

# TEN TROUBLED YEARS

SETTLEMENT, CONFLICT AND REBELLION

IN FORKHILL, COUNTY ARMAGH

1788-1798

by

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A thesis submitted to the Department of History  
in conformity with the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

Arguably the 1790s was the most important decade in Irish history. Modern Irish nationalism traces its roots to the rise of the United Irishmen and to the martyrdom of Wolfe Tone; Ulster unionism commemorates the foundation of the Orange Order and the triumph of loyalists over the rebels of 1798. For the people of Forkhill, County Armagh, the years between 1788 and 1798 were equally volatile. The decade opened with a wave of settlement on the Forkhill estate after the death of its landlord, Richard Jackson, in 1787. Competition for land increased tensions between local people and incoming settlers, and the parish was disturbed for several years. The trouble in Forkhill is usually placed in the context of the so-called "sectarian disturbances" in Armagh between rival factions of Peep O'Day Boys (Protestants) and Defenders (Catholics), who had committed arms raids, robberies, murders and intimidations in the county since the mid-1780s. When the most sensationally violent outrage of this period was committed on the Forkhill estate in 1791 – the brutal mutilation of a Protestant schoolmaster and his wife by a mob of Defenders – the attack was immediately labelled sectarian. The "Forkhill outrage" helped to polarize relations between the two communities in Armagh and had a tremendous impact on nineteenth-century Protestant opinion.

Yet the circumstances surrounding the Forkhill attack are much more complex than the historical record has allowed. This thesis discusses the roots of sectarianism on the estate, its influence on local relationships, its place in Defender ideology, its place in the infamous outrage on the estate in 1791 and its role in the rebellion of 1798. Chapter I provides a general introduction to Forkhill, the history of the estate and the background to the eighteenth-century. Chapter II examines land returns and leases in Forkhill to determine if the trustees favoured Protestants as they settled the vacant lands on the estate. Chapter III considers the disturbances on the Forkhill estate, the origins of local Defenders and their role in the brutal attack on the schoolmaster in 1791. Finally, Chapter IV considers the spread of revolutionary ideas in south Armagh and the role of local people in the rebellion of 1798.

## FOCAL BUÍOCHAIS

I owe many people thanks for the help they gave me at various stages of this project. First, I would like to express my thanks to my supervisor in the History department, Professor D.H. Akenson, who arranged my term of research at the Institute of Irish Studies in Belfast and who suggested many useful improvements to the final draft of this paper. As well, I am always grateful for the advice of David Wilson, professor in the department of Celtic Studies at the University of Toronto. Overseas, I met many wonderful people who helped me in different ways and I would like to mention them by name: Sam Burns, Dr. Desmond Campbell and Mary Olive Campbell, W.H. Crawford, Brian Walker, Peggy Garvey, Marie Grant, Master Keating, Nora McCoy, Ferdy McElevy, Mickey McGuigan. Pat and Nora McKeown, Jack McWall, Kathleen Murphy and Kevin Murphy, as well as the librarians at the Irish Studies library and Robinson's library in Armagh. I would like to thank Kevin McMahon for giving me permission to use the manuscript of his article on the United Irishmen in Creggan parish, prior to its publication in the 1998 edition of Creggan, and for directing me to some important references on the United Irishmen in south Armagh. I am especially grateful to Pauline Loughran for introducing me to so many people who share my interest in this subject, and for sharing all she knows about the history of south Armagh. To Mom and Dad, thank you for bringing Nuala, Aileen and me to Forkhill for as long as we can remember, giving us the finest memories of our childhood. Finally, I would like to mention my grandmother, Eileen Garvey. During the six months I spent researching and writing this paper, I lived with my grandmother in Forkhill, the village in south Armagh where she lived all her life. Early in the morning hours of December 2, 1997, the day I was leaving to return home, Grandma Garvey died peacefully in her sleep. I did not research the history of Forkhill for my grandmother - she wasn't in the least bit interested - but I did do it because of her, and because her stories made me interested. Without her, my life would have been very different and certainly this paper would never have been written. I can think of no better reason to dedicate it to her memory. Solas agus suaimhneas na bhFlaithis uirthi.

