

Creative Centenaries

Remembering the Future

Activity

05

How should I/we remember sensitive historical events?

What can we learn from the Easter Rising commemorations in 1966?

What can we learn from the Battle of the Somme commemorations in 1966?

In this section you will investigate

- How the 50th Anniversaries of the Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme were commemorated in Belfast in 1966.
- Why the commemorations were controversial.
- Why the Government was concerned about the commemorations, and whether its decisions were fair.

A Decade of
Anniversaries

Schools
Resource

A Prototype Local Study: **West Belfast 1912—1922**



Activity

05.1

Was the Northern Ireland Government right to be worried about 50th Anniversary commemorations of the Easter Rising?

In 1966, life in Northern Ireland seemed relatively peaceful. However, 1966 was the 50th anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising and Nationalists all over Ireland were planning big public events to mark the 50-year “Golden Jubilee”. In Northern Ireland, the Unionist Government was very nervous. The Minister for Home Affairs, Brian McConnell, had to decide how to respond to these events.

Activity 05.1

You are working as an advisor for the Northern Ireland Government in 1966. Read the following security files and write a brief report for Mr McConnell, explaining why the Easter Rising commemoration is so controversial.



Warn Mr McConnell about what might happen if he...

a) banned the commemorations

or

b) allowed them to go ahead.

1966 File A: Fears of a major IRA attack.

The IRA is still determined to bring down the Northern Ireland Government by violence. From 1956 - 62 they conducted a campaign of bomb and gun attacks in border areas, but it was unsuccessful.

On 8 March 1966 Nelson's Pillar, a famous Dublin landmark, was blown up. The IRA are assumed to be responsible, as the pillar was a symbol of British rule in Ireland and stood outside the GPO, one of the most famous sites of the Easter Rising.

1966 File B: fears of IRA involvement in the Easter Rising commemorations.

Many Republicans are angry with the Government of Southern Ireland and will not attend the official Easter Rising commemorations in Dublin. Instead, thousands of Republicans from all over Ireland (many of them IRA members) are expected to attend the Belfast events.

SOURCE A

Belfast Telegraph,
6 April 1966

Photographs said to be of I.R.A. men now in training are published in the 'Daily Telegraph' weekend magazine this week.

One shows armed men converging on a ruined house in an unidentified location, simulating a cross-border attack.

The accompanying article, by a Dublin journalist, says the I.R.A. may have up to 2,000 members with American sub-machine guns "barely off the de-classified list," Sterling guns, Lugers and rifles.

Throughout Northern Ireland, members of the IRA are believed to be very active among the groups who are organising the commemoration events.

Playing a leading role in large and popular public events will greatly improve the IRA's image and help it recruit new supporters. The stronger the IRA becomes, the greater the threat of violent attacks against and Protestant civilians.



CONFIDENTIAL

1966 File C: Fears about controversial flags and symbols.

Many Unionists want all Easter Rising commemorations to be banned in Northern Ireland (they believe that "disloyal" citizens should not be allowed to celebrate a rebellion against Britain).

The Rising commemorations will feature many Republican symbols such as Easter lilies and Tricolour flags. Unionists regard these symbols as offensive and provocative.

In 1964 extreme Unionists led by the Reverend Ian Paisley threatened to remove a Tricolour flag displayed inside a Sinn Fein office in Divis Street, West Belfast. Although it was the who eventually removed the flag, their action provoked two days of serious rioting by outraged Nationalists.

DIVIS STREET

Mr. Diamond said that he was afraid of a kind of situation, such as Divis Street, developing at Easter when certain intolerant people on the fringes of areas of that kind objecting to the display of emblems and provoking a situation where the liberty of the citizen would be infringed and the forces of Government brought into action. "This is not the kind of situation we want to see," said Mr. Diamond. "We do not want to see the Government being dictated to by an fanatical minorities." He said there should not be any heavy hand in matters such as this because it was known that in both major sections of the community there were people who felt strongly about emblems and their display, but once this was recognised the only way in which to view this kind of situation was one of tolerance.

