

Creative Centenaries

Remembering the Future

Activity

102

West Belfast 1914—1918 World War One

In this section you will investigate

- How Nationalists and Unionists responded when war broke out
- Why some Nationalists were not satisfied with the Home Rule Bill
- How Nationalists and Unionists fought in WW1
- The Easter Rising

A Decade of Anniversaries

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



Can you work out what is happening in this picture?

- Who are these people?
- What are they doing?

I NEED A CLUE

I NEED ANOTHER CLUE



Did you get this answer?



Queen Elizabeth II and Irish President Mary McAleese laying wreaths together in May 2011. This ceremony to honour Irish citizens who died during World War One took place at the Irish National War Memorial in Dublin.



Is commemorating the First World War too much bother?



1st July 2002

The anniversary of the Battle of the Somme

9.00

9.30

9.00 am: Alex Maskey, Sinn Fein politician and Lord Mayor of Belfast, lays a memorial wreath at the Cenotaph beside Belfast City Hall.

Mr Maskey was accompanied by some Sinn Fein party members. After laying the wreath he stood for a moment's silence.

The wreath was made of laurel branches (not poppies) and its message read: "In memory of all the men who made the supreme sacrifice at the Battle of the Somme and during the First World War and in recognition of the sorrow, suffering and sense of loss of their relatives, friends and comrades, from The Right Hon The Lord Mayor Councillor Alex Maskey."

It was believed to have been the first time a republican politician in Northern Ireland had laid a wreath to remember those killed in a First World War battle.

When I was elected Lord Mayor in June last year, I took the view that everything that happened during the year would be an opportunity rather than a problem

Alex Maskey

10.00

10.30

10.45

To be true to myself as both a republican and as First Citizen, I needed to reach out to both communities and I needed to find ways of doing that. I knew the Somme commemoration was coming up and I regarded it as a ready-made opportunity to do something positive

Alex Maskey

10.45 am: At a meeting of the City Council in City Hall, Mr Maskey proposed a motion of gratitude for the sacrifice of “the brave men of the 36th Division” (this has been a council tradition ever since news of the Battle of the Somme reached Belfast in July 1916). The motion was seconded by Councillor Jim Rodgers from the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP).

However, a councillor from the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), Sammy Wilson, severely criticised Mr Maskey for refusing to attend *the official* commemoration ceremony due to start at 11.00 am. He said that Mr Maskey’s separate wreath ceremony was a “sectarian snub” to unionists. Mr Maskey did not reply.

I had no deputy to step into my place and I also felt that, if I didn’t chair the meeting, then I would be undermining my own wreath-laying

Alex Maskey

No, I don't consider it progress at all, I consider it an insult. They laid a green wreath - it has nothing to do with the Somme.

Revd Dr Ian Paisley

11.00 am: The official commemoration ceremony took place at the Cenotaph. This included city councillors and representatives from the British armed forces laying wreaths. A crowd of 200 gathered to watch.

DUP leader Revd Dr Ian Paisley was among the politicians leaving a wreath. Asked if he considered Mr Maskey's action a sign of progress, he answered, "No, I don't consider it progress at all, I consider it an insult. They laid a green wreath - it has nothing to do with the Somme".

It was a hard call and it was not easy to get it through. I got a lot of stick over it.

[Many republicans] were angry because I was a republican acknowledging Irish people who died fighting for the British Army.

Alex Maskey

Activity

02.1

What do you think was going through Alex Maskey's mind as he laid the wreath?

Do you think he realised how much criticism he would face?



Activity 02.2

How did Belfast react when World War broke out?

Investigate how the people of West Belfast responded to the World War in the period 1914—16.

Using the information from the sources, create a series of diary entries describing life in Belfast in the first few months of the war. If you were there, what would you have seen and heard happening? How would you have felt? How would other residents of the city have felt? What would people have been saying?

World War One

WAR NOTICES

NOTICE TO SPECIAL RESERVISTS.

ORDERS for mobilisation having been received, all N.C. Officers and Men of the 4th Batn. (Fermanagh) Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers are required to report themselves to the Adjutant, at Enniskillen, on 6th August, 1914.

Any man not receiving their Notice Paper and Warrants should enquire at the Post Office without delay, and, failing to receive them there, report immediately to the nearest Officer or Police Station, and apply for warrants to enable them to join.

W.P.B. FRAZER, Lieut.
Adjutant, 4th R. Inniskilling Fusrs.
GOD SAVE THE KING.

Source A

Notices like this appeared in the Belfast newspapers the day after war was declared. Similar adverts were posted on public buildings. [BT 5/9/14]

LAST NIGHT AT THE QUAYS

Never in the lifetime of the city have such scenes of popular feeling been witnessed as those which characterized the departure of the Reservists by the English bound steamers sailing from Donegall Quay on Wednesday night. There was a great deal of pathos, relieved by an occasional touch of comedy; but dominating all was the intense spirit of patriotism that pervaded the many thousands who foregathered to give a hearty bon voyage to the departing troops.

From seven o'clock in the evening large crowds poured, from all parts of the city, in the direction of the quays, and numerous organised parties, hailing from the Shankill, Sandy Row, Crumlin Road, Ballymacarrett, and Ballynafeigh districts, marched in compact bodies, waving Union Jacks and singing patriotic songs.

Source C

From the Belfast Telegraph, 6 August 1914 (the third day of the war)



Source B

This sergeant is typical of the Ulster and Irish Volunteers who returned to their British Army regiments when World War One broke out. [BT 5/9/14]

RESERVISTS DEPART.

Scenes of Enthusiasm in City Streets.

A great number of reservists left Belfast yesterday to join various mobilization centres, and at night especially their departure was attended by large and enthusiastic crowds.

About six hundred men attached to the Irish Volunteers in Belfast were called up, and there was a great gathering to wish them God-speed and a safe return, when they departed yesterday evening for regimental centres, quite a large demonstration attending the departure of one body, while at the same time a quota of the Ulster Volunteers were being "seen off" by a cheering crowd with a band and pipers. The Belfast tramways and Post Office staffs have been heavily taxed by mobilisation.

Source D

From the Irish News on the same day, 6 August 1914



Activity 02.2

September 1914: The King signs the Home Rule Act

Look out for:

How Unionists and Nationalists reacted to the news that Home Rule had been passed;
Why Home Rule did not happen immediately once the law was passed.

The British Government wanted to sort out Home Rule so that it could concentrate on fighting the war. On the 18th September 1914 King George V signed the Home Rule Bill, making it law (The Government of Ireland Act 1914). However, with the agreement of the Irish Parliamentary Party, the Government suspended enforcing the law until after the war was over. Home Rule had finally been passed, but Ireland would still have to wait to get its own Parliament.

BETRAYAL OF ULSTER

Indignant feeling of Unionists

COVENANT DEMONSTRATION

ARRIVAL OF CAPTAIN CRAIG, M.P.

“It’s disgusting, but I’m not a bit surprised; indeed, I’ve said all along it was what would happen,” was the remark of a prominent Belfast Orangeman, asked his opinion today on the Asquith betrayal. “The feeling of the rank and file of the Order,” he added, “is one of intense indignation, and naturally so. Although we had always distrusted the Government in the political sense, there were many who believed that, in a time of the greatest national peril, they could, as Britons, rise to the occasion, and keep their pledged word. They have acted treacherously under the flag of truce which they themselves held out; but, strong though our feeling may be – and we shall have much to say and do concerning the matter later on – it is our firm resolve meantime to slacken no effort to ensure the safety of the Empire, by giving the best of our services in every possible direction, ‘strengthened’ – to use the words of our beloved and trusted leader – ‘by the belief that Great Britain will never forgive the base treachery of the Government.’” And he added, “This we are determined at all costs, again to use the words of Edward Carson, ‘We will not have Home Rule – Never.’”

Source E

From the Belfast Telegraph,
16 September 1914



Activity 02.2

...we have won honestly and with clean hands and unsullied consciences. We have fought our battles for Self-Government in the open light, before the eyes of all nations; and the people of all free nations rejoice in our victory. The Home Rule Act will be on the Statute Book before many hours; then some of the questions with which an 'Amending Bill' must concern itself can be discussed fully and freely.

Source F

From the Irish News,
15 September 1914

THE NEWS IN BELFAST.

While the announcement of the passage of the Home Rule Bill created unbounded satisfaction amongst the Nationalists of Belfast, it was not made an occasion for exultation, and the people exhibited the same admirable coolness and self-restraint which has characterized them throughout every stage of the struggle. In several exclusively Nationalist districts bonfires were lighted, but no organised public demonstration on a general scale took place

Source G

From the Irish News, 19 September 1914, the day after the King signed the Act.

It is reported that during a football match at Belfast, on the 19th September, a Union Jack was flying on the chief flagstaff of the Celtic Football Grounds, which are owned and controlled by Nationalists. A Nationalist band at the conclusion of the match played the National Anthem.

... At St Michael's (Church of Ireland) Church, on the 27th September, one half of the congregation left whilst the National Anthem was being played on the organ. Very few of those who remained joined in the singing.

Since the passing of the Home Rule Bill, the audience at the west End Picture House, Shankill Road, have groaned and hissed when the King's photograph was displayed.

Source H

From the police monthly report for Belfast, September 1914. [PRONI MIC448/58]

Activity 02.2

Autumn 1914: joining “Kitchener’s Army”

Look out for:

How Unionists and Nationalists reacted to recruitment appeals at the very start of the war;
Reasons why large numbers of UVF and Irish Volunteers joined up together in 1914.

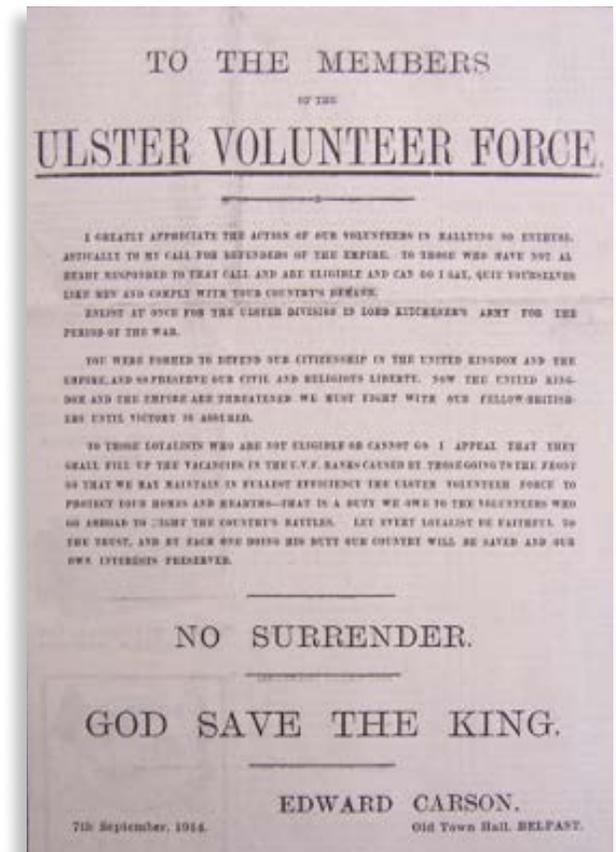
Britain’s most famous general, Lord Kitchener, realised that the British Army would need many more men to achieve victory. As Secretary of State for War, he launched a great campaign encouraging men to “join up”.