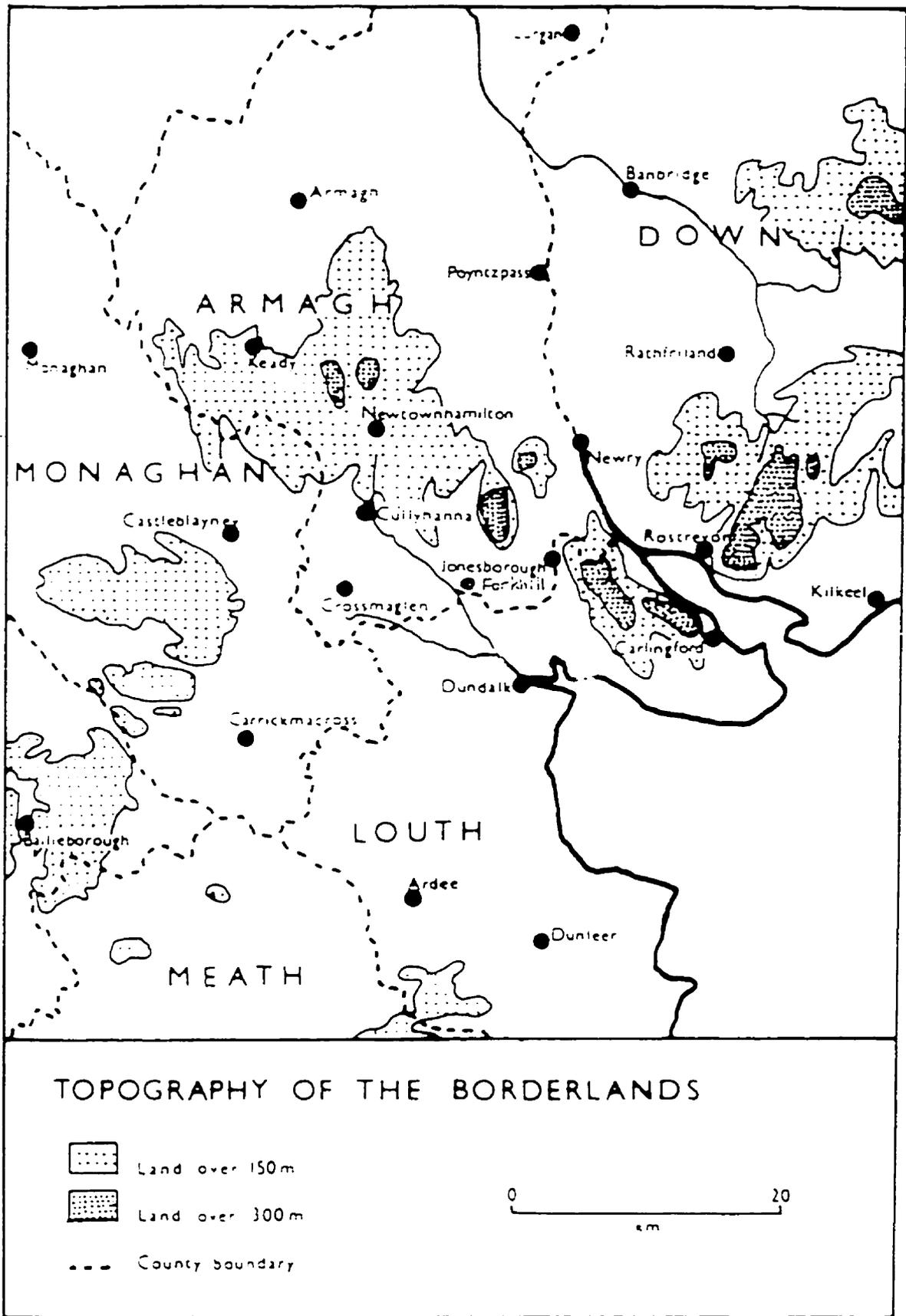
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Ireland

Reprinted from Samuel Clark and J.S. Donnelly (eds.), Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, 1780-1914. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983).



Reprinted from Raymond Gillespie and Harold O'Sullivan (eds.), The Borderlands: Essays on the History of the Ulster-Leinster Border (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1989).

## THE STUDY OF LOCAL HISTORY

A mandatory review of the historical literature on this topic presents me with a problem, because my thesis does not fit easily into any category for which historical scholarship is currently available. As a local historical study which traces events in the parish of Forkhill, County Armagh between 1788 and 1798, the subject is narrowly parochial, but it is also broad in scope: landholding arrangements, conflict over land, agrarian disturbances, sectarian disturbance, nationalism and rebellion, are considered in turn. These themes have received substantial treatment in scholarship by Irish historians and to present their various lines of interpretation within a single chapter would be an impossible task. In any event, such an historiographical emphasis would be misplaced, for this is not a study of land, peasant protest, religious struggle or emerging national identity. These themes are only incidental to the thesis, which first and foremost is the study of a community during the most turbulent decade in its history.

I have decided to break up the review of historical literature into several sections. In this preface, I will review the theory behind local historical research and discuss the development and methods of local history writing in England, Ireland and France. I will also comment on the sources I relied upon for my own research. Chapters One and Two are not suited to literature reviews: the first is a background essay on the history of the Forkhill estate before 1788, and there is no argument in historical scholarship on this subject; discussion in the second chapter is based almost exclusively on a collection of documents relating specifically to the leaseholding arrangements on the estate and, apart from some general information about systems of landholding, I did not have recourse to secondary

sources. Within Chapters Three and Four, I will devote separate sections to lines of historical interpretation on the relevant subjects, including agrarian protest, sectarian conflict, the Defenders, the United Irishmen and the rebellion of 1798.

