

Ulster Volunteer Force

January 1913



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Ulster's Solemn League and Covenant.

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

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

God Save the King.

Introduction

The 36th (Ulster) Division was extremely fortunate in its official historian because Cyril Falls was to become one of the finest British military historians of the twentieth century and Professor of the History of War at Oxford University. Sir Michael Howard, widely considered to be the United Kingdom's foremost military historian, has observed that *The History of the 36th (Ulster) Division* (London, 1922) 'contains some of the finest descriptions of conditions on the western front in the literature of the war'.



During the third Home Rule crisis Falls was a clerk in the Foreign Office but his Fermanagh background gave him a full and sensitive appreciation and understanding of the origins of the Division and events leading up to its formation.

The son of an Enniskillen solicitor, who was the commander of the 3rd Battalion of the Fermanagh Regiment UVF and a future Westminster MP, he grew up in the county and received his early education at Portora Royal School. Explaining why his history did not begin with the British declaration of war on Germany on 4 August 1914, he observed:

There are ... certain local circumstances anterior to that declaration, which have an intimate connection with the particular Division that is the subject of this History, and so could not be omitted without robbing the latter of much of its significance. The Ulster Division was not created in a day. The roots from which it sprang went back into the troubled period before the war. Its life was a continuance of the life of an earlier legion, a legion of civilians banded together to protect themselves from the consequences of legislation which they believed would affect adversely their rights and privileges as citizens of the United Kingdom – the Ulster Volunteer Force.

Falls appreciated that the UVF was a twentieth-century Covenanting army, its membership being confined to those aged between 17 and 65 who had signed



the Covenant in September 1912. He was also aware of that ‘the Covenant of the 17th century was taken almost as widely in Ulster as in Scotland’ and he was alert to the survival of ‘the old covenanting spirit’:

The writer of this book can bear witness from personal observation that it was not uncommon to find a man sitting on the fire-step of a front-line trench, reading one of the small copies of the New Testament which were issued to the troops by the people at home. The explanation was that, on one hand religion was near to them; on the other, that they were simple men. They saw no reason to hide or disguise that which was part of their daily lives.

Falls was also very conscious of the ethnicity of the membership of Ulster Division and, by extension, of the UVF:

The old clan-names of the Northumbrian and Scottish Borders were clustered thick together [in the Division]. A platoon would have five Armstrongs or Wilsons or Elliots, a company half a dozen Irvines or Johnstons, a battalion half a score of Morrours or Hannas.



The Scottish National Covenant 1638



Banbridge 1912

Origins

Although the Ulster Volunteer Force formally came into existence in January 1913, its informal origins may be traced back to a letter sent to every Orange lodge by the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland in November 1910 which sought particulars of lodge members who, in the event of Home Rule becoming law, were willing to take



Col Robert Wallace

‘active steps’ to resist its enforcement. A similar letter had been issued by Grand Lodge in 1885 at the time of the First Home Rule Crisis. This communiqué from Grand Lodge enjoyed the unusual distinction of having its content closely scrutinized round the Cabinet table in Downing Street.

As early as 22 December 1910 Colonel Robert Wallace, the County Grand Master of Belfast and almost certainly the prime instigator of the letter, was able to reassure an interested Canadian sympathiser that ‘we are quietly organising’ and that ‘the various [Orange] lodges have received enrolment forms and will be taught simple movements’.

In April 1911 Colonel Wallace wrote to a fellow officer, who had also seen service in the Boer war, recording how he had been encouraging the Belfast Orangemen to adopt military formation:

I am trying to get my Districts in Belfast to take up a few simple movements – learning to form fours and reform two deep, and simple matters like that. I suggested some time ago the advisability for the men to march on the 12th in fours, and not to straggle along in the way that they have become accustomed to ...



The spread of drilling

By the spring of 1911 drilling was taking place in a wide range of locations. For example, Orange lodges were drilling in Fermanagh, even if the local District Inspector attributed it to 'bluster and bravado' and a calculated bid 'to get into the press of the United Kingdom to show what determined fellows the Orangemen are'.

At present it is impossible to state with any degree of certainty where drilling first began and indeed we may never know. In his book entitled *L'Irlande dans la crise universelle* (Paris, 1917) Louis Tréguiz, a French journalist, suggested that drilling began in the Lecale district of east Down. Two facts make this identification eminently plausible. First, Colonel Wallace lived at Myra Castle, near Downpatrick, and was an influential figure in area. Secondly, James Craig was the area's MP, was a close friend of Wallace's and he had a home at Tyrella in the district. In *Ulster's Stand for Union* (London, 1922), Ronald McNeill advanced the claims of County Tyrone, crediting Captain Ambrose Ricardo of Sion Mills with inaugurating drilling in north Tyrone.

Orange lodges did not have monopoly when it came to drilling. Unionist Clubs were also heavily involved. Unionist Clubs had been established in 1893 by Lord Templetown to provide Unionism with a local network, but the movement became dormant as the Home Rule threat receded with the defeat of the Second Home Rule Bill in 1893 and the return of a Unionist Government in 1895. With the renewal of the Home Rule threat, in late 1910 the Ulster Unionist Council invited Lord Templetown to revive the organization. By mid-December 1911 there were 164 Clubs in existence. In all 139 Unionist Clubs were represented at the Craigavon demonstration in September 1911. By the end of February 1912 there were 232 Clubs.



The Craigavon Demonstration, 23 September 1911

The RIC's Crime Special Branch took an extremely close interest in the Craigavon demonstration of 23 September 1911 in the spacious grounds of Captain James Craig's home in east Belfast. It was at this event that James Craig, the MP for East Down, introduced Sir Edward Carson, the new Leader of the Irish Unionist Parliamentary Party, to rank and file unionists, the people he would lead over the next decade. The *News Letter* estimated that at least 100,000 people, drawn from the Unionist Clubs and the Orange Institution, were present. Those attending the demonstration paraded to Craig's home from the city centre. The *News Letter* noted that 'the order was much closer and the pace better than in an ordinary Twelfth procession'. RIC's Crime Special Branch submitted the following report:



It was observed that by far the greater number of the men who marched in the procession carried themselves as men who had been drilled, particularly the members of the Unionist Clubs and the Orangemen from Counties Tyrone and Armagh.

