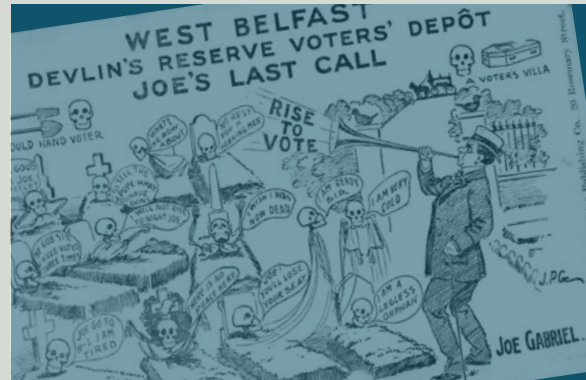
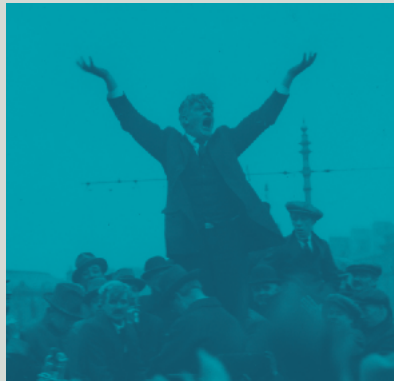
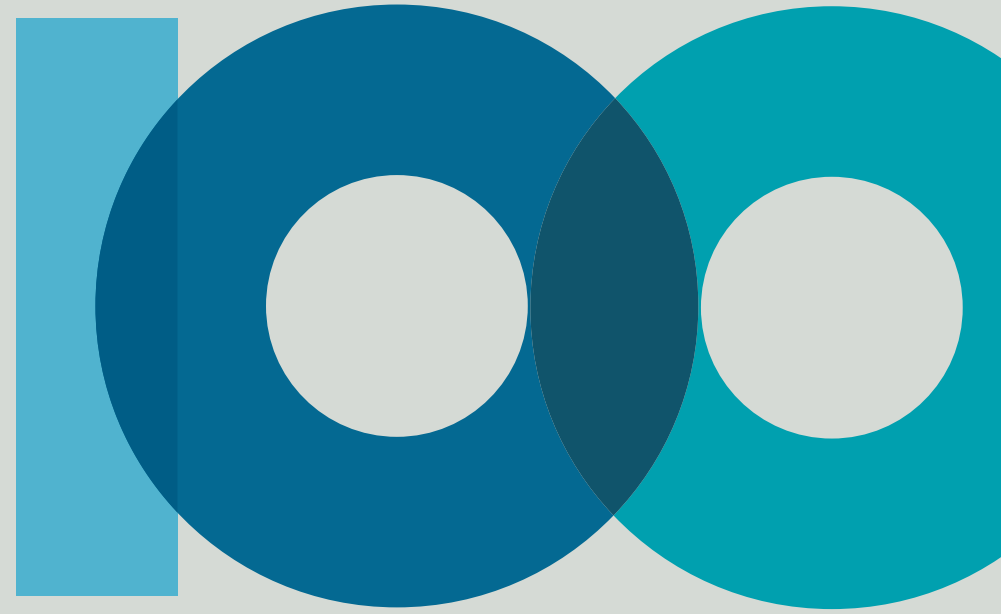


Creative Centenaries

Remembering the Future



West Belfast 1912—1914: The Ulster Crisis

A Decade of
Anniversaries

Schools
Resource

A University of Ulster project

Creative Centenaries

Remembering the Future

Activity



West Belfast 1912—1914 The Ulster Crisis

In this section you will investigate

- The Ulster Covenant and Ulster Day (28 September 1912)
- Different peoples' reactions to the 3rd Home Rule Bill
- The rival "armies" in Ireland: the UVF and Irish Volunteers

A Decade of
Anniversaries

Schools
Resource

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

Icons Key



Print this page



Click to enter text



Tick box exercise



Click the rollover for more information



2012: The 'Ulster Day' Anniversary Parade

On 29 September 2012, tens of thousands of people marched through Belfast to mark 100 years since the signing of the Ulster Covenant on "Ulster Day" 1912. The parade was also attended by groups of protesters and hundreds of police who were there to try and prevent riots breaking out.

Although the parade eventually passed peacefully, in the days and weeks beforehand there had been widespread fears that it could spark serious violence.

