The Dutch eagerly listed all the positive things they had experienced: the beauty of the countryside; the fascinating if troubled history; the friendliness and humour of people in both communities; the liveliness and enthusiasm of the children; the openness and honesty they had encountered; the less frenetic pace of life; the vitality of the music. . . in short, they had thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

“Well, then,” I asked, “perhaps a reassessment is needed? I realise that the violence going on here, coupled with the depressing social circumstances many of the children face, creates a very negative image to outsiders. But if you look closer you will find that this society has a richness about it, and the people not only possess an energy and a resilience, but display a friendliness towards visitors that some other countries often lack. Our conflict might seem unreal in today’s world, but the people here are *very* real.”

All credit to the Dutch, but their reassessment began that evening, and the following morning, prior to departure, their chairman spoke on the organisation’s behalf:

Can I say that we appreciated the question posed yesterday. We have talked much about it among ourselves and we realise that although our purpose in coming to Northern Ireland was to learn about the Irish, we must also learn more about ourselves and our motivations. We have been treating your children simply as refugees, who could hopefully learn from our children, but from whom our own children were not expected to learn anything in return. We were also viewing Northern Ireland society very negatively, and we realise now that not only is this inaccurate, but counterproductive if we hope to contribute positively to the situation here.

It was such learning experiences – and it was a learning process that *went both ways*, for the Northern Irish also gained from their involvement with another society – which finally led Pax Christi Kinderhulp to make a generous gift to the people of Northern Ireland when they purchased Kinder Community House in Killough, Co Down, for use by community groups here.

However, not all such exchanges develop so productively, and, in much the same way that, in our desire to attract inward investment, we undermine ourselves by ‘selling’ Northern Ireland abroad as a low-wage economy, we often allow foreign exchange organisations to package and sell our children’s predicament in a way that is ultimately demeaning and counterproductive when endeavouring to build community self-esteem.

Looking for ‘news’

It is clear that not all outside interest proves of positive value to the communities here. This is especially so when we are referring to the media. Time and again throughout the Troubles the media have revealed their obsession with the controversial and the dramatic, and shown scant regard concerning the possible effects on our communities. And if anything is guaranteed to reinforce powerlessness at the grassroots it is the media’s constant refusal to see that the everyday story of ordinary people – separate from the doings of the politicians and the ‘patriots’ – is worth telling.

To give one example. Denis Smyth, a community historian, writing about the August 1969 period in the ‘Sailortown’ area of Belfast’s dockland, recalled how both sides of the community, by a courageous joint effort, managed to avert the communal violence which was erupting elsewhere in the city. In his recollection he made pointed reference to the negative attitude adopted by the media:

This co-operation was a unique event in the present troubled history of events, but unique only to the ordinary people themselves, it seems, for to outsiders it apparently held no interest. During that period in 1969 when working-class people allowed themselves to be incited against one another, and Belfast was plunged into obscene and irrational violence, a foreign television team visited the Dockland area. Now obviously they had done their research properly and knew that, going on past history, some of the worst of the communal violence could be expected to erupt in Sailortown.

However, much to the surprise and obvious disappointment of the television team, they found the people of Sailortown, while tense, managing to co-exist in peace with their neighbours. In our naivety we assured them that here, after all, was a real story, a good scoop for them – here at last, in a city gone mad, sanity had had its way and communal co-operation had replaced sectarian violence. But no, this time to *our* disappointment, they made it clear that such a peaceful situation wasn’t ‘news’. They wanted to report on the bomber, the killer, the savage tendencies of men – that was real ‘news’. ⁹

Once, while sending local children abroad on a summer scheme, a TV crew from the host country asked if they could come to Belfast to make a brief item about two children participating in the scheme – a Catholic girl and a Protestant boy. We insisted that the parents must give their full consent to all that was asked of their children, and this was accepted. However, only a week before the crew’s

arrival the young uncle of the Catholic girl was shot dead during a gun-battle with the British Army. When the TV team learned of this they seemed quite excited, and, somewhat concerned, we insisted that they do nothing to upset the child. How naive we were! Not long into the filming the interviewer began probing the girl's feelings on her uncle's death... and then probed further. As the girl got visibly more upset and her anguished mother paced up and down at the back of the room, we endeavoured to indicate that the team desist, but were dismissed with evasive hand gestures, while the cameraman, completely oblivious to our entreaties, zoomed in on the increasingly anguished face of the young girl. Only when the frantic mother stormed out of the room threatening to "get 'the boys' to turf them out" did we regain some measure of control over events. But it was a salutary lesson for all of us, and clear evidence that when the media decide they have unearthed a good human-interest angle, nothing is allowed to get in their way, certainly not the feelings of those most closely involved.

More reprehensibly, media interference has often thwarted attempts at promoting genuine dialogue. When journalists or reporters get wind of anything 'new' they invariably dash with unseemly haste to the editorial desk or newsroom to proclaim their discovery to all and sundry. People who were trying to sound out possibilities for accommodation suddenly find an unwelcome spotlight turned upon them, and their erstwhile friends and supporters rapidly distancing themselves from whatever was said. The commentators crown their efforts by posing patently unanswerable hypothetical questions, but ones which are guaranteed to raise deep suspicions among the populace, with the result that all concerned have to back down, and yet another attempt to reach across the divide has to be retracted, another window of opportunity is slammed shut.

What do the media believe they achieve when they so readily risk destroying embryonic moves before these have a chance to percolate into the community consciousness? Is their vision limited to a three-minute slot on the evening news? Are they afraid that if they don't leap in, some competitor will grab the opportunity instead?

Despite the self-indulgent congratulations those in the media are so frequently in the habit of bestowing upon one another, many at grassroots level view them with great distrust. During one occasion when media attention not only deliberately distorted what was occurring at community level, but placed those involved at great risk, Ballymurphy community activist Father Des Wilson wrote to me:

We have been betrayed by the BBC and the rest of them so often that we

make resolution after resolution never to have anything to do with them again. And time and again we break that resolution. I think we would do well to boycott the whole lot of them.... We don't need them – because we don't need misinterpretation. Better for us to explain what we are doing to a hundred people than have it misrepresented to a million!

One of the more recent assertions made by media representatives when they try to inveigle you to participate is to insist that *their* programme will be balanced, because their programme will look at both sides. Is it not time the media did *three* programmes: one about Unionists, one about Nationalists. . . and one about the rest of us!

5: Heads in the Sand

“I’m afraid my shelves are basically Mars Bars orientated”

In November 1993, in the wake of the Shankill bombing atrocity and Greysteel massacre, Northern Ireland witnessed the most intense demands for peace for many years. Not a day went by without government spokespersons, church leaders, business leaders and others appearing on TV or in print beseeching *everyone* in the community to do all they could to bring peace that little bit closer. At the height of these calls for peace I approached the manager of a chain of newsagent-cum-bookshop outlets, asking if he would be prepared to stock some of my publications, which, I explained to him, were aimed specifically at encouraging cross-community understanding. He declined to take any, but gave a surprising explanation: “I’m sorry, but I really have to maximise the returns I get from the space I have – I’m afraid my shelves are basically Mars Bars orientated.” I looked around his extensive shop and wondered whether he and I lived in the same tormented country, whether we had been listening to the same appeals for the past fortnight, whether ‘Mars Bars’ could really be more important than all that was happening around us, and whether working for peace was really only for those who would not be inconvenienced too much by it.

This wasn't my first such experience. A few years *prior* to initiating my Island Pamphlets series a city centre bookshop had turned down one of my community-themed publications because they considered it would be a slow seller. “We live in a commercial world,” the manager wrote to me, “and money tied up in very slow saleable stock can be extremely expensive.” Now, the ‘expense’ in question,

for 10 copies of the title, would have amounted to the grand sum of £10.72, but it was not this which concerned me. I replied that while we certainly lived in a commercial world we *also lived* in Belfast during a turbulent period in its history, and in my opinion even bookshops could play a positive role – for downtown shops provided an ideal neutral zone for people from both communities to access each other’s material. I felt that these bookshops had an *obligation* to provide shelf space – no matter how uncommercial it might be – for such community-based material, particularly if its purpose was to confront the sectarian divide.

‘Of insufficient aesthetic worth to warrant subvention’

Some years ago a young woman from a Loyalist area of Belfast showed me a collection of her poetry. I was surprised at the content, for in her poems she had managed to put herself in the position of *all* women in Northern Ireland suffering because of the violence: the anguished widow of a murdered policeman; the distraught mother of a hunger striker helplessly watching her son’s life waste away; the wife of a lifer coming to terms with *her own* ‘sentence’ – being left to rear her children alone. It is often said that only when our two communities begin to understand each other’s fears and aspirations can they ever hope to bridge the terrible gulf between them. Here was someone who was not only trying to *understand* the ‘other’ community, but was *feeling with them*, articulating a humanity that transcended the sectarian divide. To enable her poems to reach a wider audience I submitted them (along with a collection of shipyard poetry written by my grandfather) to the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, requesting assistance with publication costs.

The response (to both poetry collections)? The writing, I was informed, “remains verse rather than poetry [and is not] of sufficient aesthetic worth to warrant subvention.”¹⁰ ‘Insufficient aesthetic worth’? Our communities had been traumatised by an orgy of killing for years, and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland was preoccupied with aestheticism! In a meeting two years later with the author of the Arts Council’s rejection, at which a member of the Cultural Traditions Group was also present, he reminded me that his remit was to maintain literary standards. I responded that not only did I consider the literary quality of the poems to be quite acceptable, but I believed that for him to judge material solely on the basis of ‘aesthetic worth’ in the midst of our communal tragedy was shortsighted. Arts Council funding was *public* money, after all, yet instead of it being used to encourage *all* signs of an emergent new consciousness within the communities bearing the brunt of the violence, it was

merely subsidising the efforts of the cultural elite. I told him that I might be prepared to accept a concern with aestheticism if we were living in Edinburgh or Cardiff or Leeds, but *this was Belfast*, where there was a bloody war going on, and it was up to everyone – the Arts Council included – to use all the resources at their disposal to do something about it. Rather than adopting a position which, as he himself admitted, could effectively “silence a voice” he should have been *actively encouraging* such voices. In a letter to the Cultural Traditions Group – which had actually prompted the joint meeting – I had written that it seemed ironic that representatives of important funding bodies could travel up and down to Dublin on ‘peace trains’ appealing for everyone to work towards ending the conflict, when there might have been some extra contribution *they themselves* could have made within their own areas of responsibility.

6: ‘Received opinion and scholarly pints’

The *real* ‘Culture Club’?

Questions of national identity and supposedly irreconcilable cultural ‘differences’ are undeniably at the root of the Northern Ireland conflict. Understandably then, some community groups have a ‘cultural’ component to their work, and when they are denied funding, or face hostility from the academic establishment, they often suppose it is a direct consequence of the particular cultural stance they have taken. For example, when the Gaelic League publication *Cuisle na nGael* failed in its efforts to secure funding in 1992, its editors retaliated:

...‘culture’ is being insidiously refined and sanitised by Civil Servants and Government appointees... Culture, too, is being increasingly presented, not in an Irish or even in an Ulster context, but in exclusively Northern Ireland terms. Instead of culture enabling us to broaden our horizons and to enrich our experiences, it is steadily being pared back to concentrate on the ‘culture’ of the Northern Ireland State.¹¹

Although the editors have a point, I do not believe that the problem is ultimately one of establishment allegiance to a specific State, but is more in the nature of an exclusive club fending off intruders, *irrespective* of the cultural stance these intruders might adopt. Sometimes the nature of this club can seem almost benign, as revealed by archaeologist Jim Mallory’s telling

insight into the world of academia:

... the layman, no matter how intelligent and industrious, can easily become unstuck, not so much because he hasn't read everything he could get his hands on, but rather because he doesn't get the opportunity to drink with the right people. Received opinion in any field is more easily found between scholarly pints than the pages of a book.¹²

Quite often, however, the club is far from benign, and easily reveals its irritation and even its arrogance when its professional monopoly is encroached upon: some academics have thrown temper tantrums in public; others have dashed into print with attacks which even astound their colleagues, or have hastily cobbled together 'critiques' through which double-decker buses could be run. And often this is all accompanied by a lack of the very 'professionalism' they are seemingly endeavouring to uphold.

No-one knows better the energy which can be expended by ruffled academia than Ian Adamson and myself – as a consequence of our promotion of the shared heritage of the Ulster people. In their attacks academics frequently assert that, as non-professional 'popular' historians, we are deliberately misrepresenting history to suit our own ends. In fact, more often than not the misrepresentation originates from them. This is not the place to describe the ongoing exchange in detail – I refer readers to my pamphlet *The Cruthin Controversy* for a much fuller account – but a brief mention here of some of the more recent so-called 'critiques' might give some flavour of their quality.

“Defenders of the Cruthin myth...”

When reviewing a new edition of Estyn Evan's *The Personality of Ireland*, Jonathan Bell of the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum felt it necessary to add:

Defenders of the Cruthin myth would not find comfort in Evans, however. He is determinedly against racist or ethnic explanations. He is a supporter of cultural exchange and enrichment. His views are in fact close to those espoused by many people working in the area of cultural traditions. Differences between north and south should be seen as “a potential source of enrichment through cross-fertilisation ... To achieve this... one should first look towards the renewal of regional consciousness in the old province of Ulster.”¹³

This is blatant misrepresentation. As Bell draws no distinction between those (Adamson and myself) who have done most to promote popular awareness of the

Cruthin, and those who have abused our efforts for sectarian interests, I can only assume that Adamson and I are considered among those “defenders of the Cruthin myth” whom Bell claims “would not find comfort in Evans”. According to Bell, then, we are seemingly engaged in promoting a racist theory, one which is opposed to cultural exchange and enrichment, and which denies the benefits of cross-fertilisation. This type of pretend analysis and sweeping insinuation is the type of approach we normally expect from the assortment of armchair intellectuals who care little of what we are really saying, but gleefully jump onto the anti-Cruthin bandwagon. Bell, on the other hand, should be familiar enough with our books to realise what it is we are promoting, and that we have actually quoted Evans approvingly on numerous occasions *in support of* our work.

Considerations of space do not permit me to counter such misrepresentation here. However, I feel it presents an ideal opportunity for readers to *judge for themselves* the quality of these ‘critiques’. Readers should read a copy of Adamson’s *The Ulster People*¹⁴ or my pamphlet *Ulster’s Shared Heritage*¹⁵, and then decide whether what we are saying bears any relation to such claims that we are promoting racism and denying cultural enrichment. Having done this, perhaps the reader might then spend a moment reflecting upon the motives of those who constantly endeavour to misrepresent our work.

One curious aspect of Bell’s criticism was his mention of those “working in the area of cultural traditions” by way of comparison, almost implying that they are a different breed of people from the so-called “defenders of the Cruthin”. This is to completely ignore the fact that Adamson and I were endeavouring to stimulate cross-community awareness of our shared cultural traditions *long before* it became the flavour of the month among our academic establishment, and certainly long before the appearance of the lucrative funding which finally dragged our academics down from their ivory towers where for so long they had managed to pretend that our communal tragedy was no concern of theirs.

“Quite wilfully annoying...”

One tactic often employed when implying that Adamson and I are simply misrepresenting history is for our critics to feign exasperation at our ‘distortions’, such as Pádraig Ó Snodaigh does, when, referring to Ian Adamson’s contribution to a collection of essays on the Ulster-Scottish connection,¹⁶ he indignantly remarks that “Adamson’s article is quite wilfully annoying.”¹⁷ This is because he objects to Adamson labelling the 18th century Ulster settlers in America as ‘Scotch-Irish’, when, Ó Snodaigh asserts, “the fact is that the early immigrants...

called themselves Irish”, and the ‘Scotch-Irish’ designation was “spawned... in the mid-19th Century. This fundamentally-important fact is seldom averted to, and not once in this book.” This seemingly authoritative and schoolmaster-like rebuke seems to be proclaiming: ‘Here’s that man Adamson concocting his facts again!’ And if Adamson was indeed guilty of such inaccuracy, the reader should more easily be swayed against his overall argument.

But let us look more closely at the ‘accuracy’ of Ó Snodaigh’s ‘fundamentally important fact’. Contrary to his assertion that the ‘Scotch-Irish’ designation was not ‘spawned’ until the mid-19th century, its use in America was actually noted *as early as 1695* when Sir Thomas Laurence, Secretary of Maryland, wrote: “In the two counties of Dorchester and Somerset, where the Scotch-Irish are numerous, they clothe themselves by their linen and woollen manufactures.” The following derogatory comment was made in 1723 by an Anglican minister in Delaware: “They call themselves Scotch-Irish – ignavus pecus – and the bitterest railers against the church [of England] that ever trod upon American ground.” That same year reference was also made to them in Sussex County: “The first settlers of this county were for the far greatest part originally English, but of late years great numbers of Irish (who usually call themselves Scotch-Irish) have transplanted themselves and their families from the north of Ireland.” Crown official James Logan, himself from Ireland, was upset by the Ulster immigrants’ habit of taking land without proper authorization, and in a letter of 1730 to his employer he complained: “They are of the Scotch-Irish (so called here) of whom J. Steel tells me you seem’d to have a pretty good opinion but it is more than I can have tho’ their countryman.” Another who held them in low regard was the Marylander who a few years later murdered the sheriff of Lancaster County in Pennsylvania, after calling the sheriff and his assistants “damned Scotch-Irish sons of bastards”! George Washington, however, was more complimentary in the remark credited to him during the height of the Revolutionary War: “If defeated everywhere else, I shall make my last stand for liberty among the Scotch-Irish of my native Virginia.”

So while it is a fact that many of the Ulster immigrants quite rightly celebrated their ‘Irishness’ following their arrival in America, it is *also* a fact that the hyphenated title ‘Scotch-Irish’ “had been coined, was generally known, and was even used by some of the Scotch-Irish”¹⁸ *right from the start*, and it is mischievous to pretend that it was only ‘spawned’ over a century later. The indignation expressed by Ó Snodaigh was hardly justified by his misrepresentation of the ‘facts’; while his attempt to discredit Adamson in the process could best be described as . . . well, “quite wilfully annoying”.

Some of the ‘critiques’ plumb new depths. Allan Armstrong, having shown himself to be obsessed with ‘gable-wall’ distortions of Adamson’s writings, can seemingly only respond with little more than a ‘gable-wall’ critique: “When the fraternal knock finally arrives on Robbie the Pict’s door, he’d better beware. The first question is likely to be. ‘Are you a Proddie Pict or are you a Papish Pict?’”¹⁹ Quite wilfully annoying? No – pathetic!

Because so many of the ‘critiques’ emanating from academia (and its hangers-on) prove to be little more than veiled antagonism – and flawed by dishonesty and innuendo – the suspicion exists that hidden behind the supposed concern with professionalism and objectivity lies a distaste for any ‘non-professional’ encroachment upon a jealously-guarded preserve. Our academics *could* play a vital role in helping our two communities abandon unfounded and frequently abused stereotypes and embrace a new vision of our diverse but shared heritage, but to do so they would need to descend at long last from their ivory towers and join with those in both our communities who are endeavouring to make history and culture *accessible* and *relevant* to people at the grassroots.

7: The need for community responsibility

Although throughout this pamphlet I have detailed the processes by which powerlessness at the grassroots is reinforced from *without*, I am mindful of the tensions, failings and inconsistencies which exist *within* communities. Often in their haste to tackle the most pressing problems even community activists can inadvertently contribute to the very sense of powerlessness they are striving to overcome. Once when I was walking around Highfield estate selecting children to go to Holland, a resident confronted me:

You’ll not be picking any of my kids, I’m sure. After all, we try to make sure they never get into trouble and do our best to provide for them. It’s only parents who neglect their children, who are out at the boozer every night, who get rewarded with free holidays [for their children]. Same with the RUC Community Relations: the easiest way for a kid around here to get taken away camping by the police is to smash somebody’s window, or terrorise the elderly. Those of us who make an effort to see that our children behave themselves get little recognition for it.

It was a salutary encounter, and made me realise that, despite the best of intentions, different layers of community reality often go undetected.

Also, the constant struggle of many groups to access funding often militates against them being able to develop a manageable and purposeful outreach programme. And, unfortunately, a few groups can become ossified, with the same old personnel holding sway, until the wider community loses interest and their involvement gradually drops away.

It also seems that the high profile painstakingly gained by community action over the years has unwittingly created an 'expectancy' culture, particularly among our youth, which some community activists find near-impossible to fulfil. Even more disheartening for many community activists is the destructive nihilism which greets some of their hardest efforts. A worker who organised an outdoor music concert as part of the Shankill '94 celebrations was dumbfounded by what transpired:

Gangs of youths went out of their way to destroy it – they climbed up to the top of the marquee and slid down, with those inside kicking at their friends as they slid past; they sprayed the expensive sound equipment with the fire extinguishers; and when they realised I was finally having to call the whole thing off, they let out one massive cheer – as if they had won some great victory! And this was all being done for their benefit! They need to catch themselves on!

Across the interface in Catholic West Belfast another youth worker, who for years had tried to raise the self-image of his estate's frequently stigmatised young people, felt totally disheartened when one of his groups, on a residential weekend to Kinder Community House, tampered with all the fire extinguishers, spent most of their time consuming crates of beer, and left the premises in a terrible mess. He relayed to me afterwards the two words which best summed up his feelings: 'burnt out'. There is a constant toll of burnt-out people within the community network, a reality not properly acknowledged, and many genuinely caring individuals have given up, exhausted by constant battles with the bureaucracy without and the indiscipline within.

Much of this indiscipline is obviously a consequence of the social and economic disadvantage which is still a fact of life in many working-class areas, and is also directly related to the experience of powerlessness which only serves to compound such disadvantage.