At first recruitment from Ireland was disappointing. Most Ulster and Irish Volunteers were more concerned about Home Rule. They believed they needed to stay in Ireland to fight for or against Home Rule, so they were reluctant to join the Army and be sent to France.

Kitchener wanted to make use of the trained men in the UVF and IVF. In September 1914 he made an agreement with Sir Edward Carson that the UVF could fight together if they joined up. The result was a new army unit called the 36th (Ulster) Division, and within a few days the majority of UVF men throughout Ulster had joined it.

Source 1

From the Belfast Telegraph,
8 September 1914



Activity 02.2

Jack Christie from the Shankill was 16 when he joined the Ulster Division with his UVF comrades:

I left school at about twelve years of age and went to serve my time in the old Ulster Spinning Company, in the Falls Road branch. I hated it... So when I came to join up when the War came, it wasn't a challenge or anything to do with patriotism, it was simply: here's an escape route to get out of the mill, for surely life holds more than what this mill can offer?

U.V.F.
WEST BELFAST REGIMENT.

MEMBERS JOINING LORD KITCHENER'S ARMY WILL FALL IN TOMORROW (WEDNESDAY) MORNING AS FOLLOWS:

SPECIAL SERVICE SECTION,
MOUNT JOY STREET.....8.30
1ST BATTALION, STEWARD'S YARD.....8.45
2ND BATTALION, SPRINGFIELD HALL.....8.30
T.C. BROWN, ADJ.

Source J

From the Belfast Telegraph,
8 September 1914
(the third day of the war)

Ulster Volunteer Force Recruiting.

Recruiting for the Ulster Volunteer Division of Kitchener's Army was continued as the Unionist Headquarters, Old Town Hall, yesterday, when the West Belfast Regiment supplied over 400 men drawn from the Special Service Force and the 1st and 2nd Battalions. At 8.30am the Special Service men paraded under Captain M. Glover at Mountjoy Street; the 1st Battalion, under Mr. Stewart Blacker Quin, battalion commander, at Stewart's Yard, Shankill Road, at 8.45am; and the 2nd Battalion, under Mr. John Graham, battalion commander, at Springfield Hall at 8.30am. The three contingents subsequently assembled at Stewart's Yard, where they were addressed by Colonel T.E. Hickman, C.B., D.S.O., N.P., Recruiting Officer for Ulster and Captain James Craig, M.P., both of whom were in uniform.

MARCH TO THE OLD TOWN HALL
...
At the conclusion of the speeches the contingent, which was accompanied by Colonel G.H.H. Couchman, D.S.O., commanding the Belfast Division, and Mr. T.C. Brown, acting regimental adjutant, marched to the Old Town hall, their progress along the Shankill Road and through the centre of the city being witnessed with the keenest interest and admiration by thousands of spectators, who raised enthusiastic cheers. The regimental bugle band was in attendance. The loyalty of the inhabitants of the Shankill Road district is traditional, and they turned out in large numbers to mark their appreciation of the action of the Volunteers in offering their services in the hour of the Empire's need.

Source K

From the Belfast News-Letter,
11 September 1914



Activity 02.2

Kitchener also wanted to make use of the trained men in the Irish Volunteers. In September 1914 he made an agreement with John Redmond to form a new unit made from men of the Irish Volunteers. This was called the Irish Brigade, which later became part the 16th (Irish) Division.

John Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party believed Irish Nationalists should help Britain fight against Germany. On 25th October 1914 John Redmond came to Belfast. At a great meeting in the Clonard Picture House on the Falls Road, Redmond strongly encouraged the Irish Volunteers to join up. At the same meeting, West Belfast MP Joe Devlin (who belonged to Redmond's Party) said Irishmen should fight to demonstrate their goodwill towards England (now that Home Rule had been granted) and help other free nations to defend "gallant little" Belgium against German tyranny.

A month later a similar meeting took place at St Mary's Hall, but this time the purpose was to honour Belfast Nationalists who had joined up and were ready to start their army training.

I do not ask any Irish man listening to me or not listening to me to enlist if he does not wish, and there is no power to compel any man to do anything against his own conscience and free will. It is

**A MATTER FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL
ACCORDING TO HIS OWN CONSCIENCE
AND HIS OWN CIRCUMSTANCES**

and I believe I am speaking the truth when I say of the Irish race as a whole that they would feel covered with humiliation if, when this war was over, they had to admit that their rights and liberties had been saved by the sacrifices of other men, while Irishmen remained safe at home and took no risks. (Loud cheers, and voices – "We will go to the war" and "The Irish Brigade.")

Source L

From John Redmond's speech to the Belfast Irish National Volunteers, 25 October 1914

THE IRISH NEWS

AND BELFAST MORNING NEWS,
WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 18, 1914

ST MARY'S HONOURS VOLUNTEERS

The hall was very effectively adorned; and, appropriate to the occasion, the colours of the Allies were prominent in the decorative scheme. On the platform, the drapery comprised the green flag with harp emblem and the Union Jack intertwined, while around the balcony were suspended parti-coloured flags, including Imperial and Irish insignia, with a large Union Jack as the centre piece. Guards of the I.N.V. in uniform and with rifles and bayonets were in attendance...

Source M

How the Irish News described St Mary's Hall on the evening of 18 November 1914

Activity 02.2

August 1914: leaving Belfast

Look out for:

How Belfast's Nationalist and Unionist communities showed their support for the departing troops.

THE WEST BELFAST CONTINGENT

An Enthusiastic Send-Off.

The contingent from the West Belfast Regiment which had enlisted at the Old Town Hall on the previous day assembled at Mr. William Stewart's Yard, Shankill Road, at two o'clock yesterday afternoon, and marched to the Belfast and County Down Railway Station, where they entrained for Newcastle. The occasion gave rise to a great demonstration of popular enthusiasm, thousands of spectators according the Volunteers a splendid send-off, while the route to the railway terminus was lined by citizens who joined in acclamation as the sturdy artisans from the Shankill Road passed by.

THE IRISH NEWS

AND BELFAST MORNING NEWS,
FRIDAY 20 NOVEMBER 1914

OFF TO FERMOY Belfast Recruits for Irish Brigade WONDERFUL SCENES

Crowds of Thousands Witness the Departure

The departure of six hundred men of the Irish National Volunteers – the first contingent from Belfast – to Fermoy for their training, after joining the colours, was attended by quite remarkable scenes yesterday morning. Probably the spectacle was such as has never been witnessed in the streets of Belfast before. Headed by pipers in Gaelic costume, flourishing banners emblazoned with the Red Hand of the O'Neill and distinctively Irish National devices and mottoes, the men marched through Belfast with their khaki-clad officer to the inspiring airs that are inseparably associated with Irish traditions and Ireland's age-long fight for freedom....

The scenes along the route to the railway station were very striking, the deep fringe of onlookers stretching the entire distance, while cheer after cheer and the waving of hats and handkerchiefs marked the progress of the men who marched along to the martial and stirring music of Irish National airs. It was a rare spectacle for the average citizen and created quite a sensation, the music of the bands causing people to flock from all points to add to the crowd already thronged along the streets. The railway station was completely surrounded by an immense crowd and even the tops of the adjoining sheds were crowded.

Before the departure of the train many touching scenes of parting were witnessed, the relatives of the men handing them little gifts, which mostly took the form of rosaries and religious emblems, while cigarettes, sweets, newspapers, etc., were lavishly distributed through the packed carriages constituting the long troop train. Mr Joseph Devlin, M.P., who was cheered to the echo, made his way along the train and took a personal farewell with every individual recruit.

Source P

From the Belfast News-Letter,
11 September 1914

Source Q

From the Irish News,
20 November 1914

Activity 02.2

THE IRISH NEWS

AND BELFAST MORNING NEWS,
WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 18, 1914

In St Mary's Hall Joe Devlin MP explained why he was so proud of the Irish National Volunteers who had joined the army.

I confess I never felt prouder of them, and I am deeply moved by the present manifestation of patriotic spirit exhibited by the 700 young men who have

PLUCKILY AND SPONTANEOUSLY RESPONDED TO THE CALL OF DUTY

in the nation's hour of difficulty and trial. (Cheers) Nationalist Belfast has always shown an example in translation into practical action the needs of the hour. You have never failed in any emergency or trial in the past. You have not failed on the present occasion. (Cheers) I have asked no man to volunteer as an individual; I have applied no pressure in any shape or form... I have merely pointed out the duty of the young men of Ireland in relation to the present war. I have told them that on the side of the Allies there lies justice, right, principle, and freedom. (Cheers) I have explained that Mr Redmond and the Irish Party have given pledges and assurances to the British democracy that if justice were given to Ireland, if her Legislature were restored, and if Irishmen were allowed to govern themselves in their own land, then Ireland would loyally act as a free partner in the confines of Empire, and by the Empire they would stand or fall. (Cheers) Well, we have seen the Home Rule Bill placed on the Statute Book. We have succeeded in making National Self Government the law of the land. The democracy of Great Britain has stood faithfully by us to the last. Are we in these circumstances to prove false to our promises, and recreant to our pledges and our solemn obligations? (Cries of 'No!')

Source N

From Joe Devlin's speech to the Belfast Irish National Volunteers, 18 November 1914

Source O

How the Irish News described St Mary's Hall on the evening of 18 November 1914

The British democracy having conceded Ireland's claim to be... a free, self-governing community in the British Empire, may count on the Home Rulers of this city to the last man in defence of our common rights and liberties now threatened by Germany.

Activity 02.2



Using the information from the sources, create a series of diary entries describing life in Belfast in the first few months of the war. If you were there, what would you have seen and heard happening? How would you have felt? How would other residents of the city have felt? What would people have been saying?



