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# Irish Identities Before and After the Act of Union<sup>1</sup>

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This paper considers how recent research is changing our perceptions of Irish identities in the eighteenth century. It assesses how those identities were affected by the upheavals of the 1790s and the Act of Union of 1800 and offers some reflections on how far those changes were the result of the Union or of broader factors at work.

In the autumn of 1798, the British government brought forward a proposal for a legislative Union between Great Britain and Ireland. It was presented as the solution to a number of Ireland's ills, above all to the differences and divisions that had recently culminated in rebellion in 1798. A Union would, among other things, restore harmony and stability in Ireland by offering a new context for the solution of one of the most contentious political issues in the 1790s: the Catholic question. In a United Kingdom, Irish Protestants would be reassured by being part of an overwhelmingly Protestant population, and would consequently be prepared to accept the extension of full political rights to Catholics in place of the partial enfranchisement that had existed since 1793.<sup>2</sup>

As we know, things did not work out like that. The Union of 1800 was intended to take religion out of Irish politics; in fact, post-Union Ireland was more, rather than less, divided on sectarian lines, and this certainly extended to

politics. And instead of being accepted as a new basis of political identity, the Union itself soon became a new cause of division. To nationalist historians of an earlier generation, the inadequacies of the Union scarcely required any explanation or analysis. It was enough for them that it was clearly incompatible with the enduring forces of Irish nationalism. Modern historians are less satisfied with this approach. They point out that the Scots and the Welsh did not lack national credentials, yet Union with England worked sufficiently well for them during the nineteenth century to forestall the emergence of strong nationalist or “home rule” movements.<sup>3</sup>

But to judge the impact of the Union on Ireland and Irish identity, it is important first to consider the Ireland that came before 1800. What was that Ireland like? How has recent research extended or modified our view of it?

Eighteenth-century Ireland is, of course, known as the age of the penal laws, and the image that springs to mind is that of a deeply divided society with religion providing the main line of division. As P. S. O’Hegarty put it in *A History of Ireland Under the Union*, there were two nations in eighteenth-century Ireland: the Protestants, enjoying all the privileges and the “underground nation,” the Catholics, lacking property, without freedom to practice their religion, excluded from parliament, the professions, and all political rights.<sup>4</sup> While historians still debate the precise aim of the penal laws—to preserve political life as a Protestant monopoly or to bring about the extinction of Catholicism—the main thrust of research since O’Hegarty wrote has shifted away from the letter of the law towards an investigation of how the penal laws worked in practice; and the result has been to modify considerably the earlier picture.<sup>5</sup> While on paper the laws were draconian, it has become apparent that many of them were not enforced evenly and, for much of the time, some weren’t enforced at all. Patrick Fagan has highlighted the success of the Irish Catholic lobby in the early part of the century in enlisting the help of foreign powers, especially Austria, in mitigating the enforcement of the laws, and by mid-century Catholics in effect enjoyed freedom of worship (a right not made official until 1782).<sup>6</sup> The late Maureen Wall drew attention to the importance of Catholics in trade, while Kevin Whelan has demonstrated the existence of a “strong farmer” element among Catholics, cultivating middle-class virtues of thrift and hard work.<sup>7</sup> Although they were excluded from the legal profession, Catholics did well in medicine.<sup>8</sup> Where the penal laws were effective was in excluding Catholics from political life, or to be more precise, from formal political life, since studies are beginning to reveal informal

participation by Catholics, for instance at elections, despite being deprived of the vote.<sup>9</sup> By conforming to the established Church of Ireland, Catholics could exercise the same rights as Protestants, and the existence of a convert element in Irish political life is a phenomenon that is also beginning to receive attention.<sup>10</sup>

None of this meant that Ireland was not a deeply divided society, with great inequalities between the various religious denominations as well as between rich and poor. However, it is worth bearing in mind that all eighteenth-century European societies were highly unequal and tended to discriminate on confessional grounds. What made Ireland distinctive was that the Protestants—themselves divided into Anglicans and Dissenters—represented only a minority, not much more than one-quarter of the population. For most of the eighteenth century, however, the significance of this fact was muted, given that throughout Europe political rights tended to be concentrated in the hands of a land-owning elite. The issue of Catholic numbers only assumed major proportions when the question arose towards the end of the century of reforming the political system in a more democratic direction.<sup>11</sup>

If the penal laws looked worse on paper than they were in practice, it has nevertheless been assumed that there was a deep gulf in terms of social values between Catholics, proud of their ancestry and culture, and *parvenu* Protestants who lacked pedigrees and aristocratic attributes. Again, recent research uncovers a more complex picture. Certainly it can be shown that Catholics continued to take pride in their pedigrees, and that some, despite losing their land, continued to patronise the Gaelic genealogists. Moreover, for Catholic emigrés a noble pedigree was a requirement for holding office in certain continental countries.<sup>12</sup> However, what has also been revealed is the extent to which Irish Protestants too were keen to establish their lineages, and to assert their status as “gentlemen.”<sup>13</sup> Some even patronised the same Gaelic genealogists as their Catholic counterparts. A case in point was that of Thomas Wilkinson, who became lord mayor of Dublin in 1720, and who was probably typical of many Protestants from mercantile backgrounds who came to Ireland in the wake of the Williamite reconquest. On the eve of making an advantageous match for his son, Wilkinson was anxious to have his own ancestry attested. What is surprising is that he bypassed the state official charged with such duties, the Ulster king at arms, and instead approached Charles Lynegar, who was eking out a precarious living teaching Irish in Trinity College, Dublin, and doing what his ancestors, the Ó Luinín family of