News reports on parade

peaceful
start to
Ulster
parade

Huge Parade
Marks Ulster
Covenant
Centenary

Centenary
begins
peacefully
in Belfast

Biggest
loyalist
gathering for
generations



A report of inappropriate behaviour at the parade

Photo gallery

A very lame commemorative effort



Interesting comment articles:

McGuinness warns over anniversaries

Dignified day gives grounds for hope

How can breaking the law be a form of celebration?

Why Ulster Covenant centenary must be open to everyone



In 1801 Ireland and Britain were joined together by the Act of Union. Ireland became part of the United Kingdom and was governed from London. The old Irish Parliament in Dublin was abolished - in its place, Ireland sent 100 MPs to the UK Parliament at Westminster.

As the 19th Century went on, more and more Irish people, especially Catholics, were unhappy with the Act of Union. They felt that Ireland could only be governed fairly if it separated from Britain and became its own country with its own Parliament once again.

There were still many people in Ireland who wanted to keep the union with Britain. These "Unionists" were mostly Protestants. Although they were in a minority in the whole of Ireland, in Ulster they had a strong majority. In 1912 life in Ulster became tense as Nationalists got excited about the Home Rule Bill and Unionists launched a great campaign to show how determined they were to reject it. At that time Belfast was the biggest city in Ireland, home to 387,000 people. One quarter of these citizens were Catholic, the rest were Protestant.

Saturday 28 September 1912 (called "Ulster Day") was to be the greatest day of the Unionist campaign. Half a million people attended special church services, marched in processions and signed "Ulster's Solemn League and Covenant" – a firm promise to oppose Home Rule by "all means which may be found necessary".

By 1912, these Irish Nationalists had been trying to get "Home Rule" for nearly 40 years. Nationalist MPs had convinced the British Prime Minister to introduce Home Rule Bills in Parliament in 1886 and 1893, but both were outvoted by Unionists.

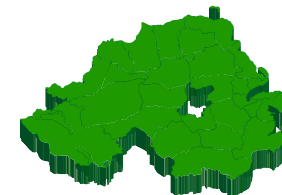
However, the 3rd Home Rule Bill introduced in April 1912 seemed to have a great chance of succeeding:

- The Bill was introduced by the governing Liberal Party because it needed the support of the Nationalist Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) to stay in power. Together both parties had enough MPs to vote the Bill through the House of Commons.
- The IPP had already helped the Liberal Party to pass a law which reduced the power of the House of Lords. Most Lords were opposed to Home Rule, but now they could not stop the Bill after it passed the House of Commons. All they could do was delay it.

Activity



The size of the 100th anniversary parade reflects what the marchers thought about the original 'Ulster Day' - an event so important in history deserved a suitably large-scale commemoration.



However, back in 1912 opinions differed as to how significant the Ulster Covenant was, and whether 'Ulster Day' was really a big deal. The Belfast Telegraph (Source A) stated the "display of loyal emblems" in Belfast was on a magnificent scale. From the pictures select examples of "loyal emblems" that might have been seen on Ulster Day.



Activity

O.I.I

Did you get these answers?



NO

This is a made up flag, invented by an English politician



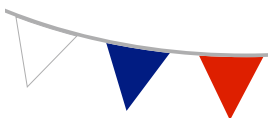
YES

As loyal subjects of King George V, the Unionists were proud to use the symbol of his royal crown.



NO

The Ulster Defence Association, a Paramilitary group, was created in 1971. It did not exist in 1912.



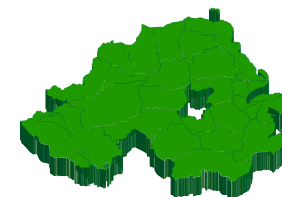
YES

Bunting was a popular way of displaying the Unionist colours of red, white and blue



YES

The Red Hand would have been seen on Ulster Day, although in 1912 it was not really a "loyal" emblem – it was simply the symbol of the province of Ulster, so both Unionists and Nationalists used it.



NO

In 1912 there was no such thing as Northern Ireland. The Unionists lived in Ireland, which was all part of the United Kingdom.



YES

The Union flag was everywhere on Ulster Day – flying from buildings, on badges and armbands, even on tablecloths where people were signing the covenant.



NO

For the 2012 commemoration, many participants wore loyal order sashes. In 1912 the loyal orders had many members, and the colour orange would have been widely seen on Ulster Day – but most people did not wear their sashes.

Activity



Sources B&C

- Read about Ulster Day from two Belfast newspapers, the News Letter and the Irish News (Sources B and C).
- From each article make a note of the key 'important' and 'unimportant' words and phrases used to describe the day. Which words portray Ulster Day as a "magnificent" and important occasion and which depict it as a "meaningless" and unimportant fuss?