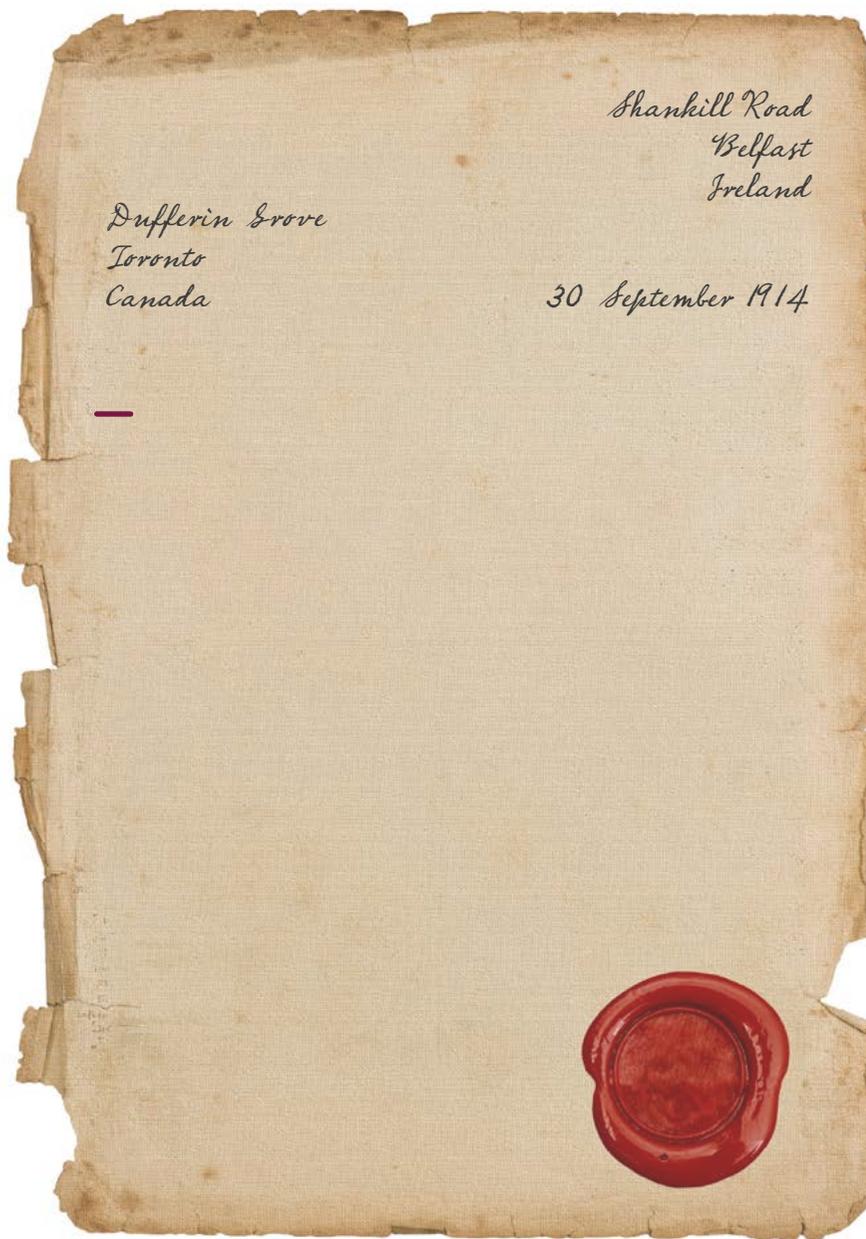
Some tips for making diaries:

- Keep entries in chronological order.
- Diaries also express emotion, recording how the person felt about what happened.
- Diary entries should describe events that the person experienced themselves or heard about at that time.
- Keep entries brief and make sure facts about events are accurate.

Activity 02.3

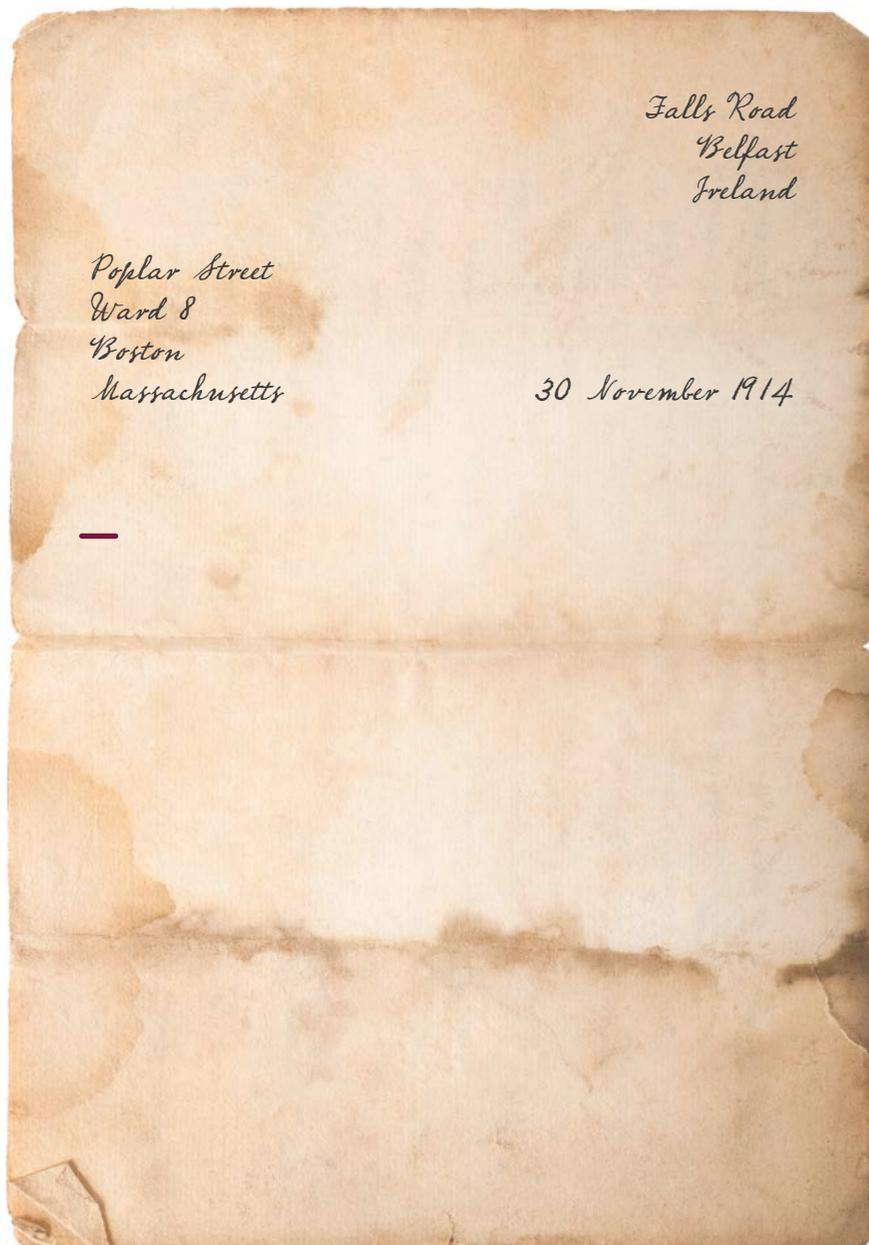
Fighting for King and Country?

Choose one of the following characters and write a letter to a friend in North America explaining why you have chosen to fight in the British Army, or to stay at home.



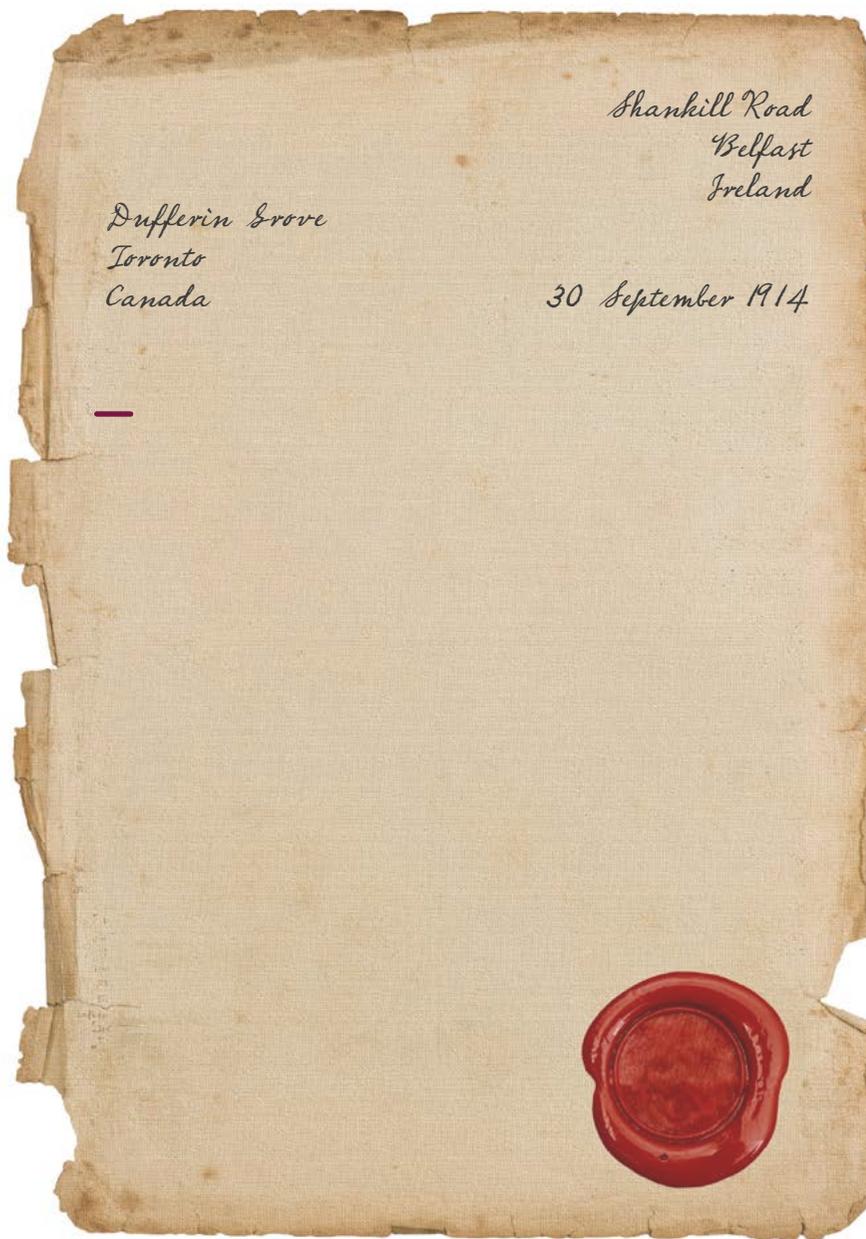
A young man from the Shankill, now training in Donegal with the 36th Ulster Division