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hereditary genealogists, had always done: make out pedigrees.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps Lynegar offered a cheaper service. At all events, he claimed to have access to noble genealogies of England as well as Ireland, and duly traced Wilkinson's pedigree back through various English gentry to one Robert, "Lord of Innsbruck [*sic*] in Germany," and presumably had a satisfied client.<sup>15</sup>

More generally, there continued to be a significant cultural division between English and Irish speakers. However, the Irish language was already under some pressure from the spread of books and newspapers, for the most part in English; and although a significant proportion of the books emanating from Catholic printers were Catholic devotional works, the fact that they too were mostly in English contributed to the anglicising effect.<sup>16</sup>

Another aspect of elite status that cut across confessional divisions was the code of honour. The division that separated those who could pass themselves off as "gentlemen" from those who could not was arguably greater than that caused by religious difference. It has been pointed out that in early-modern Europe, honour and dishonour provided the currency in which men competed for reputation.<sup>17</sup> The code of honour rested on the belief that the public reputation of a gentleman had to be free from stain or slight, otherwise he was not entitled to be regarded as part of the social and political elite. Hence the prevalence of duelling. Honour, and the right to take up arms to defend one's reputation against insult, were regarded as privileges exclusive to the upper classes, though in Ireland, where the Protestant landed elite was comparatively small, duelling was inclined to spread somewhat down the social scale, with some members of the mercantile and professional classes adopting the practice. Duelling is of interest because by engaging in it duellists were taking on two of the great institutions in eighteenth-century society: the churches (opposed to duelling on religious grounds) and the courts (whose methods of arbitration were at odds with those of the duellists). Thus the Irish elite reaffirmed its privileged status and its distinctiveness as a social group. Far from declining during the century, the historian of duelling finds that it reached a peak in the 1770s and 1780s. It is remarkable that even certain United Irishmen, who (having read Tom Paine) had set themselves against aristocratic privilege, found themselves drawn into it. Leading United Irishmen who fought duels included Napper Tandy, Thomas Russell, Archibald Hamilton Rowan, Sir Simon Butler, and Henry Sheares.<sup>18</sup>

As for Catholics, in principle they were excluded from the culture of duelling because from the 1690s to 1793 they were not permitted to bear arms.

However, certain Catholics had been officially exempted from the ban, and in any case there were parts of the country where the rule of law was not strictly observed. Thus even before the relaxation of the penal laws towards the end of the century there were Catholics who did fight duels, and it is noteworthy that as soon as the ban was relaxed, Catholics from the landed and professional classes adopted the practice as warmly as Protestants. The most notorious duel involving a Catholic was the one fought between Daniel O'Connell and a member of the Protestant corporation of Dublin in 1815, in which O'Connell's opponent was killed. O'Connell henceforth declined challenges to duel, but other Catholics continued to participate until the practice died out in Britain and Ireland from the 1830s.<sup>19</sup> Thus the code of honour to some extent cut across religious divisions.

What about political identities? One of the main developments in eighteenth-century historiography in recent years has been the moving of Jacobitism to centre stage. Literary historians have long debated the importance of Jacobitism in Gaelic poetry, but the subject remained somewhat marginal for mainstream historians who (following Lecky) were inclined to doubt whether the phenomenon retained any more than a short-term hold over Catholics. Such a view is now difficult to sustain. New work by Patrick Fagan, Breandán Ó Buachalla, Vincent Morley, and Éamonn Ó Ciardha shows in considerable detail the extent to which Catholics continued to think in Jacobite terms.<sup>20</sup> This only began to be challenged in the 1760s when Charles O'Connor of Belanagare and Dr John Curry adopted what has been called a "Hanoverian strategy" in their quest for a relaxation of the penal laws; and the point is made that for many years their writings were aimed at fellow Catholics as much as at Protestants.<sup>21</sup> And if evidence from the book trade is anything to go by, in the course of the century Jacobitism and a sense of dispossession may have spread down the social scale, since there were several cheap editions of a key Jacobite work, Hugh Reily's *Ireland's Case Briefly Stated*.<sup>22</sup> It has even been argued that for Catholics in the 1790s, Jacobitism was a more potent mobilising force than republicanism.<sup>23</sup> Its importance in Ireland is complemented by the new attention historians now devote to English Jacobitism.<sup>24</sup>

Irish Protestants, too, have come in for scrutiny, and particularly in respect to what historians have been accustomed to label their "nationalism." Difficulties arise with the label because however much Protestants may have defended Irish rights, they retained (at least in the early decades of the century)

a strong Unionist outlook.<sup>25</sup> There were also aristocratic and confessional overtones in Protestant definitions of “the Irish nation,” and an absence, at least until the end of the century, of the modern sense that the nation and the state should coincide. Consequently, the term “Patriotism”—a contemporary one—has become more widely used.<sup>26</sup> But how did Protestants see their place in Ireland and their relations with the other inhabitants and with Britain? Several studies have taken up this theme, one of the most important being Colin Kidd’s *British Identities Before Nationalism*.<sup>27</sup> Kidd’s starting point is that in the eighteenth century lineage or ancestry was the key to legitimisation, and that the history of race or ethnicity took second place to that of institutions and religion. In an age when biblical revelation was still the dominant force in intellectual life, there was general support for view set out in the Book of Genesis that all the world’s peoples had a common origin. Racial differences were regarded less as innate (a view that became more common in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) than as a matter of differentiation from a common stem. Racial or ethnic elitism was thus linked to assumptions about how different peoples had or had not cultivated the institutional values in church and state that were prized in the eighteenth century.<sup>28</sup>