If our communities are to regain a sense of power over their lives they must not only be prepared to confront the domination of outside agencies, but must be

open to self-criticism and be prepared to accept full responsibility for their own actions. Above all, they must always *believe* in themselves.

Some years ago, when the Newtownabbey Musicians Workshop was celebrating its first successful year of weekly sessions in a local lounge bar, they decided that, in place of the usual entrance charge, admission would be gained by handing in an Easter egg (the following day being Good Friday). Prior to the event Bo Dyer, one of the Workshop's leaders, informed me they wanted to donate the eggs to the NSPCC, as well as to a local children's home. "Why the NSPCC?" I asked. "The NSPCC's a reputable agency, people will trust you with the eggs," he replied. "But you are just as reputable an organisation, and know just as many deserving children," I said. "People don't necessarily see us that way – to them we're a strange assortment: skinheads, punks, you name it..." "Well – why not confront that image, then?" I replied.

And so they notified the media that on Good Friday their minibus would visit various Newtownabbey estates and children were advised of the 'drop points' where the eggs would be distributed. If you ignore the fact that the 300 eggs were insufficient to satisfy the hordes of waiting children, the venture was a complete success – epitomised by one resident's comment to me: "They all look a bit weird, mind you, but they're not a bad bunch – at least they're trying to do something for the community."

Under it all, the community knows who is out to help them and who is not. When I look around at our assorted politicians, professionals and others I often feel that Kropotkin's question is as relevant now as when he posed it, almost a century ago:

Where are those who will come to serve the masses – not to utilize them for their own ambitions?

There *are* many genuine people in the professions and the community *does* need their expertise. But the relationship between them must be one of genuine partnership, one that consolidates and develops community strengths, not one in which the community repeatedly finds itself subservient to the career needs of the 'experts'.

Now, more than ever before, it is vital that the ordinary people of Northern Ireland begin to demand a greater say over their future, for it is they who have sustained their areas throughout our long nightmare and who ultimately provided the real impetus behind the current ceasefires. It is equally clear that most of those charged with taking us into that future – politicians and professionals alike – could easily, without the assistance provided by a genuine community partnership, prove unequal to the complexities of the task that lies ahead.

Up to now the voice of ordinary people has been effectively excluded from the ‘peace process’, and this is the major flaw of that process. Yet, irrespective of whether our politicians reach, or fail to reach, some accommodation with each other, ultimately it is what is achieved at the grassroots of our society that will prove to be the real peace process.

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Grassroots leadership

(7)

Recollections by

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ISLAND (78) PAMPHLETS

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Introduction

Towards the end of 2005, the Community Think Tanks Project facilitated a series of discussions involving working-class Protestant women in Belfast. An account of these discussions was to form the basis of the very last pamphlet to be produced under ‘Peace II’ funding. However, soon after the final draft was agreed I was informed that certain people – *not* the participants – were unhappy with some of the comments the women had made, and advised that publication should not take place – in case ‘anyone receives a knock at their door’.

As the project has never risked jeopardising anyone’s personal safety, I agreed to abandon the pamphlet. However, I told the leader of the women’s group that the fact that, *eleven years* after the declaration of a Loyalist ceasefire, Protestant working-class people still had to fear a paramilitary knock on the door for expressing honest opinions should act as a ‘wake-up’ call to their community. The irony in this particular case was that what the women had been saying was not really all that controversial. Indeed, in the opinion of others who read the draft their views came over as balanced and humane, and I regretted not being at liberty to share these views with a wider audience.

As the Community Think Tanks Project had submitted an application for ‘Peace II Extension’ funding, my intention was to facilitate a substitute Think Tank in the event of this application being successful. However, to the surprise of many people at community level, the project was turned down for funding. This seemed especially unfortunate given that the problems highlighted by the women’s pamphlet confirmed that the need for debate and dialogue – such as promoted and facilitated by the project for some time – was as great as ever.

Although I felt confident that the Think Tanks Project would resume its work once an alternative funding source could be secured, there still remained the problem that a final ‘Peace II’ pamphlet needed to be produced quickly to meet the agreed funding deadline. And the only recourse open to me was to turn to what was closest to hand: my own recollections (or some of them). I hope that the reader accepts that it was this dilemma – and not any attempt at self-promotion on my part – which was my reason for falling back on such subject matter. I also apologise for the somewhat chaotic nature of these reminiscences; perhaps on some future occasion I can pen a more coherent presentation.

Michael Hall

Michael Hall

The eldest of five children, I was born in 1949 in Sandbrook Park in the Sydenham area of East Belfast, in the shadow of Harland and Wolff shipyard. Although our parents imbued us with strong ethical and moral standards, these derived not from any religious belief but from a secular humanism. Despite having been born into the ‘Protestant’ working-class community, and with close relatives being members of the Orange Order and B-Specials, I never recall hearing the word ‘Protestant’ mentioned in our house, even when the streets outside were festooned with bunting during the Twelfth of July celebrations. Indeed, the first time I was made aware of that label was when it was used by Catholic friends. My parents, happy to embrace different facets of their Northern Irish heritage, sent me and the older of my two sisters to Patricia Mulholland’s School of Irish Dancing in North Belfast. During a rest-break in one particular class we happened to be chatting with some of our classmates and one of them asked – with no hint of malice, only curiosity: “Are you two Protestants or Catholics?” When I replied that I didn’t know, they responded, “Oh, you must be Protestants, for a Catholic would know.”

Not that we could keep religion at a distance entirely. We moved from East Belfast over to the university area, where I attended a local primary school. During one particular class the teacher asked all the pupils to bring their family Bibles into school the following day, and I innocently said that I wasn’t sure if we had one. When she then asked what our family used in church and I told her we didn’t go to church she was livid and straightway ordered me to the corner of the room where I had to stand facing the wall for half an hour. When my parents heard of this they were equally livid, my mother ready to storm round to the school and confront the overzealous teacher, but my father decided that it was better just to go out and purchase a Bible, as he felt that any other action on their part might only rebound on me.

Both sides of my family were proud of their working-class roots – embracing occupations from shop assistant and shipyard plater to master-stairbuilder. My maternal grandfather was the shipyard poet Robert Atkinson, who had copious quantities of poems, short stories and articles published in *Ireland’s Saturday Night*. Unfortunately for my later attempts to gather together a collection of his

poetry¹, he had submitted his material under different pseudonyms in an effort to prevent the Labour Bureau – the ‘buroo’ – from finding out that he was supplementing his ‘dole’ with the occasional meagre payment. Indeed, one day two dole snoopers, their suspicions aroused, went to question the owner of the newspaper – who unceremoniously showed them the door!

Local history and politics were not much to the fore in our household discussions – what was happening on the world stage was deemed far more noteworthy. Nevertheless, aspects of a local connection would surface from time to time. For example, my paternal grandmother was a Gray, and she claimed to be able to trace her family lineage to prominent United Irish leader Betsy Gray. Certainly within our home library a torn and tattered 1899 edition of *Hearts of Down* held pride of place. Not to be outdone, my mother’s sister had married a Munroe, who claimed lineage to Henry Munro, leader of the United Irish forces in County Down. Whether these aspects of my family ancestry were real or simply the product of wishful thinking I was never sure. But the fact that my uncle was both an Orangeman and a member of the Masonic did nothing to lessen his pride in this aspect of his family heritage – such are the anomalies of Northern Irish political and cultural life.

Closeted from the world of Protestant sectarianism – which I was eventually to experience – my awareness of Northern Ireland’s religious divide first surfaced through my participation in Irish dancing. Now, my dancing skills were nil – in Ulster-Scots parlance I was a bit of a *pachle* – but my sister was excellent and amassed a sizeable collection of medals from the numerous competitions in which she competed. During one particular *feis* she performed so well that expectations were high that she would be overall junior girl winner. Although she actually came second both she and my mother were delighted. However, soon afterwards some of the other parents approached my mother and one of them said, “Mrs Hall, we believe your daughter should have been placed first. And – to our shame – we suspect that one of the reasons she wasn’t was that the organisers didn’t want a Protestant name listed as junior girl winner in *The Irish News* tomorrow.”

My mother was taken aback, but believed that there was some other, more acceptable explanation. But it was an unsettling experience, and when it was followed by a more deeply personal incident some months later, it alerted me to the fact that sectarian attitudes in Northern Ireland were not the sole preserve of only one side of our community.

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The nature of these recollections necessitates that I must skip now to the beginning of the ‘Troubles’ and how that period impacted upon my life. But in the intervening years I developed not only a deep interest in history and politics, but a passion for exploring the scenery of Ireland as well as its castles, abbeys, dolmens, court cairns, stone circles and a wealth of other antiquities.

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On 5th October 1968 a civil rights march in Derry/Londonderry was halted by police at Craigavon Bridge. Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association organisers urged the marchers to disperse, saying that their point had been made. After some pushing and shoving, placards were thrown at the police and the latter responded by charging at the marchers, hitting out indiscriminately with their batons. To make matters worse this was all done in full view of television cameras. Four days later I was part of a sit-down protest in Linenhall Street, Belfast, organised by students from Queen’s University. The protesters retreated to the university where the organisation known as the People’s Democracy (PD) was formed. Many of PD’s core members, such as myself, were not students (although I did enter Queen’s a year later to do a degree in Social Studies and Politics).

The unfolding local situation, particularly since the emergence of the Civil Rights movement, had caught many radical young people here by surprise. Our attention had been focused almost exclusively on events abroad, especially the tragic war in Vietnam and the worldwide student revolt, which revealed its revolutionary potential during the ‘May events’ in France that same year.

Although my upbringing had been enthused with socialist ideals, my own extensive readings, coupled with the daily evidence of authoritarian Communism in practice – particularly the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the crushing of all the hopes of ‘socialism with a human face’ which had been voiced during the ‘Prague spring’ – had left me highly antagonistic to all forms of state-sponsored Marxism, and even liberation movements if I suspected that they embraced any element of Leninist elitism. To me, Marxism/Leninism resembled another authoritarian religion, and a very dangerous and oppressive one.

No, what attracted me were the constructive ideals of libertarian socialism – or

anarchism – with its emphasis on mutual aid and with ordinary citizens having the greatest possible control over the running of their daily lives.

[This is not the place to begin to dispel whatever stereotypical notions the reader might hold about a philosophy which has been so pejoratively presented in the media. Suffice to say that the anarchism which I find appealing has nothing to do with either bomb-throwers or chaos, but is something highly creative and life-affirming.]

There were a few others who felt likewise, and the first meeting of what would become the Belfast Anarchist Group (BAG) took place on 5th October 1968 in a small candlelit room above a restaurant in Upper Arthur Street in central Belfast. However, the meeting was poorly attended, as many prospective members had gone to Derry for the aforementioned Civil Rights march – an early foretaste of the competing contradictions which lay ahead. As events on the ground now began to unfold it was clear that dormant passions and aspirations – of a type totally alien to my own upbringing – were being unleashed within and between the two communities here, and within a short time I would find that neither Irish Republicanism nor Ulster Loyalism was sympathetic to libertarian socialist ideals.

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That my understanding of Northern Irish society was severely deficient was dramatically revealed to me at the Burntollet ambush on 4th January 1969. On 1st January forty PD members set out from Belfast City Hall on a four-day march to Derry. Loyalist ‘counter-demonstrators’ dogged the march’s progress, and there were sporadic outbreaks of violence. I hadn’t started out with the rest of the People’s Democracy but had received a phone call from BAG member and PD spokesperson John McGuffin on the evening of the 3rd, asking me to bring the BAG’s banner for the final day’s march into Derry. The Ulsterbus on which I travelled actually had to make a detour to avoid the march, and, seeing it in the distance (close to Burntollet bridge), I asked the driver to let myself and three others off and we proceeded on foot. However, as we made our way along a narrow country road we realised, with some alarm, that our way was blocked by a large crowd of Loyalists, some of whom now surrounded us. I dreaded their reaction if they should discover the banner hidden under my coat – the two poles I was carrying were enough to arouse their curiosity. However, just then the march came into view and luckily – for us, that is – the entire crowd ran towards it, some of them

picking up stones from piles already prepared in a nearby field.

We could also see a number of police vehicles stationed not far away and we hurriedly made our way towards them. When I next looked towards the march I was shocked to see it almost obscured under a barrage of stones. Then the ambushers made a direct assault, and, unable to resist its momentum, some of the marchers were forced off the road and chased across an adjoining field.

The police pushed us away from the main attack and as we stood there, horrified but transfixed, we gradually began to be joined by those who had escaped the initial force of the ambush. More and more stragglers arrived, many with blood streaming down their faces. Eventually the decision was made to resume the march to Derry, with the BAG banner to the forefront – the People’s Democracy banner having been lost during the ambush. As we got closer to the city we were joined by hundreds of local people who had come out in support. A short time later, as we proceeded along Irish Street, we were again attacked. As I sustained a flurry of head punches and body kicks I attempted to defend myself with the banner pole before it was roughly snatched from my grip. Moments later I looked over my shoulder to see that the banner had been set on fire.

Once we arrived in Derry’s Guildhall and had time to let our emotions and adrenaline levels subside, I found myself lost in deep reflection. It had all been quite a shock to me – not only the physical shock of the bodily assault but a psychological, even cultural, shock. The men who had attacked me had faces brimming with hatred, a hatred I just could not fathom. I began to wonder whether my secular upbringing had really prepared me for the reality of my own society. I was having to learn fast, to make up for lost time. And, for the first time, I experienced a deep unease about what I and others, both knowingly and unknowingly, had helped to unleash.

• • •

The PD did make an effort to show that it was equally critical of the set-up in the Republic of Ireland. As part of this effort a march was planned to Dublin for Easter 1969, with the marchers being bused through the North – to avoid any unwanted confrontations – and then walking from there. Although it was a bit of a non-event, one incident is worth recording. At one of our nightly halts prior to our arrival in Dublin, John McGuffin and the BAG members discussed the way the march was

falling apart, the product of both internal dissension and weariness. In light of this, McGuffin made a proposal which was put to other marchers present in the room, not only the BAG members. It being Easter Sunday the following day his proposal was for a small group to proceed in advance to Dublin, and mingle with the crowds waiting for the traditional Easter commemoration parade² to pass. Then, just as ageing President de Valera would be taking the salute from outside the GPO, we would walk straight into the front of the parade and produce concealed placards attacking both the northern and southern states. We knew that for such an affront we could expect a severe beating by the Irish Army and the Garda Síochána – maybe not in front of the TV cameras, but soon enough afterwards.

Those gathered to hear McGuffin's proposal agreed in principle as long as he could get at least 20 marchers to support it. However, with most marchers by that stage exhausted and more concerned with finding somewhere comfortable to lay their sleeping bags, we just failed to reach that figure and the idea had to be abandoned. It was a missed opportunity many later regretted, especially when they saw what an anti-climax the whole event turned out to be, and the way in which waiting Republicans in Dublin tried to manipulate proceedings. Some southern Republicans even tried to get the PD members to march through Dublin in strict military lines, rather than sprawl across the road in their usual anarchic fashion. Needless to say, they were told where to put their request.

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At the Ballymurphy estate on the Springfield Road on the evening of 31st March 1970 a crowd of Catholic young people – some of whom were to proudly style themselves the 'Ballymurphy Young Hooligans' – attacked British Army soldiers standing between them and the adjoining Protestant housing estate of New Barnsley, despite efforts to defuse the situation by vigilantes and local Republicans. Inter-communal tensions had been building up since that morning, when a Junior Orange parade from New Barnsley had marched onto the Springfield Road on its way to a rally in Bangor, and upon its return the anticipated violence had erupted. The serious disturbances which occurred over the next two evenings were to become known as the 'Ballymurphy riots', and were seen by many as a significant point of escalation in the Troubles.

It so happened that at that time an Italian film crew, whose members

belonged to a radical left-wing organisation, were in Belfast, and having made contact with the PD asked to be taken to Ballymurphy on the second evening of the riots. I was among a small group of PD members who agreed to fulfil their request.

When we arrived at Ballymurphy estate the scene which greeted us resembled a large-scale re-enactment of a medieval battle scene. Different ‘formations’ were drawn up lengthwise along that part of the Springfield Road. Lining one side of the road was a crowd of Protestants, waving Union Jacks, who jeered and cat-called across at their Catholic adversaries. Next came a line of RUC officers, some facing the Protestants, others keeping a wary eye for what might be happening on the opposite side of the road, where an equally vociferous gathering of Ballymurphy’s Catholic residents lined the pavement. Finally, between the RUC and the Catholic residents stood the British Army.

Apart from the jeering and catcalls being exchanged across the road, there were no other signs of trouble, so we proceeded to escort the Italians through the lines. We got the impression that the Army and RUC personnel might have otherwise barred our progress, but the presence of the bulky cameras seemed to act as our passport. However, as the Italian film crew began to set up their equipment, the rest of us felt quite uncomfortable, for we were left in limbo in a sort of no-man’s-land.

A few minutes later a roar of anger erupted from the Protestant crowd. It had been occasioned by an event which occurred yards from where we were standing: a Catholic youth had clambered up a lamp post and secured an Irish Tricolour as high as he could reach, before hurriedly descending and disappearing into the crowd. A group of soldiers was moving towards the scene, perhaps intending to remove the offending article, when loud bangs just above our heads – made by empty milk bottles smashing against nearby houses – made everyone in the vicinity duck to avoid a shower of glass splinters.

The Ballymurphy Young Hooligans had obviously been making preparations during the day, for numerous crates of empty bottles had been stored in readiness. For their part, the British Army clearly intended to be firmer in their actions than on the previous night, and within minutes ‘snatch squads’ were preparing to pursue the teenagers into the interior of Ballymurphy estate. As the troops came under a renewed barrage of bottles and stones loud orders were barked and, to the astonishment of the RUC, the soldiers began to don gas

masks. Within moments a cloud of CS gas descended upon us, and with our eyes smarting painfully we endeavoured to escape this new threat.

We looked around for the Italians but they were nowhere to be seen. Then a number of RUC officers, also suffering from the effects of the gas, began to usher us back through their lines.

“Lads, it’ll be safer if you go this way. I don’t know what those bloody eejits are playing at – they never warned us they were going to use gas!”

The problem was that this ‘safe way’ took us directly towards the crowd of angry Protestants, a few of whom now ran over and began firing rapid questions at the four of us. Luckily one of our number possessed a fortuitous ability to replicate different accents. Utilising one such ‘voice’ he managed to convince the Protestants that we were foreign freelance journalists.

“But where’s your cameras?”

“The rest of our crew got separated when the gas was fired. We need to get back into Ballymurphy to rejoin them.”

“What about interviewing *us*?”

“We’d certainly like to do that – once we can meet up with our camera crew.”

“Aye, right; you’re a fuckin’ liar – nobody’s interested in us Prods!”

Despite the palpable sense of menace, no physical action was directed towards us. Apart from our ‘foreign’ comrade, who continued to chat away amiably, the rest of us maintained a careful silence. We made our way to Britton’s Lane, which we knew would lead us back into Ballymurphy.

The Protestant crowd halted at the top of the lane, eyeing us suspiciously. From their comments it was obvious that not all were convinced of our journalistic credentials, and an overheard suggestion to ‘Let’s get the bastards!’ almost made some of our small group want to break into a sprint there and then. After we had proceeded a few dozen yards one of our party again suggested running, as we were now far enough down the lane to reach safety should the Protestants decide to pursue us. However, I counselled against this, and we proceeded as casually as we could, afraid to look over our shoulders.

When we reached the far end of the lane to our great alarm two men with guns suddenly stepped into our path. We walked up to them and their wary faces only relaxed when explanations were given and accepted.

The sequel to this story occurred some months later when one of our group

present that night happened to be jailed on a trumped-up charge of rioting and by chance mentioned the incident to some Republican inmates. To his astonishment one of them burst out laughing, explaining that he and four others had been on armed guard that night and when they saw the crowd of Protestants standing at the top of Britton's Lane they assumed that a flanking attack on Ballymurphy was imminent. However, they couldn't understand why our small group had broken off from the main crowd, and debated how to respond. They decided that as long as we kept walking they would hold their fire, but if we started to run then they would open up!

During the Italian film crew's stay in Belfast, some of us had endeavoured to give them what we felt was a balanced picture of what was happening in Northern Ireland, especially important as the perceptions held by many outsiders were often abysmally inaccurate. (I once took a carload of foreign visitors through the lower Shankill area, and was surprised when one of them asked: "Why do these Catholics paint their kerbstones red, white and blue?" "This is a Protestant area," I replied. To which they responded: "But how can it be – these people are poor!")

Although the PD was distrusted by most working-class Protestants, the latter could not have found much fault with the sympathetic picture we presented to the Italians of their community, lamenting the artificial divisions which had been created between the two sections of the working class. Naively, we had assumed that the Italians' left-wing credentials would mean that they would be receptive to our analysis. However, when we later saw the completed film we realised that our input had been a total waste of time, for not only was it a glorification of nationalism, but it had a very anti-Protestant bias. That Protestant who had confronted us at New Barnsley had been quite accurate in his assessment.