Activity **02.3**



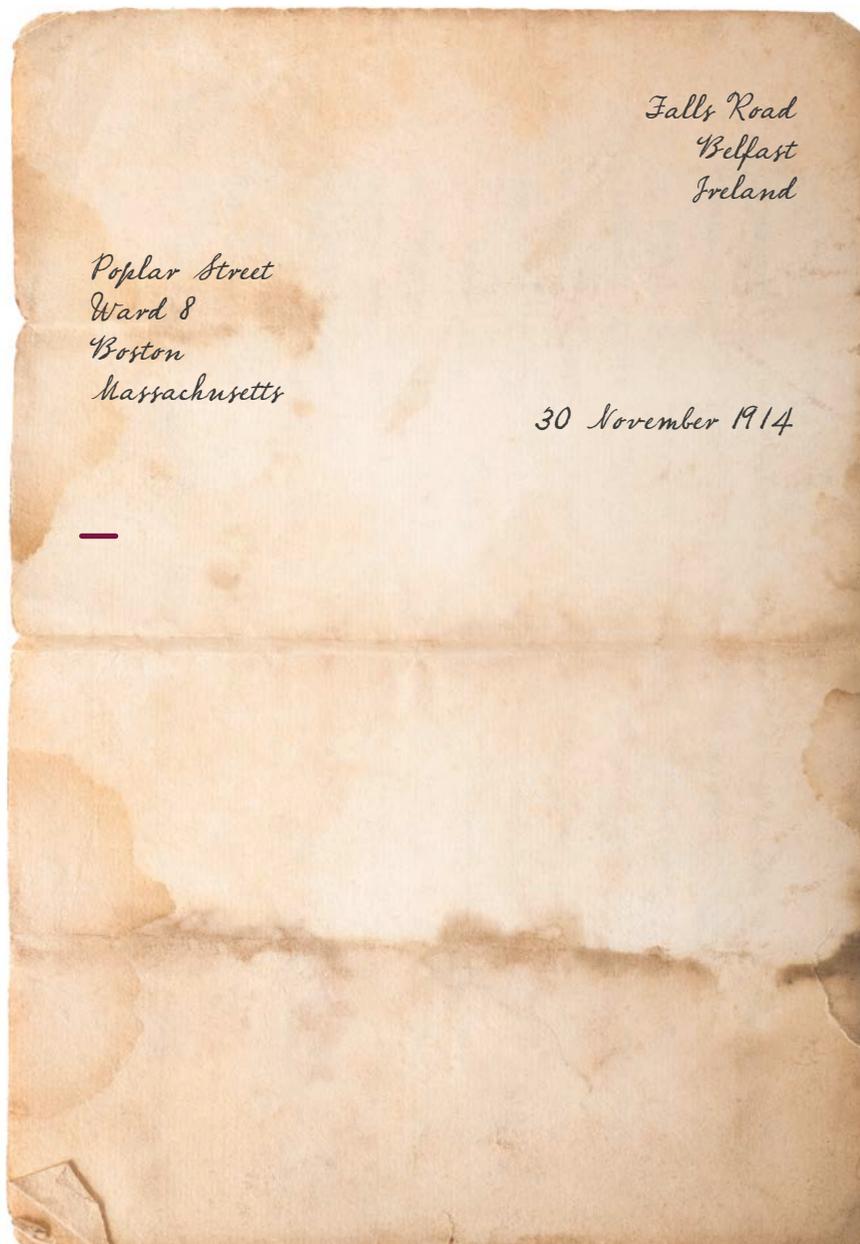
A young man from the Falls, now training in Cork with the 16th Irish Division

Activity **02.3**



A young man
from the Shankill
who has chosen
to remain at
home

Activity **02.3**



A young man from the Falls who has chosen to remain at home

The war years: Giving their all

Look out for:

Examples of extreme sacrifice made by West Belfast families during WW1.

By the end of 1914, people were beginning to realise that the war they were fighting was much larger and deadlier than any which had gone before. People started calling it “the Great War”. Soon most families in Ulster (and the rest of Ireland) had at least one member in the Allied forces. Some families set amazing examples of commitment, or suffered heart-breaking loss.

Source R

The Donnelly and Adams families lived off the Falls Road.

Paddy and Tom Donnelly joined the Connaught Rangers in 1914. Tom’s sweetheart was Elizabeth Adams; her brothers Johnny and Dominick also enlisted.

Johnny and Dominick were killed in the same week in May 1915. In August Elizabeth Adams suffered further heartbreak when her sweetheart Tom Donnelly was killed. All three men were later listed on memorials for soldiers with no known grave.

Paddy Donnelly was the only one to return. After the war he and Elizabeth Adams were married.

ANSWERED THEIR COUNTRY'S CALL.



MRS. MAGEE, OF 53 BRAEMAR STREET, BROADWAY, BELFAST, HAS GIVEN SIX SONS TO THE SERVICE OF HER KING AND COUNTRY. THIS IS FINE ENCOURAGEMENT FOR LADS TO ENLIST, SEEING WHAT ONE MOTHER GIVES UP FOR OUR DEFENCE. THE NAMES ARE AS FOLLO:-1, MRS. MAGEE; 2, ROBERT, AT THE FRONT WITH THE 4th HUSSARS; 3, EDWARD, 6th B.I.R.; 4, WILLIAM, 8th INNISKILLING FUSILIERS; 5, JACK, SERVING ON H.M.S. LANCE; 6, JOSEPH, 2nd B.I.R., IN HOSPITAL AT BOULOGNE; 7, GEORGE, 6th B.I.R., SERVING IN KITCHENER'S ARMY.

Source S

Belfast Telegraph,
15 March 1915

Six brothers from the Magee family all served in the army or navy. This feature in the Belfast Telegraph called Mrs Magee and her sons "a fine encouragement for lads to enlist".

Activity 02.4

What is worth remembering about the Battle of the Somme?

The Battle of the Somme - Thiepval

At the beginning of 1916 the 36th Ulster Division arrived in British front line trenches at Thiepval Wood, near the River Somme. The whole army was busy making preparations for a great attack which would overwhelm the Germans and drive them out of France.

The Battle of the Somme began on the morning of 1 July 1916. British artillery had pounded the German trenches for a week, so it was believed that the defences had been severely weakened. When the bombardment ended, the British troops were expected to walk across no man's land and occupy the German trenches. The Ulster Division's

objective was a fortified hilltop position called the Schwaben Redoubt; to British troops it was nicknamed "the Devil's Dwelling".

The Ulster Division's attack on that morning is remembered as one of the greatest exploits and worst tragedies of the battle. They advanced further than any other British Division but suffered heavy casualties. Although they captured the Schwaben Redoubt, lack of support from the rest of the army left them badly exposed. After fighting German counter-attacks all day, they eventually had to retreat back to their own lines.



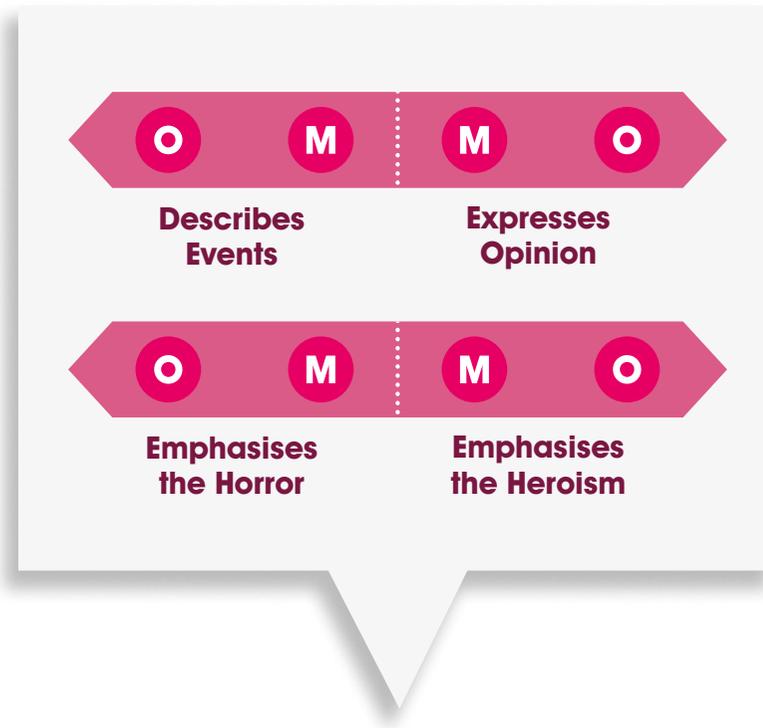
This mural depicting the Ulster Volunteer Force can be seen on the Shankill Road.



This famous painting of the Ulster Division's attack now hangs in Belfast City Hall. The young officer (shown with his hand raised) survived the battle and advised the artist how to make his painting accurate.

Activity **02.4a**

Click on each of the sources and analyse it using the following scales.



- O** Only
- M** Mostly

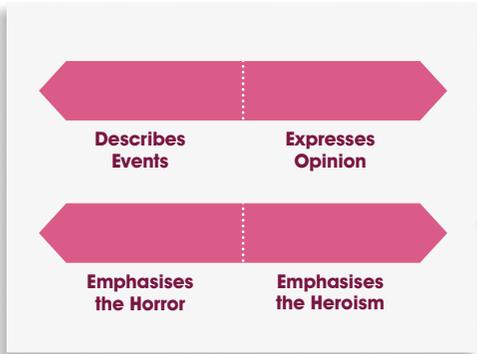


Eyewitnesses
who fought
in the battle

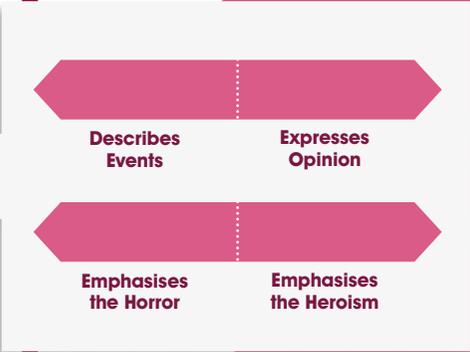


Memoir of an ordinary soldier in the 36th Ulster Division:

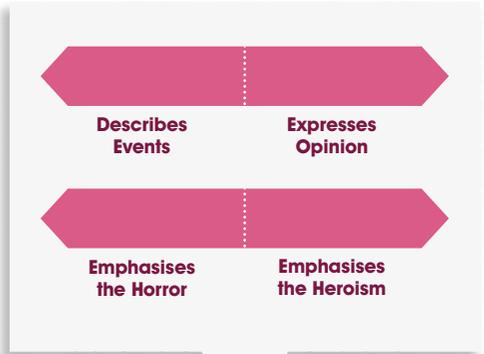
You couldn't hear them for the noise of the guns and the exploding shells. Everywhere among those fearless Ulstermen burst high-explosive shells, hurling dozens of them up in the air, while above them and among them shrapnel bursts with sharp ear-splitting explosions. But worst of all was the silent swish, swish, swishing of the machine-gun bullets, claiming their victims by the score, cutting down sheaves and leaving bunches of writhing, tortured flesh on the ground.