Important

unimportant

The Ulster Crisis

PAGE 8

THE BELFAST NEWS-LETTER,
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 1912

B

ULSTER DAY Signing of the Covenant

A NEW PAGE IN HISTORY

Unprecedented Scenes

IMPRESSIVE RELIGIOUS SERVICES

March Past of Unionist Forces.

SPEECHES BY SIR EDWARD CARSON.

Ulster Day, so eagerly anticipated and prepared for with such care and organising skill, has come and gone, leaving behind it memories that will make the 28th September, 1912, a date never to be forgotten in the annals of the Imperial Province. The proceedings of the day were characterised by an enthusiasm and at the same time a solemnity which heightened their impressiveness, and nothing was wanting to emphasise the importance and significance of the occasion.

It was undoubtedly one of the most notable and epoch-making days in Ulster history, and its incidents were in keeping with the best traditions of a province that has long been famed for its unswerving loyalty to the Throne and Constitution of the United Kingdom and its stalwart Protestantism.

[I]t is difficult to understand how any honest observer, whatever his personal views on Irish policy may be, can doubt the strength of conviction, the earnestness of purpose, and the unalterable determination of Ulster Loyalists.

The signing of the Covenant is the logical sequel to all that has gone before in the history of the fight against Home Rule. ...In the two former campaigns victory rested with the Loyalists, and they are determined that in this third fight the result shall be the same. They have entered into the struggle that has been thrust upon them with determination that this shall be the last and greatest of the campaigns, and that it shall end in the final rout of the forces of disruption. It is true that they have had greater difficulties to face than they had in 1886 or 1892, for the power of the House of Lords, which rendered such valuable service in days gone by, has been weakened by the passing of the Parliament Act, but these difficulties have only tended to impart new enthusiasm...

THE IRISH NEWS AND
BELFAST MORNING NEWS,
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 1912

C

CARSON'S COVENANT COMEDY CONCLUDED.

A Silly Masquerade in Belfast.

GROTESQUE PROCEEDINGS

City Hall Utilised as
Political Playground.

"RELIGIOUS" RANTINGS

Unionist Clubmen "the
Supers" in Gigantic Farce.

NOISY NIGHT'S SCENES.

At last the curtain has been rung down on the Ulster Day farce, and we may hope for, at any rate, a temporary return to that civic sanity on which Belfast prides itself so tremendously. The Carson circus having toured North-East Ulster, and added considerably to the gaiety of nations, gave its final and greatest performance, entitled "Signing the Covenant," in Belfast on Saturday, and wound up its fantastic career in a paroxysm of flag-waving and noise, emblematic of the meaningless nonsense of the whole grotesque scheme from start to finish. Even such a poor cause as that of Irish Unionism might be allowed to sink into the decrepitude and decay which awaits it without being turned into a world's laughing-stock, but the fanatical followers of Sir Edward Carson are bent upon making the funeral march of Ascendancy as ridiculous as its living influence was blighting and harmful.

The stage lost an actor manager when the law and politics claimed Sir Edward Carson. His unfailing instinct for theatrical effect was never better exemplified than on Saturday in his state "progress" to the City Hall. Something was expected from him as the central figure in the "historic scene" and he rose to the occasion splendidly. He evidently aimed at mimicking some great pose of history; he had set himself a part which was a mixture of Cromwell and King William III., with just a suggestion of Charles I. on the way to execution; but he rather spoiled the effect by introducing a melodramatic swagger reminiscent of Sidney Carton's farewell.

Taking the proceedings altogether, they were tame as a demonstration of enthusiasm and highly ludicrous as an indication of the "grim and determined" spirit. The whole grotesque production has been a political failure, though a comic success, and now that it is past and gone,



Did you get these phrases?