SOURCE B

Belfast Telegraph,
28 March 1966

SOURCE C

Belfast Telegraph,
16 April 1966

**1966 File D:
Fears of protest events led by extreme Unionists.**

Extreme Unionists are planning a big parade and meeting in Belfast at the same time as the main Easter Rising Parade. This event will be led by the Reverend Ian Paisley, who accuses the Unionist Government of being too lenient towards Nationalists. Revd Paisley has previously caused trouble by protesting against Tricolour flags (see File C).

The two parades will pass very close to each other, so the atmosphere will be very tense and there will be a real risk of riots breaking out.

A SOLEMN SERVICE OF THANKSGIVING

FOR THE DEFEAT OF THE 1916 REBELS AND THE SALVATION OF ULSTER FROM PAPAL DOMINATION

will be held (DV)
TOMORROW (SUNDAY) AT 3.30PM IN THE ULSTER HALL

Preacher: **Rev, Ian R. K. Paisley**

The service will be preceded by a march through the City centre, leaving Carlisle Circus at 2.45pm

Those taking part will assemble from 2.2.30 at Carlisle Circus, in Denmark Street, Carlisle Street and Lonsdale Street.

THE COMMITTEE REGRETS THAT OWING TO SPACE ONLY THOSE IN THE PARADE WILL BE ADMITTED TO THE HALL.

Protestants from all over Ulster are urged to take part in this parade and Service and to register their lawful disgust at the 1916 celebrations held in Ulster and in certain Protestant churches in the Republic, and their determination not to allow the Government of Northern Ireland to surrender to the enemies of Ulster.

MEMBERS OF THE ORANGE INSTITUTION, APPRENTICE BOYS OF DERRY AND THE BLACK INSTITUTION ARE SPECIALLY INVITED BY THE COMMITTEE TO PARTICIPATE

Regalia may be worn.

ORGANISED BY ULSTER CONSTITUTION DEFENCE COMMITTEE



CONFIDENTIAL

**1966 File E:
Fears of violent
action by Loyalist
paramilitaries**

Unionists feel threatened by Nationalist preparations for marking the Easter Rising. There are rumours that the most extreme Unionists have formed a paramilitary group. They are deliberately using the name and symbols of the original Ulster Volunteer Force from 1913.

This group have not done anything illegal yet, but they may have weapons and they will probably become more active as the date of the commemoration gets closer.

SOURCE D

Belfast Telegraph,
1 March 1966

**UVF unit reformed in
Tyrone – report**

Police in the Dungannon area were today investigating reports that the Co. Tyrone unit of the Ulster Volunteer Force was being reformed. According to the reports, the decision to reconstitute the unit was made at a meeting held in secret last night. Police sources said they had no knowledge of the meeting. A man who called the 'Belfast Telegraph' anonymously stated that a declaration would be drawn up and sent to the Government this week.

'Dissatisfied'

He said the Volunteers were being reformed because of dissatisfaction with the way the Government was handling the situation created by preparations for Easter Rising celebrations. "Protestants are not going to be tramped on by these Sinn Feiners," said the caller.



Activity 05.1a

 In March 1966 Brian McConnell stated what the Northern Ireland Government would do about Easter Rising parades and ceremonies (Source F).

 Read Source F and complete the thought bubbles on the next page to show what McConnell might have been thinking when he made this statement.

Several Hon. Members referred to possible processions during Easter and while the House is in recess. The procedure under the Public Order Act is that people wishing to hold a procession which is not customary, give notice to the police, who have got the power, where they consider it necessary for the preservation of the peace, to re-route a procession. I have got the power, where I consider it necessary for the preservation of the peace, to ban any meeting. When notice is given of any meeting in the next week or two that procedure will be gone through. We will consider whether there is any danger to the peace in the proposed setting. If necessary

it will be re-routed or it will not be allowed.