[We ran] into [an] inferno of screaming shells and machine-gun bullets. Crouching, we slowly moved across no man's land. ... Something had gone wrong. When the fumes lifted we saw what it was – a couple of battalions wiped out. Masses of dead and dying instead of ranks moving steadily forward.



Memoir of **Davy Starret**, a Corporal in the 9th Battalion, Royal Irish Rifles (West Belfast Volunteers):



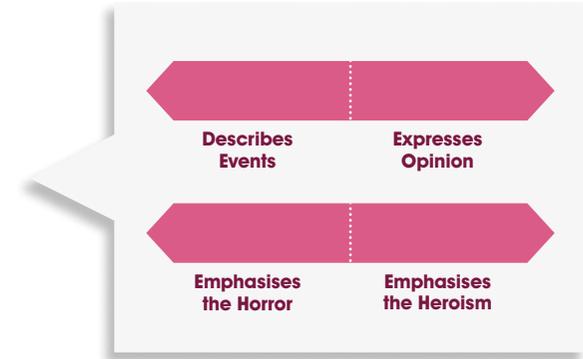
Mother would have cried and quite possibly you also when I called the remnant of my company to attention... Not a few of the men cried and I cried. A hell of an hysterical exhibition it was. It is a very small company now. I took 115 other ranks and four officers (including myself) into action. I am the only officer and only 34 other ranks are with me now out of the 115.



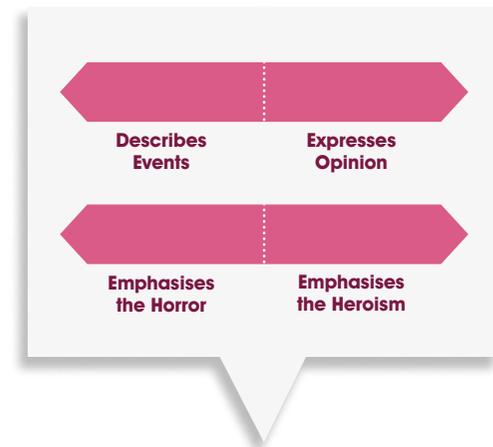
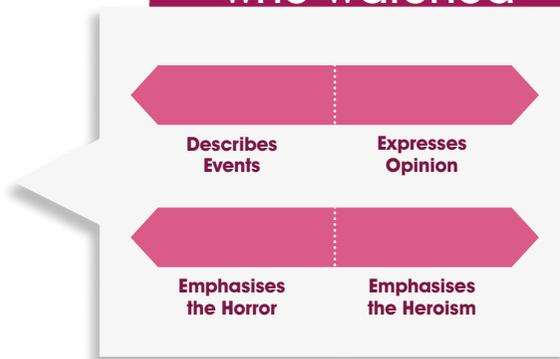
Activity **02.4**

Eyewitnesses
who watched
the battle from
a distance

Activity 02.4



Eyewitnesses who watched



02.4

July 2, 1916.

Yesterday was terrible. Our losses I fear very heavy. The Ulster Division has been too superb for words. The whole army is talking of the incomparable gallantry shown by officers and men. There has been nothing like it once the new armies came out.

They came out of the trenches formed up as if on the barrack square and went forward with every line dressed as if for the King's inspection, torn from end to end by shell and machine gun fire. We are the only Division that succeeded in doing what it was given to do and we did it with all fearful costs. The Ulster Division no longer exists as a fighting force and we shall probably go back behind the line to refit and be made up again in numbers.

Eyewitness
who watched
the battle from
a distance

General Nugent
wrote this letter to his wife
on 2 July 1916:

02.4

July 2, 1916.

Yesterday was terrible. Our losses I fear very heavy. The Ulster Division has been too superb for words. The whole army is talking of the incomparable gallantry shown by officers and men. There has been nothing like it once the new armies came out.

They came out of the trenches formed up as if on the barrack square and went forward with every line dressed as if for the King's inspection, torn from end to end by shell and machine gun fire. We are the only Division that succeeded in doing what it was given to do and we did it with all fearful costs. The Ulster Division no longer exists as a fighting force and we shall probably go back behind the line to refit and be made up again in numbers.

Describes Events Expresses Opinion

Emphasises the Horror Emphasises the Heroism

ed
the battle from
a distance

General Nugent
wrote this letter to his wife
on 2 July 1916:

Describes Events Expresses Opinion

Emphasises the Horror Emphasises the Heroism

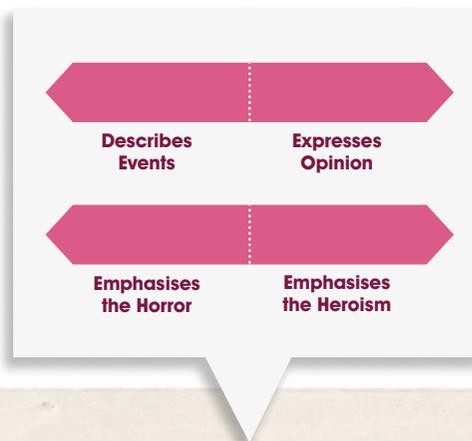
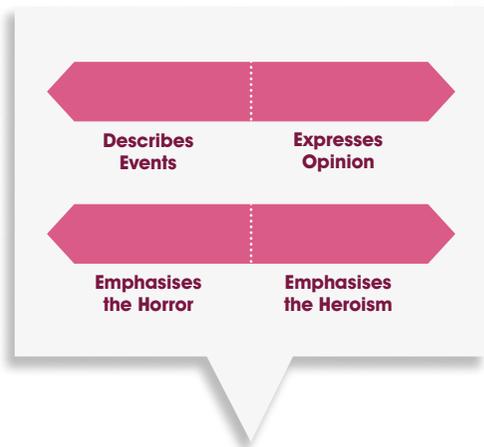
02.4

To Ulstermen henceforth the 1st Day of July will be a day of sacred memories; a day when the blood of her sons was poured out like water for the defence of Britain's honour and freedom...

Editorial in the Belfast Telegraph,
7 July 1916:

Opinions
at the time

Activity 02.4



To Ulstermen henceforth the 1st Day of July will be a day of sacred memories; a day when the blood of her sons was poured out like water for the defence of Britain's honour and freedom...

Editorial in the Belfast Telegraph,
7 July 1916:

Opinions
at the time



02.4

In terms of loss of life, Saturday 1 July was the most expensive day of the war: 21,000 British soldiers had died or been mortally wounded. ...[The Ulster Division suffered] 5,104 casualties, of which at least 2,000 probably died. When this figure is added to the casualty list for 2-3 July and the casualties in the regular Irish battalions and Scottish regiments where Ulstermen also served, it may be assumed that the total of Ulster losses was much greater.

Historian Philip Orr

Comments by historians

The failure of the divisions on either side of the Ulstermen to take their objectives spelt doom for the 36th, as they ended up receiving the machine-gun bullets that the generals had calculated would be spread across three British divisions.

Historian Philip Orr



02.4

In terms of loss of life, Saturday 1 July was the most expensive day of the war: 21,000 British soldiers had died or been mortally wounded. ...[The Ulster Division suffered] 5,104 casualties, of which at least 2,000 probably died. When this figure is added to the casualty list for 2-3 July and the casualties in the regular Irish battalions and Scottish regiments where Ulstermen also served, it may be assumed that the total of Ulster losses was much greater.

Historian Philip Orr



Comments
by historians



The failure of the divisions on either side of the Ulstermen to take their objectives spelt doom for the 36th, as they ended up receiving the machine-gun bullets that the generals had calculated would be spread across three British divisions.

Historian Philip Orr



Activity 02.4



2.4b Do the different **kinds** of sources tend to go around the same places on the scales?

2.4c For each source, try to work out the author's motivation – the reason they wrote or said what they did.

2.4d Identify the sources which people back home in Ulster might have read in the days and weeks following the battle.

Does the motivation help to explain the way the source is written e.g. whether it describes events or expresses opinion?

How would the people back home have felt when they read these sources?

2.4e General Nugent said that the exploits of the Ulster Division would be "a source of pride to all Ulstermen". Was he right?

Think about:

- Was "pride" the only/main emotion people at home would feel? Was it the only/main emotion the soldiers themselves would feel?
- Would "all" people in Ulster feel the same way?
- Did Nugent mean Ulster women too? Would they feel proud?

- Did Nugent just mean Ulster people at that time, or in the future as well?
- Was Nugent right at the time? Is he still right nowadays? Does Nugent's statement apply to you?



Activity 02.5

Is the 36th Ulster Division remembered in the right way today?



The table shows some of the ways people commemorate the Ulster Division. Complete the table to show if you think these commemorations are appropriate and explain your reason why.

Ways of Commemorating the Ulster Division	Appropriate ✓ or inappropriate ✗	Explain your reason
	 	
Memorials		<input type="text"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Link 1 Link 2 		
Murals		<input type="text"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Link 1 Link 2 		
Orange parades		<input type="text"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Link 1 Link 2 		
Orange banners		<input type="text"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Link 1 Link 2 		
Marching songs		<input type="text"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Link 1 Link 2 		



Activity 02.5



Ways of
Commemorating
the Ulster Division

Appropriate ✓ or
inappropriate ✗



Explain
your
reason

Tattoos

- [Link 1](#)
- [Link 2](#)

Poems

- [Link 1](#)
- [Link 2](#)

Plays

- [Link 1](#)
- [Link 2](#)

Pilgrimages to the
Somme battlefield

- [Link 1](#)
- [Link 2](#)



02.6

Why has the Nationalist contribution to the Battle of the Somme received less attention?

The Battle of the Somme – Guillemont and Ginchy

Despite the enormous losses the British army suffered on 1 July, the Battle of the Somme lasted until September 1916. The 16th Irish Division, which included the “Irish Brigade” of former Irish National Volunteers, launched its first great attack on the village of Guillemont on 3 September. In a fearless charge the Irish troops seized their objective. Despite their heavy casualties, they repeated the feat a few days later when they captured the nearby village of Ginchy.