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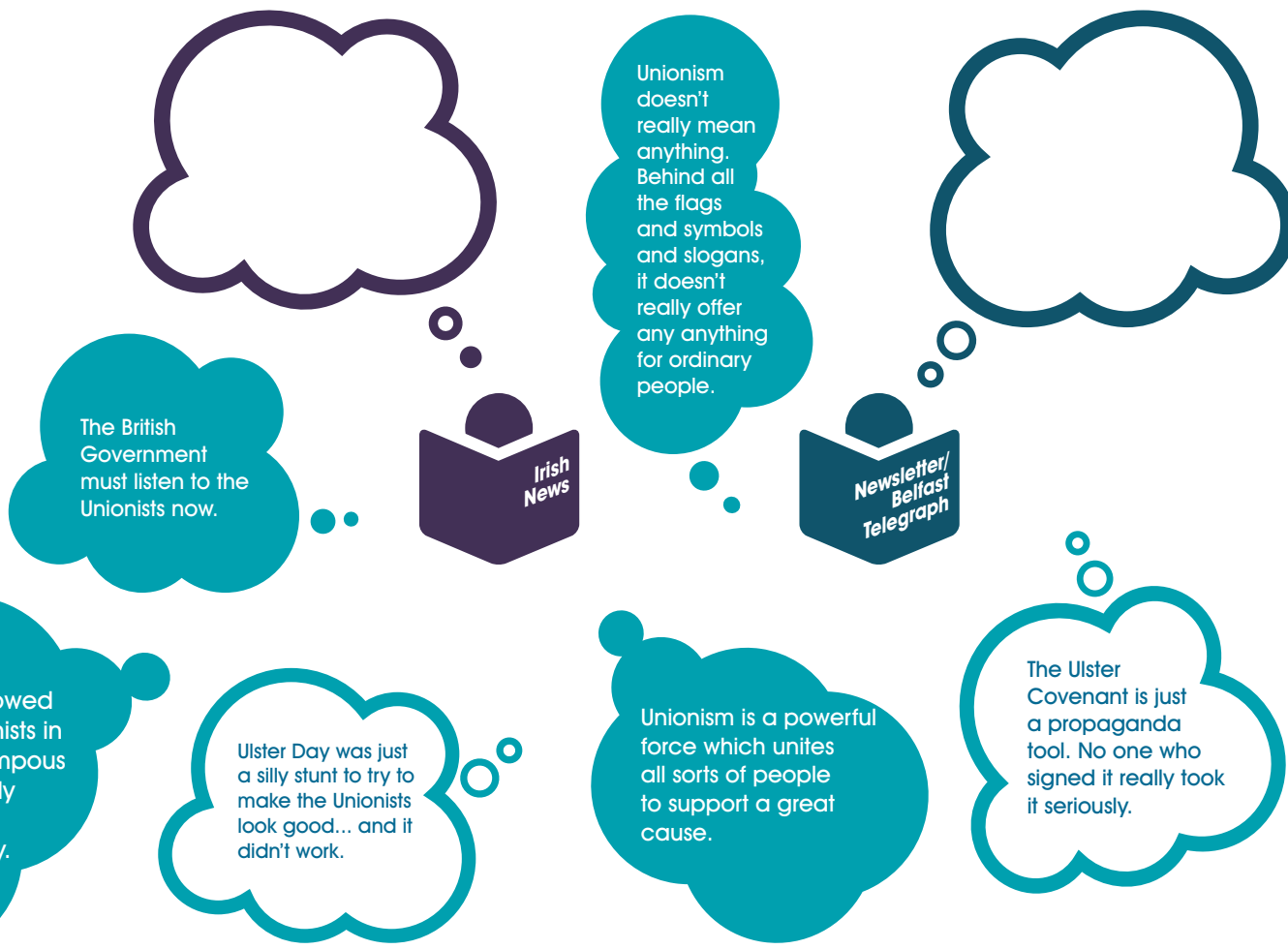
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Activity



- How might the different newspaper reports in 1912 have affected the views of their readers? Match up the thought bubbles about "Ulster Day" to the people reading the main Belfast newspapers. Use a different coloured pen for each newspaper.
- Ulster Day was part of a wider dispute about Home Rule for Ireland. In the blank bubbles, add what these people might have thought about Home Rule.



Activity O.I.

- The link opposite shows video footage of Ulster Day 1912 without any sound.
- Using Windows Movie Maker or a similar video editing programme, source images and video footage to create your own news report. Make sure you describe what is happening and explain how important you think it is.
- Compare your news report with these examples from the 2012 anniversary parade:



Examples for comparison

Huge Parade Marks Ulster Covenant Centenary

Ulster Covenant Parade

Activity 01.2

A rowdy response to the Home Rule Bill

Despite Ulster Day, the UK Government pressed ahead with the Home Rule Bill. When it passed the House of Commons in January 1913, trouble flared on the Streets of West Belfast.