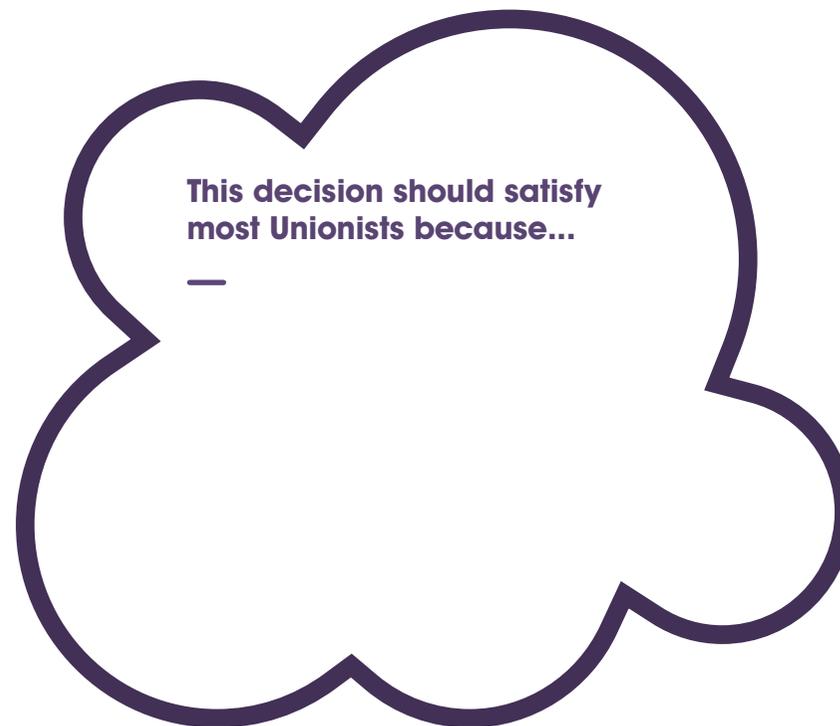
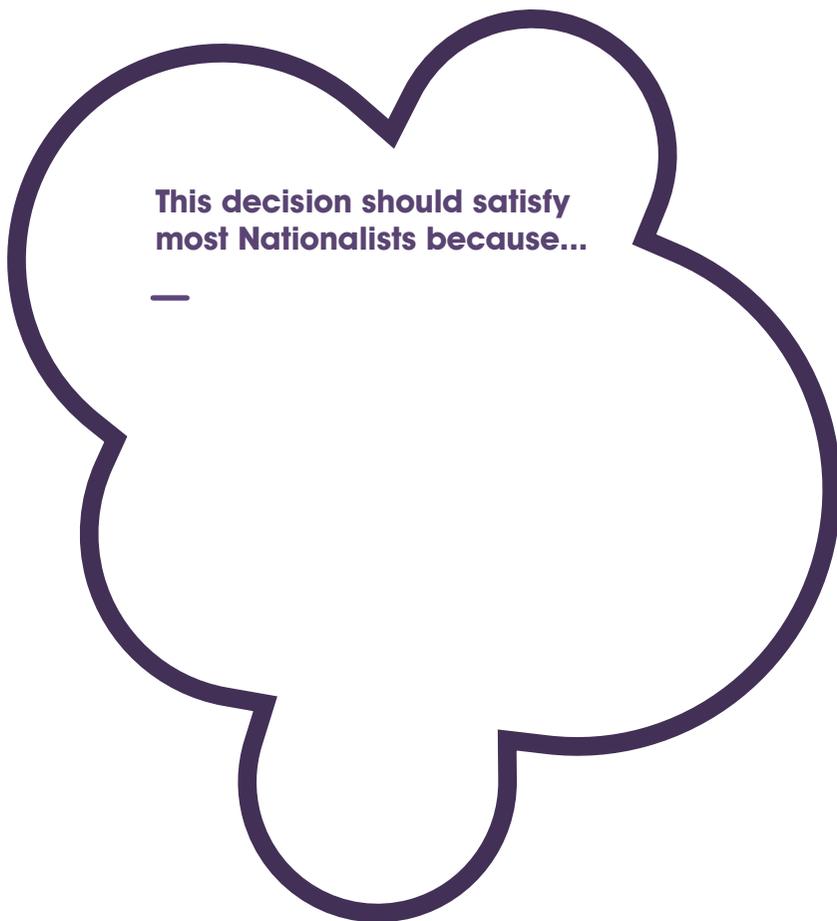
Meetings of this kind have been held at Easter for many years. It has been the policy of my predecessors that any meeting proposed in an area where it is likely to cause a breach of the peace is not allowed. I intend to continue that policy. If it appears that a meeting proposed for a particular area is likely to give offence to the people living in the area or to result in a breach of the peace it will be suggested to those organising it that it should be held in some other place. If that is not possible or not agreeable it may well be that no meeting will be allowed.