Activity

02.6



HISTORIC IRISH CHARGE AT GUILLEMONT

English Wonder at Great Spectacle.

SKIRL OF PIPES

Sends Our Men Helter Skelter Through
Hun Lines.



Activity **02.6**



Activity 02.6

Read the sources and complete the table which compares the 36th Ulster Division with the 16th Irish Division at The Battle of The Somme

	36th Ulster Division	16th Irish Division
Members	Mostly former Ulster Volunteers	The "Irish Brigade" was mostly former Irish National Volunteers
Time and place of attack	1 July 1916, Thiepval	3 and 9 September 1916 Guillemont and Ginchy
Success	Achieved their objective, but had to retreat due to lack of support from other divisions	Achieved both objectives and held onto them
Casualties	—	—



Activity 02.6

Read the sources and complete the table which compares the 36th Ulster Division with the 16th Irish Division at The Battle of The Somme



	36th Ulster Division	16th Irish Division
Examples of courage		
Reaction of eyewitnesses		
Reaction of newspaper reports		
How famous today?		



Activity 02.6

Should the 16th Irish Division be remembered in the same ways as the Ulster Division?



The table shows some of the ways people **could** commemorate the 16th Irish Division. Complete the table to show if you think these commemorations are appropriate and explain your reason why.

Ways of Commemorating the Irish Division	Appropriate ✓ or inappropriate ✗	Explain your reason
	<input type="checkbox"/> ✓ <input type="checkbox"/> ✗	
Memorials	• •	<input type="text"/>
Murals	• •	<input type="text"/>
Orange parades	• •	<input type="text"/>
Ancient Order of Hibernians/Irish National Foresters banners	• •	<input type="text"/>
Marching songs	• •	<input type="text"/>



Activity 02.6



Ways of Commemorating the Irish Division	Appropriate ✓ or inappropriate ✗  	Explain your reason
Tattoos • •		<input type="text"/>
Poems • •		<input type="text"/>
Plays • •		<input type="text"/>
Pilgrimages to the Somme battlefield • •		<input type="text"/>



Activity 02.7

The First World War – A common memory?

The Battle of Messines – Shared Victory

In June 1917 the British Army won a remarkable victory at Messines. In one of the most precisely and cleverly planned attacks of the war, a strong German position on a ridge was captured with surprisingly few casualties.

During the build-up to the battle, the 36th Ulster Division and the 16th Irish Division were stationed beside each other in the British frontline. When they went “over the top” on 7th June 1917, the two divisions attacked the enemy side by side.

Many soldiers within the two divisions were encouraged by the good relationship which developed between them.

Activity 02.7

A Protestant chaplain from the 36th Ulster Division wrote:



It was impressive to see what a feeling of security before the battle the Ulster Division had in having the 11th Irish on our left flank and that the 11th Division had in having our Ulster Division on their right flank. This feeling of goodwill and confidence between the two divisions had been growing for some time. I wish the entire north and south that they represent, could participate in the same spirit.

After the battle, the Commanding Officer of the 6th Connaught Rangers (an English Catholic) wrote home to his wife:

June 8, 1917. Rossignol Wood

The extent of our advance you will have learnt from the newspapers, and I hope you and all the world will have learnt also that the South Irish Division and the Ulster Division went forward side by side; - that they opened the battle.

I should like to put on record one further memory of the Battle of Messines. However little it interested me then, it fascinates me today; that during the battle and for the weeks before, the 11th (Irish) and the 31st (Ulster) Divisions lived and fought side-by-side, got on with each other splendidly and at times even pulled each other's chestnuts out of the fire.

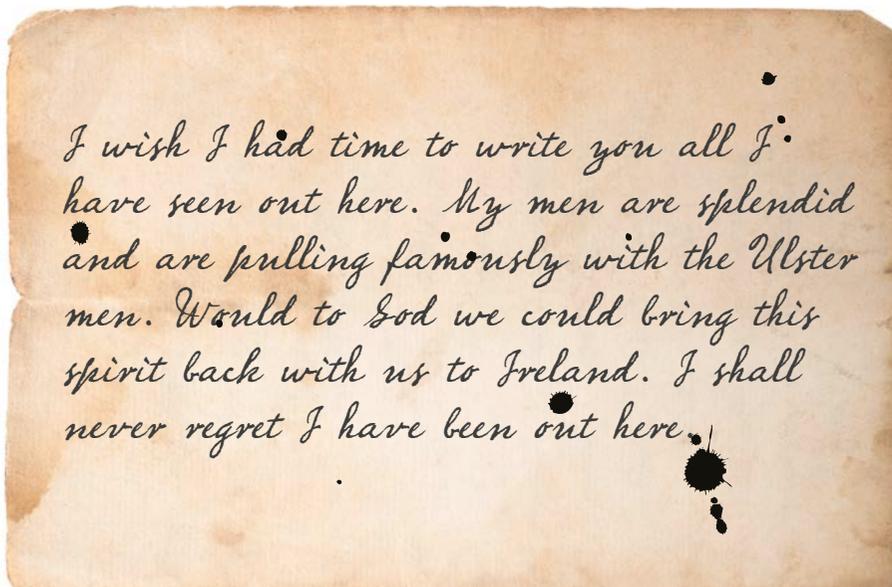
An English officer who took part in the battle wrote:

I remember there were four of us in this advanced post dealing with the wounded of the Royal Irish Rifles. And just over the brow of the hill some of the 16th had their wee dug-out, and we went across, a couple of us at a time, to have a yarn with them; and they came across too, a couple at a time, always leaving a couple at the first aid post - and we became great friends.

Jack Christie was an Ulster Division soldier from the Shankill.

Activity 02.7

John Redmond's brother Willie was an Irish Nationalist MP. At Messines he was officer in the 16th Irish Division. He wrote this message to a friend in Ireland:



Redmond was wounded during the Messines attack. He was tended by an Ulster Division stretcher-bearer, who was wounded in the process and awarded the Military Medal for his bravery.

Redmond died in an ambulance on his way to hospital. Chaplains from both the 16th and 36th Divisions led his funeral, and troops from both Divisions fired a salute over his grave.



Activity 02.7

Design a Peace Park

Messines is now the site of the Island of Ireland Peace Park ([link](#)), a memorial site dedicated to the soldiers of Ireland, of all political and religious beliefs, who died, were wounded or missing in the Great War.

The story of Messines is also the inspiration behind the International School of Peace Studies ([link](#)) which is based near Ebrington Square, an important public space in the city of Derry~Londonderry.

Design a temporary Peace Park to occupy Ebrington Square during the 100 year anniversary of the Battle of Messines.



Activity 02.8

Those who died for Ireland: lest we forget?

Fighting for “freedom”

All over Ireland in early September 1914, local battalions of Irish Volunteers met to discuss an urgent question – how should the organisation respond to the war which had begun a few weeks previously? The Volunteers had joined to defend Ireland’s freedom, but now there were very different opinions about what that meant:



John Redmond
leader of the
Irish Parliamentary Party

To Irish Volunteers
drilling at Woodenbridge,
Wicklow, September 1914

Go on drilling and make yourselves efficient for the work, and then account for yourselves as men, not only in Ireland itself, but wherever the fighting line extends in defence of right and freedom and religion in this war.

At a meeting in Belfast of
Irish National Volunteers,
October 1914

I believe I am speaking the truth when I say... [that] the Irish... would feel covered with humiliation if, when this war was over, they had to admit that their rights and liberties had been saved by the sacrifices of other men, while Irishmen remained safe at home and took no risks.

Activity 02.8

Funeral oration for
Fenian leader O'Donovan Rossa,
August 1915

We of the Irish volunteers...
must stand together...
for the achievement of
the freedom of Ireland.
And we know only one
definition of freedom: it is
[Wolfe] Tone's definition,
it is [John] Mitchel's
definition, it is Rossa's
definition. Let no man...
[give it] it any other name
or definition...



Patrick Pearse

At a recruitment meeting
of Irish Nationalist Volunteers,
November 1914

I have never felt prouder
of [the hundreds of young
Nationalists] who have
pluckily and spontaneously
[joined the British Army] in
the nation's hour of difficulty
and trial...on the side of the
Allies there lies justice, right,
principle, and freedom.



Wee Joe Devlin
Nationalist MP
for West Belfast

Activity **02.8**



Activity

02.9

Your class will roleplay a meeting of Irish Volunteers held at St Mary's Hall, West Belfast.

In order to hold the debate, you will need to research the views of two groups within the volunteers:

- The "Redmondites" and
- The Republicans ("Fenians")



Activity 02.9

The Republicans



THE NATIONAL VOLUNTEERS. A branch of this organisation was started this month. The total number joining is about 150 and they have had a few drill practices at Willowbank Huts, which were attended by about 80 on each occasion. The movement is only taken up by the extreme section of the Nationalist Party, Sinn Feiners, Gaelic Leaguer, etc. The Roman Catholic clergy and the official Nationalist Party have discouraged the movement.

Source A From the police monthly report for Belfast, March 1914.

When the Irish Volunteers first started in Belfast, most of the early recruits were Republicans. These extreme Nationalists were not satisfied with the Irish Parliamentary Party and its tactic of achieving "Home Rule" by setting up an Irish Parliament – they hoped the Irish Volunteers could eventually launch an armed rebellion against British rule in Ireland.

By the time WW1 broke out in August 1914, the Irish Volunteers had grown massively and the Republicans were only a minority of the overall membership – the new members were mostly "Redmondites". However, a number of important leadership positions were still held by Republicans who were also members of a secret

society, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, also called the Fenians. For example, the military commander of the Belfast Irish Volunteers, Denis McCullough [left], was also a high-ranking Fenian.

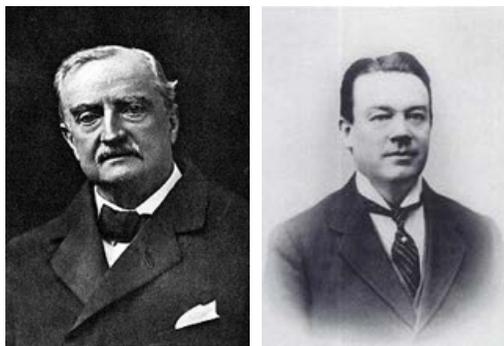
The Fenians had organised a rebellion against Britain in 1867, and were waiting for the opportunity to try again – their slogan was "England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity".

How would Republicans react to the beginning of World War One?

What did they believe their "duty" was?