It has been ascertained that about 100 of the Armagh contingent, when going to and returning from the Railway Station at Armagh on this occasion, "fell in" in two ranks, numbered off, formed fours, and marched off at the word of Command of a retired Army Sergeant named Walker. These men were all young, and it is believed that they had previously learned drill in the Yeomanry, Militia or the Boys' Brigade.



Craigavon House

On the basis of what he had seen, Edward Pearson, the author of the report, was convinced that drilling was widespread throughout Ulster.



J. H. Campbell's revelation

Around the time of the Craigavon demonstration, Colonel Wallace learned from J. H. Campbell, the barrister and MP that drilling in certain circumstances was perfectly legal. Such activity was permitted, provided that it was used by those so training to make men more efficient citizens for the purpose of maintaining the constitution of the United Kingdom and protecting their rights and liberties, and only if it was authorised by two Justices of the Peace. These were conditions to which Orangemen and Unionists alike could whole-heartedly subscribe with a clear conscience. On 5 January 1912 Wallace applied for such authorisation from two Belfast magistrates on behalf of the Grand Lodge of Belfast. Many more such applications were to be made in the following months.



JH Campbell



Drilling at St John's, Malone, Belfast



The legality of drilling

It was not until the end of 1913 that J. H. Campbell's interpretation of the law was queried. Sir John Simon, the Attorney General, told the cabinet that 'drilling' without lawful authority was illegal under the unlawful Drilling Act of 1819. Simon further advised: 'Even if those who are drilling Ulster Volunteers have secured documentary "authority" from two Justices of the Peace, I do not think this would amount to 'lawful authority' in a case where the whole proceeding is a seditious conspiracy. Indeed I think the Justices of the Peace who gave such authority would be accessories to the crime.'

However, Sir Edward Carson did not appear to have been unduly worried as a speech at Ashgrove, on the northern outskirts of Newry, in September 1913 indicates:

Drilling is illegal. Only recently I was reading the Act of Parliament forbidding it. The volunteers are illegal, and the Government knows they are illegal, and the Government dare not interfere with them.

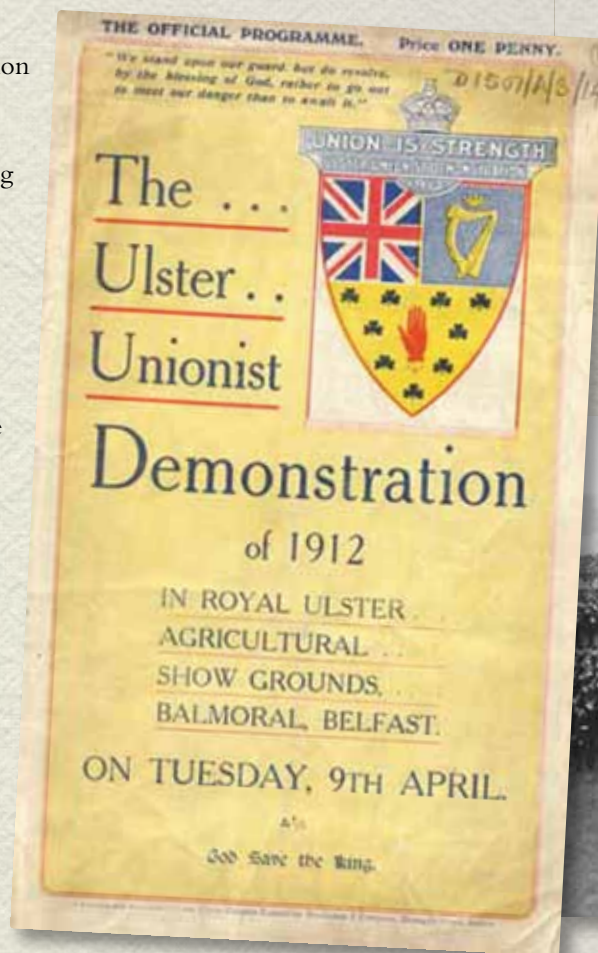
As far as Carson was concerned illegalities were not crimes when they were taken to assert 'what is the elementary right of every citizen, the protection of his freedom'.

Whether it was legal or illegal, in the words of the historian Charles Townshend, 'the volunteering craze spread across Ulster as it has spread in 1859 in England; it became a dominant social activity'. This assertion is evidenced by the fact that the pages of the *Belfast News Letter*, the *Northern Whig* and the *Belfast Evening Telegraph* (and the provincial weekly press too) soon were filled with accounts of drills, route marches, church parades, field manoeuvres and skirmishing, test mobilisations and training camps. Of course, not all the volunteers' activities were so publicised, gunrunning being an obvious case in point.



The spread of drilling gathers momentum

In February 1912, a mere month after Colonel Wallace had applied for authorisation from two Belfast magistrates, Augustine Birrell, the Chief Secretary for Ireland, circulated a report to the Cabinet indicating that drilling was taking place in seven of the nine counties of Ulster, the exceptions being Donegal and Monaghan. About 12,000 men were involved but in most cases they were unarmed. It seems likely that the Government underestimated both the number of men drilling and indeed the geographical extent of drilling.



The Balmoral demonstration, 9 April 1912

There was a decidedly military character to the Balmoral demonstration of Easter Tuesday (9 April) 1912. Large contingents of unionists and Orangemen marched in formation from the centre of Belfast to Balmoral. It took three hours for the procession, marching four abreast, to pass a saluting base. Bonar Law (the leader of the Conservative Party), Carson, Lord Londonderry and Walter Long (former leader of the Irish Unionist Parliamentary Party) took the salute. The organising sub-committee's minutes for 4 March 1912 referred to those who would be marching past the leaders on the platform as 'the troops'.





The pre-Covenant campaign, September 1912

Military preparations were also in evidence during the pre-Covenant campaign in September 1912. On 18 September at Enniskillen Carson was escorted to Portora hill by a unit of mounted Yeomanry, formed by William Copeland Trimble, the editor of *The Impartial Reporter* and future historian of Enniskillen. On 20 September in Londonderry, the third demonstration of the pre-Covenant campaign, Carson on his arrival at the railway station, was provided with a guard of honour from the local Unionist Clubs and with a bodyguard of 100 men. In Coleraine on 21 September Carson was similarly greeted by a guard of honour drawn from the Unionist Clubs. At Portadown on 25 September Carson was provided with a mounted escort of 50 men under the command of Mr Holt Waring JP of Waringstown. Unlike previous venues, Carson was greeted by men who presented arms with their dummy rifles. There were also a group of nurses and an ambulance, evidence of the willingness of women to play a proactive role in the unfolding political crisis.