### *The Study of Local History*

As the study of one small place, this thesis should fall easily within the bounds of local history, but even this classification is ill-fitting. Local history has been defined as the “origin, rise and development of the local community,” and local history studies usually trace the history of a place over a period of at least one century, if not several centuries.<sup>1</sup> This paper considers events in Forkhill over the course of only a decade, giving the community very little time to undergo any traceable transformation. And because sources for the study of rural parishes in Ireland at the end of the eighteenth-century are so thin, many typical features of local histories (trends based on population data, birth rates and death rates) are missing from this study. Census data for Ireland were not collected until 1801 and population figures compiled before this date cannot be relied upon absolutely. Local parish registers of births and deaths were not consistently maintained until the late nineteenth-century, and many of the extant documents were destroyed in the fires which swept through Dublin Castle in 1922.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>J.S. Moore (ed.), Avon Local History Handbook (Sussex: Phillimore & Co., 1979), 1.

<sup>2</sup>Donald Akenson, Between Two Revolutions: Islandmagee, County Antrim, 1798-1920 (Hamden: Archon Books, 1979), 6.

Yet this paper is guided by the same principle behind local historical research, which has been defined succinctly by W.G. Hoskins, one of the pioneers of local history in England. Hoskins described the goal of his profession as the attempt to restore “the fundamental unit of human history which the ever-increasing mountain of available records has caused to be fragmented into a score of specialisms.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, an exclusive focus on political history *or* economic history *or* class history eclipses the perspective of history as a whole, and what is the history of humanity but a series of past lifetimes spent in small communities? As D.H. Akenson points out in his introduction to a local history study of the parish of Islandmagee, the framework of life for the typical Irishman was not the nation, nor the administrative apparatus in Dublin Castle, but his own community, his parish and the nearest market town.<sup>4</sup> When the focus of the historian is trained on a single community, it becomes possible to study the region and its people at a microscopic level: charting the growth or decline of the local population, comparing industrial capacity and agricultural productivity, observing the local impact of reforms in health and education, watching a community cope with disaster or respond to prosperity. The end result is a superbly detailed picture which is almost always eclipsed in wider surveys and thematic studies. Hoskins used the phrase “human ecology” to describe the painstakingly detailed methods which he believed were necessary to advance historical research in all fields. As historians widened the scope of

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<sup>3</sup>W.G. Hoskins, English Local History: The Past and the Future (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1966), 20-22.

<sup>4</sup>Akenson, Between Two Revolutions, 3.

their research interests, he argued, they would encounter questions that could only be answered with the precision and detail of microscopic studies carried out as part of local history research. Before historical change could be understood on a macro-scale, it had to be understood on a micro-scale.

The sharpening of local historical research in England began in the 1940s, when newly founded country record offices catalogued documents from public and private archives, making them accessible to researchers for the first time. As these records became available, historians gradually shifted their attention from the landed elite to other elements of the population (the lower classes, women) and other subjects (education, nonconformist religion) which had suffered historical neglect. Under Hoskins's direction, a department of local history was established at the University of Leicester and its researchers pioneered professional study in this area. The "Leicester school of local history" displayed its greatest strength in the field of rural history, focusing on the study of land tenure, landlord-tenant relations and agricultural improvements in England between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Much of the work was deliberately conducted on a very small scale, as Hoskins had recommended, in order to produce minutely detailed topographical studies of villages and rural parishes whose data would be the most reliable.<sup>5</sup>

Pierre Goubert observed a similar trend in the writing of local history in France, where the mid-century revival of local historical study accompanied a growing interest in the field of social history. This ambitious new discipline sought to embrace all aspects of the

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<sup>5</sup>Lawrence Stone, "English and United States Local History," *Daedalus* 100, no.1 (1971): 129; W.G. Hoskins, *Local History in England* (London: William Clowes, 1959), *passim*.

human condition within its scope, but soon encountered an obstacle. The overwhelming size of the populations involved in social history studies militated against accurate representations, as it proved difficult to make convincing generalizations about millions of people. When social historians restricted their focus to particular geographic regions with manageable populations and well-kept records (in effect, conducting local history studies) their findings became more precise and more useful. In Goubert's view, they were able to challenge some of the prejudices and "approximations" that had dominated historical research in France.<sup>6</sup>

The sudden burst of popularity for local historical research was not welcomed by some professional historians, who continued to regard the new speciality with a degree of scepticism. Their attitude did not improve when a proliferation of local history journals, written by amateurs for amateurs, flooded the field. Many of these were studies by local enthusiasts with no prior training in historical research and proved to be of limited value: they were more preoccupied with facts than with problems, failed to approach sources critically and displayed no clear argument.<sup>7</sup> I encountered this tendency when I consulted the published journals of several local historical societies in county Armagh. Some journals, like Seanchas Ard Mhacha, the journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society, are of a professional quality - the late Cardinal Tomas O'Fiaich, edited the journal for many years

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<sup>6</sup>Pierre Goubert, "Local History," Daedalus 100, no.1 (1971): 117-18. In the 1950s, Goubert conducted a regional history study of the province of Beauvais for his doctoral dissertation, later published as Cent Mille Provinciaux au XVIIe siecle, Beauvais et le Beauvaisis de 1600 a 1730 (Paris: Flammarion, 1968).