Activity 02.9

The Redmondites



John Redmond was leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party. In 1914 he was immensely popular in Ireland because he had become the first Nationalist leader to get a Home Rule Bill passed by the British Parliament in London.

One of Redmond's most trusted lieutenants was the Nationalist MP for

THE NATIONAL VOLUNTEERS. There is one regiment of this organisation at present established in Belfast. They number about 2,100 and at present are supported by all sections of the Nationalist party. They have weekly drills at Shaun's Park and in halls in North Queen Street and Victoria Street.... they occasionally have route marches through their own localities and quite a number of old soldiers have joined them.

Source B From the police monthly report for Belfast, July 1914.

West Belfast, Joe Devlin. A likeable character and astute politician, "Wee Joe" was hugely popular among Nationalists in his constituency. The scale of this popularity ensured that he kept getting being elected as MP, even though the Unionists of the Shankill Road refused to vote for him.

Although Redmond's supporters had not shown much interest in the Irish Volunteers when they started up, they became more involved in the summer of 1914. The organisation grew all over Ireland, and "Redmondite" Nationalists soon massively outnumbered the original Republican members.

Now that Home Rule had been passed, Redmond knew that Unionists in Britain and Ireland were very frightened of its consequences,

so he wanted to reassure them that a Nationalist government in Ireland would be a responsible and friendly ally.

As an Irish Nationalist, Redmond was sympathetic towards any small nations which struggled to stay independent against the aggression of more powerful neighbours. As a devout Catholic, he took an interest in the welfare of the Church throughout the world. He was therefore understandably outraged by news that Germany had invaded neutral Belgian and that its soldiers had committed atrocities against Belgian nuns and other civilians.

How would Redmondites respond to the outbreak of WW1?

What did they believe their "duty" was?

02.9

Why was the meeting at St Mary's Hall so angry?



Joe Devlin (1 person)

You are the chairman, but as a Nationalist Party MP you strongly agree with John Redmond that the Irish Volunteers should join the British Army and fight against German aggression in Europe. You want this opinion to win the debate.

You know that most of the Volunteers at the meeting trust your leadership. In fact, you have made sure that some of your strongest supporters are present so that they can cheer speakers who agree with you and boo those who don't.



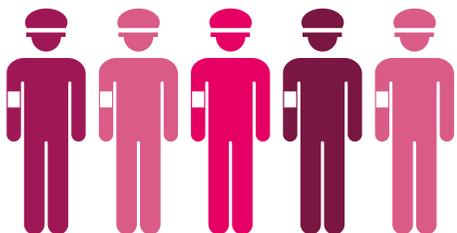
Denis McCullough (1 person)

You are the main speaker representing the Republican view - that British rule is the main threat to Irish freedom. Instead of helping Britain by joining the Army, the Irish Volunteers should keep training in Ireland.

As a Fenian, you actually want the Irish Volunteers to launch an armed rebellion while the British Government is distracted by the war. However, you can't really say that publically - your role in the Fenians is secret.

You know that many of the Volunteers present are strong supporters of Devlin. However, they are all Nationalists, and you hope that your arguments can convince enough people to join your side of the debate.

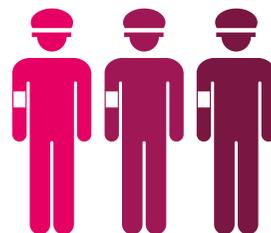
Activity 02.9



Devlin supporter (many people)

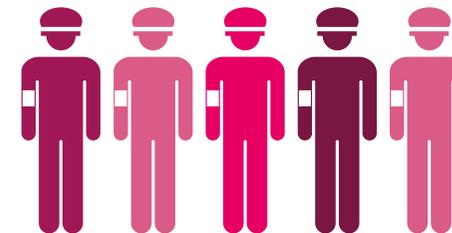
You have already made your mind up. You support Devlin and the Irish Parliamentary Party and you agree that the first duty of Irish Nationalists is to fight for freedom and justice in Europe. You dislike Republicans whom you consider to be deluded extremists.

During the debate, you are planning to support every speech and comment which confirms your point of view. If anyone speaks against your point of view you will heckle them.



McCullough supporter (a few people)

You have already made your mind up. You are a Republican who joined the Irish Volunteers right at the start, and you believe the only freedom that matters is Ireland's complete independence from Britain. You are disgusted at the idea that Irish Nationalists should help Britain fight for "freedom" abroad.



Undecided (most people)

You are a strong Nationalist and want to do whatever is best for Ireland's freedom – but you are still unsure what that that should be. You hope that the speakers at the meeting will present convincing arguments to help you make your mind up. If they don't, you are ready to ask them questions!

You are not a fanatical supporter of Devlin, but you respect him because of what the Irish Parliamentary Party has achieved, and up until now you have always trusted his leadership. After all, the Home Rule Bill has been passed and it seems Ireland will get its own parliament soon.

You have been shocked by the news reports of what is happening in Belgium. It seems clear that the war has started because of Germany's aggressive ambitions to conquer the whole of Europe.

What actually happened at St Mary's?

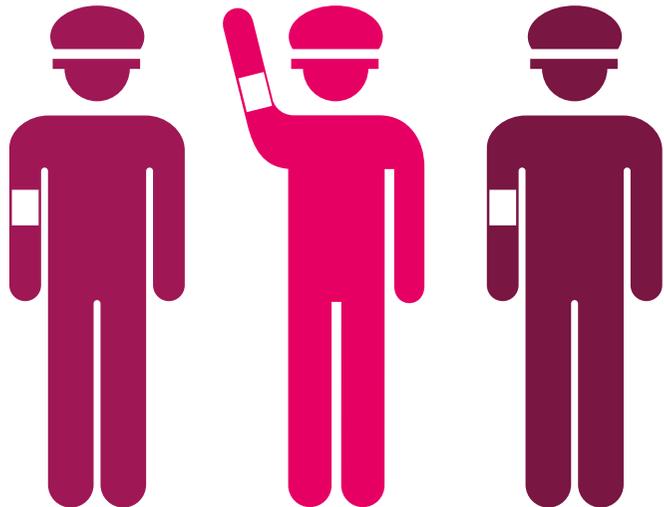
Meetings like the St Mary's debate led to a split in the Volunteers. In Belfast, and throughout Ireland, over 90% of members were loyal to Redmond. Their organisation was renamed the "Irish National Volunteers". Although much smaller in number, the Republicans kept the name "Irish Volunteers" and retained their hope of launching a rebellion while the British Government was distracted by the war. The following statements were all made by Republicans who were present at the original meeting.

Denis McCullough

The hall was filled to capacity and well laced with Devlin's infamous "Baton Men", and as indeed we had only our own few active Volunteers and no great following of sympathisers, the result was a foregone conclusion.

The Volunteers were split and of the four thousand enrolled men who paraded in Sean's park a few weeks earlier, we were left with less than one hundred and fifty all told, of all ages and capacities, but all very loyal men. A great number of the younger men who remained with Devlin and most of the ex-British Army men in his party joined up in the 16th Division, when it was formed, went to France" to fight for small nations" and a great many of them left their bones there. They didn't lack courage nor perhaps national feeling, but they were wrongly led. I suppose a story similar to the above would apply to various parts of Ireland where the Volunteers were strong.

Seamus Dobbyn
was a senior figure in the IRB
when the Irish Volunteers split.



At the time of the Split meetings were called all over Ireland, and our meeting was called and held in St. Mary's Hall, Belfast. Joe Devlin, M.P., presided; He ... called on the Volunteers to aid England in the war against Germany in the so-called fight for small nations. Joe Devlin then called on Denis McCullough to give the views of the opposition. McCullough made many attempts to get his statement across, but was booed down by a patently packed meeting.

...On the following Sunday, I remember well, the Devlinite section of the Volunteers paraded as usual up the Falls Road. Our section did not meet for possibly three weeks later, when we were mobilised at Willowbank at the Upper Falls Road, when we had a total of 146, as compared with, roughly, 3,000 of the Devlinites. The founders of the Volunteers were all with us; those who had broken away were all Devlin's nominees.

... Hundreds joined the 16th so-called Irish Division of the British Army. Our section settled immediately to military training ... and we gradually increased our numbers to about 130, I would say. That included old and young. Belfast was a great stronghold of Hibernianism which would account for our sparse numbers.

...We were actually afraid to appear in public, afraid of our own people, because we were informed that if we appeared we would be attacked by the people themselves, the Hibernian people. We did appear some time in the winter of 1915, when The O'Rahilly came to give a lecture in St. Mary's Hall, Belfast...

The R.I.C. came to McCullough, who was then our leader, and advised him not to bring our men out, as they would be attacked by the people, but McCullough said that we were prepared to defend ourselves.

The outbreak of the Great War in 1914, and the split in the Volunteers occasioned by John Redmond's attitude towards the British war effort and his promise of Volunteer assistance to Britain produced great changes in the Volunteer circles in Belfast. The overwhelming majority of the Volunteers sided with the Redmond party and the Republican Volunteers were reduced to approximately the small number of men, who in the early days of 1913-1914 started the organisation in Belfast.

Falls Road man **David McGuinness** was already in the IRB and the Fianna when he joined the Irish Volunteers in 1914.

When the Irish Volunteers split in September 1914, the Republican minority were regarded by most Nationalists as "cranks" (see this headline from the Irish News).

Public reaction to the Republicans became even more hostile all over Ireland when they launched their rebellion on Easter Monday 1916. In the videos to the left, these nationalists who had joined the British Army tell how angry they felt when they heard what the rebels had done.