(This was not the only time I was to feel betrayed by the workings of the media, both international and local, for my disenchantment was to be reinforced over subsequent years through various encounters with journalists and documentary makers. Not only have many media individuals proven themselves to be primarily interested in the violent and the controversial but they sometimes placed people's lives at great risk. Indeed, when one TV programme did just that, I endeavoured to interest other community activists in the idea of organising a community-wide media boycott. The idea never came to fruition, but in the course of those efforts radical priest Father Des Wilson wrote to me: "We don't need them, because we

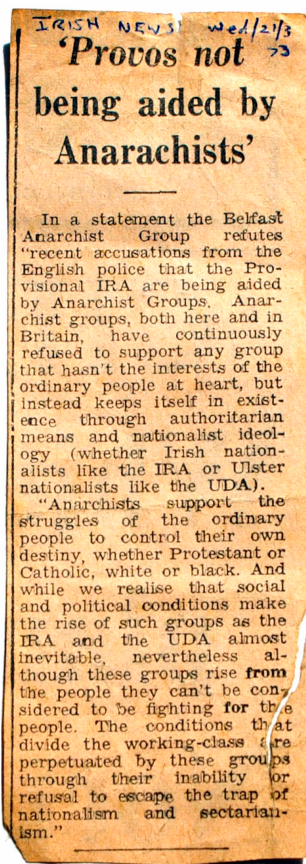
don't need misinterpretation. Better for us to explain what we are doing to a hundred people than have it misrepresented to a million.”)

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From its inception, many members of the BAG increasingly found their energies preoccupied with PD activities, and by 1971 meetings were sporadic and attended by only a handful. The end came in early 1973 after about half a dozen of us had met to discuss our disillusionment with the prevailing situation, not only the senseless blood-letting but the total absence of any cross-community socialist politics. The meeting also discussed recent allegations by the police in London that the Provisional IRA were being aided by local anarchists. It was agreed that I would issue a statement to the local press refuting the claims, stating that as anarchists we refused to support any group which we felt hadn't the interests of ordinary people at heart, but instead kept itself in existence through authoritarian means and nationalist ideology (whether Irish nationalism or Ulster nationalism).

One BAG founding member, who had become a prominent figure within PD politics and had not attended any of our meetings, was furious with the statement. To my astonishment he said that we should not have been criticising the Provos because “they were the only ones killing British soldiers.” I was aghast. “How can anyone professing libertarian socialist ideals come out with such an analysis?” I asked him. But he wasn't the only one. The Provisionals' so-called ‘armed struggle’ – wedded to a nationalist agenda – seemed to be sucking many radical individuals along in its wake, and the purely internationalist and socialist ideals we all once shared were slowly crumbling in the process.

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Note the *Irish News* spelling of anarchists!

When the BAG folded, a handful of us formed the Belfast Libertarian Group, and, dismayed by the relentless violence and the rampant sectarianism, made what small contribution we could to counter this appalling situation. To begin with, we produced what we hoped would be the first in a series of documents which attempted to analyse the events unfolding around us. In a pamphlet *Ireland, Dead or Alive?* we not only castigated the divisive legacy of Unionism but also the Provisional IRA's murderous bombing campaign.

Reaction was almost immediate. A close friend who had contacts within the Provisionals was given a 'message' from them to pass on to me: "Tell your mate that if he writes anything like that again he'll get his knees ventilated³." Around that same time I was confronted by a couple of Loyalists whose warning was no less blunt: "We're gonna get you, you bastard – just wait and see!"

Alongside the doomed pamphlet venture, we also produced a series of silk-screened posters, incorporating a numbered 'Know Your Enemy' theme, in the hope that this might stimulate public interest. Our targets included sectarianism and working-class exploitation. We began to paste up the posters around North and West Belfast, but found it exhausting work for such a small group. When a member of the Official wing of the Republican movement approached us, saying how much he liked the posters and suggesting that 'his crowd' put them up in Catholic areas, we very reluctantly let him become involved. And so his associates began to put up our posters by the hundreds.

When our contact first began to take posters we hadn't at that stage produced poster No. 5, focusing on the Churches, and when he saw it he looked quite alarmed and asked us not to do anything with it until he got back to us. He returned two days later, looking extremely worried: "I've been told to tell you that we can't put that poster up. We've been seen putting all the others up, so people will assume they originated with us. And we can't be associated with any attack on the churches." Somewhat ominously, he added that he had been instructed to warn us that we were '*not going to be allowed*' to put up any either.

We put up two dozen of the offending posters in a gesture of defiance, then destroyed our remaining stock. With hindsight, it was probably an ill-conceived move on our part to attack the churches. I guess our small group were viewing matters too dogmatically: but to us the divisions between the different Christian churches throughout Irish history had greatly contributed to the sectarian

animosities which were now tearing this society apart. (Over subsequent years, commendably, the churches have genuinely tried to rectify this legacy with joint appeals for an end to violence.)

Shortly afterwards, while socialising one Saturday afternoon in Kelly's Cellars – a favourite PD haunt – I complained about all these impediments to what we were trying to do, and to my surprise was told by those PD leaders present that it was all our own fault. They felt that we were totally naive, that any notion of promoting cross-community radicalism at that time was a waste of time, as the two extremes had the situation sewn up between them and nobody else could expect to get a look in. This sober assessment was a final confirmation to me that the idealistic dream was over and the nightmare well and truly begun.

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The threats received over the pamphlet and poster efforts – minuscule though they were in comparison to the tragedy which was engulfing so many lives all around us – were nevertheless enough to encourage my partner, Sheila, and I to get offside for a while. Within days of our marriage in the summer of 1974 we set off to Amsterdam to look for work. We were lucky to find employment, for Amsterdam then was a thriving Mecca for young people from all over Europe and any job vacancies were greedily snapped up. When we arrived there the 'youth scene' was so all-pervasive the city authorities had permitted a youth committee to establish 'sleep-ins' – cheap, hostel-type accommodation – and run a comprehensive youth support network. By day the city's multinational youth population congregated around the National Monument in Dam Square, observing and being observed, while at night they got high in music clubs like the *Paradiso* where soft drugs were openly available.

Amsterdam's central park – the Vondelpark – had also been appropriated. By day it was filled to capacity with young people, lounging in small groups or gathered in circles around any budding musicians. Crowds were liveliest around those music-makers who beat out a driving rhythm on drums and tom-toms, usually to the accompaniment of hypnotic chanting from enthusiastic spectators. By night the park became one vast dormitory, with sleeping-bags and plastic sheeting indicating the whereabouts of those who, like ourselves, had been unable to find room in the 'sleep-ins' (although at one point we did manage a

temporary stay in one of these facilities). A main road crossed over a section of the park and in the walkway underneath an area had been sealed off for use as a depository for backpacks.

We spent two weeks trudging the docks, the markets, the industrial estates, in a vain search for work. We made daily checks with the staff at various work bureaux, hoping that familiarity might result in job offers. Then, just as our finances began to run so low that we contemplated moving to Germany, we both struck lucky, with a temporary job bottling pickles for me and a position for Sheila in the foreign section of a Dutch bank. To any early morning strollers in the Vondelpark it must have seemed quite incongruous to hear a small alarm clock go off amid the sleeping bodies, then watch as two figures hurriedly arose, rolled up their sleeping-bags, deposited them in the 'luggage office' before rushing off to the nearest exit. It was a difficult routine which luckily only lasted a few days, for one of Sheila's work colleagues lent us her apartment while she went on holiday and then other Dutch friends found us a houseboat to rent.

The Dutch felt that these were all terrible hassles to have to contend with, but to us they were not hassles at all. The Belfast we had left behind was a place of nightmares. To compound the brutality of the IRA's campaign of violence Loyalist gunmen were conducting their own barbaric campaign of indiscriminate assassinations, mainly directed at innocent Catholics but engulfing anyone who just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. There had been periods when there was a new victim almost every night, and rumours of torture and mutilation had many people in a barely-contained state of panic. Our flat in Fitzroy Avenue was sandwiched between what were perceived – certainly at that time – to be Catholic and Protestant areas – and in the evenings, if I had occasion to visit our local 'corner shop', I would hold my breath if I heard a car approaching, listening for the slightest indication that the vehicle might be slowing down, and when it was well past I would release my breath in one long, tension-filled sigh.

We never realised just how insidious the whole process had been until, about a month after arriving in Amsterdam, one of Sheila's work colleagues said to her:

"We were talking about you the other day, and we agreed that when you first arrived your face looked tense. But now you look much more relaxed."

It was only then that we understood just how deeply it had affected us. But

gradually we reclaimed the freedom which had been stolen from us. Sometimes, late in the evening or even in the early morning hours, we would leave our houseboat to go window-shopping along the deserted Kalverstraat, Amsterdam's main pedestrians-only shopping street. Our Dutch friends had been horrified to learn of this, for to them the Kalverstraat at that time of the day was considered dangerous territory, the haunt of petty criminals and drug addicts. But to us it only mattered that it wasn't Belfast, and that was enough.

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After living for a year in Amsterdam, we decided that we wanted to travel much further afield. In the mid-1970s the talk among adventurous young people in Amsterdam was of taking a 'Magic Bus' all the way to Goa or Kathmandu. Although the idea of sitting in a cramped bus did not appeal to us, such destinations certainly did. And so we returned to Belfast and made our plans. (The return journey from the Hook of Holland to Harwich was enlivened when, at the railway station at Harwich docks, English police officers came running along the platform, boarded both ends of our train carriage, ordered us off and detained us for several hours under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.)

Although our decision to embark upon an extensive overland journey was prompted partly by the realisation that there was little contribution we could make to grassroots politics at that time – and, in the wake of the previous threats, certainly not one without personal risk – such a trip was something I had long been contemplating even before the Troubles erupted. A good proportion of the second-hand books I had amassed over the years were devoted to travel and adventuring. And although these readings may have fuelled my appetite for long-haul travel in a manner absent from Sheila's experience, her willingness to embark upon our venture was just as evident. This was epitomised by her reaction when I showed her the route I proposed we take to India and back.

She scrutinised the world map spread before us for some moments, lost in thought. She had never expressed any hesitation up to now and her silence perturbed me.

"Are you happy enough with that?" I asked her, somewhat anxiously.

She leaned over the map and stretched her thumb and little finger to touch

both Ireland and India, then moved her hand sideways so that her thumb and finger, still held the same distance apart, now touched India and Australia. She looked up, a clear determination etched upon her features.

“There hardly seems any point retracing all our steps from India when the same distance will take us to Australia?”

I smiled and watched as she continued to peruse the map, suspecting what was coming next.

“And, furthermore, there hardly seems any point in retracing our steps from Australia when we can just continue on round.”†

Quite logical, really, when you think about it.

This is not an appropriate place to describe our next 19 months of travelling, which provided us with a host of unforgettable memories: being detained by the Turkish army on suspicion of spying for Greece; bumping across the desert-like landscape of northern Afghanistan in open-topped local transport; feeling not only sick but anxious as rickety old buses crawled their way around precarious hairpin bends in Pakistan’s beautiful Swat valley; trekking to the Annapurna Sanctuary in Nepal; smuggling spices from Sri Lanka into India; sleeping on the deck of an old riverboat plying the Irrawaddy River in Burma; working to replenish our finances in Australia; hitchhiking around Japan in the snow; travelling the length of the Trans-Siberian Railway in the middle of the Russian winter... and many other such experiences.⁴

And the warmth and generosity we encountered in every country on our route only served to reinforce our already firmly-held belief that ordinary people’s needs were the same the world over, as was their desire to see a better world for their children – *irrespective* of all the many and varied religious and cultural ‘differences’ which attempted to divide them.

• • •

When we returned to Belfast I went back to Queen’s University to complete a Master of Social Work degree, and on qualifying joined the NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children). At that time NSPCC was undergoing a period of self-examination. Its centenary was approaching and it was

† We never did get to circle the globe; when we found we were going to be parents we decided to return home from Australia via New Zealand, Fiji, New Caledonia, Japan and the USSR.

attempting to redefine itself, especially in relation to its big brother, the Social Services. In such periods of questioning all options can seem equally viable, and I was permitted to develop my own ‘community-orientated approach to social work’.

[An account of my experiences while developing this community-orientated approach has been removed from here, as it is replicated on pages 81-84.]

After seven years with the NSPCC, I was eventually asked to relinquish my community-oriented outreach, and, unwilling to do so, I resigned.

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During my time as a social worker I was also engaged in various community-based activities. For a short period I was involved with community drama, and Sheila and I were founder parents of Hazelwood Integrated Primary and College (where we sent our two children). I would later become voluntary co-ordinator of Kinder Community House, a cross-community residential facility located in Killough, Co. Down, funded by the Dutch children’s charity Pax Christi Kinderhulp.

Over the next few years I made contact with, and had the privilege to work closely alongside, numerous community activists: people like Joe Camplisson, Louis West, Fr. Des Wilson, Jim McCorry, Noelle Ryan, Jackie Hewitt, Ann Brown, June Campion, Jackie Redpath, Ciarán Cahill, May Blood, May Robinson, Joyce McCartan, Eilish Reilly, Tommy Holland, Róisín McGlone, Anne Gallagher and others.

However, I’d deliberately kept away from any involvement with paramilitary organisations, because after the previous threats I had received and the almost daily murders that were being perpetrated I just felt that republican and loyalist organisations were plagues upon the backs of our communities, and as far as I was concerned I wanted nothing to do with any of them. Yet a part of me also felt, as did many other community activists, that somehow we had to engage.

And then, in 1983, I came across a small book of poetry, *Concrete Whirlpools of the Mind*, written by Sam Duddy, Public Relations Officer for the Ulster Defence Association [UDA]. I was quite surprised, and indeed heartened, by the content of some of the poems, for they spoke of the fratricidal tragedy which was now engulfing Northern Ireland and of the manipulation of working-class

Protestants by their own politicians. This put a totally new perspective on things, and I realised that I had forgotten my own rule of thumb, which is that no organisation is ever monolithic but invariably contains a broad spectrum of political views. I resolved, therefore, to pay a visit to UDA headquarters in Gawn Street in East Belfast.

As I made my way across town I reflected that although I had been born in East Belfast – and my mother had been born in Ravenscroft Avenue, my father in Dee Street – it had become alien territory to me, both geographically and politically.

Andy Tyrie (the UDA's Chairman) was in the building and was able to see me right away. (I assumed this was just good fortune but I soon discovered that Tyrie was someone who always made time for visitors.) When I entered his office he welcomed me:

“Well, what can I do for you?”

I felt I had better just come to the point.

“I am an NSPCC social worker and all I am interested in is our children's future – *all* our children. And, as far as I am concerned, *you people*, the Republican movement, and our assorted politicians are all making a bloody mess of this country.”

“Indeed?” he replied. He pointed to the massive table which adjoined his equally large desk and smiled: “Sit yourself down and we'll have a talk.”

Before the conversation proceeded too far I said, “I should also point out that, twenty minutes after leaving this building I will be visiting my good friend Father Des Wilson in Ballymurphy.” (I had wanted Tyrie to know exactly where I stood: that I was working in, and for, *both* communities.) Tyrie just smiled.

“Well, give him my regards when you see him. Tell him I'd love to go for a walk up the mountain with him if we can ever achieve peace. I used to live in Ballymurphy, you know; we might have our differences, but the people there are good people.”

The meeting lasted a few hours, and was to be the first of many I would have over the coming years with Loyalist leaders – individuals like Joe English, Sammy Duddy, Gusto Spence and Billy Hutchinson – as well as those from a Republican background, such as Tommy Gorman, Jim McCorry and others.

• • •

I have numerous anecdotes relating to cross-community efforts in the 1980s and 1990s – involving my Loyalist and Republican contacts – which limitations of space necessitates me to leave to another time. But if I stick with the UDA connection for the moment, it might give some flavour of the contradictions which exist at all levels of our tragically-divided society.

For example, at one stage I was involved (in collaboration with Dr Ian Adamson) in promoting the *shared* history of the people of Northern Ireland, and of the people of our two islands. (The intense debate the history issue engendered is covered elsewhere.⁵) As part of my efforts to stimulate cross-community awareness of our common historical and cultural inheritance I began work on a book *Ulster: the Hidden History*.⁶ When I had the first draft completed I gave copies to various people in both communities, including Andy Tyrie and John McMichael of the UDA, and Martin McGuinness and Joe Austin of Sinn Féin. I wanted to see what they thought about the book's basic theme, and whether they felt any aspects of it could be improved or clarified. I was in Tyrie's office one day when McMichael came in and joined our conversation. Andy, with a mischievous tone in his voice, said:

"John, did you know that Michael was talking to Martin McGuinness the other day?"

At the mention of that name John expressed a few derogatory comments, clearly wanting to know whether I agreed with their content. Tyrie laughed.

"John, you're wasting your time – Mike never runs anyone down. He'll not run them down in front of us, just as I have no doubt that he doesn't run us down in front of them."

John smiled and then asked me,

"Okay, then: tell me this – what is McGuinness like as a person?"

The question stunned me, for it was a straight case of *déjà vu*.

"John, I'll tell you why your question has surprised me. When I was with McGuinness, do you know what he said to me: 'I know you are in contact with the UDA, and I want to ask you something. We [Republicans] know the way we are demonised by the media, so when we see UDA leaders on TV we must assume that they are being demonised likewise. So tell me: what are Andy Tyrie and John McMichael like as people?' "

• • •

During my discussions at Gawn Street, I would also argue about the material which was appearing in the UDA's magazine *Ulster*, not only because I found much of it highly sectarian, but because I considered it dangerous to those involved in community activism. For example, articles would frequently attack Father Des Wilson. I told both Tyrie and McMichael that whatever they thought of Father Wilson's politics he had far more concern for working-class Protestants than their own Unionist 'fur-coat' brigade. Tyrie agreed with this and, to his credit, stopped any further such attacks appearing in the magazine.

Another anecdote is equally illuminating. At that time the editor of *Ulster* got to know me well because of my constant urging to cut out the magazine's blatant sectarianism and encourage more progressive material. Then he informed me that he and his wife were going on their first holiday abroad for many years. I asked whether he was going on a package-holiday direct from Belfast, and when he said that he was, I responded,

"Jim, when you're in your hotel I bet that your best friends there will not be any other UK 'Brits' but people from here, irrespective of their religious background."

He just laughed: "Give my head peace – you and your working-class unity."

When I encountered him a few weeks later he met me with a wry smile.

"Mike, you should have put money on it. Not only were our best friends Northern Irish Catholics, they were Derry Republicans! There's no doubt that people from here have the same humour, the same easy-going nature... whereas, as you predicted, the other 'Brits' in the hotel were hard to communicate with."

I shook my head in mock despair.

"Jim, on the one hand that type of comment makes me feel really hopeful, but on the other hand it really pisses me off – because so many people here can turn their antagonism on and off like a tap when it suits them. Yet despite all that we have in common, we're still slaughtering each other."

[A section concerning the writing of a play – entitled 'This is It!' – co-authored with Andy Tyrie and Sammy Duddy, which explored working-class Loyalism and tried to look positively to the future, has been removed, as it was also included in the preface to the play itself, which begins here on page 139.]

My experience of trying to initiate a dialogue with Republicans has been far less productive (with the exception of progressive community activists such as Tommy Gorman, Jim McCorry, Tommy Holland, Michael Doherty and Harry Donaghy). Once, when I discovered that a friend from my PD days was now a member of Sinn Féin, I asked him whether the party's economic plans for a United Ireland would incorporate any genuinely socialist policies. His response stunned me: "Mike, we'll worry about all that when the Brits are kicked out!" On a later occasion I submitted a discussion paper to Sinn Féin but never received any feedback.

• • •

All these community encounters – and in particular the rich diversity of ideas and opinions I was hearing on a daily basis, much of it at variance with the stereotypical analysis presented by the mass media – reawakened my desire to establish a vehicle which would encourage as many people as possible to engage in debate and dialogue. One means was by bringing individuals from both sides of our so-called 'divide' into small-group discussions. When Andy Tyrie left the UDA in March 1988, I had hoped to bring him and Father Des Wilson together in what I described as a 'Cross-Community Think Tank', but although they both expressed their willingness the idea unfortunately never came to fruition.

By that time I had resigned from the NSPCC and set up my one-man publishing concern, Island Publications. As part of my determination to create a vehicle for debate I commenced preparatory work on what was to become my series of 'Island Pamphlets'. A complementary 'Think Tank' component to the pamphlets was initiated following a meeting with loyalist ex-prisoner Billy Hutchinson. *(For a fuller account see page 177 onwards.)*

For the next five years output was sporadic, as I had to bear much of the costs myself (over a dozen funding bodies having previously turned down requests for assistance for a variety of proposed publications), sustained by infrequent amounts of commercial desktop publishing.

Then, in late 1998, funding was offered by both the EU Peace Programme and the International Fund for Ireland, and with the support of the Farset Youth and Community Project, with whom I had a long-standing association, the volume of work really took off. Operating as the Farset Community Think Tanks Project, I have been able to facilitate a rich variety of discussion groups, embracing young people, senior citizens, victims, ex-prisoners, community workers, Loyalists, Republicans,

those with disabilities, women's groups, community development practitioners, interface activists, cross-border workers... and many others. The geographical spread has been equally diverse: Think Tanks were convened on the Shankill, the Falls, Ardoyne, Glenbryn, Short Strand, Ballymacarrett and other parts of Belfast, as well as in Derry and Strabane. Initially people engaged in their own locally-based Think Tanks, but eventually, to my great satisfaction, community groups expressed the desire to cross the sectarian divide and engage in *joint* Think Tanks.

Furthermore, the funding allowed for 2000 copies of each pamphlet title to be distributed free of charge to over 80 community groups with whom I had built up working relationships during nearly three decades of community activism.

Not that the process proceeded effortlessly. For example, after Island Pamphlets had become well accepted across all communities as a trustworthy vehicle for exploration and dialogue, I commenced work on a series of titles bringing different strands of republicanism into a wide-ranging debate. Wanting Sinn Féin to participate in this debate, I was told that a request had to be submitted in writing to their Belfast Executive. I wrote to the Chairperson, Bobby Storey, explaining the background to the initiative and requesting that he nominate someone for the first round of discussions. There was no reply. I wrote again ... no reply. I wrote a third time ... and finally a fourth time, but still no reply. Ironically, a Sinn Féin friend who was supportive of my work privately advised me to publish my unanswered letters as an Appendix in the first pamphlet in the planned series [Island Pamphlet No. 96 *Republicanism in transition (1) The need for a debate*] to prove that I had at least made an effort to be inclusive. Subsequently, however, members of Sinn Féin *did* agree to participate in the follow-up discussions.