<sup>7</sup>Hoskins, Local History in England, 10; Goubert, "Local History," 123-24.

and maintained its high standards of scholarship. But other historical journals readily publish any contribution from local historians without demanding footnotes or questioning sources, and professional academics remain unable to capitalize on the potential of these publications.<sup>8</sup> Yet I do not want to belittle the work of local historians, because they possess a wealth of information which cannot be found in any archive and, as true enthusiasts, they love to share what they know. Most important, they seem to have a knack for uncovering interesting stories and writing about them. I first came across the remarkable story of the Forkhill estate in a series of articles written by local historians in the journals of the

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<sup>8</sup>The work of local historian Colin Johnston Robb is a very good example of this type of writing. During the 1930s and '40s, Robb wrote a number of articles for local journals and newspapers on the history of south Armagh. One of his articles appeared in the Irish News on 22 June 1945. "The Rising in Mullaghbawn" described the local rising of United Irish rebels on 22 June 1798, and included a tremendous amount of background detail on the parish of Forkhill. Robb provided a population return for 1798, a religious breakdown of the population (8433 Catholics, 460 Anglicans, 104 Presbyterians), the numbers of thatched and unthatched houses in the village, and the number of people engaged in the local linen industry. I showed Robb's article to W.H. Crawford, an Ulster historian and Ireland's foremost expert on the eighteenth-century Ulster linen industry, who said he had never come across such specific and detailed information about south Armagh in the course of his own extensive research. Nor have I seen this information in any other collection of records. Crawford was familiar with Robb, however, who was notorious for his refusal to document sources and (on one known occasion) for fabricating evidence to support his claims. What is frustrating is that much of Robb's information is credible and fits with other documented evidence: his population returns and religious break-down correspond with nineteenth-century statistics; his reference to the local rising in June 1798 is corroborated by two letters in the Downshire Papers (PRONI Downshire papers, D/607/F/276 and D/607/F/291). Yet the source Robb provides (#710 in General Lake's portfolio) is untraceable. It is possible that Robb copied county records available in Dublin Castle before they were destroyed by fire in 1922, and later used them to write his local history articles. But because Robb did not reveal his sources, his information cannot be considered reliable and cannot be incorporated into a scholarly study of Forkhill in the eighteenth-century.

Mullaghbawn Historical Society in the 1970s.<sup>9</sup> Local enthusiasts have preserved an ideal which professional historians sometimes lose in the pursuit of documented evidence, and which Hoskins himself prized in historical writing. Behind the graphs, statistics and census data. Hoskins wrote, “we must always be able to hear men and women talking.”

*Sources on Forkhill in the Eighteenth-Century*

For my own research, I have drawn on a wide variety of sources from archives and libraries north and south of the border, including contemporary correspondence, family papers deposited in public record offices, memoirs, newspapers, indictment records, government documents and parliamentary papers, and I have relied upon four sets of documents in particular. The Public Records Office of Northern Ireland keeps a large collection of records known as the Chambre papers, which concern the transfer of landownership and lease agreements on the Forkhill estate. The Chambre documents date back to 1611 and include lease agreements from the 1790s and other papers associated with the settlement of Richard Jackson’s will after his death in 1787.<sup>10</sup> The leases are especially useful documents, as each one outlines the name, occupation, and near-relations of the leaseholder, as well as the boundaries of his holding on the estate, which often mentioned local landmarks, such as roads, bridges and the Protestant church. Also, because all leases

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<sup>9</sup>Mullaghbawn Historical and Folk-lore Society, vols.1-4 (Newry: J. Hollywood, 1974-1990).

<sup>10</sup>Public Records Office of Northern Ireland [hereafter PRONI] D/294, T/529.

had to be signed, they provide a good indication of levels of literacy in the area among the landholding population.