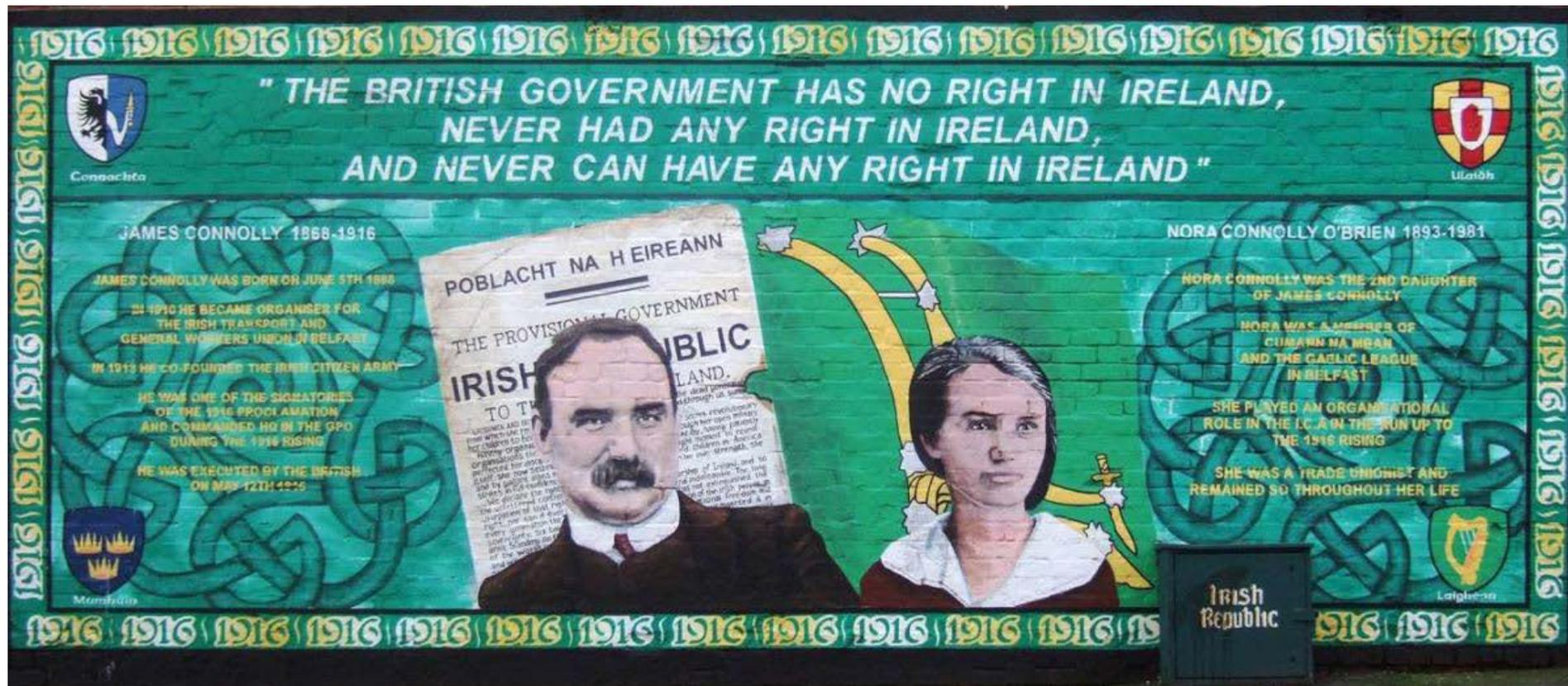




Yet nowadays most Nationalists remember the rebels as inspirational heroes. In West Belfast you can see several murals which represent the rebels as noble freedom fighters.

How did this transformation come about?

Although the IRB leaders planned the main rising for Dublin, the Belfast Irish Volunteers were supposed to be fully involved, led by West Belfast man Denis McCullough. At that time McCullough was President of the IRB. However, the orders were vague and impractical (the Belfast men were supposed to link up with the Tyrone Volunteers and then defend the River Shannon in Connaught). When Eoin MacNeill tried to cancel the Rising on Easter Saturday, it caused so much confusion that the Belfast Volunteers returned home.

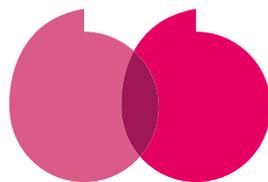


Several young women from Belfast's Cumann na mBan accompanied the Volunteers. Their leader was James Connolly's daughter Nora, who lived on the Falls Road. These girls went to Dublin to notify the rebel leaders about the confusion in the North. They left Dublin just as the Rising began, bearing important messages from James Connolly and Patrick Pearse.

Hardly any Belfast residents were directly involved in the Rising. Winnie Carney from the Falls Road was James Connolly's personal secretary. She was present with him in the Dublin GPO throughout Easter Week, and was among the last rebels to be captured. Ballymacarrett's Charlie Monahan died in a car accident on

his way to meet the ship bringing Roger Casement with German weapons for the Rising (the ship was captured by the British Navy anyway). Carney, Monahan and Nora Connolly have all featured on Belfast Murals.

Activity 02.10



Did West Belfast do its bit during Easter week?

Choose one of the following options:

(i) Read these statements from Belfast Volunteers who were mobilised at Easter 1916. Create a timeline of the events that happened to the Belfast Volunteers.

(ii) Read the statement from Nora Connolly. Create a timeline of events that happened to her and the Belfast Cumann na mBan girls around Easter 1916.

The arrangement for Easter Week was that the Belfast personnel was divided into three companies who were directed to proceed to Co. Tyrone where orders would be forthcoming from McCullough and McCartan. ... We understood in a somewhat vague way that there was a plan prepared for the northern Volunteers to hold a line of the Shannon...

Archie Heron, IRB member

The first indication we got of the coming Rising was when James Connolly came to Belfast and gathered... about 30 of us altogether in a room in Divis Street, Belfast; ... Connolly told us that we must make active preparations. He apparently thought that we would be fighting in Belfast, and gave us detailed instructions on house to house fighting. He was asked at the meeting when we might be called, and his answer was "Soon". ...I think that meeting must have been in January or February, 1916.

Seamus Dobbyn, IRB member

Looking back on the whole thing, I believe that if the mixup caused by Eoin McNeill's countermanding orders had not occurred, that the Belfast men would have gone into action without any misgivings.

Cathal McDowell

I was to mobilise my men, with all arms and ammunition and equipment available, to convey them to Tyrone, join the Tyrone men mobilised there and "proceed with all possible haste, to join Mellows in Connaught and act under his command there"... [James Connolly told me] "You will fire no shot in Ulster: you will proceed with all possible speed to join Mellows in Connaught, "and", he added, "if we win through, we will then deal with Ulster".

Denis McCullough, IRB President

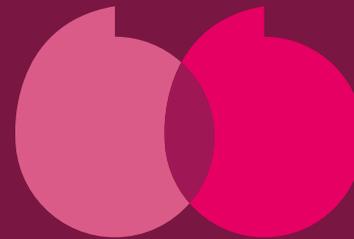


On Holy Saturday 1916 the first detachment of the Volunteers, with which I travelled, entrained for Dungannon, Co. Tyrone. A few weeks previously our rifles, had been sent before us to Tyrone and we carried our bandoliers, containing rifle ammunition, small arms with ammunition and haversacks which were covered by our overcoats when travelling... In all about 120 Belfast Volunteers went to County Tyrone on Holy Saturday 1916.

Liam Gaynor, IRB member

Early on Sunday morning Denis McCullagh... informed me that I was to mobilise my men and take them into Coalisland in preparation for return to Belfast. He informed me he was taking this step as a result of cancellation orders he received from Eoin McNeill.

Cathal McDowell, IRB member



On Easter Sunday morning... We awaited the coming of Dr. McCartan and Denis McCullough. A short time after their arrival we got an order to get our equipment, and to fall-in and march to Cookstown to catch a train there for Belfast. When we got this order we had barely time to catch the train. ...We arrived in Belfast on Sunday evening and dispersed to our homes. I do not recollect any police activity in Belfast on our arrival there.

Tom Wilson, IRB member

...even today I feel that a few determined men could have taken action which would have compelled a lot, if not all, of the British Garrison to remain in Belfast.

Roger McCorley

...During the week we were waiting from day to day and hoping to get an order from someone in authority, but the order never came and Easter Week 1916 fighting passed without our being able to take part. Less than a fortnight after the cessation of fighting in Dublin the British authorities made a general round-up of the Volunteers and their supporters.

These were brought in batches to Kilmainham jail before being transferred to internment camps in England. A large number of Volunteers were arrested in Belfast but, to my surprise, I was not.

Liam Gaynor

Nora Connolly
witness statement

When we got into the train, the Young Ireland Pipers came along; they were Volunteers also. They were unusual looking pipers; they had groundsheets, bandoliers, bayonets on their hips, and pipes under their arms... We steamed out of Belfast station to the tune of the pipers playing "The Soldiers' Song".

...Someone came running as soon as we got to the [Coalisland drill] Hall - "Where are those first-aiders? Connolly, you are wanted in a hurry. One of the lads shot himself, while cleaning his revolver". He was only grazed. It. was the first shot in the affair.

... [on Saturday]between nine and ten p.m. [The messenger] said that they got the demobilisation order that there would be no fighting in the North, and that I had my choice of going back to Belfast or Dublin... I said: "Why should there be fighting in Dublin, and not here?" He said he did not know; he only got the message. I said I would not go to Belfast; I would go to Dublin. I said I would ask the girls, and give them the choice of going to Belfast or Dublin.

...When we got in to Dublin, it was before six o'clock in the morning... Daddy said: "What are you doing here? I thought you were with the men in the North". I said: "What is happening? Are they not going to fight?" I gave him the message I got... He sat up in the bed. The tears ran down his face. Evidently they had a meeting before that, and he was very upset. Afterwards, I heard they had a long session with MacNeill, and he was absolutely obstinate - they had word that arms had not arrived - and he was absolutely obstinate about giving orders to go ahead; he would not.

... One of the [Belfast] girls had gone out to Mass, and she arrived back with the "Sunday Independent", with the notice from MacNeill - "All manoeuvres cancelled". She said: "Look, Mr. Connolly, do you see this?" He was amazed. "I know nothing of this", he said. He did not know it was going to be put in the papers.

.. We were all at Liberty Hall at eight o'clock on Easter Monday morning. When I arrived there, and reported to Daddy, he said we were to go back to the North. I did not like that. It was a struggle to go to the North, away from Daddy... He said Pearse was sending a message to the people in the North; and we were to take it. He told us that the fighting would start in Dublin at noon...

... When Pearse arrived... he had a poster in his hand; and he opened it, and said: "This is the Proclamation of the Republic. This will be posted up, when we go into action. I want you all to read it, and memorise it as much as you can. When you reach [the North], tell them you have read this; then tell every Volunteer you meet that we will be fighting from twelve o'clock on; and, even though they have not received their orders, to hold themselves in readiness; and they will receive orders".

.. When we got back to Coalisland, early in the afternoon, there was nobody there except the local Volunteers. I contacted the local officer and told him. He was in a blazing fury. He said: "They were in such a hurry to get the Belfast men away that they marched them at the double to Dungannon, to catch the train"... Eilish Allen was to tell McCullough that Pearse had said to mobilise, the fight was going on - we had seen the Proclamation - to tell them to hold themselves in readiness for remobilisation.

[The following weekend, Nora and her sister Ina Connolly headed for Dublin]

"We have come from the North", we said. [A girl] told us about the fighting. It was all over. It was an awful shock. She said: "The last of them surrendered a few hours ago". I asked about Daddy. She told us that he was wounded and in prison.