Source F

Statement by the Minister of Home Affairs, the Rt. Hon. R.W.B. McConnell, M.P., on Thursday, 24th March, 1966

Activity

05.1a



Brian McConnell
Minister of
Home Affairs



Activity 05.1d



Do you think this Government statement was a sensible response to the 1966 Easter Rising commemorations?



Explain your answer?

A major IRA attack

No attack took place in connection with the Easter Rising commemorations.

IRA involvement in the Easter Rising commemorations

The IRA did regard the anniversary as a “golden opportunity” to win more support for their cause. “From January until April the whole resources and energy of the Belfast movement were devoted to preparations for the celebrations” and the IRA was very pleased with the “vast return of national fervour which the celebrations had so obviously generated” (Liam McMillen IRA commander).

Fears of controversial flags and symbols

The commemorations did encourage widespread use of Tricolours and Easter lilies. The police generally ignored them, but many Protestants were outraged at these visible symbols of rebellion. The Government received a great deal of criticism from ordinary Unionists for not dealing with the flags more harshly.

Fears of protest events led by extreme Unionists

There were a number of ugly incidents in Belfast when a few Republicans encountered Revd. Paisley’s supporters. However, the police were satisfied that on the whole the parade events passed peacefully.

Fears of violent action by Loyalist paramilitaries

About two weeks after the Easter Rising commemorations, the new UVF began operations against Catholics in West Belfast. Their first victim was Mrs Matilda Gould, an elderly Protestant who was severely burned when the UVF tried to petrol bomb the Catholic-owned bar next door. She died of her injuries on 27th June 1966. By that time the UVF had issued an official statement declaring war on the IRA and had shot two Catholics dead in unprovoked attacks. On 28th June the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Terence O’Neill, declared the UVF an illegal organisation. Ironically, he was forced to return early from France, where he had been attending events commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme.



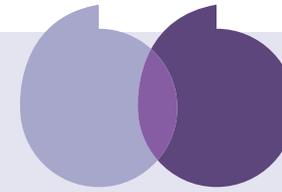
05.2

The Power of Commemorations: for good or ill?

Two of Northern Ireland's most notorious gunmen have admitted that the 1966 Easter Rising commemorations directly inspired their involvement in paramilitary violence.

Martin Meehan - the IRA's "most wanted"

In 1966 Meehan was a 21 year old dock worker from the Ardoyne.



"It made me question what the IRA was about. It was something to look up to. It was something to be proud of and my objective after 1966 was to join the Irish Republican Army. It was something to be involved in that could be honoured and I wanted to participate in it to achieve the object of what the men and women of 1916 had died for and carry on that struggle."

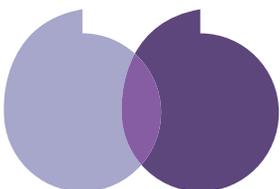
Martin Meehan, IRA member

Meehan had already been arrested twice for rioting when the "Troubles" broke out in 1969. When the IRA split in 1970, Meehan joined the more active Provisional IRA and became a well known gunman, directing sniping attacks on Loyalists and security forces. Listed as a "most wanted" target, he was the first person convicted of being a PIRA member and sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment. Released in

1975, he spent two more long spells in prison for kidnapping a police informer and a soldier. Meehan's father had been imprisoned for IRA activities in the 1940s; in 1989 Meehan and his own son occupied adjoining cells in the Maze prison. During his time in prison Meehan began, with other leading Republicans, to look for a political solution to the Northern Ireland conflict.

After his release, Meehan helped to negotiate the IRA's 1994 ceasefire. He later became a senior Sinn Fein politician and was elected to Antrim Borough Council in 2001. In 2002 he became the first Republican leader to publicly state that, in his opinion, the IRA's "war" was over. Martin Meehan died in 2007.

The Power of Commemorations: for good or ill?

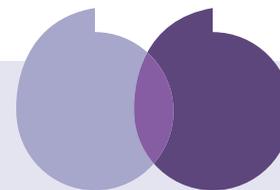


There's no doubt whatever that the Ulster Unionist Party and the police were anticipating civic disturbance at Easter 1966. The UVF was stood to and they were armed and on duty at interface areas

Gusty Spence

Gusty Spence - the UVF Commander

An ex-soldier from the Shankill Road, Spence was 32 years old in 1965.