Source D

THE IRISH NEWS

AND BELFAST MORNING NEWS,
THURSDAY JANUARY 9, 1913

BELFAST ROWDIES

Disorderly Unionist Mob Creates Trouble

STREET SCENES

Last night witnessed a further Unionist ebullition in Belfast, the crowds which were attracted into the streets by the club parade on Thursday night coming out again in search of further excitement. About nine o'clock a large gang of mill girls and lads yelling party songs emerged from the Shankill Road district, and proceeded towards the centre of the city. On their progress, these noisy processionists attracted large numbers of more able-bodied rowdies to their ranks, and they constituted quite a considerable force when they reached North Street. The course of procedure adopted was to halt at corners of streets leading into Nationalist localities, and create a hideous cacophony of ribald catch cries and offensive choruses of the 'Dolly's Brae' type, but this provocative behaviour failed to elicit the desired response. The inhabitants of the Nationalist districts of the city were content to celebrate the passage of the Home Rule Bill with due enthusiasm, but without endangering the peace of the city.

Bonfires were lighted in many of the streets in the West Division, and the jubilation proper to the event reigned amongst all sympathisers with the National and progressive movement, but the celebration was orderly and good humoured to the last degree, notwithstanding the strenuous efforts of the rowdy Unionist mob aforementioned.

Source E

Belfast Evening Telegraph.

THURSDAY JANUARY 9, 1913

PARADES IN BELFAST.

HOME RULE CELEBRATIONS.

SEQUELS IN THE POLICE COURT.

The passing of the third reading of the Home Rule Bill was last evening signalized by the lighting of tar barrels in the Nationalist districts of the city. In the Short Strand two huge bonfires attracted a muster of the great unwashed, whilst in the Falls Road district – the stronghold of the disruptionists – there were street parades and unbridled enthusiasm. As on the previous night, large numbers of police and detectives patrolled the districts where there was the probability of danger. Within hearing distance of each other, hostile processions of boys and girls passed along the streets. The battle song of the Hibernian party was 'A Nation Once Again,' whilst the rival crowd recalled the Siege of Derry by a spirited rendering of 'No Surrender'. At about 9.30 there was some stone-throwing in the vicinity of the junction of Peter's Hill, North Street, and Old Lodge Road. There was a regular fusillade of stones, and in order to quell the fight that ensued the police were compelled to draw their batons. In the course of the melee Head-Constable Moore was struck on the head with a 'paver'. The wound bled freely, but the head-constable stuck to his post, and continued on duty until a late hour. Several exciting scenes took place at the corner of Castle Street, Upper Library Street, and North Street, but the constabulary managed to intercept the raids and prevent any serious conflicts. In the course of the street parades a number of windows were smashed, and several shots were fired.

The Ulster Crisis

PAGE 12

ULSTER DAY. SIR EDWARD CARSON SIGNING THE COVENANT. BELFAST CITY HALL.
28th SEPT., 1912.



Activity 01.2

Sources D and C



THE IRISH NEWS
AND BELFAST MORNING NEWS,
THURSDAY JANUARY 9, 1913

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1.2a According to the Irish News (Source D), how did Belfast Nationalists celebrate the progress of the Home Rule Bill? Where did the main gang of "noisy processionists" come from, and how did the Nationalists respond to their attempts to provoke trouble?

1.2b Explain whether the Belfast Telegraph (Source E) agreed or disagreed with the Irish News' account of events.

1.2c From the reports, list the damage and injuries that Belfast council had to pay for after this incident.

1.2d If you were a judge working at Belfast court the following day, what verdict would you pass on:

- A member of the Unionist mob, accused of provocative behaviour towards Nationalists
- A Nationalist youth, accused of throwing a stone which broke a shop window

1.2e And, if you were the West Belfast District Inspector of the police, what verdict would you pass on:

- A constable accused of unnecessary brutality towards young people on the street

Home Rule – triumph or disaster?

The Home Rule Bill was passed twice by the House of Commons, but both times it was rejected by the House of Lords. On the 25th May 1914 the House of Commons passed Home Rule for the third time. This meant that it would have to become law eventually, even if the Lords tried to reject it again.

Activity 01.3a



Create two different headlines for Belfast Newspapers – one for the Belfast Telegraph and one for the Irish News. Both newspapers should be dated 26th May, reporting that Home Rule had been passed by the House of Commons once again, and was set to become law.

Remember that the Telegraph was a Unionist newspaper and the Irish News represented Nationalists.



Activity 01.4

“Carson’s Army” – the UVF in West Belfast

The Ulster Covenant said that Unionists would oppose Home Rule by “all means that may be found necessary”. Since Unionist MPs were unable to stop the House of Commons passing the Home Rule Bill, Unionist leaders in Ulster took a new step. In January 1913 they formed the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) – a military organisation to defend the Ulster counties against any attempt to make them accept Home Rule.