Equally valuable is the collection of correspondence written by the Protestant rector of Forkhill to the Earl of Charlemont during this period. Between 1789 and 1799, the Reverend Edward Hudson wrote nearly one hundred letters to the Earl of Charlemont, concerning the spread of disaffection in Armagh, county politics, the activities of the Defenders and the troubles in Forkhill. Reverend Hudson lived on the Forkhill estate until 1792, and his commentary on the people, local conditions and the swell of disturbances during these years is of tremendous value. Although at times an alarmist, Hudson proved to be an astute commentator on events in Armagh and his letters rank among the most useful series of contemporary correspondence on events in the 1790s.<sup>11</sup>

Third, the Assize Indictment Books for Armagh have survived since the 1730s and are an essential source for studying patterns of crime during this period.<sup>12</sup> The assizes were criminal and civil proceedings held twice each year (Lent and Summer) under the supervision of circuit magistrates, who travelled around the country hearing cases and dispensing justice. Each entry in the indictment books records the names of the “prosecutors” and “prosecuted” parties in each dispute, the nature of the offense and the outcome of the hearing. Newspapers usually provided reports on assize proceedings, including details of punishment, and are a

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<sup>11</sup>Royal Irish Academy [hereafter R.I.A.] Charlemont MS 12 R 14-27.

<sup>12</sup>County Armagh Crown Book [Indictments] General Assizes. Volumes for 1737-1797 are held in the Armagh Public Library; volumes for 1797-1822 are held in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, PRONI ARM.1/2A/1 [hereafter Armagh Assize Indictments].

useful supplement to the indictment records. Apart from assize reports, however, eighteenth-century Irish newspapers consist mostly of advertisements and foreign news, and rarely reported on events in the countryside. Two provincial newspapers, the Belfast News-letter and the Northern Star (1792-97) reported extensively on events in Ulster and the progress of the United Irishmen, but both were based in Belfast and maintained an urban focus throughout the decade.

For information on the years of rebellion in south Armagh, I drew primarily on the Rebellion Papers, an extensive collection of private and official correspondence to Dublin Castle concerning the state of the country during the 1790s.<sup>13</sup> Most of the collection falls between 1796 and 1798 and contains letters from “friends of the government,” including clergymen, magistrates, and members of the gentry, who informed Dublin Castle about the state of the country in their respective districts, reported suspicious behaviour and suggested methods of repressing revolt. Some of the correspondents were from south Armagh, including Colonel John Ogle, the captain of the Forkhill yeomanry.<sup>14</sup> Ogle should have been an invaluable source of information on Forkhill in the 1790s, but most of his letters to government were pointed requests for additional funding, and he failed miserably to fulfill his potential as an eye-witness to the rebellion.

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<sup>13</sup> The Rebellion Papers are preserved in the Irish State Paper Office [hereafter ISPO] 620/1-67.

<sup>14</sup> John Ogle was a Lieutenant-Colonel in the 128th Foot Regiment before he arrived in Forkhill and married Julia Eliza Barton, niece of the late Richard Jackson and daughter of Susanna Barton. PRONI D/294/84.

Parliamentary papers for eighteenth-century Ireland are scarce, but two mid-nineteenth-century government reports on the Orange Order and landholding practices in Ireland are situated in a historical context and provide some insights into the earlier period. In 1835, the Select Committee on Orange Lodges was appointed to enquire into the nature of Orangeism in Ireland, and submitted its four volume report to Parliament in the spring and summer of 1835, based in part on the testimony of special witnesses. The Orange Order was a society formed by militant Protestants in Armagh in 1795 as a local protective association against the Defenders, but it soon grew into a wider and more powerful organization for the defense of Protestantism and maintenance of the Protestant ascendancy in Ireland.<sup>15</sup> Whether from memory or from legend, several witnesses and members of the Orange Order who testified before the Committee recalled the outrage at Forkhill in 1791, and the report reveals the extent to which Protestants (as a collective) had been wounded and enraged by the attack.

In 1845, the Devon Commission was appointed to study the Irish system of land tenure and to submit recommendations for reform in the land laws. In addition to its remarks on socio-economic conditions relating to the land in the 1840s, the Commission identified the remarkable cultural attitudes to the land among the people of rural Ireland. Although the report was published more than fifty years after the conflict over settlement in Forkhill, many of the witnesses before the Devon Commission agreed that the intensity of feeling the people

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<sup>15</sup>This definition is derived from the Oxford English Dictionary, which also states that the Orange Order was a “political society.” The 1911 edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica called the Order “essentially political,” which is slightly more accurate since the Order was not a political party, although many unionist politicians in Ulster were (and still are) members of the Orange Order. See The Oxford English Dictionary, vol. x, 2nd edition (Clarendon Press, 1989); Encyclopaedia Britannica, vol.20 (1911).

had for their “ground” had hardened over generations, and their testimony should be read closely by any historian studying land and tension in the eighteenth-century.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, with the notable exceptions of articles by David Miller and L.M. Cullen on the Berkeley outrage, there is no secondary literature on the history of Forkhill in the eighteenth-century and my thesis is based almost entirely on the above primary source material. Secondary sources on land, protest, nationalism and the 1798 rebellion helped me to sort and understand the evidence I gathered; historical surveys of Armagh and local history articles contain important details and many items of interest. But even when all these pieces are put together, the picture is far from complete. All of the above documents share the same deficiency: none of them represents the “view from below.” The only two men who lived in Forkhill and could provide first-hand observations of the people were the Reverend Edward Hudson and Colonel John Ogle, one a clergymen, the other a soldier, and neither one qualified to speak on behalf of the mainly native Irish-speaking, Catholic population of small farmers and labourers. This population was almost totally non-literate, left no written record of its thoughts or aspirations, and the only surviving source from the people are local ballads, handed down orally through generations. Several songs from around Forkhill were written down in the early twentieth-century and two of the best-known ballads concerned the rebellion of 1798, “The Carrive Blacksmith” and “The Market Stone.” Finding songs such as these is wonderful luck, but any historical record passed down in an oral tradition must