There were also two mock cannon or artillery pieces, made of wood and painted a steel grey. F. E. Smith, the rising star of the Conservative Party and one of Ulster's most prominent English advocates, exclaimed: 'The battle is already won'. Smith's wife wrote to her sisters: 'We all thought the dummy cannons were absurd. It was only at Portadown we had them. We none of us knew anything about them. We all said: "How the Radicals will laugh!"' No doubt the Liberals and Nationalists did laugh, but the dummy rifles and cannons may be seen in retrospect as a sign of their earnest intent to acquire real weapons.



Enniskillen Horse



The formal formation of the UVF, January 1913

As the volunteers had sprung into existence largely as the result of local Orange initiative, there was no overall command structure or province-wide organisation. To rectify this situation, towards the end of 1912 the Standing Committee of the Ulster Unionist Council decided that the Ulster Volunteers should be united into a single body known as the Ulster Volunteer Force. This decision was announced at annual meeting of the Ulster Unionist Council in January 1913. The fact that this step was taken by the Ulster Unionist Council rather than the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland may be explained by the fact that whereas all Orangemen were Unionists, not all Unionists were Orangemen. Recruitment was to be limited to 100,000 men and restricted to those aged between 17 and 65 who had signed the Covenant. As Pauric Travers has noted in *Settlements and Divisions: Ireland, 1870-1922* (Dublin, 1988), 'Volunteer' was a word with 'echoes in Irish history'. It brought to mind the Volunteer movement of the late-eighteenth century which was called into existence to counter the threat of French invasion and this resonance chimed perfectly with unionist insistence that they were defending the Constitution rather than participating in rebellion.



Lisburn



Structure and organisation



Presentation of Colours, South Belfast Regiment

The volunteers (according to the scheme detailed in the papers of Frank Hall, Military Secretary of the UVF) were organized initially by counties into county divisions. The four Belfast parliamentary constituencies and Londonderry City were treated as counties, giving a total of fourteen counties. Each division was to consist of a variable number of regiments according to volunteer strength, and each regiment was, for the same reason, consisted of a variable number of battalions. For example, Fermanagh raised three battalions. The 1st battalion of the Fermanagh Regiment enrolled men from the north of the county: Ballinamallard, Irvinestown, Kesh, Pettigo and Belleek. The 2nd battalion recruited from the south of the county: Maguiresbridge, Lisnaskea and Newtownbutler. The 3rd battalion covered the central portion of the county: Enniskillen, Lisbellaw, Tempo, Brookeborough and Derrygonnelly. However UVF organization was not fixed or static. It evolved to take account of local circumstances and preferences.



County committees

In each county a committee was established to oversee the work of the volunteers, a practice similar to that of the Territorial Force, the precursor of the Territorial Army, established by R. B. Haldane's army reforms of 1908 in Great Britain. The composition of the County Down committee illustrates the broadly based appeal and membership of the UVF. The County Down committee on 23 December 1912 consisted of twelve individuals, six of whom were described as 'gentlemen', by which it may be understood that they were landowners. The remaining six consisted of a Presbyterian minister, a flax spinner, a manufacturer, a baker, a contractor and a medical practitioner. The chairman was Lord Dunleath, while the secretary was Charles Murland, a flax spinner. When Lord Dunleath wrote to Carson in March 1915 that the UVF was 'a democratic army' he was simply acknowledging the truth. Social distinctions were forgotten in volunteer ranks: the gentry cheerfully took orders from their tenants, and company directors from their employees. For example in County Down, the Seaford company included Major William George Forde JP DL, the major local landowner, and his sixteen-year-old son within its ranks. However the company was actually commanded by Alexander McMeekin, the family's coachman. In Newtownbutler, County Fermanagh, Viscount Crichton, the eldest son and heir of the Earl of Erne, attended drilling in the village but not in a leadership role. This may have been to avoid jeopardising his position as equerry to the King and endangering his commission in the Royal Horse Guards. Joseph Lee, the historian, writing of the formation of the Irish Citizen Army in Dublin in November 1913, in *Ireland 1912 - 1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge, 1989) has remarked that the use of the word 'citizen' was ambitious and has observed that the only truly citizen army in Ireland was the UVF.



Recruitment

In the summer of 1913, Carson, urging enrolment in the UVF, emphasized the importance of organisation and unity: 'Victory comes to those who are organised and united. Those who are unorganised cannot help and may hinder our efforts.'

During the summer of 1913 in the words of A.T.Q Stewart in *The Ulster Crisis* (London, 1967), 'from Fair Head to the Mountains of Mourne and from Belfast to the shores of Donegal, recruiting was going on at a rate which exceeded the most sanguine expectations'. The target for membership fixed by the UUC was probably more or less achieved, with Belfast raising 30,000 volunteers, Antrim and Down 11,000 each with even Cavan and Monaghan raising 2,000 each. Government figures, derived from the R.I.C's monthly intelligence reports, placed the number of volunteers in April 1913 at 41,000; at 56,651 in September 1913, 76,757 in November 1913 and 80,000 in January 1914.

2nd Battalion, South Down Regiment, Ashgrove, Newry



'Uniforms'

In the early days, volunteers had no uniforms. They paraded in ordinary clothes with the addition of belts, bandoliers and haversacks. In order to distinguish the different regiments, armlets were worn with the name of the regiment and battalion. Thus 'UVF/2/Cavan' signified the 2nd Battalion of the Cavan Regiment. The armlets were made of khaki canvas and printed in black. One thin black line denoted a squad leader, two lines a section commander and three lines a sergeant major. Officers wore armbands in red canvas. Some units, for example the Special Service Sections, do seem to have acquired uniforms. Others persisted with ordinary dress and achieved a comparatively uniform appearance in the process. Battalion orders for the 3rd Battalion of the Fermanagh Regiment UVF for Easter Monday 1914 instructed volunteers to be 'quietly and neatly dressed' and to parade 'without arms, but wearing bandoliers, haversacks, water bottles, armlets and belts, and if possible puttees or gaiters'. The battalion commander, C.F. Falls, father of the military historian, also regarded it 'very desirable' that volunteers should wear 'a grey soft felt hat, which can be obtained in Enniskillen, as this would greatly improve the appearance of the Battalion on parade'.