In England, it was widely assumed that the northern European (“Gothic,” or non-Roman) peoples had nurtured free institutions which had subsequently fallen victim to despotic kings or popes. Only in a few countries, notably England, had these institutions survived. Hence the boasted “liberties of Englishmen” represented an inheritance from the “Gothic” past, all the more to be prized because of their rarity. Irish Protestants, like those in North America and other parts of the Hanoverian dominions, were inclined to identify with this “imagined community,” and this was one of the reasons for Unionist tendencies. However, Unionism was not the only possible response. Indeed, the government’s resistance to a Union with Ireland in the early 1700s meant that Irish Protestants had little choice but to emphasise their links with the Old English in Ireland who had enjoyed their own (“Gothic”) institutions of parliament and the common law.<sup>29</sup> The ancient rights of such institutions could be invoked in any quarrels with the metropolitan power, as illustrated by William Molyneux in his protest against English attempts to curb the export potential of the Irish woollen industry. His influential *The Case of Ireland, Stated* represented a defence of the “ancient constitution” of the kingdom of Ireland, with an admixture of Lockean natural law.<sup>30</sup>

The kingdom of Ireland was not a new idea in the eighteenth century, but for several reasons it received a considerable boost in the course of the century. For the first time, the Irish parliament (consisting of king, lords and commons) began meeting regularly: this was primarily a by-product of new ways of financing the Irish establishment, but it also facilitated a growing body of Irish legislation.<sup>31</sup> In the seventeenth century, the rights of the parliament of the Irish kingdom had been advanced by Old English Catholic spokesmen, including Patrick Darcy, and given a historical dimension by one of the most influential writers of the century, Geoffrey Keating, in his *Foras Feasa ar Éireann (History of Ireland)*,<sup>32</sup> dating from the 1630s, and now the subject of an important new study.<sup>33</sup> Protestant respect for Keating's work was facilitated by the fact that when it first appeared in print in 1723—after almost a century circulating in manuscript copies—it was in a version that conveyed a neutral Christian flavour to the Irish past instead of Keating's vigorous Catholicism.<sup>34</sup> After the Williamite settlement, the Irish parliament was barred to Catholics, but certain Protestants, including Molyneux, Jonathan Swift, Charles Lucas and Henry Grattan, took up the baton. They dropped what had been another key aspect of Keating's kingdom, the Irish language as a badge of identity, but in other respects continued to contend that the kingdom of Ireland had distinctive rights. This created some tensions with the British parliament, which from 1720 explicitly claimed the right to legislate for Ireland. However, the emphasis on the Irish parliament's rights seemed to be vindicated when, in 1782-3 during the crisis brought on by the American revolution, the British government conceded that only the king, lords and commons of Ireland had the right to make laws binding on Ireland.

Thus far, our discussion has centred mainly on the Old English dimensions of Irish history that Protestants were borrowing. However, historians have also begun to examine in more detail the extent to which Protestants borrowed from the Celtic past. One of Kidd's contentions is that contemporary concepts of "Gothic peoples" included the Celts; in principle, then, there was nothing to prevent the Irish Protestants of the eighteenth century also identifying with the Celts, or indeed with pre-Celtic peoples.<sup>35</sup> In fact, it is clear that this did happen, though it has to be stressed that this was on a highly selective basis. For instance, one of the symbols of the kingdom of Ireland that was deployed increasingly after the winning of legislative independence was the "Milesian crown." Keating had made strong claims for the Milesians, the ancient Celtic people of Ireland, as a people who had a high respect for religion and learning,



whose kings had been “sovereign” (i.e., had admitted no temporal superiors), and had shown a proper appreciation for parliament-like institutions.<sup>36</sup> The first printed edition of Keating’s history contained a frontispiece depicting Brian Boru, the early eleventh-century high king of Ireland and scourge of the Danes, wearing a crown with a distinctive spiked rim.<sup>37</sup> Depictions of this crown became more frequent in the second half of the eighteenth century and subsequently found favour among the mainly Protestant Volunteers, set up to defend the country from invasion during the American revolutionary war (but soon taking on a political as well as a military role and championing Irish parliamentary rights). In 1782, the newspaper the *Volunteer’s Journal* had as its masthead a Milesian crown surmounting an Irish harp, and the same crown frequently appeared on Volunteer flags.<sup>38</sup> In scholarly circles, too, the device was taken up. When the newly formed Irish Academy (which became the Royal Irish Academy following the granting of a charter from George III in 1786) began to publish its *Transactions* in the later 1780s, the cover included a vignette depicting Hibernia and Britannia on either side of a shield bearing a harp, and surmounted by a Milesian crown.<sup>39</sup> Nor should it be supposed that it was only Protestants of a “reforming” outlook who were happy to identify with this symbol of the Celtic past. The Irish yeomanry, established by government as a counter-revolutionary force in 1796, was, almost from the outset, an overwhelmingly Protestant body.<sup>40</sup> Its historian has argued that the flags and other devices of yeomanry corps invariably depicted the rounded British imperial crown rather than the Milesian crown.<sup>41</sup> However, examples have now come to light of Irish yeomanry belt-plates and gorgets (badges) that depict the Milesian crown. These date from the late 1790s and even from the early 1800s (post-Union) period.<sup>42</sup> Admittedly, in these cases the Milesian crown, surmounting an Irish harp, is shown beneath an over-arching imperial crown, but these examples do indicate the enduring appeal for Protestants of the idea of the kingdom of Ireland, and lend weight to recent claims that there was greater continuity between the Volunteers and the yeomanry than has generally been accepted.<sup>43</sup>

Another borrowing from the Celtic past concerned St Patrick. In the early seventeenth century, Archbishop James Ussher of Armagh had made out a case for seeing the church founded by Patrick in the fifth century as a scriptural church that had no real contact with Rome: in other words, as a proto-Protestant church.<sup>44</sup> During the eighteenth century, Irish Protestants came to identify with this interpretation of the history of the Celtic church, and from

mid-century on, “Patrick” was even brought into service as an archetypal Irishman to represent the Anglo-Irish in their debates with government over Irish parliamentary rights.<sup>45</sup>