I joined the UVF in 1965 when I didn't have enough maturity or knowledge but others could see on the horizon the fiftieth anniversary of the Rising. So here you had the UVF reconstituted in 1965 and it's getting close to the fiftieth anniversary of the Rising. A lot of things [that we feared] were confirmed. All the Catholic streets were decorated and we saw barricades at the end of streets.

Gusty Spence, UVF member

In May 1966 the UVF declared war on the IRA, but its first victims were all innocent Catholics (and one Protestant) with no IRA connections. In June Spence was arrested in connection with the UVF's third murder. Sentenced to life imprisonment, he was the UVF Commander in Long Kesh Prison until 1978.

While in prison, Spence quickly became convinced that the sectarian violence he had helped to stir up was futile. After resigning from the UVF and being released from

prison in the 1980s, he got involved in politics. In 1994 he announced a ceasefire on behalf of the main Loyalist paramilitary groups and offered "abject and true remorse" for their innocent victims. Over a decade later the UVF also chose him to announce that their weapons would be decommissioned. Gusty Spence died in 2011. Spence and Meehan got to know each other in prison, by which time their views had already begun to change.

Meehan remembered one encounter:

I was in the visiting box waiting for my wife coming in and the next thing is Gusty Spence came into the cubicle. I says, "What did they send you here for?" "Well," he says, "some of them screws [warders] are mixing [stirring up trouble]. They've allocated us the same box hoping that there would be a confrontation." Then I said, "I think we're a wee bit too wide for that."

The two men shook hands.

Activity

05.2_b

Commemorations also played an important role in Meehan and Spence's later roles in the Northern Ireland peace process.

In 2002 the pair arranged to visit the World War One battlefields in France together. Meehan's grandfather had been killed fighting in the British army. Spence's father also fought right through the war, although he had survived. In 2007, while launching an all-Ireland military history project called R-PAST, Meehan said...

People fought [in WW1] for all sorts of reasons, from political beliefs through to economic survival.

Martin Meehan
[2007]

Roy Garland
journalist
[2007]

The similarity between Gusty Spence and Martin Meehan is remarkable. Both men encapsulate the tragedy and the hopes for this society.

Gusty Spence's son-in-law, former Loyalist prisoner Winston Rea, was also part of the project. 'Winkie' Rea added...

By understanding other people's experiences we will hopefully avoid the mistakes of the past.

Winkie Rea
[2007]

Activity 05.2_a



Draw two living graphs

One for Martin Meehan and one for Gusty Spence, to show how their attitudes to violence changed over time.



Attitude to violence



Dates / Events
e.g. 1966 Rising commemorations,
the Troubles, prison



Activity 05.2_a

How did the 1966
Easter Rising
commemorations
affect Gusty Spence
and Martin Meehan?



Activity 05.2_b



Both the IRA and UVF claimed to be inspired by historical “heroes” – the 1916 rebels and the 1913 Ulster Volunteers.



In your opinion, how do the Republican/Loyalist paramilitaries of the 1960s—90s compare with the volunteering organisations of 1913—16? In your comparison, try to consider the following points:





1913
UVF



1960s—90s
Loyalist paramilitaries



1916
rebels



1960s—90s
Republican paramilitaries

Objectives

Objectives

Motives

Motives

Membership

Membership

Methods

Methods

Organisation
Structure

Organisation
Structure

Appearance

Appearance

05.2_b

How might veterans of the old UVF/IRA (in the 1912—22 period) regard the organisations which acted in their names from the 1960s?



05.2_c

In your opinion, is there any danger that controversial commemorations in 2012—22 could inspire people to violence, as happened in 1966? Be sure to explain your answer.

05.2_d

Martin Meehan and Gusty Spence are both regarded as “folk heroes” in some communities. Does either man deserve to be remembered in this way?



Whose parade?
Whose protest?
Whose police?
What actually
happened at
Easter 1966?

On 17 April 1966 two large parades took place in Belfast.