Headquarters staff

On the recommendation of Lord Roberts of Kandahar, a firm Unionist and the most distinguished British soldier of the day, Lieutenant-General Sir George Richardson, a retired

Indian Army officer and also a soldier of distinction, was appointed General Officer Commanding the Volunteers in August 1913. Colonel G. W. Hackett Pain, another retired Army officer, became Richardson's Chief of Staff. Colonel T. E. Hickman, the MP for Wolverhampton South and a key figure in the British League for the Support of Ulster and the Union, was heavily involved in recruiting English officers for the UVF. Captain Wilfrid Spender, the youngest staff officer in the British Army, threw up a promising military career to identify himself more closely with Ulster's cause and become the UVF's Quartermaster-General. The UVF benefited enormously from his expertise.

Major Frank Hall of Narrow Water Castle, County Down, Military Secretary of the UVF, was another key figure whose importance in the organisation should not be overlooked. Before the formation of the UVF, Hall had played a crucial role behind the scenes in the revival of the Unionist Clubs and in the success of Ulster Day.



Sir George Richardson



An impressive array of specialist units

Probably through the influence of Wilfrid Spender, the UVF possessed an impressive array of specialist units which would have been the envy of many a contemporary professional army: Special Service Sections, the Medical Corps, the Motor Car Corps and the Nursing Corps. Another important unit, The Signalling and Dispatch Riders Corps, was also established. Among their ranks was Godfrey Boyton of Convoy, County Donegal. The son of the Dean of Derry, Boyton was a successful competitor in the Isle of Man Tourist Trophy races.

The UVF also possessed at least two mounted units: the Ballymena and Enniskillen Horse. The Hon. Arthur O'Neill, a captain in the 2nd Life Guards and the MP for Mid Antrim, was responsible for raising the former. In November 1914 O'Neill became the first member of the House of Commons to die in the Great War.

Cavalry (as mounted infantry and used for reconnaissance) still had very considerable military value at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the Great War cavalry proved to be of much greater value on the Western Front than is generally recognised. Cavalry was deployed to stunning effect by General Sir Edmund Allenby (whose military career began as a subaltern in the 6th Inniskilling Dragoons) in Palestine against the Turks, especially in the Battle of Beersheba in October/November 1917.

Women also responded to the cause. In a post-war memorandum, Spender who appreciated the role of women at the time, acknowledged the contribution made by women to the unionist campaign against Home Rule. Spender subsequently recorded that 'many women enrolled as nurses but also performed most efficiently much of the clerical work and those supplementary services which rather late in the Great War were allotted to women's organisations'. The Ulster Women's Unionist Council helped administer the activities of many of these women, drafting schemes to train women, organising instruction classes in



first aid and securing medical equipment and supplies for UVF medical units which were established throughout Ulster.

Between October 1913 and May 1914 St John's Ambulance Association alone organised 141 first aid classes and a further 64 nursing classes, all but six of which were related to UVF activity. Just under 6,800 women attended these classes. According to the *Northern Whig* in July 1914, the UVF had 220 hospitals, 138 doctors and 410 nurses at its disposal. The organization could also call on the assistance of 3,520 nurses enrolled in the Voluntary Aid Detachment, a voluntary organisation providing field nursing services established in 1877.

Other women played their part as signallers, motor cycle dispatch riders and ambulance drivers. At UVF headquarters a small group was engaged in intelligence work which included deciphering intercepted police messages. On 20 March 1914 Lilian Spender, Wilfrid Spender's wife, recorded a visit to Craigavon in her diary: 'The drawing room is full of typewriters and women clerks and every other room teems with men in uniform'. James Craig's drawing room had become the Staff Room with 'an enormous map of Ulster showing every unit of the UVF'.



'A stern and disciplined atmosphere'

Brigadier-General Count Gleichen (Commander of the 15th Infantry Brigade stationed in Belfast), observing events noted that there reigned in Ulster 'a stern and disciplined atmosphere and a serious spirit of unity and organisation'. Discipline was regarded as being of paramount importance by Unionist leaders, because, as Lord Londonderry observed in 1913: 'It is easy to baton an undisciplined mob into surrender, but it is a harder task to coerce a disciplined and organised community'. The smartness and discipline of Captain F.P. Crozier's 'Shankill Road boys' was widely admired, especially since they were neither renowned for docility nor awe of strangers. As A.T.Q. Stewart, acknowledged, the only sanction Crozier possessed over them was the threat of dismissal: 'Rather than face the disgrace of having his rifle and uniform taken from him, and having women and children call after him in the street, a special volunteer would make any sacrifice, even to giving up drink'. Strict discipline was equally maintained in the countryside as an incident in October 1913 near Bessbrook involving the 2nd Battalion of the South Down Regiment of the UVF clearly illustrated. The battalion, accompanied by a local band, went on a route march from Newry to Bessbrook. A policeman asked the volunteers' adjutant, Robert Nesbitt, then in command, not to march his men to the 'pump', an area recognised by the Unionists and Nationalists alike as neutral. Nesbitt complied with the request but the leader of the band refused to halt the band. Nesbitt turned his battalion 'about right-wheel' and marched back. He was proud to report to his commanding officer Captain Roger Hall, brother of the UVF's Military Secretary, that despite the incitement of one of the instructors to fall out and follow the band, 'When I called the regiment to stand steady and obey my orders not a single volunteer fell out showing splendid discipline of which any line regiment might feel proud'. Perhaps the greatest tribute to the discipline of the UVF comes from an unexpected source: Augustine Birrell, the Chief Secretary for Ireland. In June 1914 Birrell believed that widespread civil unrest could not be avoided if the discipline of the UVF broke down. However, the volunteers' discipline prevailed and Birrell's fears were not realized.



The UVF's Achilles' heel



Dungannon

While Nationalist and Liberals tended to mock and deride the UVF, others were impressed. The following account by a special correspondent of a large scale inspection of volunteers in County Antrim appeared in the *Yorkshire Post* of 22 September 1913:

As far as I could detect in very careful observation, there were not half a dozen of them unqualified by physique or age to play a manly part. They reminded me more than anything else - except that but a few of them were beyond the best fighting age - of the finest class of our National Reservists. There was certainly nothing of the mock soldier about them. Led by keen, smart-looking officers, they marched past in quarter column with fine, swinging steps, as if they had been in training for years ... officers who have had the teaching of them tell me that the rapidity with which they have become efficient is greater than has ever come within their experience in training recruits for either the Territorials or



the Regular Service. That is a tribute to the resolute and determined spirit which animates them. They are drawn from every section of the community. There were in the ranks landowners, businessmen, mill hands, farmers and their sons, country peasants, gardeners, fishermen, plasterers, and shopkeepers, and in one contingent even such indispensable members of the body politic as golf greenkeepers had taken the day off to attend the parade.