At first Nationalists laughed at Ulster Volunteers marching in their ordinary clothes and carrying wooden rifles. However, the UVF gradually became better trained and equipped and Nationalists started taking the threat more seriously.

In April 1914 the UVF succeeded in smuggling 25,000 German rifles into Ulster aboard a ship called the Clyde Valley (which they had renamed the Mountjoy).

Activity 01.4

The UVF planned to recruit 100,000 men aged between 17 and 65.

All had to previously have signed the Ulster Covenant. The force was organised by local area into regiments and battalions. Belfast had four regiments (North, South, East and West), and the West Belfast Regiment had two Battalions.

Source F



Source F shows men of the West Belfast UVF forming up at Brookmount Street in 1913.

Source G



Source G shows the West Belfast UVF parading at Glencairn in June 1914. They are ready to be inspected by Sir Edward Carson.

Activity 01.4

Earlier

Later



William Magee was a shipyard worker who lived in Lawnbrooke Avenue, off the Shankill Road. In 1913 he joined C Company, 2nd Battalion, West Belfast Regiment, Ulster Volunteer Force.

Scroll over the pictures to see how volunteers like William changed in just 18 months between January 1913 and June 1914.

Activity 01.4

Who were the real rebels?



UVF volunteers like William Magee practised shooting at targets on a rifle range. But who did they actually expect to fight against? Scroll over the text to find out who the UVF considered to be their main enemies

– you may find the answers surprising.

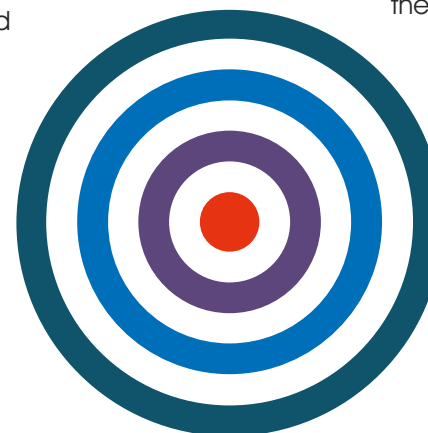
THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT

The 3rd Home Rule Bill was introduced by Herbert Asquith, the British Prime Minister. It was drafted by Government civil servants.

Asquith's Party was the Liberals – although they did not have an overall majority in Parliament, they had the support of the Irish Parliamentary Party (Nationalists) led by John Redmond. With votes from Liberal and Irish Nationalist MPs, the Bill was passed by the House of Commons.

The House of Lords only had power to delay the Bill, not to reject it completely.

Once the Bill became law, it was the British Government's job to set up a new Parliament in Dublin and to make sure that the Unionists in Ulster obeyed it.



THE BRITISH ARMY

Since the British Government had passed Home Rule, it was up to the British Army to enforce the new law. Anyone who resisted the Dublin Parliament would have to fight against the Army.

However, in March 1914 50 British Army officers based at the Curragh near Dublin told their generals that they refused to fight against the Ulster Volunteers. If they were sent to fight in Ulster they would resign from the Army.

This event, known as the Curragh Incident, put the British Government in a difficult position. They obviously could not rely on the Army to follow orders and enforce Home Rule. So who could they trust to support the Government and follow its orders?

THE IRISH VOLUNTEERS

Started in November 1913 as a Nationalist response to the UVF, by the middle of 1914 the Irish Volunteers had become a large force of trained men, though not very well armed.

By May 1914 it was obvious that the Irish Volunteers would not have to resort to fighting to achieve Home Rule – it had already been passed by Parliament. Instead, with the Government unable to rely on the British Army

to overcome the UVF, it looked as if they would have to turn to the Irish Volunteers to do the job.

In this situation, bizarrely, the UVF were armed rebels against a democratic decision of the British Parliament. And a Volunteer Force of Irish Nationalists was the only "army" the British Government had on its side to enforce Home Rule.