• • •

The pamphlet series is a world away from my first venture into pamphleteering. My 1973 document *Ireland: Dead or Alive?* was rhetoric-filled and imbued with the self-certainties of youth. In the Think Tank pamphlets, however, I strive to allow the participants to speak for themselves, and refrain from passing judgement. Assisting victims and the disempowered to have their voices heard came naturally to me, but back in 1973 I could never have imagined that I would also be sitting down with Loyalists, Republicans, Orangemen – and many others with whom I have fundamental disagreements – and assisting them to articulate and clarify their views for the benefit of the wider community. But I had come to

realise that before this society can really move forward, we must all begin to listen to one another properly – and even *hear ourselves* properly. Only when all sections of this society feel that they are being accorded an equal input will we begin to find ways of reaching a lasting accommodation which will permit us to move into a more secure future.

The pamphlets have also had an impact further afield; indeed, some titles are currently being distributed by Israeli and Palestinian peace activists on both sides of their conflict interface.⁷ Such a development was no real surprise, as I have long believed that human beings of every nationality, colour and creed have identical needs, and humanity as a whole not only faces common problems but will hopefully find shared solutions to those problems. In the course of this sharing of experiences I have been brought into a working relationship with some remarkable individuals from different arenas of conflict around the world.

And some of those encounters have brought me back to my own beginnings: for example, through my association with Joe Camplisson's efforts to assist in the conflict between the former Soviet republic of Moldova and its breakaway region of Transdnistria, I met Evgeni Berdnikov who, as a bewildered young tank commander, was part of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. The same event was a motivating force in both our lives, and all those years later we were to become associates in what are genuinely international efforts to find new ways of resolving violent conflict between peoples.

• • •

On the day of the IRA ceasefire I was asked what it meant to me. I replied that, primarily, I felt deeply the horrendous waste of lives which had occurred, but I also felt that the Troubles had dissipated thirty years of my own energies. For although I had started out with a desire to promote fundamental socio-economic change and work towards new forms of participatory democracy, for over three decades I had found most of my energies largely side-tracked into trying to stop Protestants and Catholics from killing one another.

The Troubles will never be over for many people – they will bear its legacy the rest of their lives. Even I find that I can be 'ambushed by my emotions' (an apt description used by a friend of mind) at any time, any place. I can be sitting at a meeting, or driving in my car, and without warning a memory of one of the victims will flood back into my mind in all its original, painful intensity. And

if this is how it can affect me, it is impossible to comprehend how it must still be affecting those who have directly lost loved ones.

And yet, I suppose my experience over the years has not been entirely negative. I have seen how generous and caring many people can be – from *all* communities – and how even hard-line individuals can reveal a genuine preparedness to work towards accommodation. Most importantly, I have repeatedly experienced at first hand just how willing many people are – from all backgrounds and aspirations – to enter into dialogue and debate, if provided with a conducive environment. I only hope that the Community Think Tanks Project, along with its complementary pamphlet series, has been able to play even a small part in encouraging and facilitating such debate and dialogue.

Notes

- 1 See Island Pamphlet No. 4, *Idle Hours: Belfast Working-Class Poetry*.
- 2 The government in the Republic ceased holding this official parade in the mid-70s.
- 3 A reference to the paramilitary ‘punishment shootings’ in which the victims – the majority of whom have been working-class young people alleged to have been involved in anti-social behaviour – received a bullet through the back of the knee. As Liam Kennedy notes: “Between 1973 and 2017, according to the statistics compiled by the police, there were 3,401 victims of shootings by paramilitaries and 2,949 victims of vigilante-style beatings, well over 6,000 in total.” (Liam Kennedy, *Who was responsible for the Troubles?*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal & Kingston, 2020, p 112.)
- 4 Subsequent to the writing of this pamphlet I published *Remembering the Hippie Trail: travelling across Asia 1976-78* (Island Publications, 2007) which is an account of these travels. Available from Amazon, eBay or from myself.
- 5 See Pamphlet No. 7, *The Cruthin Controversy*.
- 6 Published in 1986 by Pretani Press, Belfast. A revised edition was published in 1989.
- 7 See Island Pamphlet No. 57, *Reflections on Violence*, and Pamphlet No. 58, *Road maps to Peace*, which engaged two groups of young Palestinians and young Israelis.

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Additional personal recollections can be found in the following pamphlets:

Pamphlet No. 117	<i>History of the Belfast Anarchist & Libertarian Groups</i>
Pamphlet No. 137	<i>Grassroots Experiences</i>
Pamphlet No. 138	<i>The role of the Media + Selected Articles</i>
Pamphlet No. 139	<i>Assorted Anecdotes</i>
Pamphlet No. 140	<i>Island Pamphlets – the background story</i>

This is It!

A community play by

Andy Tyrie

Sammy Duddy

Michael Hall

ISLAND (134) PAMPHLETS

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Introduction

In 1983, during one of my many bouts of despondency over Northern Ireland's unrelenting violence, I came across a thin volume of poems by Sam Duddy, *Concrete Whirlpools of the Mind*, and was surprised, and indeed heartened, by the content. The author was the Public Relations Officer for the Ulster Defence Association, the largest of the Loyalist working-class paramilitary organisations, some of whose members had been responsible for a catalogue of sectarian killings. And yet, although many of Duddy's poems reflected all the self-certainties of a staunch 'defender of Ulster', others spoke of young men from both Protestant and Catholic working-class backgrounds being duped by politicians and warped by history into killing one another in a fratricidal conflict.

The poems served as a vivid reminder that within *all* those organisations which had sprung up from the grassroots, on both sides of our communal divide, a wide diversity of attitudes co-existed – the monolithic stereotypes so beloved by the media did not reflect the actual reality.

Wishing to encourage the type of progressive views expressed in the poems, a week later I found myself in the East Belfast office of the UDA's Chairman, Andy Tyrie. I explained that I worked with individuals and groups in both communities, and that as far as I was concerned Republicans, Loyalists and our assorted politicians were all making a bloody mess of things. Tyrie heard me out patiently, then said: "Sit yourself down and we'll have a talk."

That discussion and the ones which followed revealed to me much more of the tensions and contradictions which resided within the Protestant working class. Yes, within that community there existed the anti-Catholic bigots, but there also existed humane people who fervently wanted to see a new society emerge, who were willing to reach an honourable accommodation with their Catholic neighbours. Yes, there were those whose politics were on the extreme Right, but there were also those with family traditions of long involvement in Northern Ireland's Labour movement. There were the bewildered, the betrayed, the angry, the embittered, the dangerous and the reactionaries, as well as the idealists and the progressives – all were there, side by side.

The most paradoxical aspect was that not only were these internal tensions

and contradictions mostly hidden from the general public, but even within the Protestant community they had never been fully aired or explored. This was partly a legacy of the violence which had forced many ordinary people to ‘keep their heads down and their mouths shut’, but also because there were no forums to begin this exploration, no vehicles to carry forward any public debate. We discussed ways of initiating such a debate, and the barriers we would encounter, not least the suspicion which would inevitably be engendered by an overtly ‘political’ approach, especially at a time when the Protestant community felt itself increasingly under siege. Tyrie suggested taking the debate into Loyalist pubs and clubs in a less threatening, more entertaining, and hopefully more thought-provoking manner – by presenting these contradictions in a play. Could I help them accomplish this? he asked.

And out of this discussion ***This is It!*** was conceived, with Tyrie suggesting both the title and the plot – that of a young Protestant, who in 1981, convinced that his beloved Ulster is in a ‘do or die’ situation, decides to join the Rev. Ian Paisley’s ‘Third Force’. This seemed an appropriate story-line, for the way the ‘Big Man’ was viewed within the Protestant working class reflected many of that community’s internal contradictions. While some castigated him as a latter-day ‘Grand Old Duke of York’ who had helped fill the prisons with young working-class Loyalists because of the way they had responded to his fiery rhetoric, many others viewed him with unquestioning respect.

After we had finished the play *Theatre Ireland* requested a copy and asked if they could publish the entire script inside their magazine. In a pre-publicity handout they considered it a very progressive document, and welcomed its intended performance in clubs and pubs as a purposeful use of drama.

The play had poems and songs in it, and was probably too lengthy, and it was only then that we realised there was a dearth of actors within the Protestant working class, certainly at that time. Then, to my great surprise, Tyrie said to me: “You see your friends over in Ballymurphy? [I had told Tyrie that I also worked closely with Father Des Wilson.] Could you get *them* to perform it and I’ll guarantee their safety in Loyalist areas?”

[Father Des Wilson was a co-founder of Ballymurphy People’s Theatre, and was always very supportive of the idea of using drama to engender radical

political and social debate, and he would also have been very open-minded regarding differing viewpoints being expressed. Furthermore, along with Father Alec Reid, he had promoted, and engaged in, dialogue with unionists and loyalists. He had also written a fictional work, *The Demonstration*, which contained an appeal for working-class unity, something which also figured strongly in *This is It!*]

However, any progress on Tyrie's suggestion stalled after the BBC asked us if we could rewrite the play for radio, but on the condition that it wasn't performed anywhere before it was aired. The BBC involvement ultimately proved fruitless and time-wasting. And although the play was never to see a live performance, either on a stage or radio, it *was* used by a number of community groups as a 'reading script'.

2022 Postscript

At the time the play was written no-one in the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist [PUL] community could ever have imagined that the DUP would eventually jettison its 'Never, Never, Never!' stance and enter into power-sharing with Sinn Féin. Nor could anyone have imagined that the Rev. Ian Paisley, as First Minister of a new Northern Ireland Assembly, would quickly establish a close rapport with his Deputy First Minister, former IRA commander Martin McGuinness – so much so that their detractors sarcastically labelled them 'the chuckle brothers'.

The Rev. Paisley died in September 2014, Martin McGuinness in March 2017. Sammy Duddy, co-writer of this play, died of a heart attack in October 2007.

Why re-publish the play now? Mainly because many community activists in the PUL community feel that the need for an in-depth community debate – such as was the original purpose of the play – remains more pressing than ever, and the internal tensions within Loyalism and Unionism are still as divisive.

For this reprint the original has been revised somewhat. The poems and songs have been deleted, partly because they were not vital to the plot, but also because the play required shortening. Some of the political lecturing has also been trimmed, without losing the essential thrust of the arguments being presented.

Michael Hall

2025 Postscript: Andy Tyrie died on 16 May 2025 after a long illness.

Prologue

To remind the audience just how much fear, uncertainty and anger was building up in Northern Ireland over the period leading up to the massed display of the ‘Third Force’ in Newtownards, all (*or at least a selection*) of the following items should be read out by a **NARRATOR**:

September 1981

- 5th Off-duty soldier shot dead in University area of Belfast.
- 6th Detective fighting for his life after being gunned down leaving Mass in Armagh.
- 7th Two teenage policemen on first patrol blown to pieces in 700lb landmine explosion.
- 13th UDR man fatally shot in back, Maghera.
- 14th RUC Reservist murdered after seeing his wife (who had just had their second child) at Mid-Ulster Hospital in Magherafelt.
- 19th Catholic man murdered on Ormeau Road, Belfast. UFF claim responsibility.
- 22nd Two soldiers seriously injured when terrorists fired into their Land Rover.
- 26th RUC man shot dead in Killough public house, Co Down.
- 27th Youth found shot dead in Republican area of Belfast.
- 28th RUC man killed in rocket attack on Land Rover.
- 29th Part-time UDR man shot dead as he left Mackies Foundry, Belfast.

October

- 3rd Republican Hunger Strike, during which ten hunger strikers had died, ended today.
- 5th *New Letter* states that 64 people died during the seven months of the Hunger Strike • Former UDR man murdered in grounds of Altnagelvin Hospital.
- 8th City Councillor – a Hunger Strike supporter – dies in gun attack on club in Belfast.
- 11th IRA nail bomb in London: one woman dead, 46 soldiers and civilians injured.

- 12th Catholic man shot dead in his Belfast living room by UFF.
- 13th Second person – a teenager – dies from London nail-bomb attack.
- 16th UDA welfare officer shot dead by INLA. UDA appeals for restraint.
- 17th Sir Stewart Pringle loses leg after bomb attack at his home in London.
- 19th UDA blames RUC for shooting dead one of its men at a police checkpoint.
- 21st UDR Sergeant shot dead by man disguised as postman.
- 26th Police explosives expert killed by IRA bomb in London's Oxford Street.

November

- 4th UDA man killed by UFF.
- 6th Summit talks lead to Anglo-Irish Council. Paisley says his fears were justified.
- 7th Boy, 17, killed by booby-trap car explosion intended for his UDR father.
- 10th Former UDR man murdered three miles from where the teenager was killed on 7th.
- 11th UDR part-timer, injured on 9th, dies.
- 12th RUC Reservist loses both legs in car booby-trap explosion. • Rev John Batchelor says: "The time for talking has passed; we cannot allow one more death... I call upon the British Government to use the manpower that is available and to legitimately mobilise a third force to smash the terrorism in our midst."
- 13th Presbyterian Moderator the Right Rev Dr John Girvan accuses the government of putting political restraints on the security forces.
- 14th The Unionist MP Robert Bradford and a community worker shot dead.
- 15th Catholic youth shot dead in Belfast's Short Strand.
- 16th First appearance of the 'Third Force', when more than 500 men march in Enniskillen. • Paisley pledges to make the Province ungovernable. • Orange Order leader Rev Martin Smyth welcomes moves throughout the country to prepare the people for guaranteeing their own security. • RUC Reservist shot in Newry.
- 17th Off-duty UDR man shot dead in what the *News Letter* calls "a bid to push Loyalists over the brink." • Secretary of State, Jim Prior, jostled and kicked by an angry crowd at the Dundonald service for Robert Bradford. • Catholic man murdered in Craigavon. • Police Reservist, wounded two months previously, dies. • British Army announces it is sending in 600

more men. • Paisley plans 'Day of Action' against the Anglo-Irish talks and the deteriorating security situation. The protest is to include a mass parade in Newtownards of the Third Force. • All over the Province towns grind to a halt at memorial services for Robert Bradford. A tribute read out at various services says: "...The best way we could honour his memory is to forge this day an unbreakable link among all the Unionist people who are prepared to fight and if need be to die to save Ulster from the IRA terrorists and the treachery of the Thatcher administration."

- 18th 57-year-old former UDR man murdered by IRA as he drives home. • At a press conference Paisley says: "We want all political restraints and hand-cuffs taken off the security forces and a real war carried out against the IRA. They must flush out the Republican enclaves." He claimed he would teach Mrs Thatcher a "severe lesson" on Monday, but would not give exact details of his 'Day of Action'. He warned that "the full orchestra has not been played yet." At another press conference he told Loyalists they were now in a "do or die situation".
- 19th Part-time UDR man murdered in Strabane. • The Workers Party warns that the Provisional IRA was bent on producing a 'river of blood' in Northern Ireland. The Party said the Provisionals were intent on pushing the Protestants out of Ulster. • UDA-dominated Ulster Loyalist Central Co-ordinating Committee decides not to take part in Paisley's 'Day of Action'.
- 20th The 'Day of Action' has failed to win outright support from either industrialists or trade union leaders. Paisley admits his political future is on the line: "I have taken a risk in calling this Day of Action. I have staked my credibility on it." • Several hundred members of the Third Force parade in Carrickfergus. • Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich says: "What we need now is an end to violent deeds before the whole population is engulfed in an orgy of death and destruction." • Unionist MP Harold McCusker attacks unions and traders for their reluctance to join in the 'Day of Action'. • Paisley forecasts that the Shipyard would demonstrate that it "will not fail Ulster in this hour of crisis."
- 21st For the first time guns are produced at a Third Force demonstration in Londonderry.
- 23rd Rev Ian Paisley's 'Day of Action' and mass demonstration by Third Force in Newtownards . . .

This is It!

Characters:

BILLY (young working-class Protestant)

Billy's FATHER

Billy's MOTHER

DAVE (UDA sergeant)

ALAN (Dave's friend; a cynic)

TOMMY (extreme right-wing Loyalist)

JAMES (DUP shopkeeper)

SAM (well-respected older man)

BERT (barman)

MAGGIE (member of bar staff)

Stage settings:

There are only two settings: (1) Billy's home and (2) interior of a pub. A table and chairs remain centre stage throughout, used for both settings. Behind the table and chairs is a bar counter (which can be hidden, if felt necessary, by a backdrop during the two 'home' scenes).

Scene 1

Date: Sunday 22 November 1981

Setting: A Protestant working-class home, Belfast

[FATHER *is sitting at the table, facing audience, reading a Sunday paper. BILLY paces up and down, before going over to right of stage where he bends down to rummage in a small holdall. He mutters irritably as he does so. FATHER glances over, then resumes reading. BILLY, in obvious exasperation, begins to bundle all the contents out of the holdall: clothes, towel, rain-mac, etc., muttering even louder. FATHER stares at him, baffled.*]

BILLY: Da – did you take my shaver out of here!

FATHER: Aye, I did, right enough. I needed it earlier.

BILLY: [*In annoyance*] I've only been lookin' for it for the last bloody hour!

FATHER: Well, you never said! I'm not a bloody mind-reader, am I?

BILLY: [*Quietly*] Only when anyone's lookin' money – then it's the fastest exit ever.

FATHER: What was that?

BILLY: Oh, nothin'. [*Pause*] Well – where is it?

FATHER: Ah . . . in the bathroom, isn't it?

BILLY: No, da, it's not in the bathroom.

FATHER: Wait, maybe it's in my bedroom.

BILLY: Oh aye, and how was I to know it was in there?

FATHER: It's not the other side of the bloody moon, is it!

[*BILLY just shakes his head, and repacks the holdall. He walks across the stage a few times, gathering up other items.*]

BILLY: [*Loudly, to off-stage*] Ma! Have I any clean socks?

MOTHER: [*Voice coming from off-stage*] They're over a chair, son.

[*BILLY walks over to one of the chairs, over which clothes are draped. FATHER shakes his head, obviously distracted, but once again resumes his reading. BILLY walks across the stage again.*]

BILLY: Ma! Have you seen my . . .

FATHER: [*Unable to contain himself any longer*] Will you for Christsakes quit traipsin' up and down! Are you and yer ma lookin' to make me buy a new carpet or somethin'!

BILLY: That'll be the day.

FATHER: What on earth are you doing?

BILLY: I'm gettin' stuff together.

FATHER: I can bloody well see that! But what's got you so . . . so agitated?

BILLY: [*Very serious*] Do you not feel it, da? Can you not sense what's in the air!

FATHER: [*Puzzled*] What are you on about?

BILLY: [*Shaking his head in amazement*] God! [*Then, defeatedly*] I don't know, I just don't know . . .

FATHER: You don't know? Well, if you don't bloody know, how do you expect me to!

BILLY: Seriously da, can you not sense it? This is it!

FATHER: [*Closing his eyes in feigned tiredness*] What is 'it'?

BILLY: *This is it!*

FATHER: But what is?

BILLY: This is it! Sure it was bound to happen.

FATHER: [*Sternly*] Have you got Sally pregnant!

BILLY: No, of course I haven't!

[*MOTHER enters, carrying two meals to the table.*]

BILLY: I'll tell you what I mean by 'it'.

MOTHER: [*Not really paying full attention*] 'It', son? What's 'it'?

[*FATHER shakes his head and covers his face with his hands.*]

MOTHER: [*In the same half-attentiveness, as she fusses over the table*] Not feeling well?

FATHER: No! I'm ailin' rapidly!

[MOTHER *departs, with only a cursory glance at FATHER. BILLY sits down at the table but does not touch his food.*]

BILLY: [*Earnestly*] Look, da. For months now there's been a killing almost every day. Bradford's murder was the last straw! This country's heading for a final showdown!

FATHER: But . . .

BILLY: You'll see tomorrow night! Wait'll you see the Third Force out in strength in Newtownards. It's on, da! This time it's in deadly earnest!

[FATHER *goes to take a forkful of food, then, understanding dawning, he looks over at the holdall, then at his son.*]

FATHER: Is that where you're off to?

BILLY: [*Firmly, with an obvious sense of pride*] Yes, da. I'm gonna be there!

[MOTHER *returns with her own meal and sits down.*]

MOTHER: *Where* are you off to then, Billy?

BILLY: Newtownards, ma.

MOTHER: What for, son?

FATHER: 'Cause the Big Man's holding a rally there.

MOTHER: You going to watch it?

BILLY: No, ma, I'm going to be in it! [*Then, with determination*] I'm joining the Third Force!

MOTHER: But, for why, Billy? [*Then, to her husband*] Could you not put the paper away for just once when we're sitting down to a meal?

[FATHER *sighs in resignation and folds up the newspaper.*]

BILLY: Ulster has taken enough from the IRA. All the killings, the bombings – it just goes on and on. There has to be an end to it! 'Cause, if we don't put a stop to it, Ulster will be destroyed.

FATHER: That's what the IRA want.

BILLY: Well, it's not what *we* want, so why do we let them get away with it! Somebody has to stop them!

FATHER: Billy, the police and the Army are . . .

BILLY: . . . are just piddling about like toy soldiers! Their hands are tied behind their backs! Anyway, I don't think Britain even wants to stop it – she doesn't give a damn about us! No – the only ones who can defend Ulster are Ulstermen!