From such willingness to identify with at least some aspects of the Old English and Celtic past, it seems clear that Protestants were adopting a more “Irish” identity. However, it should not be inferred from this that they were indicating any approval of Catholicism or endorsing a return to Gaelic culture, or indeed drawing closer to those fellow-Irishmen who represented the contemporary expressions of that culture. On the contrary, there is plenty of evidence to show that deep divisions remained between Protestants and Catholics (whether Irish- or English-speaking).<sup>46</sup> Ian McBride’s meticulous study of Presbyterian thought indicates that even radicals continued to take for granted the intimate connection between religion and politics: “purifying the body politic” thus had strong religious and anti-Catholic overtones.<sup>47</sup> All this makes it difficult to find any single contemporary model into which to fit Irish Protestants. From some perspectives, their identity can appear to be an English provincial one;<sup>48</sup> they also fit into a European *ancien régime* paradigm, illustrated (for example) by the Magyars, who differed culturally and ethnically from the majority Slav population, yet considered themselves to constitute the Hungarian nation; or the Lowland Scots, who cheerfully adopted aspects of Scottish Highland culture while retaining a generally contemptuous attitude towards the Highland Scots people.<sup>49</sup> But there are also similarities with colonial patterns, in which (for example) Hispanic colonists constructed Creole identities from their own European ancestry and the local histories of the native peoples their ancestors had conquered.<sup>50</sup>

During the 1790s, there was of course movement beyond the idea of an Irish kingdom in a republican, anti-monarchical direction. Circulation of the works of Tom Paine, and the example of revolutionary France, brought the language of modern republicanism into every corner of the island.<sup>51</sup> This was reflected in the adoption by the United Irishmen of the symbol of the harp without the customary crown, whether Milesian or imperial. The Defenders, a mainly Catholic secret society, may also have been moving in this direction independently of the United Irishmen, though the extent is hard to measure.<sup>52</sup> However, older concepts of the term “republican” (compatible with monarchy) continued to be invoked, and this was true of a significant section of Presbyterian reformers.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, among the many studies that have appeared on the troubled decade of the 1790s and especially the rebellion of

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1798, some have drawn attention to the continued preoccupation, among certain leading United Irishmen, with the “ancient constitution,” which (if reformed along lines suggested by David Hume, Adam Smith and Edmund Burke) could overcome the shortcomings of British rule and open the way to a more inclusive Irish society. This was found notably among some Church of Ireland leaders, including Arthur O’Connor, and even Wolfe Tone.<sup>54</sup> The presence of these British influences suggests that the United Irishmen, at least those in Dublin, may have been closer to the Grattanite Whigs than is usually thought: it may be worth exploring parallels with the regnalist thought of Arthur Griffith a century later.

But while some in the 1790s were contemplating ways of putting Protestant/Catholic relations on a new and more equal footing, and transforming relations with Britain, the decade also witnessed a serious backlash against such plans. It needs to be borne in mind that although the extension of political rights to Catholics was not fully completed during the decade, the two relief acts of 1792 and 1793 went far towards ending the legal restrictions on Catholics exercising political rights. The right to vote, to become full members of guilds, corporations, and the legal profession, to bear arms, and to attend the only university in the country (Trinity College) were all conceded.<sup>55</sup> These concessions followed a period of some twenty years during which most of the civil (as opposed to the political) disabilities affecting Catholics had been repealed, without, on the whole, provoking much in the way of serious opposition among Protestants. Why then was there a backlash in the 1790s, its most obvious manifestation the establishment of the Orange Order in 1795? Suspicion has been directed at elite sections of the Protestant gentry, who, according to some accounts, deliberately fostered a new sectarianism by grafting themselves on to the leadership of the Orange Order while (by incorporating some Orangemen into the yeomanry) the government turned it into an overtly sectarian force.<sup>56</sup>

These charges are not without weight. However, they may also mislead by failing to make allowance for the forces producing polarisation on sectarian lines from the mid-1790s. Those forces affected not merely the plebeian Protestants who (it is generally agreed) formed the first Orange lodges in Ulster, but those members of the elite who lent countenance to the movement. The late Frank Wright suggested that the eighteenth century in Ireland witnessed a general decline in the solidarity of the settler or Protestant community. As members of the landed elite, bolstered by the control conferred

by the penal laws, came to feel more secure, so they became less inclined than in the past to treat Protestants as a special case when (for instance) it came to granting leases or other favours. This helped to create paternalistic relations between the elite and some Catholics, but it did nothing to improve solidarity between non-elite Protestants and Catholics; rather, such developments prompted periodic bouts of Protestant emigration and (among those who remained) fostered resentment against both Catholics and landlords. Thus, Wright argues that the abandoning of the penal laws was never likely to be accomplished without a crisis of some sort.<sup>57</sup> Regarding the removal of the penal laws as a process motivated by the self-interest of the elite, plebeian Protestants formed groups or associations designed to challenge the process—a case in point being the activities of the so-called Peep O'Day Boys (forerunners of the Orange Order) who raided Catholic homes to enforce the ban on Catholics bearing arms. Such activities obviously threatened Catholics but also challenged those sections of the elite that wished to relax the law. The situation became more unstable and liable to polarisation once the Catholics abandoned their deferential stance and attempted to organise themselves, as with the formation of the Defenders in the 1780s and 1790s, thus threatening members of the elite with loss of control over both Protestants and Catholics.<sup>58</sup>

Viewed in this light, it appears that the options open to the elite were shrinking. What has been interpreted as gentry deliberately lending their countenance to the Orange Order, may in certain cases have been the result of something more like intimidation.<sup>59</sup> Lord Gosford had a reputation as a champion of persecuted Catholics; but when he was informed on 12 July 1796 that 1,500 Orangemen were on the spot requesting permission to march through his County Armagh estate, he may have felt that discretion was the better part of valour.<sup>60</sup> Following the French invasion attempt in Bantry Bay in December 1796, the prospect of a United Irish rebellion became stronger, and the government's counter-revolutionary measures reinforced the polarisation process. Certain Presbyterian radicals began to move toward a loyalist position.<sup>61</sup> When the rebellion at last took place in May-June 1798 followed by a French landing in August, the British government decided on a legislative union, and Irish M.P.s were sufficiently divided among themselves to allow the measure to pass into law.