Activity 01.4_b



When Sir Edward Carson inspected the West Belfast UVF (see Source G) he gave a speech congratulating them on their “splendid turnout”. He then added,

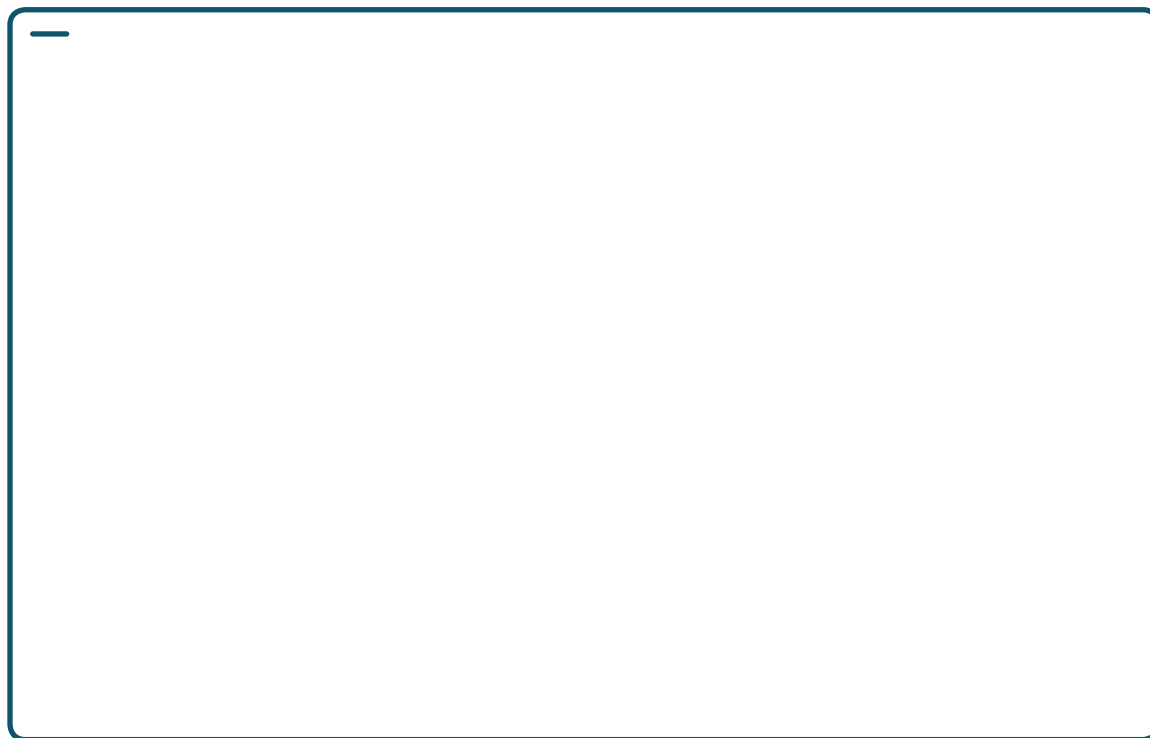


**I think I recognise
some of the cargo
of the Mountjoy**

Sir Edward Carson

and the men
cheered and laughed.

**What did Carson mean, and why
did it make the men cheer and laugh?**



Sources H and I come from the diary of Lady Lillian Spender, the wife of a senior UVF leader, Sir Wilfred Spender.



It is a beautiful ceremony. The officiating person offers some prayers, and blesses the Colours, and one or two speeches are made, and then several men of the Regt. come forward and kneel on one knee to receive the colours, and then march proudly away with them to the tune of God Save the King. The W.B. Regiment is the poorest of all, I mean its men are of a lower class than the others, as they are all in Devlin's constituency, which is the slummiest in the city. Many of the men looked just the type you see loafing about public houses, and were no better dressed, but they marched every bit as well as the others, and looked just as keen and determined.



Source H

In 1914 Lady Spender watched the WB (West Belfast) Regiment receive its colours (flags) at a special ceremony.

On Saturday ... afternoon Jack came to tea, and just after he arrived we heard drums approaching, and by came a section of the West Belfast Regiment, with band, fife band, Colours, and a Maxim, mounted on an outside car. We all flew to the gate, and they most obligingly halted exactly opposite us, so I got some snapshots. They were all carrying rifles, and the men of the Special Service Corps were of course in full uniform. Col. Patterson was in command, and came up to say how sorry he was he couldn't come to dinner on Wednesday. He is so ornamental on horse back, and was more like Lewis Waller than ever! There were nearly 1000 men out. One of the company commanders came to beg for a drink, and then a lot of men came and asked for water, so Jane and Maggie had a busy time, and enjoyed themselves hugely! Maggie is a staunch little Home Ruler, but khaki is khaki, and is irresistible. We sat in the garden after tea, and Jack stayed till nearly 7.

Source I

Lady Spender encountered the West Belfast Regiment again later in 1914.

O1.4.c

O1.4.d

O1.4.e



According to Lady Spender (Source H), what made the men of the West Belfast Regiment different from the other Belfast UVF units?



If you had been with Lady Spender (Source I) would you have been impressed by the West Belfast UVF? Why or why not?