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<sup>16</sup>Nineteenth-century evidence can only be applied with great caution to an eighteenth-century question, but it would be more foolish to ignore the conclusions of the Devon Commission and shut out its insights into the peculiar cultural attitudes towards landholding shared among Ireland’s rural population.

be handled carefully, for after two hundred years the ballad is bound to have evolved. Authenticity of composition is also difficult to determine, because the songs could have been written in 1898 as a tribute to the rebels, or they could be pure pieces of invention. Writing in 1937, the local historian Father L.P. Murray remarked that when the collective memory of a people becomes blurred after generations, their stories and legends tend to settle around one time and one man. He called this tendency the "centralization of folklore," and it is a hazard to historians.<sup>17</sup> Despite these problems, local ballads should not be overlooked, because they are among the only records of the view from below which survive for historians of rural Ireland in the eighteenth-century and provide a rare opportunity to "hear the people talking."

This literature review represents the principal materials available for the study of Forkhill at the end of the eighteenth-century, but it cannot claim to be an exhaustive bibliography. As letters and state papers long-buried in archives, libraries and private collections are gradually uncovered and made available to historians, the picture of Forkhill which I have sketched in four chapters might be utterly transformed. I welcome any new evidence which might improve the history of this place as I have presented it in the following pages and remain on the look-out for this evidence myself. Of course, the parallel danger is that as we move farther away in time from this people and this place, and as Reverend Hudson's correspondence becomes less a memory than an artifact, the past and the truth become even less accessible to us.

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<sup>17</sup>Murray, L.P. "Shanroe Barrack, Mullabawn (1795-1821)." Journal of the County Louth Archaeological Society 9, no.1 (1937).

January 29, 1791

My Dear Dobbs.

With trembling hand and a heart bursting with grief and impotent indignation I sit down to give you some account of the dreadful transactions of last night at Forkhil - you know Barkeley who was stabbed by Donnelly - He is one of the schoolmasters of Forkhil and tho' paid by the Trustees for only Sixty Scholars has for six months taught upwards of an hundred without any additional charge - This had made him to all appearance a great Favorite with the people here - However about Seven yesterday evening a person rapped at his door - on his asking who was there, a voice answered - Terence Burn - Knowing Burn's voice he opened the door, when in rushed a Body of Hellhounds - not content with cutting and stabbing him in several places. They drew a cord round his neck till his Tongue was forced out - it they cut off and three fingers of his right hand - They then cut out his wife's tongue and some of the villains held her whilst another with a case knife cut off her thumb and four of her fingers, one after another - They cut and battered her in different places - She I fear cannot recover - There was in the house a Brother of hers about fourteen years old on a visit to his sister - his tongue those merciless villains cut out and cut off the calf of his leg with a sword - They plundered the house and after all this went up the road with lighted torches at that early hour - Terence Burn did not appear so that Barkeley can only swear to his voice - I made this day a fruitless attempt to take him. What can be done - this county every day grows worse - The association gains ground and there is now hardly a man (of a certain description) in a circuit of many miles who is not in it and armed - write me a few lines to Dundalk - it will be some comfort to me to hear from you. God Bless You.

Edward Hudson

Jonesborough

## CHAPTER ONE: A VILLAGE IN COUNTY ARMAGH

The Reverend Edward Hudson's description of the attack on the Berkeley family in 1791 captured the terror of Protestants in the countryside of south Armagh, who feared they might become the random targets of Catholic Defenders in a fresh outbreak of sectarian violence, and the attack had a tremendous impact on nineteenth-century Protestant opinion.<sup>1</sup> In evidence presented before the Select Committee on Orange Lodges in 1835, Lieutenant-Colonel Verner offered his opinion about the origin of the Armagh disturbances: "I think the first occasion upon which the opinion became general that there existed a decided hostility upon the part of the Roman Catholics towards the Protestants of the country was a circumstance which occurred at a place called Fork Hill, in the county of Armagh."<sup>2</sup> Verner, himself an Orangeman, described the circumstances surrounding the attack on Alexander Berkeley and his family in great detail, almost as if he had been a witness to the event himself. He explained to the panel that he had heard the incident described by his father many times, but the collective sense of fear and hate among Ulster Protestants in the wake of the Berkeley attack, even among those removed from the event by two or three generations, was unmistakable. Almost all histories of the Orange Order record the Forkhill

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Hudson to Francis Dobbs, 29 January 1791, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 16 No.51. The Reverend Edward Hudson served as Protestant rector of Forkhill from 1779 to 1795, although he proved to be an unpopular figure in the parish and was forced to flee to safer ground after 1791. As the leading trustee for Richard Jackson's estate, Hudson had invited Alexander Berkeley to settle in Forkhill in 1789. J.B. Leslie, Armagh Clergy and Parishes (Dundalk: William Tempest, 1911), 302-305.