Despite the favourable impression they created, the County Antrim volunteers realized better than most that having insufficient weapons and ammunition seriously impaired the UVF's credibility and military effectiveness. For a long time the County Antrim volunteers had to make do with only 200 rifles for 10,700 men. Other counties such as Cavan and Donegal did not complain to the leadership but organised their own gunrunning. The late Revd Brett Ingram in his book *Covenant and Challenge* (Lurgan, 1989) offers a fascinating account of the gun-running activities of Lord Leitrim, commander of the Donegal Regiment, and his chauffeur, Stephen Bullock. In County Cavan Lord Farnham was the guiding spirit in that county's efforts to acquire arms.



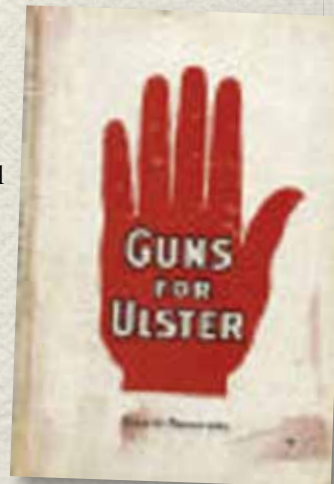


The Larne gunrunning



In December 1913 the County Antrim men pressured the leadership for large-scale gunrunning. A bold stroke was required and by 1914 was essential because according to the terms of the Parliament Act of 1911 Home Rule would reach the statute book by the summer of that year. Nothing then would stand between Ulster and Dublin rule but armed resistance. Therefore in January 1914 Carson and the Unionist leadership sanctioned Major Frederick Crawford's daring mission to Germany to purchase guns and ammunition and land them in Ulster. On the night 24/25 April 35,000 rifles and 3,000,000 rounds of ammunition were successfully unloaded at Larne, Bangor and Donaghadee and swiftly and efficiently distributed to the UVF across the province.

Predictably, Spender immersed himself in all this. From the outset, he had been very enthusiastic about 'the potentiality of the motor car'. About 500 cars from the Motor Car Corps were involved in the operation that night, approximately half the total number of automobiles in Ulster at the time. It was the first time in history that motor cars had been used for a military purpose and it was a superb piece of staff work. Lilian Spender recorded in her diary: 'Need I say that for the organisation itself, Wolf [her pet name for her husband] was mainly responsible, the scheme having been originally drawn



up by him'. Spender was present at Larne on the night of 24/25 April to observe the unloading of the *Clyde Valley* which went 'like clockwork'. He 'had bicycled part of the way to Larne, and ridden the whole way back, getting a tow for some miles by a motor cycle'.

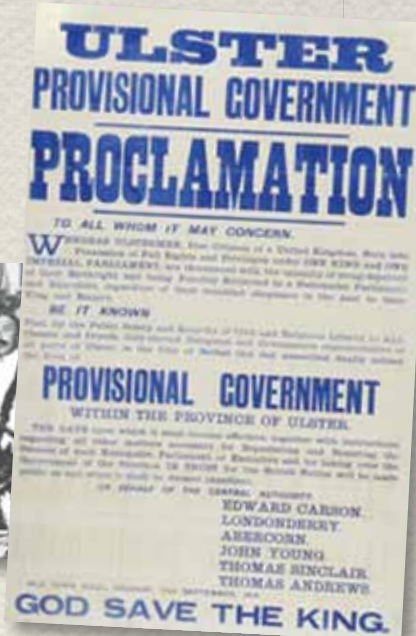
Through superb staff work and meticulous planning Ulster now not only had the will but the means to oppose the imposition of Dublin rule. A.T.Q. Stewart's *The Ulster Crisis* (London, 1967) and David Hume's *For Ulster and her Freedom* (Lurgan, 1989) provide excellent accounts of this important event.





Ulster Provisional Government

Ironically, at almost the same time as Ulster acquired the capacity to resist Dublin rule, the so-called Curragh 'Mutiny' took place. Brigadier-General Hubert Gough and 57 out of the 70 officers of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade indicated their preference for dismissal from the army rather than being ordered north to act against Ulster. Thus the Government suddenly found itself in the position of being unable to impose Dublin rule on Ulster. Strictly speaking, the incident at the Curragh did not constitute a mutiny because no orders were given and therefore no orders were disobeyed, but as a result the Government was deprived of the option of using the army to coerce Ulster, a course of action which Winston Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty, and Colonel J. E. B. Seely, the Secretary of State for War, were both seriously contemplating. That being the case, the only alternative was compromise. It was to this end that the Buckingham Palace Conference of 21-24 July 1914 was convened but the necessary compromise proved elusive. Already Ulster Unionists had set in motion steps to establish the provisional government that had been planned away back in September 1911. Although Paul Bew contends in *Ireland: The Politics of Enmity, 1789-2006* (Oxford, 2007) that 'the danger of civil war was always more apparent than real', before the outbreak of the Great War in Europe in August 1914, many feared that Ulster, Ireland and the United Kingdom as a whole were on the brink of civil war.



As we now know, Ulster in 1914 did not find herself in the position where she had to fight and be right. Instead the Great War intervened. However there can be little doubt that the UVF would have fought to oppose Dublin rule. For example, after a ten-day visit to Ulster Colonel Repington, the military correspondent of *The Times* published his assessment in two articles in March 1914. His conclusions were that, if not left alone by the Government, the UVF would fight, that it would resist desperately, and that it was capable of mobilizing a large force rapidly.

Equally, the indications are that the Unionist leadership did not expect to have to fight. The remarks of Major Gerald Madden to 250 members of the Clones and district UVF after a church parade to Drummully Parish Church in May 1914 can be seen to lend weight to this view. The major was reported as having addressed the volunteers in the following fashion:

They should keep on steadily making themselves ready, and if it were necessary that they should be called upon to fight they should take their places like men. He hoped it would not be necessary, but if it should become so they could depend on having their leaders with them.

The Unionist leadership saw the UVF as a vital factor in the campaign to convince the Government and British public of their determination not to have Home Rule. A speech by Michael Elliott Knight, Clones solicitor, member of the Standing Committee of the Ulster Unionist Council, County Grand Master of Monaghan and adjutant of the Monaghan Regiment, speaking at Wattsbridge in February 1914, made precisely this point when he observed that ‘the formation of the UVF had brought home in a very striking way the determination of Ulster’.