FATHER: But Billy, the . . .

BILLY: The real fight is now on! It's high time that . . . [*Jumps up*] Where're all last weeks 'Teles', ma?

MOTHER: I dunno, son . . . ah . . .

[*BILLY paces around the room, searching.*]

MOTHER: You dinner's going to get cold. What do you want them for, anyway?

[*BILLY comes back and stands beside the table.*]

BILLY: Da, you're not sittin' on them, are you?

FATHER: [*In exasperation*] No, I'm not! Will you sit down and ate your dinner!

BILLY: [*Pacing again*] No, I must find them. Wanna read you something. [*He finally sees the bundle of papers at right of stage. He kneels beside them*]
Now, what day was it? [*Out loud*] Da – what night was the match?

FATHER: [*Shaking his head*] Wednesday! Would you not sit. . .

BILLY: Then it must have been Tuesday? Tuesday . . . Tuesday . . . here it is.

[*BILLY carries the newspaper to centre of stage and searches through it.*]

FATHER indicates to MOTHER to continue eating.]

BILLY: Listen. Here's what he said.

FATHER: Who? The Big Man?

BILLY: The Rev. William McCrea. Now, listen! [*He reads with great import*]
“We owe it to our children, even if we have to die, to fight the rebels with a Holy determination and never to sheathe the sword until victory is won.” [*He pauses for effect and stares at his parents*] **This – is – it!** [*He goes back to the table and commences eating*]

[*MOTHER and FATHER glance at each other. They too resume eating, but it is obvious that MOTHER is worried.*]

MOTHER: Are you staying overnight with friends, Billy?

BILLY: Friends? Where?

MOTHER: In Newtownards.

BILLY: [*Puzzled*] Ah, no – why?

MOTHER: [*Indicating the holdall*] Your spare clothes an' all?

BILLY: I don't know where I could be sent, or for how long?

FATHER: [*Taken aback*] Sent! What do you mean?

BILLY: Listen, da, the Third Force wasn't formed just to march up and down!
We have a job to do!

MOTHER: [*Alarmed*] Billy, what are you talking about! [*Then, to FATHER*]
John, what is this all about!

FATHER: [*Rubbing his head tiredly*] Billy, look – you're young, idealistic . . .

BILLY: [*Firmly*] I'm going to fight!

FATHER: [*Shakes his head negatively*] No, Billy, you . . .

BILLY: [*Angrily*] You think I can't! Think I'm a coward!

FATHER: No, Billy, I'm not thinking that at all. I know you would fight. But you
see all these great leaders of ours . . . [*Falters, defeatedly*] See this country . . .
ah, I dunno, I dunno.

BILLY: Look, don't get me wrong. I will fight, but I'm not a fighter – understand?
The last thing I ever thought I'd be wanting to do would be to hurt anybody, let
alone seek them out to kill them. But I can't stand back from it any more,
watching it all happen, day after day. Every time you turn on the bloody TV
you see the faces of bereaved children clutching their mothers' hands at the
endless funerals. Those bastards must be stopped! Now!

FATHER: [*Quietly*] No side here is without guilt, son.

BILLY: I know, I know! The Prods have done some terrible things. Horrible
things. But every so often we stop – for months you'll hear of nothing but IRA
killings. We stop, but they just go on . . . and on . . . and on. Anyway, they
want retaliation from us so they can justify their 'armed struggle'. Okay, they
may have been the underdogs, but not to the extent that would justify all their
murdering. [*Then, firmly*] I don't think it's *what* the Protestants may have
done to them that upsets them – it's the fact that we're in the bloody country
in the first place! The Prods could be bloody angels and they'd still be tryin'
to push us out!

FATHER: Billy – I agree with everything you're saying. But what can you do
about it all?

BILLY: I won't know that until I try, will I?

FATHER: But you don't know the first thing about . . . fighting. You're not trained for things like that.

BILLY: I may not have any training, but I've got this real anger inside me. It'll make up for it.

FATHER: Billy, let me tell you something. You may have a righteous anger inside, but some of the people marching alongside you will have a hatred, a bitterness. Hatred clouds people's judgement – makes them dangerous, even to their own side. You don't know what you could be getting mixed up in.

MOTHER: I don't like all this talk of fighting, you two. It scares me. I wish you . . .

BILLY: Da, you must've been about my age when you fought in the War?

FATHER: Hum, I must've been, yes.

BILLY: Well, you thought you were serving your country, didn't you? You felt you had to defend what you believed in?

FATHER: Yes, but . . .

BILLY: 'But' what!

FATHER: [*Wearily*] Ah, dear. Ah, dear.

MOTHER: Billy, I don't want you to go tomorrow.

BILLY: I'm going, ma.

MOTHER: Billy, I . . .

BILLY: Don't try to stop me!

MOTHER: But son, there could be trouble . . .

BILLY: There's been trouble every day for the last twelve years!

MOTHER: But there's no need for you to get involved in it . . .

BILLY: [*Fiercely*] I am involved – I live in the middle of it, don't I! We're all involved in it! It's right there in front of us every bleedin' day. I'm going – and I don't know when I'll be back. If fighting begins, and they're searching out the IRA, they could send me anywhere . . .

MOTHER: [*Struggling to think of some argument*] But . . . but . . . Tuesday you have to sign on.

BILLY: [*Momentarily confused by this reminder*] Well, I . . . I . . .

FATHER: You see, Billy, it's not so simple, is it? Despite the killings, life has to go on, people have to go to their work, have to . . .

BILLY: [*Angrily*] That shows you how bloody stupid it all is! The country's bleeding to death, and nobody seems to notice! Doesn't matter how many get killed, as long as the friggin' milk's on the doorstep every morning everything's supposed to be alright! Bloody Hell! [*Jumps to his feet.*] I'm going out for a walk – I need some fresh air!

[*MOTHER goes to say something but FATHER stops her. BILLY exits.*]

MOTHER: Can't you stop him going, John?

FATHER: I could try alright, but I wouldn't succeed.

MOTHER: [*Hopefully*] He'll change his mind, won't he?

FATHER: I don't think so, I don't think so.

MOTHER: But why not?

FATHER: 'Cause I know how he feels. Look, I feel just as frustrated and helpless as he does. At times even I feel something drastic must be done. But I can find excuses for doing nothing. Plenty of excuses. Most times I feel too tired to even care about excuses. It's so easy now to close the door and hope it'll all go away.

MOTHER: Could we get Sally to talk him out of it?

FATHER: [*Shaking his head*] No, Lily, Billy isn't interested in excuses – he's too angry. [*Muses a moment*] But maybe it's better he does go tomorrow.

MOTHER: John, you can't mean that!

FATHER: Oh, I do. Don't worry, he'll be okay. He just has to learn something about this country. At the moment he's reacting to its history because he doesn't really understand it. But he'll get a lesson tomorrow. And if not tomorrow, then very soon afterwards. Yes – a lot of people will get their eyes opened soon.

MOTHER: [*Sadly*] It's terrible the way this country's going. Just terrible. When we were having the kids, we could never have imagined it would all turn out like this. [*Pause*] I had such dreams for them all, such hopes. And they've all been shattered. You know, sometimes I lie at night wondering how many other mothers are lying awake like me, saddened by the stupidity of it all,

fearful for what the future holds for their children. And I mean mothers on both sides. *[Another pause]* Where is it all going to end? Where?

[MOTHER sighs deeply and rises to her feet, busying herself gathering up all the plates. She lifts them in a pile and exits. FATHER leans back in his chair for a moment, then picks up his newspaper. He tries to concentrate on reading for about ten seconds but shakes his head, throws the paper onto the table and just stares in front. Finally he too rises and exits the stage.]

Scene 2

Date: Monday, 23 November 1981, early evening

Setting: Inside a 'pub' in Newtownards

[BERT, the barman, enters. He goes behind the bar counter and we hear glasses clinking. He cleans the bar top. After some moments ALAN and DAVE enter.]

BERT: Well, here's the boozers comin' in now.

DAVE: It's your friggin' wages comin in, you mean!

[The two men sit down at the table.]

BERT: What's it to be?

DAVE: The usual.

[ALAN offers DAVE a cigarette and lights up one himself. BERT pulls two pints.]

BERT: Quite a crowd gathering out there.

ALAN: Aye, the circus is in town alright.

DAVE: I'm surprised there aren't more in here.

ALAN: All too bloody nosey. Out gawkin'. They'll be in later on. Then we'll hear all the rousing words. All the Loyal heroes and how they're goin' to move mountains.

[TOMMY enters, looking slightly tipsy.]

DAVE: Speak of the Devil. Here's Tommy.

TOMMY: Huh, just thought you two'd be in here. Not going out to watch the men, eh? The *real* Ulstermen. The 'do-ers' – not wafflers like you two. Pull me a pint, Bert.

DAVE: Ach, we might nip out later. Thought we'd give the speeches a miss.

TOMMY: Huh, 'fraid they might shame you, eh?

ALAN: You jokin'! I bet I could tell you word for word what the Big Man and his lieutenants are going to say.

TOMMY: [*Sarcastically*] But then you're such a smart-arse! Newtownards is packed with men who'll show the fuckin' IRA a thing or two!

ALAN: If you're so eager to be breakin'-in your new kickin' boots, why aren't you out there?

TOMMY: I like to get topped up, no matter what I'm at.

DAVE: Like last Saturday?

TOMMY: [*Dismissively*] Ach, that was nothin'. How come you know about it?

DAVE: Word travels, you know. You didn't think word of a punch-up in Belfast would get through to Newtownards?

TOMMY: It was just a 'friendly' disagreement.

ALAN: What took you to Belfast, then? Not your normal kickin' grounds?

TOMMY: I was up for the big match. Wasn't it magic – real magic! I knew we could get into the World Cup. Nothin'll stop us now! That Israeli keeper must've thought the A-rabs had landed when big Gerry put that one past him. [*He goes to centre of stage, to energetically replay the action.*] One of the Israelis fouled Brotherston, no doubt at all – a free kick. But Noel runs over the ball, leavin' it for Jimmy Nicholl, who floats it high into the goalmouth. Hamilton nods it down, and big Gerry Armstrong knocks it into the back of the net. It was real magic! Left foot and all!

BERT: Aye, we've a good team now alright. They play real well together.

ALAN: Hey Tommy, how do you feel about some of the team being RCs?

TOMMY: What're you gettin' at?

ALAN: Well, you're not exactly a 'Fenian-lover', are you?

TOMMY: Bloody sure I'm not! But they're all playing for Northern Ireland, aren't they?

DAVE: You mean, if there were things to unite us, you'd accept Catholics as equals, would you?

TOMMY: I'm not in here to friggin' philosophise!

DAVE: Of course, that would be askin' too much.

TOMMY: Get lost, smart-arse!

[BILLY and JAMES enter. BILLY is sporting a 'Third Force' armband. He doesn't come fully onto the stage.]

BERT: Evening, James.

JAMES: You got any sandwiches left, Bert?

BERT: I could rustle up something in a minute.

JAMES: Fine. [*Then, to BILLY*] I knew you'd get a bite here, lad. Come on in.

[*Everyone exchanges greetings with JAMES.*]

JAMES: What you got? Salad? Cheese?

BERT: I think there's only cheese left. One round?

JAMES: Aye, just for the lad here. I'm not long after me tea. But we'll take a drink first. [*To BILLY*] What're you having?

BILLY: Tennents, thanks.

JAMES: Pint for the lad, Bert. And a hot whisky for meself; not too warm out there. Well, gentlemen . . . this is Billy. He's come all the way from Belfast.

[*BERT sets up the drinks, then exits at rear. BILLY and JAMES sit down at the others' table.*]

DAVE: One of the marching men, eh? One of the Big Man's Army?

ALAN: [*Peering closely at the armband*] 'For God and Ulster'. Well, that's a slogan's been evoked manys the time. Doesn't seem to have gotten us anywhere – we're still like lost sheep.

TOMMY: Don't pay any attention to these two, Billy. Chicken-livered, that's them.

DAVE: [*Angrily*] Listen you, I've done my fair share of marching! And where did it get us!

TOMMY: Big deal. You've done more mouthin' than marchin'.

DAVE: You wanna step outside!

ALAN: Wise up, you two! [*Then, to BILLY*] Come up with a crowd?

BILLY: No, by myself.

ALAN: Many out there now?

BILLY: Seem to be thousands gathering.

[*Bert returns with the sandwiches. BILLY reaches into his pocket.*]

JAMES: It's on me.

BILLY: No, you bought the drink.

JAMES: Put it away.

ALAN: Do as he says, Billy – he's rollin' in it.

JAMES: I wish I was!

DAVE: Go on, away-a-that. Sure you shopkeepers are loaded. [*Winks at the others*]

JAMES: [*Defensively*] If you realised the overheads I have! All the bills I have coming in!

DAVE: My heart bleeds for you!

JAMES: I'm damn sure it doesn't! You fellas on the dole get it easy. Life of Riley, you lot.

DAVE: Listen – I'd be workin' if I could get any.

TOMMY: Sure you've no time to work. You're too busy footering around in the UDA, trying to look important.

[*For the past few seconds BILLY has been searching through his pockets, a puzzled look on his face.*]

ALAN: Lost something, Billy?

BILLY: No, no. Just thought I had a single quid on me. Can't remember breakin' it.

JAMES: Bus fare?

BILLY: No, I had that in change.

JAMES: As long as it wasn't a fiver, or a tenner.

DAVE: What's a 'tenner'? Never seen one of them.

JAMES: Oh, here we go. Working-class martyr. Downtrodden. Starved.

ALAN: I know where it went, Billy.

JAMES: *You know?*

ALAN: Sure. [*Pauses*]

JAMES: Well, tell us then.

ALAN: [*Leans over and touches BILLY's armband*] This badge of honour here.

BILLY: Dammit, you're right. I clean forgot about that.

ALAN: A pound a time, isn't that right? How many do they reckon will muster tonight?

TOMMY: They're expectin' ten thousand.

ALAN: There's ten thousand quid. Not bad, not to be sniffed at, eh? Maybe we're in the wrong game, Dave?

JAMES: Aren't you being a bit cynical? Billy has come here tonight to serve his country in what is perhaps its darkest hour. At least he's standing up to be counted.

ALAN: Look James, I'm not knockin' Billy, I'm just none too sure he'd be marchin' to serve his country's interests. If you ask me those marchers will only be servin' the interests of themuns on the platform.

DAVE: Haven't we seen it all before? Think of all the men 'inside' now. How many of them are politicians? Well? Not effin' one of them! Those ones on the platform do all the mouthin' – "Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right!" – but *who* is it does the fightin'? Us! The ordinary Prods! That lot keep their noses clean. None of their families has to worry about gettin' a bloody mini-bus up to see them at visitin' times! Oh, no, they're too smart for that. But what really gets up my nose is that after havin' goaded us into action, they turn around and disown us! They don't wanna know us then!

ALAN: Nobody wants to know us, even the media. Every time something happens, who is it they get on the box to discuss it? Us? People from the Shankill? Or even the Falls? Not friggin' likely! It's the same bloody politicians they trot out every night. I'm sick lookin' at the lot of them, let alone havin' to listen to them!

DAVE: Especially when they keep repeatin' the same bloody things, month after month, year after year. Nothin'll ever change here if we leave politics to the politicians. That's the politics people should start talkin' about!

JAMES: Oh, aye – you lot go ahead and run them down. I'd hate to think what

would have happened to Ulster if the likes of the Big Man hadn't been here to defend us.

TOMMY: [*Sounding drunk*] I agree! I support the Big Man all the way! The effin' Taigs would've taken over years ago if it weren't for him! Bloody Westminster would've sold us down the river long ago!

DAVE: And you think they still can't?

TOMMY: [*Aggressively*] The Big Man all the way! Long live the Third Force! To Hell with the IRA! To Hell with all those too chicken to march! [He sways close to BILLY and puts an arm on his shoulder.] Me and Billy's goin' out now to walk beside *real* men. Real Ulstermen! You comin' too, James, me oul' son?

JAMES: Well . . . I can't tonight, I'm . . .

TOMMY: You're with us, aren't you?

JAMES: [*Hurriedly*] I am, I am! I never said I wasn't, I . . .

TOMMY: [*Swaying*] Didn't you say this was our darkest hour! [*Leans on JAMES*]

JAMES: I did, I did! [*Looks uncomfortable and tries to dislodge TOMMY*] I've . . . I've a lot on my plate tonight. I've . . . stock-taking to do . . .

TOMMY: You and your wee shop! You're hardly workin' in it tonight?

JAMES: No, but first thing in the morning.

TOMMY: But man, you mightn't need to worry about openin' your wee shop tomorrow!

JAMES: What're you talking about?

TOMMY: Don't think all those men out there are just gonna prance up and down! Tonight's the night! Once we feel our strength we're straight into sortin' out the fuckin' IRA! Isn't that so, Billy. [BILLY *nods in reply*. TOMMY *then leaps to his feet*] Must take a juke and see how things is gettin' on. [*He staggers to the door and looks off-stage*] God, it's swarmin' out there. Hey, did I see . . .

[TOMMY *peers out again and then begins to laugh uncontrollably*.]

BERT: Well – share the joke then.

TOMMY: [*Fighting back his mirth*] Dave, I thought the UDA weren't havin'

anything to do with the Third Force.

DAVE: [*Surprised*] We aren't.

TOMMY: Then take a gander out there.

[DAVE *hurries to the door and stares 'outside'.*]

DAVE: I don't see what you – bloody Hell! Frank! Harry! Come 'ere! Friggin' come over 'ere, I tell you!

[DAVE *disappears, and the rest of cast glance at each other in bewilderment. After a few moments DAVE returns, scowling.*]

DAVE: Lost them in the bloody crowd!

ALAN: Lost who?

DAVE: My whole bloody platoon's out there, armbands an' all! Wait'll I friggin' see them!

TOMMY: You can't hold good men down, Davey-boy. Some men know when the hour has come! Are you ready, Billy? [*He downs the remainder of his drink*]

BERT: Ah, Tommy, before you go . . . [*Waits expectantly*]

TOMMY: [*Feigning ignorance*] Eh?

BERT: I know you don't think things will be the same tomorrow, but I bet my bills still come in as usual.

TOMMY: Here's your friggin' money. Just testin' you. [*Places it on the bar counter*] That's all you're bloody interested in, anyway. [*Puts an arm around JAMES*] Not comin', me oul' son?

JAMES: Nah.

TOMMY: [*Suspiciously*] Not turnin', are you.

JAMES: What?

TOMMY: Ditching the Big Man for Dave's lot?

JAMES: Not likely.

TOMMY: Then you just go back to your stock-takin'. That reminds me – I passed your wee shop last Saturday; it looked closed?

JAMES: [*Defensively*] I . . . I wasn't here.

TOMMY: Oh?

JAMES: No.

TOMMY: Where were yah?

JAMES: Well, me and the missus . . . we, ah . . . we went down to Dublin on one of those special ‘weekenders’ . . . [*There is a stunned silence. JAMES tries to look nonchalant*] It was quite cheap . . . it was . . . [*Falters*]

[*TOMMY is now bent double with laughter. Even DAVE and ALAN cannot hide their mirth.*]

TOMMY: Dublin! Some bloody Loyalist you are! Come on, Billy, let’s leave this nest of turncoats. God love them! [*As he passes DAVE, he leans drunkenly close to his face*] Well, Dave, when the Third Force clears out the IRA all by itself, people will look at you lot in the UDA and say: “Where the fuck were you!”

DAVE: [*Angrily*] Get stuffed!

TOMMY: Come on, Billy, let’s go. [*He leads BILLY to the door, then turns around.*] This night’ll go down in history, you’ll see. The Big Man said it’s now “a do or die situation”. This is it, lads! This is it!

[*TOMMY and BILLY depart. Everyone else stares after them. Lights fade.*]

Intermission

[*During the Intermission a video could be shown, depicting the Third Force gathering and marching at Newtownards, as well as some of the speechmaking.*]

Scene 3

Date: Late December 1981

Setting: The pub once again

[*The pub is adorned with Xmas bunting. BERT is busy behind the bar.*

ALAN, DAVE and TOMMY are at the table.]

DAVE: Do you think the Russians will move in?

ALAN: Dunno. If marital law can't stop all those strikes and protests, I reckon they will.

DAVE: Those miners are holding out bravely. Sealed themselves in the mine – wouldn't fancy that at all. Something like ten dead so far.

TOMMY: If the Ruskies come in with tanks there'll be far more than that dead – only nobody'll ever hear about it.

ALAN: This General seems to be a tough nut. What's this you call him?

DAVE: Yara–something. Hey, Bert – what's yer man in charge of Poland called?

BERT: Ah . . . just can't remember, lads.

TOMMY: You'd know his name alright if he owed you bloody money!

BERT: I can do without your lip tonight!

ALAN: Strange. For a while I thought 'Solidarity' was going to win out.

TOMMY: Sure nothin' free survives under bloody Communism.

ALAN: For once I agree with you. Communism has been a terrible distortion of Socialism.

TOMMY: Same bloody thing!

ALAN: Oh no, it's not! In no way!

[MAGGIE enters, greetings are exchanged and she goes behind the bar to assist BERT.]

TOMMY: Course it is. They're all bloody Reds. Once they're in power, that's the end of your freedom.

DAVE: You mean you'd be stopped from kickin' peoples' head in on a Saturday night? We couldn't have that – that would be unthinkable!

TOMMY: I'm being serious.

MAGGIE: [*Cynically*] That's not possible.

TOMMY: [*Ignoring her*] I'm tellin' yah, there'd have been no bloody Civil Rights marches allowed in Russia. No IRA funerals. Tanks would've gone in and – BANG! – all over. Hunger strikes would've made no impression on those boyos in the Kremlin.