Belfast's main Easter Rising commemoration was a parade down the Falls Road, followed by a ceremony at Casement Park. 4,000 people marched with the parade and 12,000 gathered in the stadium.

5,000 Unionists marched from Carlisle Circus to the Ulster Hall to hear the Revd. Ian Paisley make a speech which criticised the Northern Ireland Government for allowing the Nationalist commemorations to take place. These protesters then marched back to Carlisle Circus.

Although the day passed off without "serious incident", it was not entirely peaceful. Read the following newspaper reports and decide who the "villains" of the day were, and who were the heroes.



Whose parade?
Whose protest?
Whose police?

What actually
happened at
Easter 1966?

Belfast Telegraph
18 April 1966

POLICE SAVE GIRLS FROM THE CROWD

EVERYTHING looked peaceful as a crowd of about 5,000 people gathered round the Hanna statue at Carlisle Circus to hear a departing speech from Mr. Paisley. He was marshaling the crowd around him over a loud speaker when three teenage girls coming up Denmark Street from the Republican demonstration were seen wearing tricolour rosettes. Then a group of girls who had followed Mr. Paisley's parade rushed at them shouting: "You won't wear those Fenian colours through here: The crowd surged towards the girls, two of who were bundled into a parked Land Rover by police and driven off to safety.

TRAPPED

The third girl was trapped with two policemen against the home of Mrs. Enid Cochrane, a widow, who lives at 90 Denmark Street, as hundreds of people surged into Denmark Street for revenge. Police battered on Mrs. Cochrane's door and the girl was taken in. The two policemen were pinned against the wall as the crowd threw pennies and coins at them. Windows in Mrs. Cochrane's home were smashed and one policeman was struck on the head by a stone. The handful of police which had been directing traffic rushed to their aid. With no stones or "ammunition" on the street the enraged demonstrators continued their barrage of coins. One man threw a milk bottle through a window. Immediately a call went out for reinforcements and within minutes two tenders full of policemen, who had been waiting in side streets along the parade route, arrived. Still more had to be summoned and it took about 200 to restore order.

NO AVAIL

Mr. Paisley tried to recall the mob and shouted over a hailer in an attempt to

restore calm, but his efforts were of no avail. His words were drowned in the strains of the "Sash" from the Union Jack waving crowd surging down Denmark Street.

He then instructed the band to play the National Anthem, but the few minutes respite quickly passed and soon the police and crowd were scuffling once again. Mr. Paisley apparently gave up his efforts, handed over the loud hailer to a supporter and explained he was off to Armagh to preach at a service.

Many of his supporters continued in their efforts to calm the crowd and at one stage formed a barrier between the police and the crowd with flag poles. Shouts of "Is this Ulster or a police State?" and "ring her out; we'll burn her and her flag" were heard outside Mrs. Cochrane's house.

CORDON OFF

With the arrival of the large force of police it was possible to cordon off the crowd into groups of about 500. For some time there was tense calm, but on one occasion the crowd threatened to break the human cordons to attack a group young men returning up Regent Street

from the Casement Park demonstration.

Police rushed off in a car and turned them back, making them go home by another route.

Later, a Ballyhenry bus carrying some republican demonstrators from Casement Park, was held up and about a dozen people tried to board it. Police got on the bus and kept them off as boys on the upper deck waved their fists and tricolour rosettes.

SEPARATE

From here nearly everyone who came from the Falls Road direction who might have been at the Republican parade were confronted, and police had to separate to break up about 20 different splinter groups carrying on a running battle along Antrim Road.

Several detentions were made in the Antrim Road incidents.

At one stage, police drew their batons, but did not use them.

When the road was cordoned off a section of the crowd ran riot up Adela Street, breaking windows as they went. Police tried to cut them off but they escaped down Adela Place and mingled with a larger group.

R.U.C. list six Belfast incidents

The following incidents in Belfast were listed by R.U.C. headquarters in a statement last night:

- 1 - A man was arrested for disorderly behaviour in Howard Street.
- 2 - Three girls were arrested for disorderly behaviour in the Antrim Road area.
- 3 - A man was arrested for disorderly behaviour near Carlisle Circus.
- 4 - There was a disturbance near Carlisle Circus in which three young girls were chased by a crowd. The girls were removed by the police and later taken home. A few windows were broken in two nearby streets.
- 5 - A crowd attempted to board a Belfast Corporation bus on the Antrim Road from which it was alleged a tricolour had been waved. The police successfully intervened.
- 6 - A small home-made bomb exploded near the entrance to Milltown Cemetery. No damage was caused.