The exclusion debate

By 1914 the Unionist case for some form of Ulster exclusion from the operation of Home Rule had been firmly established. Two areas of contention remained. First, whether exclusion would be temporary or permanent and, secondly, the extent of the area to be excluded. As to the former issue, Nationalists obviously viewed temporary exclusion with greater favour than permanent exclusion. Unionists preferred and expected exclusion to be permanent. On the latter question, Nationalists were reluctantly prepared to contemplate four-county exclusion. The formal Unionist position was to insist on exclusion for all nine counties of Ulster, but in practice the Unionist leadership was probably prepared to settle for six-county exclusion. This of course was to prove to be the source of great pain and anguish to the Unionists of Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan in June 1916 (when the Ulster Unionist Council reluctantly accepted Lloyd George's proposals, in the aftermath of the Easter rebellion, for the immediate implementation of Home Rule in return for six-county exclusion) and again in March 1920 (when the Ulster Unionist Council 'accepted' the Government of Ireland Bill on the basis of six-county rather nine-county exclusion). In May 1920 the Ulster Unionist Council delegates from Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan were unsuccessful in overturning the decision reached by the Council in March.



Winston Churchill's retrospective justification for the formation of the UVF

To return to 1914, that Ulster Unionists had produced a decisive shift in the both the Government's and the British public's perception of what was fair and equitable was in no small measure due to the UVF. Winston Churchill, a Liberal Cabinet Minister at this time, acknowledged in his book *Great Contemporaries* (London, 1937) that 'if Ulster had confined herself simply to constitutional agitation, it is extremely improbable that she would have escaped forcible inclusion in a Dublin Parliament'. That six of Ulster's nine counties remain part of the United Kingdom today is largely the result of the willingness and determination of ordinary Unionists and Orangemen to stand shoulder to shoulder with each other in the ranks of the Ulster Volunteer Force a century ago.





The Battle of the Somme

Ulster's position within the United Kingdom was further secured by the manner in which the Ulster Volunteers demonstrated the reality of their loyalty to the Crown from the very first days of the Great War: by the speed with which they rallied to the flag and the gallantry with which they fought and died at the Somme. That being the case, it seems appropriate to conclude with an extract from Captain Wilfrid Spender's famous eyewitness account of the Battle of the Somme, which may also serve as a tribute to their sacrifice:

The Ulster Division has lost more than half the men who attacked and, in doing so, has sacrificed itself for the Empire which has treated them none too well. The much derided Ulster Volunteer Force has won a name which equals any in history. Their devotion, which no doubt has helped the advance elsewhere, deserves the gratitude of the British Empire. It is due to the memory of these brave fellows that their beloved province shall be fairly treated.





APPENDIX: KEY FIGURES

James Henry Campbell MP

In years before the outbreak of the Great War, the two ablest members of the Irish Unionist Parliamentary Party were the two barristers who represented Trinity College, Dublin: Edward Carson and J. H. Campbell.

Between 1901 and 1905 Campbell was Solicitor General for Ireland and in 1905 he was briefly Attorney General for Ireland, a post to which was appointed again in April 1916. In June 1918 he became the penultimate Lord Chancellor of Ireland.

Maurice Healy, the Irish lawyer and author, in his memoirs observed that Campbell was considered the finest Irish barrister of his time, with the possible exception of Carson. Although Campbell had a more brilliant academic career than Carson, Carson was the more able lawyer.

Campbell's significance in the story of the UVF is the result of his discovery (in 1911) of the legal anomaly that permitted two JPs to authorize drilling.

Unionists were less impressed by a speech Campbell made in Manchester on 4 December 1913 in which he revealed that a ban on the importation of arms would be proclaimed 'within a day or two'. Senior figures in the UVF were furious that Campbell revealed this valuable information in a speech and had failed to give them advance notice which would have allowed them to bring in extra quantities of arms before the ban came into effect.

Campbell was a member of the Provisional Government of Ulster. In 1921 he was raised to the peerage as Lord Glenavy.



Narrow Water Castle



Major Frank Hall (1876-1964)

Educated at Harrow, Hall joined the Royal Artillery in 1895. Retiring in 1911 with the brevet rank of Lieutenant Colonel, he became involved in reviving the Unionist Clubs movement 'to bring in the staunch Unionists who are not Orangemen'. On the formation of the UVF, he became Military Secretary of the organisation.

Early in 1913 Hall and Fred Crawford imported Vickers maxim machine guns from London in boxes labelled 'Wireless Apparatus'. Frank and his brother Roger test fired one of the weapons at Narrow Water Castle, the family home. The bullets, fired from the tennis court, ricocheted off a bank and rained down on estate workers a thousand yards away. Fortunately there were no casualties.

Hall was one of only twelve people who knew in advance about the large-scale gunrunning of April 1914 and was one of those who successfully argued in favour of landing the guns in Larne rather than Belfast, an argument which brought him into conflict with James Craig.

In 1915 Hall declined to become of Assistant Paymaster of the Ulster Division at Newtownards and went to England to join up, only to be offered a job in Military Intelligence. Hall became MI5's fifth most senior official, forming a section with responsibility for the dominions, colonies and Ireland. Hall's code name was 'Q', the name later utilised by Ian Fleming in his Bond novels. Hall, as MI5's Belfast chief, scrutinized the activities of Sir Roger Casement and other Irish 'disloyalists'. Hall was one of the three men who interrogated Casement in London after his arrest in County Kerry



Brigadier- General Ambrose Ricardo (1866-1923)

Of Sephardic Jewish ancestry, Ambrose St Quintin Ricardo was a great grandson of David Ricardo, the famous economist. He grew up at Gatcombe Park near Minchinhampton, Gloucestershire, now the home of the Princess Royal. He served in the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and saw service on the North West frontier in India and in the Boer War. During his military service he had been awarded the DSO and three bars for gallantry. In 1893 he married Elizabeth Alice, the second daughter of Emerson T. Herdman. Ricardo retired from the Army (as a captain) in 1904 in order to become a Director of Herdmans Ltd, Sion Mills.

F.P. Crozier once described Ricardo as 'efficient if verbose'. He certainly possessed impressive organisational skills which were deployed to the advantage of a wide range of organisations. He was a co-founder of the annual Londonderry *Feis*, was largely responsible for the building of the Byzantine-style Church of the Good Shepherd in Sion Mills and helped form, train and arm the UVF in County Tyrone.