<sup>2</sup>Reports from the Select Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Nature, Character, Extent and Tendency of Orange Lodges, Associations, or Societies in Ireland, with the Minutes of Evidence and Appendix (House of Commons 1835 [377], xv), #29 [hereafter Orange Lodge Inquiry].

outrage as the single most brutal attack on Protestants during the Armagh disturbances, and it has assumed mythic proportions in the sectarian imagination of Ulster unionists. A local historian in south Armagh reported reading a newspaper interview in the 1970s with the Reverend Ian Paisley, a staunch unionist and the current leader of the Democratic Unionist Party. When the reporter suggested to Paisley that he perhaps exaggerated the depth of sectarian feeling in nationalist enclaves such as south Armagh, Paisley replied that he did not, and referred pointedly to the barbaric attack on the Protestant schoolmaster in Forkhill in 1791.

Sectarianism in Ulster has a genuine pedigree on both sides of the historic divide, but as an answer to the conflict between two communities it must never be the explanation of first resort. When blanket references to "sectarian hatred" and "mutual hostility" between Catholics and Protestants are thrown over the problem as an explanation for the conflict, history becomes distorted. When an outrage such as the one in Forkhill is depicted as a random attack by deranged Catholics driven senseless by their hatred of Protestants, when no other explanation for the attack is sought, and when that skewed version of events is passed down to generations of Protestants as an example of the treatment they might expect at the hands of Catholics, history becomes dangerous. The sectarian thesis spreads too easily over arguments in Irish history, obscuring cross-confessional friendships, inter-confessional conflict, and local factors peculiar to parishes which more immediately determined the nature of relations in Ulster's mixed communities.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>L.M. Cullen, "The United Irishmen: Problems and Issues of the 1790s," The Turbulent Decade: Ulster in the 1790s, 18, no.2 (Belfast: Federation of Ulster Local Studies, 1997), 20-26.

In fact, there are strong historical grounds for questioning the authenticity of sectarianism as the root of the conflict in Ulster. Warring among the clans of the ancient province of Ulaidh turned the region into a theatre of conflict for centuries before the Ulster plantation. After the twelfth-century Norman invasion, most of the territory in the borderlands of south Ulster and north Leinster came under foreign ownership, and conflict between the new landlords and the native clans of MacMahons and O'Hanlons endured for several centuries. But bitter dispute over land was endemic to the region even before this. Archaeologists have studied the remains of linear earthworks along the borderlands, which they believe were built as massive defensive ramparts by local clans sometime during the first and second centuries B.C.<sup>4</sup> The historical background to the "troubles" in Armagh is almost impossible to comprehend: in 1180 A.D. more than one thousand years had passed since the Black Pig's Dyke was thrown up to repel raiders and invaders, but another six hundred years would pass before the troubles in Armagh broke out between the Peep O'Day Boys and Defenders. The communities in south Ulster and north Leinster gradually evolved as new cultural forces encountered the old Gaelic kingdoms, and the terms of the ancient conflicts among them naturally changed as well. But it is worth remembering that these borderlands knew violence and fierce battles over the land long before Protestantism was planted in Ulster.

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<sup>4</sup>Victor Buckley, "From the Darkness to the Dawn," Borderlands: Essays on the History of the Ulster-Leinster Border ed. Raymond Gillespie and Harold O'Sullivan (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1989), 23-28; Brendan Smith, "The Medieval Border." Borderlands, 41-53.

### *The Emergence of the Forkhill Estate*

The parish of Forkhill lies in the ancient barony of Orior, in the southern bounds of county Armagh. The landscape is wild and mountainous, remained an uninviting spot for settlement until the 1800s, and the mainly native, Catholic and Irish-speaking population resisted outside interference for centuries.<sup>5</sup> In 1571, Queen Elizabeth awarded the lands within the barony of Orior to Captain Thomas Chatterton, but he failed to fulfill the conditions of ownership which demanded that he establish an English settlement, and his grant was revoked. In 1612, James II awarded the same lands to Lord Audley, under the title of the "manor of Stonebridge," but Audley also failed to settle the region with English or Scottish tenants.<sup>6</sup> Despite the best intentions of the Crown, the seventeenth-century scheme of Ulster plantation failed to penetrate most of south Armagh, beyond the establishment of a Presbyterian settlement in the parish of Creggan in the 1730s.<sup>7</sup> A poll-tax return conducted in 1659 reported only 193 English and Scottish settlers in the barony of Orior, among the 694 native Irish, and the ratio of 3.6 to 1 was the second-highest differential in all the baronies