Is it surprising to know that Lady Spender's maid, Maggie, was "a staunch little Home Ruler"? Why, according to Lady Spender, did Maggie enjoy providing water for the thirsty UVF men?

“Prepared for peace and ready for war” – the Irish Volunteers in West Belfast

As the UVF increased in strength, some Nationalists feared that the British Government would give in to their demands and treat Ulster separately from the rest of Ireland. In November 1913, Eoin MacNeill, a university professor from County Antrim, wrote an article called “The North Began”, encouraging Nationalists to form their own volunteer force.

In the beginning the Irish Volunteers tended to attract more extreme Nationalists, and most of the leaders were members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (although MacNeill did not realise this). The majority of Nationalists continued to support John Redmond’s Irish Parliamentary Party, believing that it could achieve Home Rule through the Home Rule Bill.

Small units of Irish Volunteers were soon formed all over Ireland. The Belfast branch started in March 1914.

Like the UVF, the Irish Volunteers started with very little equipment and had to train with dummy rifles or even hurling sticks. After the UVF’s successful gun-running in April 1914, the Irish Volunteers carried off a similar

operation at Howth in July. However, British soldiers sent to capture the guns clashed with a crowd of Nationalist supporters as they returned to Dublin. Three civilians were killed and many wounded when the soldiers opened fire in a street called Bachelor’s walk.

This photo of the Irish Volunteers was taken in May 1914.



Activity 01.5

Sources J & K are about a parade of Irish Volunteers in Shaun's Park, West Belfast. Joe Devlin was the local MP for the Home Party.

1.5a Read the Irish News (Source J) and look again at sources F-I. In what ways were the activities and members of the Irish Volunteers similar to the UVF?

1.5b Look at Source K. Do you think the **original** members of the Irish Volunteers would cheer wildly for Joe Devlin, John Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary (Home Rule) Party?

1.5c According to Joe Devlin, were the Irish Volunteers ready to fight the UVF? Did this seem likely to happen at that time?

THE IRISH NEWS

AND BELFAST MORNING NEWS,
MONDAY JUNE 8, 1914

THE IRISH VOLUNTEERS IN BELFAST

Battalions Reviewed at Shaun's Park.

A FINE TURN OUT

Inspection by Mr. Joseph Devlin, M.P.

STIRRING ADDRESS

Enthusiasm for the Leaders and the Cause.

REMARKABLE SCENES

Since the establishment of the first company of Volunteers in West Belfast, only a matter of weeks ago, **REMARKABLE PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE** in both numbers and discipline. Drilling and route marching have been carried out assiduously under the direction of competent instructors, with military experience, and the members, comprising professional men, business men and artisans, have worked together with a will to attain a high standard of efficiency... The result has been the growth within a very short time of a strong, well trained, disciplined body of men...

On Saturday afternoon, a general review of the members of the force in Belfast by Mr Joseph Devlin, MP, took place at Shaun's Park, Whiterock Road, and provided an opportunity of judging of the strides made by the movement locally. Over two thousand Volunteers were in attendance, and of these 1,500 were paraded. The majority carried bandoliers and haversacks, and, drawn up in company formation, presented a very fine appearance.

Source J

THE IRISH NEWS

AND BELFAST MORNING NEWS,
MONDAY JUNE 8, 1914

MR DEVLIN'S ADDRESS

Inspiring Words to the Volunteers.

If Sir Edward Carson feels that he can organise volunteers to foster rancour, perpetuate racial feeling amongst Irishmen, we are here today to show by our numbers, and our resolution that **WE WILL MAINTAIN A TRAINED AND ARMED FORCE**

to fight for the liberty of our country and stand against all who may assail it.

I am proud, in my own constituency, **TO WITNESS THE SPLENDID TRAINING AND EQUIPMENT OF THE MEN**

... I ask you to go on, continuing in your patient resolve to war with no men, but to be prepared for peace and ready for war, and clinging with old-time fidelity to that imperishable principle of Irish Nationality which has been the inspiration and guide of their fathers and the all-sustaining influence of the present generation.

A Scene of Enthusiasm

When Mr. Devlin's address concluded, amidst renewed cheering from the assemblage, the commanding officer stood forward and said "Irish, Volunteers, three cheers for Mr Devlin." The response was magnificent, and when the last round of cheering had died away the commanding officer called for three more in honour of Mr. John Redmond. These were given with equal heartiness, and a call for a similar compliment to the Irish Party elicited further ringing plaudits, which denoted unmistakeably the enthusiasm of the men.

Source K