In what ways did Irish identities change after the rebellion and the Act of Union? It is now clear that the threat of rebellion did not immediately disappear following the failures of 1798 but remained formidable at least

among the lower orders down to the period of Emmet's rebellion in 1803.<sup>62</sup> However, the fact that counter-revolutionary forces had triumphed meant that republicans had little choice but to emigrate (which many did) or to keep silent, and loyalism was in the ascendant for a generation or more. Studies of English loyalism in this period point to a number of trends that can also be detected in Ireland. One of these was a growing cult of monarchy.<sup>63</sup> George III had got off to a rather unpopular start in Britain and Ireland in the 1760s and 1770s, but there is evidence to suggest that during the 1790s he and the royal family became the focus for anti-French and anti-revolutionary solidarity. The king's own vulnerability had been clearly demonstrated during his illness in 1788, when details of his horrifying treatment had been widely circulated in the press. In the 1790s, his frugality (and that of Queen Charlotte) smacked of patriotism in time of war, and appealed to the middle classes. In Ireland, his popularity in establishment circles was reflected in the enthusiasm with which his golden jubilee was celebrated in 1809, and (although the subject has not received detailed attention) the event caught the public imagination in a way that was not confined to Protestants.<sup>64</sup>

There was also greater interest in post-union Ireland as well as in Britain in the overseas empire, which in the course of the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars had grown significantly, and had come to occupy a more important place in government strategic and economic thinking.<sup>65</sup> The exploits of the armed forces in different parts of the world had become of considerable interest to Irish as well as British newspaper editors. In any case, as a result of the wars society had become more militarised, and (once the formal ban on Catholics bearing arms had been lifted in 1793) Irish soldiers, most of them Catholics, had entered the British forces in large numbers. Tom Bartlett has estimated that from 1793 to 1815, some 200,000 Irish recruits joined the British army and navy; this was in addition to those who served in Ireland as members of the (largely Catholic) militia and the (almost entirely Protestant) yeomanry.<sup>66</sup> As many as one in six adult males in that period may have spent time in uniform. Bartlett suggests that this had a marked influence on Irish society: many members of the various secret societies that flourished in post-union decades would have had some military experience. Allan Blackstock has argued that the militarisation of society was reflected in the Orange Order, with Orange processions in the early nineteenth century owing much to the military traditions of the yeomanry, especially the military-style flute bands and the playing of aggressive party tunes.<sup>67</sup>

Whether these broad trends tended to foster a sense of “British” identity, as appears to have been the case in England, Wales, and Scotland, has not been the subject of any systematic study.<sup>68</sup> In the field of religion, however, developments were taking place that were set to reinforce divisions between Catholics and Protestants, and to breathe new life into Keating’s equation of Irishness with Catholicism. Post-union Ireland was above all a place in which the institutional churches were extending their influence over their flocks. This phenomenon, which had parallels all over Europe, was nevertheless distinctive in Ireland. Whereas in countries such as France the post-Napoleonic period witnessed a significant religious *revival* as part of a reaction against the excesses of the revolutionary era, what took place in Ireland in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was to a considerable extent happening for the first time.

Take the Catholic church. The penal laws may not have been as devastating in their impact as used to be thought, but they still hampered the work of the hierarchy in introducing the decrees of the mid-sixteenth century Council of Trent, which had attempted, in face of the challenge from the Protestant Reformation, to rid the church of its various medieval abuses. The situation in Ireland at the beginning of the nineteenth century was patchy. In certain areas, particularly in the towns and in the eastern part of the country, Tridentine reforms were well under way. In other areas priests were still trying to instill in their flocks official catechesis, regularity of Mass attendance, and to wean them from various popular devotional practices that were frowned on in official circles.<sup>69</sup> Signs of progress were to be seen in a spate of new church building, replacing the simple Mass houses of the penal era with the larger, stone-built, decorated chapels of the early nineteenth century. All this encouraged Catholics to take pride in and identify with Catholicism. At the same time, freed from the necessity of tailoring their case for relaxation of the penal laws to the sensitivities of Protestants, Catholic historians dropped their reticence about the role of the pope and links with Rome in the early Irish church and strongly reaffirmed the continuity of the Roman nature of the Catholic church in Ireland.<sup>70</sup>

That the Irish Catholic church, emerging from the penal era, should wish to stamp its authority on its flocks and mark out its presence in the landscape was not surprising. What is more significant, perhaps, is that similar tendencies can be detected in the Church of Ireland. Archbishop William Magee is associated with what has been called “the second Reformation,” which in the

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1820s sought to instil greater discipline into church members and to reassert the claims of the established church to be the legitimate successor of the church founded by St Patrick.<sup>71</sup> When he became Archbishop of Dublin in 1822, Magee appointed one John Semple as diocesan architect to the Board of First Fruits (established in 1777 to administer parliamentary grants for church buildings). Semple's views on church architecture were close to the Archbishop's.<sup>72</sup> In contrast to the new Catholic chapels, which tended to favour an Italianate or classical style, Semple's churches consciously followed an early Irish Christian style, such as that of St Kevin's church at Glendalough, County Wicklow. These churches, dozens of which were built in the Dublin diocese during the 1820s and 1830s, were characterised by a single-chamber structure, steeply pitched roofs, and bell towers placed behind the west gable.<sup>73</sup> In this way, an architectural dimension was added to the Church of Ireland's claim, boosted by the evangelical revival, to be the "national" church in Ireland.