DAVE: Is that how you think it should have been handled here?

TOMMY: Damn right, it is!

ALAN: But you can't have it both ways?

TOMMY: Why not? We must have freedom. But those who would try to destroy that freedom – like the IRA – should be crushed!

ALAN: It's not that simple.

BERT: Jaruzelski.

[A brief silence falls. All at the table, puzzled, stare over at BERT.]

BERT: Jaruzelski. General Jaruzelski.

TOMMY: *[Addressing the others]* Who's your friend behind the bar? Is he a parrot? What else does he say?

BERT: A minute ago you bloody well asked me . . .

DAVE: Okay, Bert, okay. We'd just gone on a bit since.

TOMMY: He must owe you money after all.

BERT: Who?

TOMMY: Who? God! *[Puts his head down on the table in mock despair, then lifts it again]* Don't worry, Bert, it'll come to you in about five minutes.

BERT: *[Annoyed]* If that's the way. . . that's the last time I'll . . .

ALAN: Sorry, Bert, don't take offence.

TOMMY: Order another round – he'll recover then.

[Just then BILLY enters.]

TOMMY: Over here, Billy!

BILLY: Hello again.

TOMMY: Youse all remember Billy, don't you?

DAVE: Of course – you were here last month for the Big Man's parade?

[BILLY nods and sits down.]

ALAN: Bert, another round, and whatever Billy's drinkin'. Well, Billy, have you risen in the ranks since we last saw you? Not an Area Commander yet?

[BERT begins to assemble the drinks order.]

TOMMY: Billy, if he pushes us too far, we'll sort him out later, okay?

BILLY: *[Smiles]* I'm not here looking for trouble.

DAVE: [*Laughing*] You were last time. I mean, you were so sure the ‘hour had come’.

BILLY: [*Quietly*] I did. . . I really did.

TOMMY: Anyway, Billy, before you came in we had just decided to install a Communist dictatorship to crush the IRA.

DAVE: We were wondering how the Big Man would take it though. We weren’t sure how the Martyrs’ Memorial would look with a big Red flag flying over it.

[*MAGGIE delivers a round of drinks to the table. BILLY is seen giving her his order.*]

ALAN: As long as it wasn’t a Green one, it might be alright. You know, never mind Communist governments, I’m beginning to think that *all* governments are much the same. The greatest enemy of ordinary people anywhere is often their own government.

DAVE: Look at the way Britain treats us. After all our loyalty and the blood we shed in two wars, she doesn’t want to know us. And what did we get for being so loyal, eh? Some of the worst living conditions in Europe. That’s what annoys me so much about Catholics. They point out all the deprivation they’ve suffered. Life hasn’t been a bed of roses for us! I can still remember our ones talk of the blood-money that had to change hands before you could get a job in the Yard. To be honest I’m a Labour man. It’s the Republican threat that always made me support the Unionists. But I’d no love for them – especially the ‘fur coat brigade’. I’d even support the Big Man before I’d trust that lot!

[*Just then JAMES and SAM enter.*]

ALAN: Hi, James; hi, Sam. Come on over, the pair of you.

[*SAM makes his way to the table, but JAMES goes over to the bar counter.*]

DAVE: [*Softly, but loud enough for JAMES to hear:*] You notice he didn’t come over to the table before ordering, in case he had to buy a round.

JAMES: [*Defensively*] Aren’t I buying Sam one!

[*As JAMES is collecting the drinks from MAGGIE, she hands him a pint as well.*]

MAGGIE: James, would you take that over to Billy?

JAMES: Who? [*Stares at BILLY*] Why, it's young Billy, indeed.

[*As JAMES goes to carry the tray over to the table, BERT places a copy of the Belfast Telegraph on it as well.*]

BERT: If Sam didn't get that the minute he came in here, he might just take his custom elsewhere. Isn't that right, Sam?

SAM: Too right. Have to catch up on all the news. [*Then, sarcastically*] Read about the great changes that *aren't* taking place in this country.

[*JAMES distributes the drinks and hands SAM the newspaper. SAM reads, now and then glancing at the others as they continue their conversation.*]

JAMES: So, Billy – what brings you here again?

BILLY: I'd promised Tommy I'd look him up before Christmas.

MAGGIE: [*Banteringly*] Pity someone wouldn't *lock* him up before Christmas.

TOMMY: My, you're full of seasonal charity, I don't think.

DAVE: Tell us, Billy – you still in the Third Force?

BILLY: [*Subdued*] I guess not.

DAVE: Fall out with them?

BILLY: No, it wasn't that. Nothing happened to fall out over. I suppose that was the problem.

BERT: Why?

TOMMY: [*Looking over at the bar in surprise*] My God, he's still there! [*BERT shakes his head in disgust.*]

BILLY: Well, when we'd marched to the centre of the town, the Big Man gave a . . . well, it was a stirring speech. I remember clearly what he said: "This is a solemn occasion. It is solemn because many of us here tonight will have to lay down our lives to give our children the freedom they deserve." [*Looks distant*] I can almost hear him speaking even now, it was so . . . well, it really got into you. The security forces are like a "chained dog", he said. "If that dog is not unchained, *we* will be the unchained dog! . . . The killing of the IRA is over as far as Ulster is concerned!" [*Falls silent*]

MAGGIE: And? [*She comes over to the table and sits down*]

BILLY: Nothing. During the speeches we were all tense, excited. I can tell you I felt a little nervous, not knowing what to expect. But after the parading was over, we just stood around. The Big Man was nowhere to be seen. I thought he was probably with some of his Commanders, planning. But I never saw him again. Then everyone sort of drifted off. I got a lift home. Well, I didn't go home . . . I went to a friend's in the Shankill. And we waited.

MAGGIE: Waited? For what?

BILLY: [*Looking embarrassed*] For a phone call.

JAMES: From whom?

BILLY: I dunno. From one of the Commanders, I suppose. Telling us when we were going to go into action.

ALAN: You'll have a long wait, Billy.

BILLY: I guess so.

ALAN: This whole country's going to have a long wait. Until people on both sides wake up to the stupidity of it all.

DAVE: But sure, anyway, you've an armband as a souvenir. Just be thankful the whole thing only cost you a quid.

BILLY: [*Quietly*] Six quid.

ALAN: Six!

BILLY: Aye, I put a fiver into a bucket that was passed around.

[*ALAN and DAVE burst out laughing.*]

ALAN: [*Shaking his head*] One of the Big Man's 'six-pound-wars'.

DAVE: Tell me, Tommy: how did the Big Man's speech affect you?

TOMMY: I . . . ah . . .

DAVE: You 'ah' what?

TOMMY: Well, it was . . . as Billy said – stirring.

DAVE: [*Suddenly suspicious*] Billy – was Tommy with you?

BILLY: Ah . . . yes.

DAVE: All the time?

BILLY: [*Hesitantly*] Well . . . at the beginning.

MAGGIE: Don't tell us, we can guess. You nipped off to another pub, didn't you?

TOMMY: [*Defensively*] Well, it was friggin' cold! I hadn't come out with heavy enough clothes on. And wasn't it snowing that night?

DAVE: You're a bloody chancer! No two ways about it! Ulster is definitely safe in the hands of the likes of you!

TOMMY: [*Angrily*] When the time comes I'll bloody fight alright!

DAVE: But wasn't that the time?

TOMMY: How could it be! Sure all the speeches the week leadin' up to it were so bloody contradictory! One minute they're talkin' about 'exterminating' the IRA and warning the IRA that the Third Force wasn't 'politically restrained' – and the next they're reminding us that we're 'law-abiding' people. You can't bloody well have it both ways!

DAVE: You can surely.

TOMMY: You friggin' can't!

DAVE: You can have the politicians remaining law-abiding, and the prisons filled with those who went outside the law. Isn't that the score now? Only the politicians will disown the ones inside. I've seen it all before. I don't trust any of them any more.

JAMES: Strange really. Prods distrust each other as much as they distrust the other side. Maybe even more, in some cases.

ALAN: If only spreadin' confusion could be used as a weapon – it's the only thing we seem to be good at.

TOMMY: You'll not confuse the bleedin' Provies. They're not confused! They just stick their heads down and blatter on, regardless of the piles of dead, 'Irish' or 'Brits'.

JAMES: The Prods may be confused, but they'll still have to take us into account. One million people aren't gonna just jump into the Irish Sea just because we don't fit into the IRA's Gaelic Ireland.

[*SAM has been shaking his head from side to side for the past minute. The others now look at him, expectantly. Deliberately and slowly he folds up his newspaper.*]

SAM: You're talking here as if we are two completely separate communities in Ulster. Republicans talk the same way.

TOMMY: Well, aren't we?

SAM: [*Pointing to his forehead*] Up *here* we are, but that's about all. Oh yes, I've just remembered: some of us attend different churches – those that bother to go.

ALAN: Come off it, Sam, there's more than that separates us.

SAM: You couldn't be more wrong. We have far more in common than you think. Both communities here come from ancient roots, roots that long predate the coming to Ireland of the Anglo-Normans, or the Vikings, or even the Celts. We're much older than all that.

TOMMY: Sam, you're talking about Ireland; our lot came from Scotland – we're quite separate peoples.

SAM: Quite separate, are we? When do you reckon 'our lot' came to Ireland then?

DAVE: During the Plantation of Ulster, obviously.

SAM: [*Shaking his head*] Have any of you ever looked out to sea from Donaghadee or thereabouts?

ALAN: Sure.

SAM: And what'd you see?

ALAN: Well, Scotland, of course.

SAM: And it's close enough for you to make out buildings, isn't it?

ALAN: On a clear day, yes.

SAM: And you think people on both sides of the water only noticed that closeness a few hundred years ago during the Plantation? So for thousands of years before that nobody felt intrigued enough to cross that narrow stretch of water?

DAVE: Alright, there was probably some toing and froing.

SAM: [*Laughs derisively*] Some! Let me tell you about some of that 'toing and froing'. For a start, the 'Scots' originally came from here.

TOMMY: Yer head's cut, Sam!

SAM: [*Firmly*] You want to hear me out or not?

ALAN: Fire away.

SAM: The Romans called the people in this part of Ireland the 'Scotti', and when some of these 'Scotti' migrated across the water they united with the local

people to form what became known as ‘Scotland’. They took the Gaelic language with them and it spread throughout the Highlands. But the links don’t stop there. Even before the ‘Plantation’ the Irish chieftains imported thousands of Scottish mercenaries – the galloglass – to help them in their battles against the ‘English’. They even crowned a Scotsman King of Ireland, because as far as the Irish chieftains were concerned the two peoples were one and the same. [*Sam looks around the gathering*] So whether you like it or not, and whether the Republicans like it or not, the peoples of Ireland and Scotland have a continuous, shared history – possibly even a shared kinship. Both communities in Ulster have a common inheritance, and an equal right to be here. Certainly we have done great wrongs to each other in the past but we must accept that what’s done is done, and we should be looking to the future.

DAVE: But we look at the future differently: we want to be British and they want to be Irish.

SAM: Whether we are prepared to accept it or not, *we* have an Irish part to our heritage, and *they* have a British part to theirs. There’s no escaping that reality, for any of us. We’re a mixed people here: look at the ‘Planter’ surnames among Sinn Féin – like Adams and Morrison. [*Looking at Dave*] Or the Gaelic surnames among your crowd – Murphy, Doyle and Duddy. [*Smiles to himself*] And I’ll tell you another thing: when you lot go on about defending the ‘heritage of your forefathers’, half your forefathers probably fought for King James!

TOMMY: [*Irritatedly*] This history lesson is all very well, but it doesn’t alter the main fact – the fuckin’ IRA are tryin’ to bomb us into the sea. So – how do we protect Ulster?

SAM: Defence alone won’t ‘protect’ Ulster.

TOMMY: Now you’re talkin’! We’ve got to attack! Go into the Republican areas and wipe the bastards out!

SAM: [*Shakes his head despairingly*] Wise up – I don’t mean that at all.

TOMMY: Then how!

SAM: Ulster can’t survive just by you lot defending it – but only when you act to *change* it. We’ve tolerated far too much here. The ordinary people of Ulster – all of them – have been treated like second-class citizens. Some of the worst housing conditions in Europe, the highest unemployment figures in the UK:

you name it, we've suffered it, and put up with it.

DAVE: Look, Sam, I've never liked the set-up here, but if we were to attack it too much, we'd only be helping the IRA.

SAM: [*Dismissively*] Hah! On the contrary, the IRA thrives on our intransigence! If the Protestant working class began to change things here for the better, it would put the wind up not only the Unionists but the IRA too! It would totally undermine them. We could do more damage to the IRA if we showed we had a better vision of a new society than they could ever have. The British Army won't defeat them. The RUC and UDR won't defeat them. [*Looking at Dave*] Your lot won't defeat them. But if we had that *new vision* we could defeat them and really build something better here.

DAVE: But what political programme could we come up with that might. . .

MAGGIE: Why do you men always talk in terms of 'political programmes'? I'm sick hearin' about all these 'political programmes'!

DAVE: [*Irritatedly*] Maggie, would you just. . .

MAGGIE: [*Angrily*] Don't you dare finish that sentence! You men just think you bleedin' know it all, don't youse! We women don't get a word in edgeways! Well, let me tell youse a few things. See you lot – and the bloody Republicans – well, youse are all the bloody same! Youse are! The bloody same!

JAMES: Maggie, it's not like you to curse. . .

MAGGIE: Oh, I've cursed alright! I've been cursing for the last twelve years. Okay, under my breath, sure; but I've cursed the lot of youse! You lot and your precious 'Ulster'; them and their precious 'United Ireland'! Oh aye, you men can get plastered in your bloody pubs and plan how youse'll all kill each other. But it's we women who do most of the suffering, and are left to pick up the pieces – we're the ones livin' in fear for our kids! [*She suddenly becomes quieter and her face looks pained, distant*] Like Betty's child. . . eighteen months old. . . imagine, only eighteen months old. In its pram too. [*Looks near tears*] 'Safe' in its pram – what safety was that! Well, tell me then, all you heroes! When you can't even leave a ba out in its pram without it being blown to bits, what's the point of it all! [*Looks increasingly distraught*]

ALAN: [*Putting his hand on her shoulder*] Take it easy, Maggie, take it easy.

MAGGIE: [*Angrily*] Don't touch me! You men haven't felt half of what's been

happening in this country. You and your ‘political programmes’! I don’t need any ‘political programme’ to tell me I feel the same as some woman up the Falls who sits in dread of anything happening to her kids. I don’t need any ‘programme’ to tell me what I want out of life, or that it’s the same as what she wants. *[More emotional now]* And when youse do all friggin’ wise up, and youse have all finally decided just what type of country we’re goin’ to get, let me tell you this – it’ll be too late for Betty’s child, ’cause the child’s dead! *[Begins to cry]*

[For some time all we hear is MAGGIE’s sobbing. The men seem lost for words. Finally MAGGIE gets up and goes behind the bar. SAM too gets up and paces about for a moment, before stopping beside the table again.]

SAM: Maggie’s got more sense than the rest of us put together. It’s not just new ‘policies’ that’s needed. We need to build a completely new society here. And that’ll show us who the brave men really are – for a new society cannot be built unless it’s done in co-operation with the Catholic working class.

TOMMY: There’s no friggin’ point in talkin’ to them until we’ve crushed the IRA!

[SAM shakes his head sadly.]

TOMMY: Sure Catholics wouldn’t want to talk to us anyway.

SAM: Are you brave enough to talk to them! Or maybe you wouldn’t want to bother!

*[SAM paces about again. As if he is even angry with the **Audience** he gesticulates at them.]*

SAM: And what about you lot! Any of you think it’s high time we all got together? *[If there are any positive responses from the audience he says:]* Well, at least there’s a few brave souls out there. *[But if there is no response he says:]* Isn’t that typical – we’d all rather continue to kill each other than to talk to one another! Ach, is it worth it! *[Goes over to the bar]*

[There is a period of strained silence. Finally BILLY dons his scarf and rises.]

BILLY: I think I’ll head on back now. Maybe see youse again some time.

OTHERS: See yah, Billy – take care.

[BILLY exits. Lights fade]

Scene 4

Place: Billy's house

[FATHER enters carrying a newspaper and sits at the table. A few seconds later MOTHER also enters. She too sits at the table, darning socks. They sit in silence for some moments, then BILLY enters, doffing his scarf and coat.]

MOTHER: Hello, son. Did you get anything to eat?

BILLY: Aye.

[BILLY sits down at the table, looking somewhat subdued.]

FATHER: Some post arrived for you just after you left this morning. [BILLY still looks distant] Did you hear me?

BILLY: Aye, da. Where is it?

FATHER: Over on the sideboard.

[BILLY rises lethargically and crosses the stage, returning with a large envelope. He opens it, takes out a bundle of forms and brochures and begins to browse.]

MOTHER: What is it, son?

FATHER: Don't be so nosey.

MOTHER: I was just . . . well, it's not like it's a personal letter, is it?

BILLY: To save youse two any fightin', it's from the Australian High Commission.

FATHER: [Putting down his paper, puzzled] Australia?

BILLY: Aye.

[MOTHER and FATHER look at each other.]

MOTHER: Why are they writin' to you?

BILLY: 'Cause I wrote to them. [Another silence. Both parents stare at him] I'm thinkin' of emigrating.

FATHER: Emigrating! Why!

BILLY: Do I really need to answer that? What's here for anybody? Well – tell me?

FATHER: It's bad, son, I know, but . . .

BILLY: It's bloody awful! Isn't it! There's no jobs gonna come my way in a month of Sundays.

MOTHER: Things could pick up. Sure on the TV yer man said. . .

BILLY: [*Impatiently*] The TV talks about England – not here! They might pick up across the water, but we'll not. Years after they've got on their feet again, we'll still be floundering! This country's in a real mess!

[*Another short silence. FATHER stares at BILLY intently.*]

FATHER: Billy. [*BILLY looks up*] Son, you've been out of work some time now. Why did this idea just come up now?

BILLY: Dunno.

FATHER: You've never talked of Australia before.

BILLY: Suppose not. [*He looks completely disinterested*]

FATHER: What's buggin' you, Billy?

BILLY: Nothin'.

FATHER: I don't believe you.

BILLY: Suit yourself.

FATHER: [*Sighs*] Listen, son, I'm not lookin' an argument, but . . . recently you've been . . . very quiet . . . keepin' to yourself.

BILLY: There's no law against it, is there! [*Seeing his father's hurt face BILLY relents*] Sorry, da. I'm just . . . I've had it up to here with this place. I want out of it!

FATHER: This has all been building up with you since Newtownards, hasn't it?

BILLY: Nah, not really.

FATHER: I think it has.

BILLY: Well, maybe it has. Look, da – Ulster is lost! Despite all the big words and the heroic speeches, it's not going to fight to defend itself.

FATHER: Maybe people don't know any more just what they're defending?

BILLY: Well, they're not spendin' too many sleepless nights tryin' to find out!

MOTHER: I'd be really sad to see you go, Billy, but I suppose there really isn't anything here for you.

FATHER: Son, if you don't believe me when I say this, you'll find out when you fill in those forms, but – you'll not be able to emigrate either.

BILLY: We'll see about that.

FATHER: I'm tellin' you. There's no country nowadays standing with open arms to welcome any Tom, Dick or Harry. You've no trade, no apprenticeship, not even a consistent work record. They'll not even look at you. You can't escape this place, Billy.

BILLY: So, here I am – a loyal citizen of Ulster! And what has Ulster done for me? Brought me up as a nobody? Isn't that it!

MOTHER: Things might change, son.

BILLY: [*Bitterly*] Nothing changes here! Doesn't our bloody history prove it! Huh! An ould lad in the pub tonight was goin' on about a new society here. Hah! No way – no way.

FATHER: Wouldn't you like to see something new . . .

BILLY: Huh! Fat chance of it comin' about here. This place doesn't want to change. I've come to the conclusion that people here are happy the way things are; they enjoy takin' sides and yellin' at each other'; they're happy with all their wee bigotries. If they'd wanted to change, they'd have started long ago. No, it's not on – this place is lost.

FATHER: And you'll not escape it, Billy. [*Musing*] Funny, isn't it: it's the ordinary people who bear the brunt of it all, and it's them who can't escape it. No, people will only get the Ulster they want. And whatever that is, we'll all have to accept it. This is your country, son; this is your future. This is it, Billy – *this is it*.

(Curtain)

Supplementary Material

1: Creating a vehicle for debate

2: The Think Tank Process

3: The pamphlets listed chronologically and thematically

1: Creating a vehicle for debate

A hidden history

I have always had a deep interest in the largely untold story of what ‘ordinary’ people accomplished during periods of radical social change: such as in France 1789, Mexico 1905, Russia 1917, Spain 1936, Hungary 1956. In most history books – dominated by an academic fixation with political parties and ‘leaders’ – not only were the creative achievements of ‘the masses’ either ignored or sidelined, but so too were their voices. However, if you searched the historical material deeply enough, those voices slowly began to emerge. One recurrent thread which linked different historical episodes was that they had often been preceded by, or had given rise to, an intense and often radical grassroots debate. This debate had taken different forms: the radical pamphleteering which emerged during the French Revolution; the energetic discussions in the Spanish working-class community centres (*Casas del Pueblo*) during the 1930s; or the café debates which flowered during Czechoslovakia’s ‘Prague Spring’ in 1968.