Anticipating the formation of the 36th (Ulster) Division in the late summer of 1914, he raised two companies of the UVF which became the nucleus of the 9th Battalion of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and was given the acting rank of Lieutenant Colonel. He ended the war with the rank of Brigadier General.

After the war he immersed himself in the work of the Scout movement (becoming Ulster's Chief Scout) and the welfare of ex-service men and women. In March 1920 at the crucial Ulster Unionist Council meeting which decided in favour of a six-county Ulster, Ricardo supported the delegates of Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan who obviously preferred a nine-county settlement.



Lieutenant-General Sir George Richardson (1847-1931)

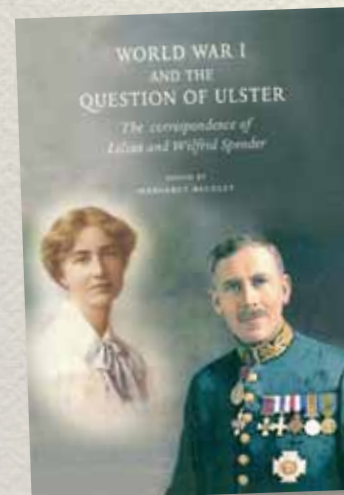
The son of Major General Joseph Fletcher Richardson, Sir George Richardson had a distinguished military career, largely in the Indian Army. He joined the 38th (1st Staffordshire) Regiment of Foot in 1866 and transferred to the Indian Army in 1871. He saw action in a wide variety of largely forgotten colonial campaigns, commanding the Zhob Valley Field Force and the Tirsh expedition. He was a veteran of both the Second Afghan War (1881) and the Boxer Rebellion in which he led the final assault on Peking. Before retiring from the Army in 1909, he had commanded the Poona Division of the Indian Army. In 1913 he agreed to command the Ulster Volunteer Force.



Captain Wilfrid Spender (1876-1960)

Wilfrid Bliss Spender was born into a West Country family with a distinguished record in both journalism and politics. He was the son of Edward Spender, co-founder of the *Western Morning News* in Plymouth.

Spender was educated at Winchester College and chose to make a career in the Army rather than follow family tradition. In 1897 he obtained a commission in the Devon Artillery before transferring to the Royal Artillery. He saw service in various parts of the Empire (including Bermuda, Canada and Malta), of which the greater part was spent with a mountain battery on the North West frontier of India. In 1905 he passed out first





in military subjects at the prestigious Camberley Staff College in Surrey. Proving himself to be a distinguished military scholar, by 1909 he had become a member of the home defence section of the Committee of Imperial Defence. It was while drawing up plans for the defence of the United Kingdom that he became convinced of the strategic importance of Ireland and concluded that Home Rule posed a serious threat to the security of the Empire. This striking insight was to shape his entire career.

Acting on this belief, he approached the Conservative Party and undertook engagements to highlight the strategic implications of Home Rule. He organised (and partially financed) a national petition against Home Rule. In 1912 he accepted an invitation to stand for Parliament in Hull West, but withdrew when the rules were changed to place officers on half pay if they entered the House of Commons. He also signed the British Covenant, promoted by Lord Milner and Leo Amery, in England.

Spender's political activity was viewed with distaste by the War Office and resulted in 'months of acrimony and agitation'. He was sent back to regimental duty in India, having been informed that he could never hold a staff appointment again. Spender's superiors wished him to resign. However he believed that resignation implied a slur on his integrity and he wished to retire.

Sir John French, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, wished to have him cashiered, but Spender skillfully and tenaciously fought his corner, taking his case to the King. Ultimately, Spender's view prevailed and on 7 August 1913 the War Office allowed him to retire with a pension. A confidential report, prepared that year commented that Captain Spender had been led away by a 'too active conscience' and had been very injudicious, risking his prospects in life. Spender was almost certainly correct in surmising that he fatally damaged his prospects for promotion during the Great War: on three occasions he was recommended for promotion to Brigadier General but he ended the war as a Lieutenant Colonel.



In the midst of his problems with the War Office Spender sought legal advice from Carson, who invited him to come to Belfast to assist the Unionist cause. Lieutenant-General Sir George Richardson, possibly at Carson's prompting, formally invited Spender to join his staff. In September 1913, a newly-married Spender and his wife arrived in Belfast where he joined the Headquarters Staff of the UVF as Quartermaster-General. As we have already noted, the UVF benefited enormously from his professionalism and expertise, not least in the creation of an array of specialist units and the organisation and planning surrounding the Larne gunrunning.

With the approach of the Great War, in July 1914 Spender was instructed to hold himself ready to take up an appointment with the eastern command in Chatham. He returned to England and was offered a position in his old department in the War Office.

Spender joined the 36th (Ulster) Division as General Staff Officer (GSO2) shortly before the Division's embarkation for France in October 1915. He witnessed both the heroism and the slaughter at the Somme on 1 July 1916, commencing his famous account, which was widely carried by the British press, with the following words: 'I am not an Ulsterman but, yesterday, the 1 July, as I followed their amazing attack I felt that I would rather be an Ulsterman than anything else in the world'.

Spender's account appeared in *The Times* and *Morning Post* on 7 July. The account appeared anonymously in both papers, being attributed to 'an eye-witness' in *The Times* and 'a correspondent' in the *Morning Post*. As serving soldiers were not supposed to write to the press, for many years the identity of the author was unknown. The Ulster Division's exploits on the Somme became legendary and they did so disproportionately as a result of Spender's impassioned account. Their sacrifice, properly publicized by Spender, made the coercion of Ulster by Asquith or Lloyd George pretty nigh impossible.



After the Great War Spender briefly joined the Ministry of Pensions, in London, to assist demobilised officers and their families, a role for which he was perfectly suited. In July 1920 Spender was approached by Sir Edward Carson and urged to return to Belfast to help reorganize the UVF to counter the descent into anarchy and chaos which was engulfing the rest of the island. The Ulster Special Constabulary, the rock on which the IRA's insurgency floundered, evolved out of Spender's reconstituted UVF. Thereby, Spender contributed significantly to the survival of the early Northern Ireland state.