All this alone would have been productive of heightened religious tensions, and hardly conducive to removing religion from politics, as the legislative Union was supposed to do. But what arguably sharpened those divisions was the role of the state. In the established Church of Ireland, bishoprics were political appointments, and the church was subject to regulation by parliament. In the Catholic church, as the penal laws were gradually removed, and particularly as government funds were extended following the foundation of St Patrick's College Maynooth in 1795, it might have been expected that the government would obtain some sort of control, either in the form of a veto over episcopal appointments or through state stipends for bishops and/or priests (such as was exercised unofficially over the Catholic church in Quebec).<sup>74</sup> A veto was indeed agreed to by the Catholic hierarchy in 1799, but that was on the assumption that the Act of Union would be accompanied by the admission of Catholics to parliament. Catholic emancipation did not come until 1829, and in the meantime the question of a veto became a controversial one for the supporters of emancipation, with liberal Protestants for the most part endorsing it and most Irish Catholics (their English counterparts were more flexible) opposing it. The Irish bishops came under some popular pressure to reverse their 1799 stand, and in 1808 they duly did so and stuck to that position despite indications from the Vatican that a veto was acceptable.<sup>75</sup> Thus, unusually for this period, the Catholic church entered the post-emancipation era subject to no state control. This did nothing to reassure Protestants, for whom the Catholic church loomed ever more monolithic and



intimidating. Complaints were made that emancipation gave Catholics in parliament the right to legislate for the established church without there being any reciprocal rights.<sup>76</sup> Only the grant to Maynooth afforded the opportunity for Protestant M.P.s to address the question of state funds to the Catholic church, and that grant duly became the subject of much wrangling both inside and outside parliament.<sup>77</sup>

For Catholics, of course, the picture looked very different. They had obtained emancipation only after a long struggle, and even though after 1829 they were on more or less the same legal footing as Protestants, the legacy from the eighteenth century meant that Protestants were still entrenched in many areas of Irish public life: the civil service, grand juries, and urban corporations. The only way that this was likely to change was by opening career to talent and linking the franchise in urban corporations to property rather than birth or confessional allegiance.

Irish Catholics thus became exceptional in early nineteenth-century Europe for the fact that they identified not with conservative or reactionary political parties but with liberalism.<sup>78</sup> Some Protestants were generous enough to support liberal reforms, but since the effects would be (for instance) to turn Protestant corporations into Catholic ones, there was a great deal at stake, and most Protestants sided with the forces of conservatism. The broad sectarian divide in politics was reinforced by the decision of Daniel O'Connell immediately after emancipation to adopt as the slogan for his essentially liberal party "the repeal of the Union." He may have had little choice. The emancipation campaign had revealed the continued existence of republican ideas among some of his supporters, and O'Connell was keen to harness as wide a spectrum of Irish opinion as possible behind his liberal agenda. His occasional residence in Dublin, where the loss of the Irish parliament was still keenly felt by Protestants, may have led him to suppose that Irish Protestants in general would support a repeal movement. But in fact even liberal Protestants, who had supported the emancipation campaign, were reluctant to endorse a goal that seemed likely to afford even greater opportunities for Catholicism to entrench itself in every part of Irish life.<sup>79</sup> The Union, though it took time to become popular with Protestants, seemed to guarantee them and the established church some sort of security.

If O'Connellite repeal was liberalism in another guise, this was not the case for the "Young Irelanders" in O'Connell's movement, who (unlike him) saw the repeal of the Union as a goal that would stem the tide of anglicisation and



preserve the Irish language. Although certain Young Irelanders moved in a republican direction during the year of European revolution in 1848, most of them were content to seek a restored and reformed Irish parliament under the crown to comprehend Catholics and Protestants, natives and newcomers.

In conclusion, it is clear that most of the main post-Union trends—anglicisation, militarisation, the advance of the institutional churches—were already under way before 1800. And because Protestantism had been such a defining characteristic of the elite in eighteenth-century Ireland, it was always likely that nineteenth-century politics—with or without the Union—would have had a strong sectarian flavour as Catholics sought to give practical effect to the legal rights they had gained and Protestants defended the status quo. However, in one respect—the abolition of the Irish parliament—the Act of Union was crucial. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Irish parliamentary tradition already exerted a powerful influence on the imagination of Irish constitutional nationalists<sup>80</sup> and this ensured that the Act of Union itself would remain a key political issue in nineteenth-century Ireland.

## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> R. B. McDowell, "The Age of the United Irishmen" in *A New History of Ireland IV: Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, eds. T. W. Moody and W. E. Vaughan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 363-4.

<sup>3</sup> Ron Weir, "The Scottish and Irish Unions" and Paul O'Leary "Accommodation and Resistance: A Comparison of Cultural Identities in Ireland and Wales, c. 1880-1914" in *Kingdoms United? Great Britain and Ireland Since 1500*, ed. S.J. Connolly (Dublin and Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 1999), 56-66, 123-34.

<sup>4</sup> P. S. O'Hegarty, *A History of Ireland Under the Union* (London: Methuen, 1952) 3.

<sup>5</sup> See Louis Cullen, "Catholics Under the Penal Laws," *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* 1: 23-36.