In the early 1970s in Belfast and Derry radical discussion papers and small pamphlets had surfaced sporadically, but had been limited in their impact. Moreover, it was also evident that a radical exploration of views would not necessarily be welcomed by the main protagonists. Most Loyalist paramilitaries viewed any attempt at dialogue with suspicion – and, if it embraced a cross-community element, often deemed it to be traitorous – and even Protestant community workers with progressive views had to tread cautiously. The IRA too, for all its talk of ‘freedom’, was averse to any views critical of its so-called ‘armed struggle’. I have already made mention of the ‘kneecapping’ threat which I received from members of the Provisionals, as a result of their antagonism to my publication of the document *Ireland, Dead or Alive?*

Nevertheless, as the eighties dawned many people at a grassroots level *were* attempting to initiate genuine dialogue – even if only within their own areas. And over the coming years community groups on both sides of the so-called ‘religious divide’ – from the Rathcoole Self-Help Group on the ‘Protestant’ side to Springhill Community House and Conway Mill on the ‘Catholic’ side – would

endeavour to provide citizens with opportunities to talk their way through to a new future. Indeed, I believe that the *real* untold story of the ‘Troubles’ – aside from the largely unheard suffering of the victims – concerns the constant efforts made by ordinary people to initiate dialogue, efforts repeatedly thwarted not only by forces within their own communities but by a political establishment which resented any intrusion upon its well-entrenched interests.

Frustrated first efforts

Over the years I had made a number of unsuccessful applications for a variety of publications with a cross-community focus. The funding bodies I applied to included The International Fund for Ireland, The Ireland Funds, The Community Relations Council, The Arts Council, Belfast City Council, The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, The Irish American Cultural Institute, The Cultural Traditions Group, The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, and The Foundation for Sports and the Arts.

However, they all either sent me an outright rejection or poured cold water on my application because I was applying as an individual and they could only really consider requests from organisations.

I have already made reference to my failure to obtain funding for ‘the Steps of Columbanus’ and for a collection of poems by a woman able to empathise across the ‘divide’. I also failed to secure funding for a graphic novel telling the story of Cúchulainn. I eventually brought out the latter at my own expense, largely to honour the excellent work done by the artist, Gary Hamilton.



A cartoon by Gary Hamilton which appeared in the *Belfast Telegraph*, 25.02.91, alongside an article noting my failure to obtain funding assistance for the Cúchulainn graphic novel.

Exploring our shared history

In 1986 I received a request which reawakened my desire to utilise the printed word as a means of engendering debate. Jackie Hewitt, manager of Farset Youth and Community Development Project, handed me a copy of *The History of the 36th (Ulster) Division* by Cyril Falls and asked if I would write an abridged booklet version, primarily for use by the young people involved in Farset's Somme Project. I agreed, on the understanding that the booklet's content would *not* be restricted to the material contained in Falls' history.

The resultant publication, *Sacrifice on the Somme*¹, recounted the story not only of the 36th (Ulster) Division but of the 10th and 16th (Irish) Divisions, and while acknowledging the sacrifice made by Irish citizens of all religious persuasions it also highlighted the futility and horror of the Great War and set the Irish contribution against the backdrop of political events at home.

The interest shown in the booklet – and the debate it engendered – suggested that an exploration of other aspects of Ulster's shared heritage might be an ideal way to kick-start the pamphlet series I was now determined to produce. That same year I also wrote a book on the theme of our shared heritage, *Ulster: the Hidden History*. However, such work, particularly when done in collaboration with local paediatrician, historian and publisher Dr. Ian Adamson, stirred up a veritable hornets' nest among certain quarters.

I have made a detailed response to this matter elsewhere², but at times the so-called 'critique' contained wild assertions. One academic even attempted to place himself in the role of all-seeing oracle when he wrote: "Hall's work for reconciliation is admirable, but the myth that drives it is false."³ And this despite the fact that my involvement in grassroots reconciliation work *predated* my first awareness of an ancient, and largely hidden, shared history – the so-called 'driving myth' – by a full seventeen years.

I also painted, in watercolour, a poster-sized map of *Historic Ulster*, which I was pleased to see displayed in community centres on both sides of our so-called 'divide'.

New focus

As noted earlier in this book, in May 1988 I had hoped to bring together a number of individuals, including former UDA leader Andy Tyrie and radical priest Fr. Des Wilson, in what I described to them as a ‘cross-community think tank’. However, the initiative never got off the ground. In 1990, I began to prepare much of the historical material in *Ulster: the Hidden History* for eventual re-publication in pamphlet format. It was also my intention that the very first title in what I would call my *Island Pamphlets* series would be a (re-sized) reprint of *Sacrifice on the Somme*. However, a chance discussion was to amend that.

In December 1991 I happened to be engaged in conversation with Billy Hutchinson, loyalist ex-prisoner and Director of Springfield Inter-Community Development Project (SICDP). Our discussion once again turned to the idea of convening a ‘community think tank’, for this was something Billy had also been contemplating. We kept the idea alive throughout 1992, intending to move on it subsequent to a major interface conference being organised by SICDP in October of that year. That conference proved to be a landmark community event, and it was felt important that an account of it should be widely circulated at grassroots level. Furthermore, because many of the exchanges during the conference itself had been emotive and energy-charged it was also realised that before a *joint* Think Tank could be convened, a necessary preliminary would be to establish separate, but complementary, Think Tanks in each community.

On both accounts it was felt that my proposed pamphlet series could play a significant role. The conference report would become the first title in the series, and when the different Think Tanks eventually got going those discussions would also provide ideal pamphlet material, for this would permit the debate to reach a much wider audience.

Island Pamphlet No. 1, *Life on the Interface*, published in 1993, received an enthusiastic reception across the community network and had to be reprinted. It was quickly followed by seven ‘shared history’ titles already in preparation, and the first actual ‘Think Tank’ pamphlet – produced in collaboration with SICDP – was published as Pamphlet No. 9, *Ulster’s Protestant Working Class* (1994).

Even at this early stage interest in the pamphlets at a grassroots level far exceeded my expectations, and, much to my satisfaction, discussion as to the

topics which would be covered by the series increasingly originated not with me but with individuals and groups within the community who realised the potential of such a format. In effect, the pamphlet series had quickly become the vehicle for debate and dialogue I had hoped it would.

Funding at last!

Some of the early pamphlet titles were written and published at my own expense, when I failed to obtain funding or sponsorship. However, as the pamphlets slowly began to appear a few people within the funding bodies finally realised that they offered a unique vehicle for cross-community dialogue which should be assisted. The first to provide funding were The Ireland Funds, and then, in October 1998 – commencing with Pamphlet No. 19 – the Farset Community Think Tanks Project formally came into being, funded by the European Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (administered through the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council and the International Fund for Ireland). I was now in a position to devote myself full-time to the task of realising the potential of the pamphlet series.

The problem of distribution

When I commenced the pamphlet series I had assumed – especially given that the titles had an important ‘local interest’ content – that there would be no difficulty in getting them accepted for sale in Belfast bookshops. Some outlets were indeed very supportive: John Clancy’s second-hand bookshop, The Bookshop at Queen’s, and the Linen Hall Library. The Green Cross Art and Bookshop on the Falls Road and two Loyalist shops (on the Shankill and Newtownards Roads) also readily accepted the pamphlets on their shelves. Dillons too, after an initial refusal, agreed to sell the pamphlets.

But what linked such outlets was that they were mostly locally-based. Those bookshops whose parent companies originated elsewhere proved to be far less supportive. For example, when Gardner’s family-owned bookshop on Botanic Avenue (through which hundreds of the pamphlets had been sold) was taken over by Easons reordering abruptly ceased. And when Dillons was taken over by Waterstones the new Belfast manager declined to stock any of the pamphlets,

intimating that pamphlets were hard to sell and display. I wrote to the London headquarters of Waterstones pointing out that it was ironic that publications funded by the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation and the International Fund for Ireland were being denied space in Belfast's largest bookshop. As for the excuse cited, I mentioned that I could provide a purpose-built display case which held 120 pamphlets. I even pointed out that there was a suitable blank wall in the middle of the bookshop's Irish section where this could easily be mounted. The exchange of letters achieved nothing. Well, almost nothing. Within a few days of London forwarding my correspondence to the Belfast branch, the free wall space – which had lain completely bare for many months – was suddenly filled with posters!

Even though these businesses were operating during a period of great political and communal change in Northern Ireland, it seemed to me that they did not believe they had any role to play in promoting or assisting that change. Indeed, in one of my letters of complaint I expressed the opinion that "The only 'change' our business sector seems interested in is the change that rattles through the tills."

Despite this lack of support from the large bookshops I nevertheless managed to establish an extensive distribution network, and soon had over 80 community organisations and key individuals on my 'distribution list'. To date, **140** titles have been produced, containing within them some **2** million words of oral testimony, and **202,500** pamphlets have been distributed around the community network in Northern Ireland, and beyond.

Notes

- 1 Reprinted as Island Pamphlet No. 2, *Sacrifice on the Somme*. Part of the material was later incorporated into Island Pamphlet No. 84, *A shared sacrifice for peace*, which explored how attitudes to the commemoration of the Great War had changed in recent years, largely as a result of grassroots endeavours. [A summary of this grassroots-driven transformation is also given in *Island Pamphlets (Selection 1)*]
- 2 Island Pamphlet No. 7, *The Cruthin Controversy*
- 3 Patrick Maume, Queen's University, Belfast (in his review of 'Ireland and Empire' by Stephen Howe, on the web-site: www.history.ac.uk)

For further information on the genesis and development of the pamphlet series see
Pamphlet no. 140 **Island Pamphlets: the background story**

2: The Think Tank process

Small-group dialogue

Following the advent of core funding, the pamphlet series focused primarily on edited accounts of small-group discussions – the ‘Community Think Tanks’ – although a few described important community conferences.

Some Think Tanks were area-based, reflecting the experiences of people living on either side of different conflict interfaces. Some focused on specific sectors within the community – Loyalists, Republicans, victims, young people, senior citizens, community activists, ex-prisoners, people with disabilities, women’s groups, etc. – while others focused on pertinent issues such as cross-community work, marching and parades, cross-border relationships, or the ‘peace process’.

I believe that fundamental grassroots issues are more effectively and creatively addressed in small-group settings than in large public forums. Many who attend public debates often come away feeling that little real dialogue has taken place and that participants – both from the platform and the floor – have directed their comments ‘to the gallery’, or to their own constituency. Community activist Jackie Hewitt remarked,

I have attended many conferences where speaker after speaker got up and said just what I, and everybody else, expected them to say, or what we all already knew. And there was a sense of disappointment that something more productive hadn’t been gained from bringing together such a large group of people. To be honest, I find far more innovative thoughts and challenging ideas being expressed in the Think Tank pamphlets – and yet there are perhaps only a dozen people involved in each. Maybe when people sit in a small group they find it easier to voice different opinions, explore new ideas.

In a small-group setting people feel more confident that their personal input will be listened to and valued, and, if the group gels, an honesty and openness will increasingly enter into the discussions. Furthermore, unlike in public meetings, the small-group setting encourages people to bring some of their life experiences into the discussion, which allows for a deeper understanding, something one funder noted:

Some of the opinions expressed in your latest pamphlet I have heard voiced on television, but usually in the form of brief one-liners – which means that they invariably come across as hardline, reactionary or bigoted. However, when I would come upon identical comments in the pamphlet they were always part of a larger paragraph which provided a context through which you gained some insight into why the speaker had arrived at such an opinion.

As each participant is given space to recount their life experiences, the broad range of those experiences is invariably reflected in the rich diversity of opinions held by the group – often to their surprise. One member of the Shankill Think Tank commented:

When I attended the first meeting I remember expressing a very hardline Unionist viewpoint – because that was what I was expecting from everyone else. But as I listened to the different views which were voiced, not only was I amazed – I had never realised that such diversity existed in my own community – but I began to accept that this diversity – whether in my own community or right across this whole society – wasn't the threatening thing I had always believed it to be.

If genuine trust is established between participants a confidence often develops which allows them to tackle controversial subjects in a creative way, and certainly in a way rarely possible in a more public setting. Community activist May Blood made a telling comment to me which confirmed that the parameters of debate *could* be shifted:

When you brought out the last Shankill Think Tank pamphlet [in which the participants had looked to the future] I can tell you there were a few raised eyebrows about some of the things said in it... it seemed a bit radical for the Shankill area. And yet, a couple of months later I was at a meeting and was surprised that people were openly discussing issues which up until then had seemed taboo. When I pointed this out, the response was: "Well, if the Shankill Think Tank can tackle these subjects, so can we."

Encouragement and safeguards

Aspects of the Think Tank process itself undoubtedly encouraged the openness and honesty which became the most remarked-upon attribute of the pamphlets. For a start, it was accepted that my role was to *edit* the discussions, not to *censor* them. That the Think Tank pamphlets allowed people to express

themselves openly, and in their own words, was readily acknowledged across all communities in Northern Ireland.

For example, towards the end of 2001, I worked on two pamphlets simultaneously: No.39, *The forgotten victims*, and No.40, *The unequal victims*. The first involved a victims' group whose loved ones had been murdered by Republicans, the second involved the relatives of the IRA unit shot dead in the SAS ambush at Loughgall. Each group knew that I was working with the other, but to neither of them did this pose a problem. As one participant said,

The integrity of your project is so well established that we are totally confident that our pamphlet will reflect our views accurately – just as we know that their pamphlet will do the same for them. We also know that any of your own comments inserted into the document are only there to help it flow, not to pass judgement on what we say.

Jim McCorry, a tireless promoter of the pamphlets, noted:

I feel that the exercise has two important components: content and process. In terms of content, the pamphlets allow many individuals and groups to gain access to the opinions and experiences of different communities – including the 'other' community – often for the very first time. But people's preparedness to read the pamphlets is enhanced as much by the other component – the process. People have accepted that the pamphlet series isn't emanating from only one community, and isn't biased towards one community or the other. They know that you are going round meeting people from different backgrounds and political positions, and letting them freely articulate their thoughts and needs. So they are always prepared to give your material a chance, even when it sets out to reflect views they would normally feel antagonistic towards. And, of course, a lot relies on the integrity and trust you have personally built up over the years, right across all communities.

Such a preparedness to 'give the material a chance' – irrespective of its source – was displayed by the small independent political bookshops established in working-class areas. Some very anti-Republican sentiments were voiced in pamphlets emanating from Loyalist areas, yet these documents were readily given shelf space in the Green Cross Art and Bookshop on the Falls Road, adjoining the Sinn Féin Press Centre. Similarly, some very anti-Loyalist sentiments, contained in Think Tank pamphlets emanating from Nationalist groups, were on display alongside Union Jacks and paramilitary badges in Loyalist shops on the Shankill

and Newtownards Roads. Such material, which in any other form would not have been tolerated, was accepted because it was seen as part of a series of publications whose overall purpose was to promote understanding and encourage dialogue. And numerous individuals, from Sinn Féin's Tom Hartley to UDA leader Andy Tyrie willingly distributed copies to their associates.

Such trust was also engendered through the Think Tank process itself. Although each series of discussions resulted in a pamphlet which would reach a wide readership, it was, primarily, a process involving a small group of individuals. For some of the participants it was perhaps the first time they had been encouraged to articulate their hopes and fears, or describe their personal experiences. It was inevitable that over the period of the meetings views might mellow, or harden – and such a development was accommodated. When it came to discussing the drafts, participants were permitted to clarify what they had said so that their views were accurately represented.

Another encouragement to openness was that no quotes were attributed (apart from a small number of cross-border discussions where names were inserted mainly to avoid geographical confusion), and the final document was only published when there was consensus agreement on its content. As a final safeguard, once the pamphlet was published all recordings were erased and all written drafts destroyed, so that only that which had been collectively agreed remained in the public domain.

I would also be conscious of 'invisible' participants. For example, during one series of discussions a major funding body was frequently referred to, often in a negative manner. I pointed out to the discussants that this organisation had become, unknowingly, a 'party' to the discussions, and I suggested that they be given an opportunity to respond. This was readily agreed and the resultant pamphlet contained two sections: the first in which the community activists voiced their frustrations, and a second where representatives of the funding body engaged them in debate. Both sides agreed that it had been an extremely useful exercise.

An individual process

A participant in one of the Think Tanks was a woman whose father had been murdered by Republicans. It had left her devastated; the trauma she had experienced had severely blighted her teenage years. She also felt that her personal

story wasn't accorded any value. For example, the day after the 1994 IRA ceasefire the world's media descended on community groups throughout Northern Ireland, including hers, and a TV reporter asked her, "What are your hopes for the future?" She replied, "Look, this ceasefire is only a day old; I have a lot of pain to come to terms with yet." Upon which he pointedly turned away from her and addressed his question to the others in the room. Like so many in the media, he had his own agenda, and it had no room for her story. And when she told another reporter that she still felt hatred for the IRA, he responded: "Oh, we couldn't use that!" During the Think Tank discussions, because of the bitterness she felt towards the IRA, she was frequently at odds with some of the more accommodating views expressed by other participants, and when I presented the pamphlet draft I expected her to object strongly to my inclusion of many of these views. But because *her story and her views were included as well*, on an *equal* footing, she accepted that *all* views had a right to be heard. Later she described the Think Tank experience as 'therapeutic'.

Many participants felt that a definite process was at work, whether while participating in the group discussions, or reading the draft or the pamphlet itself:

When you first read the draft you get a bit of a shock. You go: did I really say that! Somehow seeing it down in black and white makes you realise how embittered you must seem to others. Sometimes we all say things automatically without really thinking about their impact.

The pamphlets help you to move forward. In the first few pages you read all these hardline statements which you naturally agree with, then you begin to see other opinions being expressed which initially you might have rejected, but, in the context in which they are said, make you pause and think. And then at the end of the document you can see how you [as editor] have sort of summarised the different views and highlighted possible ways of moving forward, and you say to yourself: Yes, I think I could live with that.

People trust the project not to have a hidden agenda, or to be self-seeking. They appreciate that you [as facilitator] are always careful to ensure that people are happy with the final document. They see it as a *process*, in which their own development is just as important as the printed product. More importantly, it is a process over which the participants have full ownership at all times.

A community response

I was once walking along the Shankill Road when I was stopped by community activist Jackie Redpath, who said, “We’re out of copies of the wee pamphlet.” Thinking that he was referring to the last Shankill Think Tank pamphlet I told him that I had few left. “No,” he said, “not *our* one – the Falls one. There’s been a lot of interest in it around here.” Two weeks later, while visiting a community group across the interface in Turf Lodge, I received a similar request for ‘more copies’. This time I was more cautious in my reply, “The Falls one?” “No, no, the Shankill one; everyone wants to know what’s being said over there.”

Such a cross-community resonance has been a recurrent theme. One pamphlet (No. 31, *Left in Limbo*), which described the experiences of the children of Republican prisoners, was much in demand from Loyalists – because they could identify with its content; as one Loyalist said to me, “Our kids must have gone through the same things.” Another positive aspect of this particular pamphlet was that although a couple of the young people had been very critical of the IRA – on the basis that their fathers had cared more for the ‘armed struggle’ than for their own families – a leading republican commented, “It’s a bit hard [on us] in parts, but if that’s what we put our young people through then we must allow them to express their feelings openly.”

Initially the pamphlets were seen as a means of learning about and understanding not only one’s own community but the ‘other’ community. There came a stage, however, when community activists began to see the pamphlets as *a vehicle for reaching out* across the ‘divide’. For example, nationalist community activists in Ardoyne, faced with the total breakdown in community relations which resulted from the Holy Cross primary school blockade of 2001, requested that a Think Tank be assembled for the purpose of exploring attitudes to cross-community contact within the local Catholic community, and then have copies of the resulting pamphlet distributed widely across the so-called ‘sectarian interface’. This was done, and the response from the Protestant side was positive, for they were heartened to learn that many people in the Catholic community still desired an accommodation, just as many of them did.

3: The pamphlets listed chronologically and thematically

Pamphlet titles by date of publication

1993

- (1) **'Life on the Interface'** Belfast 'peaceline' community groups confront common issues.
- (2) **Sacrifice on the Somme** Ulster's shared sacrifice in the First World War.
- (3) **Ulster's Scottish Connection** Exploring the many links between Ulster and Scotland.
- (4) **'Idle Hours'** Belfast working-class poetry.
- (5) ***Expecting the Future*** A community play focusing on the legacy of violence.
- (6) **Ulster's Shared Heritage** Exploring the cultural inheritance of the Ulster people.

1994

- (7) **The Cruthin Controversy** A response to academic misrepresentation.
- (8) **Ulster's European Heritage** A celebration of Ulster's links with mainland Europe.
- (9) **Ulster's Protestant Working Class** A community exploration.

1995

- (10) **The Battle of Moira** An adaptation of Sir Samuel Ferguson's epic poem *Congal*.
- (11) **'Beyond the Fife and Drum'** Belfast's Shankill Road debates its future.
- (12) **Belfast Community Economic Conference** Grassroots groups explore issues.
- (13) **A New Beginning** The Shankill Think Tank outlines its vision for the future.

1996

- (14) **Reinforcing Powerlessness** Curtailing the voice of ordinary people.
- (15) **Ourselves Alone?** Belfast's Nationalist working class speak out.
- (16) **Hidden Frontiers** Addressing deep-rooted violent conflict in N. Ireland and Moldova.

1997

- (17) **The Death of the Peace Process?** A survey of community perceptions.

1998

- (18) **At the Crossroads?** Further explorations by the Shankill Think Tank.

1999

- (19) **Conflict Resolution** The missing element in the Northern Ireland peace process.
- (20) **Young People Speak Out** A discussion by Catholic/Nationalist youth in West Belfast.