Whose parade?
Whose protest?
Whose police?

What actually
happened at
Easter 1966?

ALL NIGHT WATCH ON RESCUER'S HOME

• • •

A police guard remained on duty last night outside the home of Mrs. Enid Cochrane, 90 Denmark Street, who sheltered the girl pursued by the mob.

After the crowd had dispersed men went to work on Mrs. Cochrane's home and boarded the shattered windows.

Mrs. Cochrane, a 76-year-old widow, lives alone. She harboured the girl for nearly two hours before she could be smuggled away.

Police removed stones, a milk bottle, coins, a cigarette lighter, and a flick knife which had been thrown through the window of the house.

"Police told me that if I had not taken her in the girl would have been killed", she said today.

BATTERING

• • •

"People were battering the girl and the police. There was no way out and I was asked to take the girl in. There was nothing else I could do.

"The girl was terrified and I made her a nice cup of tea", she said.

Yesterday evening Mrs. Cochrane "I'm a Protestant" - (see Newspaper cutting) was too frightened to venture into her front room to inspect the damage.



Activity 05.3



Whose parade?
Whose protest?
Whose police?



What actually
happened at
Easter 1966?



incident	people involved	hero	villain	neither	reason
Howard Street	Man wearing tricolour rosette				
	Unionist crowd				
	Police				
Denmark Street	Teenage girls wearing tricolour rosettes				
	Unionist crowd				
	Ian Paisley				
	Police				
	Mrs Cochrane				
Antrim Road	Unionist protesters				
	Young boys on the bus waving tricolours				
	Police				
Milltown cemetery	Whoever threw the petrol bomb				



Activity

05.4

What can we learn from the Battle of the Somme commemorations in 1966?

Unlike the Easter Rising, events to commemorate the Battle of the Somme in Northern Ireland were planned and led by the Unionist Government. The most important events were a government-funded pilgrimage of veterans back to the battlefield sites, and a religious service at the Balmoral showgrounds, Belfast.



Activity

05.4_a

Read the Government's first announcement of its commemoration plans (Source A).

Highlight the words and phrases which demonstrate the Government's effort to make the events inclusive for all veterans, from all political backgrounds.

Source A

PRESS RELEASE

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SOMME

The Government of Northern Ireland took the view that it would be the wish of the people of Northern Ireland that the 50th Anniversary of the Battle of the Somme should be suitably commemorated in July, 1966.

As a result a Planning Committee under the Chairmanship of General Sir James Steele, was set up to consider what form the Commemoration should take.

The Committee considered that, in addition to the normal commemorations in Northern Ireland it would be fitting for a Pilgrimage to be organised to Thiepval where the 36th Ulster Division Memorial is situated. This Memorial, often referred to as the Thiepval or Ulster Tower is dedicated to all Ulstermen who served in the First World War, but particularly those who fell at the Battle of the Somme, which lasted for over four months, from 1st July, 1916, to 18th November, 1916.

Anyone who is not a member of a Regimental Association or Old Comrades Association may write, giving particulars of his service during the Battle of the Somme, to General Steele, Ministry of Finance, Stormont, Belfast, 4, if he is interested in going to Thiepval. The number of vacancies remaining, however, is very limited.

The major part of the cost of the Pilgrimage to France will be borne by the Government; pilgrims will be asked to bear only a small proportion of the expenses involved.