In 1921 he was reluctantly prevailed upon by James Craig to become Cabinet Secretary to the new Northern Ireland Government and in 1925 he became permanent secretary at the Ministry of Finance, thereby being responsible more than any other person for laying the foundations of the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

Wilfrid Spender played a crucial role in the history of Ulster on a number of occasions but nothing more comprehensively vindicated Spender's entire career and his recognition of the strategic importance of Ulster than Winston Churchill's striking message to J. M. Andrews, Northern Ireland's second Prime Minister, in April 1943:

When you became Prime Minister in December 1940 it was a dark and dangerous hour. We were alone, and had to face single-handed the full fury of the German attack, raining down death and destruction on our cities and, still more deadly, seeking to strangle our life by cutting off the entry to our ports of ships which brought us our food and the weapons we so sorely needed. That channel remained open because loyal Ulster gave us the full use of the Northern Irish ports and waters, and thus ensured the free working of the Clyde and the Mersey. But for the loyalty of Northern Ireland and its devotion to what has now become the cause of thirty governments or nations we should have been confronted by slavery and death, and the light which now shines so strongly throughout the world would have been quenched.



Colonel R. H. Wallace (1860-1929)

Robert Hugh Wallace, of Myra Castle, near Downpatrick, was the head of Messrs Hugh Wallace & Co., solicitors and notaries public, Belfast and Downpatrick. His father had married into the aristocracy, Robert's mother being the daughter of the Earl of Annesley.

Wallace joined the Royal South Down Militia in 1879, obtained the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel in 1898, saw active service in South Africa in 1901-2 and commanded the 5th Royal Irish Rifles. He was mentioned in dispatches and gained the Queen's Medal with five clasps.

Wallace composed 'The South Downs' (perhaps better known as 'The South Down Militia') with its rousing chorus:

*You may talk about your King's Guards, Scots Greys and a'
You may sing about your Kilties and your gallant Forty Two
Or any other regiment under the King's command
But the South Down Militia is the terror of the land.*

Wallace was a very influential figure in Orange circles, holding the office of County Grand Master of Belfast and Provincial Grand Secretary of the Ulster area of the Orange Institution, which became a temporary Grand Lodge on 6 December 1911

Wallace was also an enthusiastic Mason, and held the position of Master of 'The County Down Masonic Lodge 86' and was an honorary member of 'Ark Lodge X'. He was also Provincial Grand Master of Down and a member of Grand Lodge. He was a 33 degree Mason, the highest degree in Irish





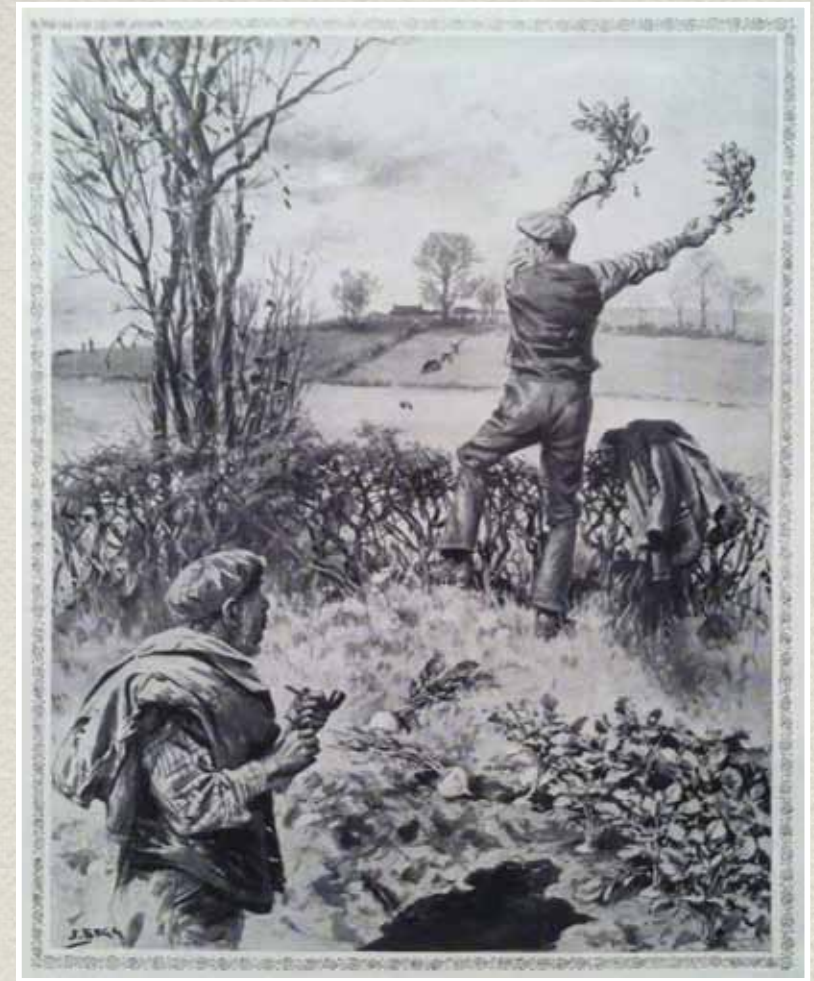
Masonry. Wallace also has significance as an historian of both Orangeism and Masonry.

He was a close friend of Captain James Craig, fellow Boer War veteran, the man who would become Northern Ireland's first Prime Minister in 1921. Although Colonel Wallace would have been an influential figure in his own right with access to the very highest echelons of the Unionist movement, his friendship with Craig underpinned and reinforced his political significance.

During the Great War Wallace commanded the 19th (Reserve) Battalion of the Royal Irish Rifles.

Acknowledgements:

Quincey Dougan, Andrew Carlisle, Ulster Unionist Party & Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland.



TURNIPS AS FLAGS: "WAR" NEWS IN ANTI-HOME-RULE ULSTER

London Illustrated News April 4th 1914

"Speaking" to a mate two or three fields away, and using turnips instead of flags: A Farm-Labourer of the Ulster Volunteer Force practicing semaphore signalling. Drawn by S Begg – Our special artist in Ireland

Describing his drawing, Mr Begg writes:

"Farm-Labourers in Ulster who are also members of the Ulster Volunteer Force have picked up training generally and signalling in particular with remarkable speed. It is not unusual to see one of the younger men communicating with a friend two or three fields away by signals. He will use as 'flags' branches of a tree, a couple of turnips, or anything else that happens to be handy. Sometimes, of course, this is done merely for fun or practice, but real use is also frequently made of it."



A selection of badges and insignia of the Ulster Volunteer Force.





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