- (21) **Puppets No More** An exploration of socio-economic issues by East Belfast Protestants.
- (22) **Beyond King Billy?** East Belfast Protestants explore cultural & identity-related issues.
- (23) **Are we not part of this city too?** Protestant working-class alienation in Derry.
- (24) **'Orangeism and the Twelfth'** Report of a cultural debate held in Protestant East Belfast.
- (25) **Broadening Horizons** The impact of international travel on attitudes and perceptions.
- (26) **Before the 'Troubles'** Senior citizens from Belfast's Shankill Road reminisce.

2000

- (27) **Seeds of Hope** A joint exploration by Republican and Loyalist ex-prisoners.
- (28) **Towards a Community Charter** An exploration by the Falls Think Tank.
- (29) **Restoring Relationships** A community exploration of restorative justice.
- (30) **Separated by Partition** An encounter between Protestants from Donegal and Belfast.
- (31) **Left in Limbo** The experience of Republican prisoners' children.
- (32) **A question of 'community relations'** Protestants discuss community relations issues.

2001

- (33) **Beyond Friendship** An exploration of the value of cross-border exchanges.
- (34) **Catalysts for change** A Los Angeles / Northern Ireland / Moldovan exchange.
- (35) **Dunmurry Reflections** Reminiscences from the 'outskirts'.
- (36) **Community Relations: an elusive concept** An exploration by community activists.
- (37) **Living in a mixed community** The experience of Ballynafeigh, Ormeau Road.
- (38) **Cross-border reflections on 1916** Report of a cross-border conference.
- (39) **The forgotten victims** The victims' group HURT reveal the legacy of the 'Troubles'.
- (40) **The unequal victims** Discussion by members of the Loughgall Truth and Justice Campaign.

2002

- (41) **Citizenship in a modern society** Report of a public debate.
- (42) **Whatever happened to the Peace Process?** Report of a public debate.
- (43) **Turf Lodge Reminiscences** Discussion by the members of Voices Women's Group.
- (44) **In search of a Haven** Discussion by members of HAVEN victims' support group.
- (45) **An uncertain future** An exploration by Protestant community activists.
- (46) **An education for the future** Debate on educational provision in North Belfast.
- (47) **Towards a shared community charter** Falls/Ballymacarrett Joint Think Tank.
- (48) **Reuniting the Shankill** Report on the Shankill Convention (May 2002).

2003

- (49) **Shared Memories** Reminiscences by the 50-Plus Springfield Inter-Community Group.
- (50) **Community development: Socialism in practice?** Report of a public debate.
- (51) **'It's good to talk'** The experiences of a West Belfast mobile phone network.
- (52) **A lifetime's legacy** An exploration by members of WAVE Trauma Centre.
- (53) **A journey towards healing** Reflections on an American model of restorative justice.
- (54) **The East Belfast Interface (1)** Protestant young people speak out.
- (55) **The East Belfast Interface (2)** Catholic young people speak out.
- (56) **Beginning a debate** An exploration by community activists from North Belfast
- (57) **Reflections on Violence** A cross-cultural exploration of the Northern Ireland conflict.
- (58) **Making road maps to peace** Report of an Israeli–Palestinian workshop held in Belfast.

2004

- (59) **Home and Away** Reminiscences on community-based children's holiday schemes.
- (60) **A Safe Place** An exploration of the work of the Koram Centre, Strabane.
- (61) **The search for resolution** Lessons drawn from a community development strategy.
- (62) **'Crossing the Line'** Report of a community-based cross-border conference.
- (63) **At a new crossroads?** An overview of community anxieties.
- (64) **Exploring the marching issue** Views from Nationalist North Belfast.
- (65) **Reflections on the 'peace dividend'** The views of women from Nationalist Belfast.
- (66) **'A tale of two sister cities'** Belfast and Dublin women reflect on a joint programme.
- (67) **'Look at me, not at my disability'** An exploration by the Disability Think Tank.
- (68) **The Good Friday Agreement: where to now?** Account of a cross-border conference.

2005

- (69) **Finding common ground** Young people in East Belfast explore shared concerns.
- (70) **Grassroots leadership (1)** Recollections by **May Blood** and **Joe Camplisson**.
- (71) **Grassroots leadership (2)** Recollections by **Fr. Des Wilson** and **Tommy Gorman**.
- (72) **Grassroots leadership (3)** Recollections by **Jim McCorry** and **Jackie Hewitt**.
- (73) **Self-harming and suicide** An exploration by young people and parents.
- (74) **Still in Limbo?** An exploration by young people from Tar Anall Youth Project.
- (75) **Grassroots leadership (4)** Recollections by **Jackie Redpath** and **Eilish Reilly**.
- (76) **Grassroots leadership (5)** Recollections by **Louis West** and **Anne Gallagher**.
- (77) **Grassroots leadership (6)** Recollections by **June Campion** and **Billy Hutchinson**.

2006

- (78) **Grassroots leadership (7)** Recollections by **Michael Hall**.
- (79) **Loyalism in Transition (1) A new reality?** Exploring changes within working-class Loyalism.

2007

- (80) ***Loyalism in Transition (2) Learning from others in conflict*** Report of an international exchange.
- (81) **Building bridges at the grassroots** The Suffolk-Lenadoon experience.
- (82) **Reconciliation: a false goal?** A grassroots discussion.
- (83) ***Loyalism in Transition (3) Is there a shared Ulster heritage?*** Looking towards an inclusive identity.
- (84) **A shared sacrifice for peace** Changing attitudes to Ireland's WWI experience.

2008

- (85) **'A future for Cooperation'** A cross-border conference looking to a post-conflict future.
- (86) **Building cross-border relationships** Community activists reflect on decades of effort.
- (87) **Divided by History?** A cross-border exploration of the misuse of history and culture.
- (88) **A grassroots achievement** How ordinary people sustained the peace process.
- (89) **Young People and the 'peace process'** A cross-border exploration.
- (90) **Self-help at the grassroots** Important examples of community activism.
- (91) **Suffolk-Lenadoon Reminiscences** Reflections by senior citizens.

2009

- (92) **Preventing a return to violence** A discussion by ex-combatants.
- (93) **Lenadoon Community Forum** Community empowerment in action.

2010

- (94) **Death by postcode** Report on a Health Inequalities conference.
- (95) **'Time stands still'** The forgotten story of prisoners' families.

2011

- (96) ***Republicanism in transition (1)*** The need for a debate.
- (97) ***Republicanism in transition (2)*** Beginning a debate.
- (98) ***Republicanism in transition (3)*** Irish Republicanism today.

2012

- (99) ***Republicanism in transition (4)*** The question of 'armed struggle'.
- (100) ***Republicanism in transition (5)*** An engagement with Loyalists.
- (101) ***Towards a shared future (1)*** The difficult questions.
- (102) ***Towards a shared future (2)*** Confronting sectarianism.

2013

(103) *Towards a shared future (3) Irreconcilable Identities?*

(104) *Towards a shared future (4) Explorations of Identity.*

2014

(105) *Towards a shared future (5) Ulster's marching bands.*

(106) *Towards a shared future (6) In search of a process.*

2015

(107) *A process of analysis (1) The Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community.*

(108) *A process of analysis (2) The Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community.*

(109) *A process of analysis (3) Searching for a road map.*

2016

(110) **Parades and Protests** Some unheard voices.

(111) **United for change** Young people's experiences.

2018

(112) **Celebrating a shared heritage**

2019

(113) *The Long 60s (1) The Social, Economic and Political background to the 'Long 60s'*

(114) *The Long 60s (2) Civil Rights Internationally and the Crisis of the 1960s*

(115) *The Long 60s (3) The Outbreak and Development of 'the Troubles'*

(116) *The Long 60s (4) The Road to Sunningdale and the UWC Strike of May 1974*

(117) **A History of the Belfast Anarchist Group and Belfast Libertarian Group**

(118) *Reflections on 1969 (1) 1969: How do we begin to recall that period?*

(119) *Reflections on 1969 (2) Putting up, and taking down, the barricades*

(120) *Reflections on 1969 (3) The Battle of the Shankill, 11-12 October 1969*

(121) *Reflections on 1969 (4) The first Peace Dividends?*

(122) *Reflections on 1969 (5) Loyalism and Unionism under Threat?*

2020

(123) *Reflections on 1969 (6) The Irish Diaspora in Britain & America: Benign or Malign Forces?*

(124) *The Long 60s (5) Civil Rights – Then and Now*

(125) *The Long 60s (6) The Contemporary Influence, Relevance and Lessons of the 60s*

(126) *Reflections on Centenaries & Anniversaries (1) The Republican Movement Divides Dec 69–Jan70*

(127) *Reflections on Centenaries & Anniversaries (2) The Belfast & Lisburn Expulsions, 1920*

2021

(128) *The realities of conflict: An exploration by ex-prisoners for the benefit of young people.*

(129) *Reflections on Centenaries & Anniversaries (3) A Land Fit for Heroes?*

(130) *Reflections on Centenaries & Anniversaries (4) Northern Ireland 1921: a state born in violence*

(131) *Reflections on Centenaries & Anniversaries (5) James Craig's efforts to secure and embed Partition*

(132) *Reflections on Centenaries & Anniversaries (6) A Carnival of Reaction? Labour's response to Partition*

2022

(133) *Reflections on Centenaries & Anniversaries (7) 'Common Sense' (1978) Revisited*

(134) ***This is it!*** A community play about Loyalism, by Andy Tyrie, Sammy Duddy and Michael Hall

(135) *Reflections on Centenaries & Anniversaries (8) 'Republicanism 1962-1972: the Legacy*

2023

(136) *Legacies and Memories of the 'Peace Train' (1989-1995)*

(137) *Grassroots Experiences* by Michael Hall

2024

(138) *Part of the problem – the role played by the media plus Selected Articles* by Michael Hall

(139) *Assorted Anecdotes* by Michael Hall

2025

(140) *Island Pamphlets: the background story* by Michael Hall

Pamphlet titles by theme

Themes : Catholic/Nationalist/Republican Community

Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist Community

Interface & ‘Community Relations’ Issues

Cross-Border Exchanges

Victims

Young People

Good Practice & Joint Endeavour

Reminiscences

Conference Reports

International Exchanges

mini-series **‘Grassroots Leadership’**

mini-series **‘Loyalism in Transition’**

mini-series **‘Republicanism in Transition’**

mini-series **‘Towards a shared future’**

mini-series **‘A process of analysis’**

mini-series **‘The Long 60s’**

mini-series **‘Reflections on 1969: Lived Experiences & Living History’**

mini-series **‘Reflections on Centenaries & Anniversaries’**

Ulster History

Miscellaneous

Catholic/Nationalist/Republican Community

(15) **Ourselves Alone?** Belfast’s Nationalist working class speak out.

(28) **Towards a Community Charter** An exploration by the Falls Think Tank.

(56) **Beginning a debate** An exploration by community activists from North Belfast

(64) **Exploring the marching issue** Views from Nationalist North Belfast.

(65) **Reflections on the ‘peace dividend’** The views of women from Nationalist Belfast.

see also mini-series ‘Republicanism in Transition’

Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist Community

- (9) **Ulster's Protestant Working Class** A community exploration.
- (11) **'Beyond the Fife and Drum'** Belfast's Shankill Road debates its future.
- (13) **A New Beginning** The Shankill Think Tank outlines its vision for the future.
- (18) **At the Crossroads?** Further explorations by the Shankill Think Tank.
- (21) **Puppets No More** An exploration of socio-economic issues by East Belfast Protestants.
- (22) **Beyond King Billy?** East Belfast Protestants explore cultural & identity issues.
- (23) **Are we not part of this city too?** Protestant working-class alienation in Derry.
- (24) **'Orangeism and the Twelfth'** Report of a cultural debate held in Protestant East Belfast.
- (45) **An uncertain future** An exploration by Protestant community activists.
- (48) **Reuniting the Shankill** Report on the Shankill Convention (May 2002).

see also mini-series 'Loyalism in Transition' and No. 134 This is it!

Interface & 'Community Relations' Issues

- (1) **Life on the Interface** Belfast 'peaceline' community groups confront common issues.
- (14) **Reinforcing Powerlessness** Curtailing the voice of ordinary people.
- (17) **The Death of the Peace Process?** A survey of community perceptions.
- (32) **A question of 'community relations'** Protestants discuss community relations issues.
- (36) **Community Relations: an elusive concept** An exploration by community activists.
- (63) **At a new crossroads?** An overview of community anxieties.
- (82) **Reconciliation: a false goal?** A grassroots discussion.
- (88) **A grassroots achievement** How ordinary people sustained the peace process.

see also mini-series 'A process of analysis'

Cross-Border Exchanges

- (30) **Separated by Partition** An encounter between Protestants from Donegal and Belfast.
- (33) **Beyond Friendship** An exploration of the value of cross-border exchanges.
- (38) **Cross-border reflections on 1916** Report of a cross-border conference.
- (62) **'Crossing the Line'** Report of a community-based cross-border conference.
- (66) **'A tale of two sister cities'** Belfast and Dublin women reflect on a joint programme.
- (86) **Building cross-border relationships** Community activists reflect on decades of effort.
- (87) **Divided by History?** A cross-border exploration of the misuse of history and culture.
- (110) **Parades and Protests** Some unheard voices.

Victims

- (39) **The forgotten victims** The victims' group HURT reveal the legacy of the 'Troubles'.
- (40) **The unequal victims** Discussion by members of the Loughgall Truth and Justice Campaign.
- (44) **In search of a Haven** Discussion by members of HAVEN victims' support group.
- (52) **A lifetime's legacy** An exploration by members of WAVE Trauma Centre.
- (60) **A Safe Place** An exploration of the work of the Koram Centre, Strabane.
- (67) **'Look at me, not at my disability'** An exploration by the Disability Think Tank.
- (95) **'Time stands still'** The forgotten story of prisoners' families.

Young People

- (20) **Young People Speak Out** A discussion by Catholic/Nationalist youth in West Belfast.
- (25) **Broadening Horizons** The impact of international travel on attitudes and perceptions.
- (29) **Restoring Relationships** A community exploration of restorative justice.
- (31) **Left in Limbo** The experience of Republican prisoners' children.
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- (89) **Young People and the 'peace process'** A cross-border exploration.
- (111) **United for change** Young people's experiences.
- (128) **The realities of conflict: *An exploration by ex-prisoners for the benefit of young people.***

Good Practice & Joint Endeavour

- (27) **Seeds of Hope** A joint exploration by Republican and Loyalist ex-prisoners.
- (37) **Living in a mixed community** The experience of Ballynafeigh, Ormeau Road.
- (47) **Towards a shared community charter** Falls/Ballymacarrett Joint Think Tank.
- (51) **'It's good to talk'** The experiences of a West Belfast mobile phone network.
- (81) **Building bridges at the grassroots** The Suffolk-Lenadoon experience.
- (84) **A shared sacrifice for peace** Changing attitudes to Ireland's WWI experience.
- (90) **Self-help at the grassroots** Important examples of community activism.
- (92) **Preventing a return to violence** A discussion by ex-combatants.
- (93) **Lenadoon Community Forum** Community empowerment in action.
- (136) **Legacies and Memories of the 'Peace Train' (1989-1995)**

Reminiscences

- (26) **Before the ‘Troubles’** Senior citizens from Belfast’s Shankill Road reminisce.
- (35) **Dunmurry Reflections** Reminiscences from the ‘outskirts’.
- (43) **Turf Lodge Reminiscences** Discussion by the members of Voices Women’s Group.
- (49) **Shared Memories** Reminiscences by the 50-Plus Springfield Inter-Community Group.
- (91) **Suffolk-Lenadoon Reminiscences** Reflections by senior citizens.

Conference Reports

- (12) **Belfast Community Economic Conference** Grassroots groups explore issues.
- (41) **Citizenship in a modern society** Report of a public debate.
- (42) **Whatever happened to the Peace Process?** Report of a public debate.
- (46) **An education for the future** Debate on educational provision in North Belfast.
- (50) **Community development: Socialism in practice?** Report of a public debate.
- (68) **The Good Friday Agreement: where to now?** Account of a cross-border conference.
- (85) **‘A future for Cooperation’** A cross-border conference looking to a post-conflict future.
- (94) **Death by postcode** Report on a Health Inequalities conference.

International Exchanges

- (19) **Conflict Resolution** The missing element in the Northern Ireland peace process.
- (34) **Catalysts for change** A Los Angeles / Northern Ireland / Moldovan exchange.
- (53) **A journey towards healing** Reflections on an American model of restorative justice.
- (57) **Reflections on Violence** A cross-cultural exploration of the Northern Ireland conflict.
- (58) **Making road maps to peace** Report of an Israeli–Palestinian workshop held in Belfast.
- (61) **The search for resolution** Lessons drawn from a community development strategy.

mini-series ‘Grassroots Leadership’

- (70) **Grassroots leadership (1)** Recollections by **May Blood** and **Joe Camplisson**.
- (71) **Grassroots leadership (2)** Recollections by **Fr. Des Wilson** and **Tommy Gorman**.
- (72) **Grassroots leadership (3)** Recollections by **Jim McCorry** and **Jackie Hewitt**.
- (75) **Grassroots leadership (4)** Recollections by **Jackie Redpath** and **Eilish Reilly**.
- (76) **Grassroots leadership (5)** Recollections by **Louis West** and **Anne Gallagher**.
- (77) **Grassroots leadership (6)** Recollections by **June Campion** and **Billy Hutchinson**.
- (78) **Grassroots leadership (7)** Recollections by **Michael Hall**.

mini-series ‘**Loyalism in Transition**’

- (79) *Loyalism in Transition (1) A new reality?* Exploring changes within working-class Loyalism.
- (80) *Loyalism in Transition (2) Learning from others in conflict* Report of an international exchange.
- (83) *Loyalism in Transition (3) Is there a shared Ulster heritage?* Looking towards an inclusive identity.

mini-series ‘**Republicanism in Transition**’

- (96) *Republicanism in transition (1) The need for a debate.*
- (97) *Republicanism in transition (2) Beginning a debate.*
- (98) *Republicanism in transition (3) Irish Republicanism today.*
- (99) *Republicanism in transition (4) The question of ‘armed struggle’.*
- (100) *Republicanism in transition (5) An engagement with Loyalists.*

mini-series ‘**Towards a shared future**’

- (101) *Towards a shared future (1) The difficult questions.*
- (102) *Towards a shared future (2) Confronting sectarianism.*
- (103) *Towards a shared future (3) Irreconcilable Identities?*
- (104) *Towards a shared future (4) Explorations of Identity.*
- (105) *Towards a shared future (5) Ulster’s marching bands.*
- (106) *Towards a shared future (6) In search of a process.*

mini-series ‘**A process of analysis**’

- (107) *A process of analysis (1) The Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community.*
- (108) *A process of analysis (2) The Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community.*
- (109) *A process of analysis (3) Searching for a road map.*

mini-series ‘**The Long 60s**’

- (113) *The Long 60s (1) The Social, Economic and Political background to ‘the Long 60s’.*
- (114) *The Long 60s (2) Civil Rights Internationally and the Crisis of the 1960s.*
- (115) *The Long 60s (3) The Outbreak and Development of ‘the Troubles’.*
- (116) *The Long 60s (4) The road to Sunningdale and the UWC strike of 1974.*
- (124) *The Long 60s (5) Civil Rights – Then and Now.*
- (125) *The Long 60s (6) The Contemporary Influence, Relevance and Lessons of the 60s.*

mini-series **'Reflections on 1969'**

- (118) **1969 (1)** 1969—How do we begin to recall that period?
- (119) **1969 (2)** Putting up, and taking down, the barricades.
- (120) **1969 (3)** The Battle of the Shankill, 11-12 October 1969.
- (121) **1969 (4)** The first Peace Dividends?
- (122) **1969 (5)** Loyalism and Unionism under Threat?
- (123) **1969 (6)** The Irish Diaspora in Britain & America: Benign or Malign Forces?

mini-series **'Reflections on Centenaries & Anniversaries'**

- (126) **(1)** The Republican Movement Divides, December 69–January 70
- (127) **(2)** The Belfast & Lisburn Expulsions, 1920
- (129) **(3)** A Land Fit for Heroes?
- (130) **(4)** Northern Ireland 1921: a state born in violence
- (131) **(5)** James Craig's efforts to secure and embed Partition
- (132) **(6)** A Carnival of Reaction? Labour's response to Partition
- (133) **(7)** 'Common Sense' (1978) Revisited
- (135) **(8)** 'Republicanism 1962-1972: the Legacy

Ulster History

- (2) **Sacrifice on the Somme** Ulster's shared sacrifice in the First World War.
- (3) **Ulster's Scottish Connection** Exploring the many links between Ulster and Scotland.
- (6) **Ulster's Shared Heritage** Exploring the cultural inheritance of the Ulster people.
- (7) **The Cruthin Controversy** A response to academic misrepresentation.
- (8) **Ulster's European Heritage** A celebration of Ulster's links with mainland Europe.
- (10) **The Battle of Moira** An adaptation of Sir Samuel Ferguson's epic poem Congal.
- (112) **Celebrating a shared heritage** Essays on Ulster's shared inheritance.

Miscellaneous

- (4) **'Idle Hours'** Belfast working-class poetry.
- (5) ***Expecting the Future*** A community play focusing on the legacy of violence.
- (59) **Home and Away** Reminiscences on community-based children's holiday schemes.
- (117) **History of the Belfast Anarchist Group and Belfast Libertarian Group**
- (134) ***This is it!*** A community play about Loyalism, by Andy Tyrie, Sammy Duddy and Michael Hall
- (137) **Grassroots Experiences** by Michael Hall
- (138) **Part of the problem (the media) plus Selected Articles** by Michael Hall
- (139) **Assorted Anecdotes** by Michael Hall
- (140) **Island Pamphlets: the background story** by Michael Hall