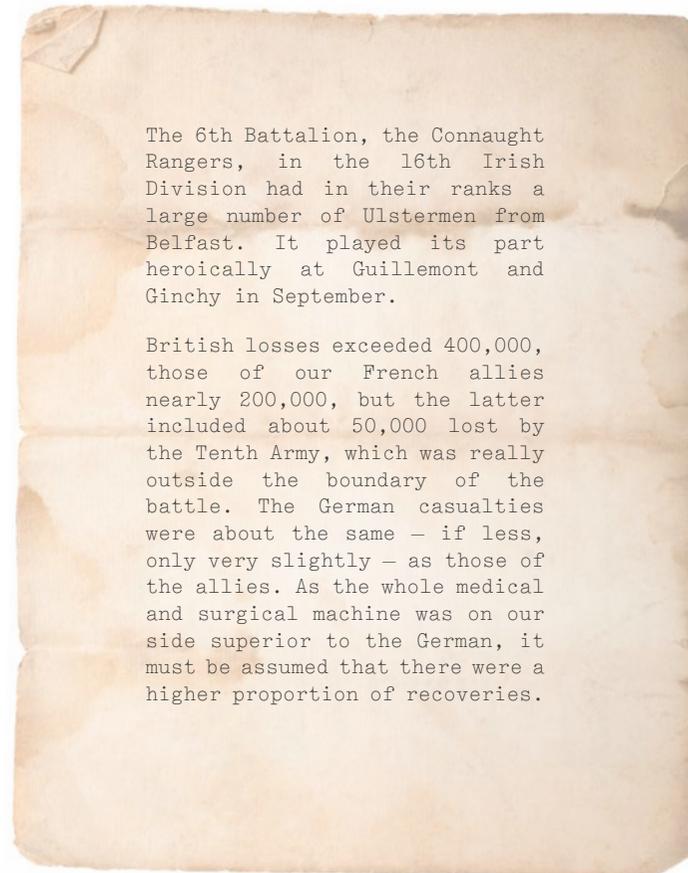
The members of the Planning Committee considered that because the Pilgrimage to Northern France must be limited in size, a special Commemorative Service in Balmoral, Belfast, on Sunday afternoon, 3rd July, which will enable many to take part. Names of those who fought at the Battle of the Somme are being sought. Anyone who took part in the Battle, which lasted from 1st July 1916, to 18th November, 1916, and who would wish to be present at Balmoral should give their names to their local Regimental Association, Old Comrades Association or the British Legion.

It is stressed that for both the Pilgrimage to Thiepval and the Drumhead Service at Balmoral the qualification is wider than service in the 36th Ulster Division at the Battle. It is desired also to have an appropriate representation of those who served in the Battle in Ulster Regiments which were part of other formations, for example 16th Irish Division.

05.4_b

Read these extracts from the official pamphlet published for the pilgrimage.

Was the Government also inclusive in the way it told the story of the Battle of the Somme?



The 6th Battalion, the Connaught Rangers, in the 16th Irish Division had in their ranks a large number of Ulstermen from Belfast. It played its part heroically at Guillemont and Ginchy in September.

British losses exceeded 400,000, those of our French allies nearly 200,000, but the latter included about 50,000 lost by the Tenth Army, which was really outside the boundary of the battle. The German casualties were about the same – if less, only very slightly – as those of the allies. As the whole medical and surgical machine was on our side superior to the German, it must be assumed that there were a higher proportion of recoveries.

Source B

From the Northern Ireland Government's official pamphlet about the Battle of the Somme

Activity 05.4c

How should I / we remember sensitive historical events?

In 1966 many Somme veterans were still alive and able to speak about their experiences. Source C is an example of a personal memory published in the Belfast Telegraph in June 1966. The author was an officer in the 36th Ulster Division.

Source C

What I want to convey is that my men were my personal friends – hence my fury at how they were almost obliterated through gross stupidity.

...And what nonsense is stuck on to the story. Certainly Major Gaffikin waved an orange handkerchief, but orange was the colour of our battalion, the 9th (West Belfast) Royal Irish Rifles. If he had said (and if anybody could have heard him) “Come on, boys, this is the First of July!” – how many would have known the Boyne was fought on the First of July? ... Nothing was further from my mind than the Boyne on the Somme.”

H. Malcolm McKee,
Officer in the 36th Ulster Division
[1966]



05.2_d

Does Source C confirm or challenge popular ideas about the Battle of the Somme and the 36th Ulster Division?



05.2_e

If any Somme veterans were still alive, would they look forward to the 100th Anniversary commemorations?

How can you ensure that your own response to historical commemorations is appropriate?

In groups, draw up a list of 6 guidelines that should be followed when organising any commemoration of the period 1912—22. These guidelines should have a reasonable chance of being acceptable to all sections of the community.