<sup>6</sup> Patrick Fagan, *An Irish Bishop in Penal Times: The Chequered Career of Sylvester Lloyd OFM, 1680-1747* (Dublin and Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 1993), 34-5, 187-8; and *Catholics in a Protestant Country* (Dublin and Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 1998), ch. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Maureen Wall, "Catholic Ireland in the Eighteenth Century," in *Collected Essays of Maureen Wall*, ed. Gerard O'Brien (Dublin: Geography Publications, 1989), ch. 3; Kevin Whelan, "An Underground Gentry? Catholic Middlemen in Eighteenth-Century Ireland," *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* 10 (1995): 7-68.

<sup>8</sup> Fagan, *Catholics in a Protestant Country*, chapters 3-4.

<sup>9</sup> Éamon O'Flaherty, "Urban Politics and Municipal Reform in Limerick," *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* 6 (1991), 105-20.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas P. Power, "Converts," in *Endurance and Emergence*, ed. T. P. Power and Kevin Whelan (Blackrock: Irish Academic Press, 1990), 101-27.

<sup>11</sup> C. D. A. Leighton, *Catholicism in a Protestant Kingdom: A Study of the Irish Ancien Regime* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1994), ch. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Niall Ó Ciosáin, *Print and Popular Culture in Ireland, 1750-1850* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1997), 174-5.

<sup>13</sup> See Katharine Simms, "Charles Lynegar, the Ó Luinín Family and the Study of Seanchas," in *A Miracle of Learning: Studies in Manuscripts and Irish Learning*, eds. T. Barnard, D. Ó Crónín, and K. Simms (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 266-83.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 375-76.

<sup>15</sup> Susannah Proctor Flory, *Fragments of Family History* (London: Hodder Brothers: 1896; limited run. Copy in Representative Church Body Library, Dublin), 41-2.

<sup>16</sup> Ó Ciosáin, *Print and Popular Culture in Ireland*, 53-6.

<sup>17</sup> V. G. Kiernan, *The Duel in European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), ch. 9; and James Kelly, *That Damn'd Thing Called Honour: Duelling in Ireland, 1570-1860* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), 12-13.

<sup>18</sup> Kelly, *That Damn'd Thing Called Honour*, 13-14, 127, 203-5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-7, 242-47.

<sup>20</sup> Patrick Fagan, ed., *Ireland in the Stuart Papers* (Dublin and Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 1995); Breandán Ó Buachalla, *Aisling Ghéar na*

*Stobhartaigh agus an tAós Léinn, 1603-1788* (Baile Átha Cliath: An Clóchomhar, 1996); Vincent Morley, “Tá an Cruatan ar Sheoirse—Folklore or Politics?” *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* 13 (1998): 112-20; Éamonn O’Ciardha, “The Stuarts and Deliverance in Irish and Scots-Gaelic Poetry, 1690-1760,” in *Kingdoms United? Great Britain and Ireland Since 1500*, ed. S.J. Connolly, 78-94.

<sup>21</sup> Leighton, *Catholicism in a Protestant Kingdom*, ch. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Ó Ciosáin, *Print and Popular Culture in Ireland*, 102-06; Hugh Reily, *Ireland’s Case Briefly Stated*, 1695.

<sup>23</sup> Mícheál Mac Craith, review of *Aisling Ghéar*, by Breandán Ó Buachalla, *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* 13 (1998): 170.

<sup>24</sup> Daniel Szechi, *The Jacobites* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), ch. 1.

<sup>25</sup> See James Kelly, “The Origins of the Act of Union,” *Irish Historical Studies* 25 (1987): 236-63; Jim Smyth, “‘Like Amphibious Animals’: Irish Protestants, Ancient Britons, 1691-1707,” *Historical Journal* 36 (1993): 785-97; and Jacqueline Hill, “Popery and Protestantism, Civil and Religious Liberty: The Disputed Lessons of Irish History, 1690-1812,” *Past & Present* 118 (1988): 96-129.

<sup>26</sup> J. T. Leerssen, “Anglo-Irish Patriotism and Its European Context,” *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* 3 (1988): 7-24.

<sup>27</sup> Colin Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-11.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-81, 250-55.

<sup>30</sup> William Molyneux, *The Case of Ireland, Stated* (Dublin: Joseph Ray, 1698).

<sup>31</sup> Charles I. McGrath, *The Making of the Eighteenth-Century Irish Constitution* (Dublin and Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 2000), 73.

<sup>32</sup> Geoffrey Keating, *Foras Feasa ar Éireann*; first published as *The General History of Ireland*, trans. Dermod O’Connor (Dublin, 1723).

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<sup>33</sup> Bernadette Cunningham, *The World of Geoffrey Keating* (Dublin and Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 2000).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 11.

<sup>35</sup> Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism*, 81-82; see also pp. 170-71 for a discussion of the interest shown in the Fir Bolg and other pre-Gaelic peoples (thought by some English and Protestant scholars to be descended from British tribes).

<sup>36</sup> Keating, *The General History of Ireland*. Vol. 1. (Dublin: James Duffy, 1841), 176-77.

<sup>37</sup> Cunningham, *The World of Geoffrey Keating*, 219.

<sup>38</sup> Allan Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army: The Irish Yeomanry, 1796-1834* (Dublin and Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 1998), 111.

<sup>39</sup> *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy* (Dublin: R.I.A., 1787).

<sup>40</sup> Some Catholics joined the yeomanry in its early days, but some were already beginning to be excluded as polarisation on sectarian lines intensified in the lead up to the rebellion. See Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, 60-72, 122.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>42</sup> Beltplate of the Slieveardagh and Comsey Union Cavalry (1797?); beltplate of the Merchants' Yeomanry Corps, Dublin city (1802), National Army Museum, London.

<sup>43</sup> Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, 173; W.A. Maguire, ed., *Up in Arms: The 1798 Rebellion in Ireland, A Bicentenary Exhibition* (Belfast: Ulster Museum, 1998), 142.

<sup>44</sup> James Ussher, *Discourse of the Religion Anciently Professed by the Irish and Scottish* (Dublin, 1622).

<sup>45</sup> Bridget McCormack, *Perceptions of St. Patrick in Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin and Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 2000), ch. 3.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph Liechty, "Testing the Depth of Catholic/Protestant Conflict," *Archivium Hibernicum* 42 (1987): 13-28; Leighton, *Catholicism in a Protestant Kingdom*, ch. 3; Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism*, 181.

<sup>47</sup> I. R. McBride, *Scripture Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 166-73.

<sup>48</sup> T. C. Barnard, "Athlone 1685; Limerick 1710: Religious Riots or Charivaris?" *Studia Hibernica* 27 (1993): 61-75.

<sup>49</sup> S. J. Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 2-3; Leighton, *Catholicism in a Protestant Kingdom*, ch. 2; Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism*, 178-79; William Doyle, "The Union in a European Context," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 10 (2000): 167-80.

<sup>50</sup> Nicholas Canny, "Identity Formation in Ireland: The Emergence of the Anglo-Irish," in *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, ed. N. Canny and A. Pagden (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 195-96; Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism*, 179-81.

<sup>51</sup> David Dickson, "Paine and Ireland," in *The United Irishmen*, ed. D. Dickson, D. Keogh, and K. Whelan (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993), 135-50; and Kevin Whelan, "The United Irishmen, the Enlightenment and Popular Culture," in *The United Irishmen*, 269-96.

<sup>52</sup> Jim Smyth, "Popular Politicisation, Defenderism and the Catholic Question," in *Ireland and the French Revolution*, ed. H. Gough and D. Dickson (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1990), 109-116.

<sup>53</sup> Nancy Curtin, *The United Irishmen: Popular Politics in Ulster and Dublin, 1791-1798* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), ch. 1; McBride, *Scripture Politics*, 176-78.

<sup>54</sup> Arthur O'Connor, *The State of Ireland*, ed. James Livesey (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1998), 107-09; Hiroko Goto, "The Dawn of Anti-Imperialism: Irish Radicals and Their Liberal Project for Modernisation of Ireland in the 1780s-90s" (Ph.D. Thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, 1998), chs. 6, 8.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992), chs. 8-9.

<sup>56</sup> Kevin Whelan, "The Origins of the Orange Order," *Bullán* 2 (1996): 19-20, 34.

<sup>57</sup> Frank Wright, *Two Lands on One Soil: Ulster Politics Before Home Rule* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1996), 24.

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 2.

<sup>59</sup> Whelan, "The Origins of the Orange Order," 19-20.

<sup>60</sup> Allan Blackstock, "'The Invincible Mass': Loyal Crowds in Mid Ulster, 1795-96," in *Crowds in Ireland c. 1720-1920*, ed. P. Jupp and E. Magennis (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000), 103-06.

<sup>61</sup> McBride, *Scripture Politics*, 185.

<sup>62</sup> Liam Chambers, *Rebellion in Kildare, 1790-1803* (Dublin and Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 1998) ch. 7; Ruán O'Donnell, *Aftermath: Post-Rebellion Insurgency in Wicklow, 1799-1803* (Dublin and Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 2000).

<sup>63</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), ch. 5; Marilyn Morris, *The British Monarchy and the French Revolution* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>64</sup> Jacqueline Hill, *From Patriots to Unionists: Dublin Civic Politics and Irish Protestant Patriotism, 1660-1840* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 275-78

<sup>65</sup> Michael Duffy, "World Wide War and British Expansion, 1793-1815" in *The Oxford History of the British Empire II: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. P. J. Marshall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 184-207.

<sup>66</sup> Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation*, 322-23.

<sup>67</sup> Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, 300.

<sup>68</sup> Colley, *Britons*, ch. 7; see also Hill, *From Patriots to Unionists*, 275-80.

<sup>69</sup> P. J. Corish, *The Catholic Community in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Dublin: Helicon, 1981), ch. 5.

<sup>70</sup> Jacqueline Hill, "Popery and Protestantism, Civil and Religious Liberty: The Disputed Lessons of Irish History, 1690-1812," *Past & Present* 118 (1988): 127-8.

<sup>71</sup> Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant Crusade in Ireland, 1800-70* (Dublin and Montreal: Gill and Macmillan and McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978), ch. 5.

<sup>72</sup> Cormac Allen, "The Church Architecture of John Semple and Son" (M. Arch. Sc. Thesis, National University of Ireland—University College Dublin, 1995) 1: 6-13.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 65, 83-84.

<sup>74</sup> Hugh Somers, "The Legal Status of the Bishop of Quebec," *Catholic Historical Review* 19 (1933-34): 167-89.

<sup>75</sup> C. D. A. Leighton, "Gallicanism and the Veto Controversy," in *Religion, Conflict and Coexistence*, ed. R. V. Comerford *et al.* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1990), 135-58; Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation*, chs. 12-13.

<sup>76</sup> Thomas Lefroy, *Report of the Speech Delivered . . . at the Second General Meeting of the Brunswick Constitutional Club of Ireland* (Dublin: 1829).

<sup>77</sup> E. R. Norman, *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England* (London: Allen and Urwin, 1968), 23-51.

<sup>78</sup> Leighton, *Catholicism in a Protestant Kingdom*, 159-60.

<sup>79</sup> Hill, *From Patriots to Unionists*, 345-54, 376-88.

<sup>80</sup> K. B. Nowlan, "The Meaning of Repeal in Irish History," in *Historical Studies IV*, ed. G. A. Hayes-McCoy (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1963), 1-17.