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<sup>5</sup>Samuel Lewis, Topographical Dictionary of Ireland, (London, 1849). Most of Forkhill lies in the barony of Upper Orior, although a small part of the parish is in Lower Orior. In 1837, the Ordnance surveyors remarked that the village of Forkhill was "in a wild district of country and not very likely to improve." Ordnance survey notes for the parish of Forkhill are included in Angelique Day and Patrick McWilliams (eds.), Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland Volume I: Parish of County Armagh, 1835-8 (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1990.)

<sup>6</sup>George Hill, The Plantation in Ulster, 1608-1620 (Belfast, 1877), 312-14; Philip Robinson, The Plantation of Ulster: British Settlement in an Irish Landscape, 1600-1670 (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1984), 48, 67, 77; PRONI T/529/1.

<sup>7</sup>W.H. Crawford, "The reshaping of the borderlands, 1700-1840," Borderlands, 95.

in Armagh.<sup>8</sup> Many of the townlands which formed part of the parish of Forkhill, such as Carricksticken, Shean, Shanroe, Mullaghbane and Clarchill, listed only Irish inhabitants.<sup>9</sup>

In 1703 Stonebridge Manor was reclaimed by the Crown, which finally gave up trying to settle the lands with loyal subjects and sold the manor as a forfeited estate. The lands changed hands several times during the first half of the eighteenth-century and by the time the estate was purchased by Richard Jackson in September 1750, its name had changed from Stonebridge to Forkhill. For the next forty years, it would be known as the Jackson Estate.<sup>10</sup>

Richard Jackson was the landlord of Forkhill for most of the second half of the eighteenth-century, apart from several interim periods when the estate came under outside management.<sup>11</sup> Jackson borrowed against his investment several times, leasing the Forkhill estate to wealthy associates indefinitely, in exchange for large sums of money, on condition

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<sup>8</sup>Raymond Gillespie, "The Transformation of the Borderlands, 1600-1700," Borderlands, 81. The poll-tax return or "census" of 1659 recorded the number of males and unmarried females over the age of sixteen.

<sup>9</sup>Tennyson-Groves papers, PRONI T/808/14929.

<sup>10</sup>In 1703, Stonebridge Manor consisted of 17 townlands; in 1789, 18 townlands made up the Forkhill estate. The townlands listed in each deed are virtually the same, with a few exceptions of lands which either changed hands or changed names during the intervening years. The estate did not correspond exactly with the parish boundaries of Forkhill (which were not drawn until 1772), but most of the 23 townlands which made up the parish were also part of the Forkhill estate. PRONI D/294/8, PRONI T/529/2; J.B. Leslie, Armagh Clergy and Parishes, 302-305.

<sup>11</sup>Richard Jackson was born in 1722, married Nichola Ann Cecil in 1750, served as High Sheriff of County Armagh in 1760 and was appointed Deputy Master of the Masonic Lodge in Ulster in 1768. He died on 11 June 1787 at the age of 65 and left no heir. PRONI T/1722; Freeman's Journal, 11 June 1768.

that they forfeit the lease on repayment of his debt.<sup>12</sup> By his tenants and by generations of their descendants, however, Richard Jackson was considered a decent, charitable landlord. Upon his death in 1787, the Belfast News-letter reported that the body of the landlord was attended to the grave by a great number of his tenants and labourers, and “the distress manifested by these poor people, was truly affecting.”<sup>13</sup> The stone slab which marks Jackson’s grave in the old Protestant churchyard in Forkhill declares he was a “firm friend to the religious and civil constitution of his country, he exerted his most strenuous endeavour for its improvement by an almost constant residence on his estate... [and] by a lenient indulgence to his poorer tenants.”<sup>14</sup> Most significant is the remark that Richard Jackson actually *lived* on his estate. One of the irksome features of the eighteenth-century landholding system in Ireland was the “absentee landlord,” usually an English or Anglo-Irish gentleman who owned property in Ireland but lived year round in Dublin or London and rarely, if ever, visited his estate. The only contact the absentee landlord had with his tenants was through a land agent who appeared on the estate twice each year to collect the rent, and these unseen landlords were deeply resented by their tenants. But Richard Jackson resided in Forkhill for a substantial part of the year and he was apparently keen on improving conditions on his estate. In October 1756, Jackson leased a nine-acre farm to David Mathews, a local farmer. Under the terms of the lease, Mathews was responsible for

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<sup>12</sup>Jackson’s purchase of the estate was notarized on 6 September 1750 and recorded in the Registry of Deeds (Dublin) under document reference 139.536.96011.

<sup>13</sup>Belfast News-letter, 29 June 1787.

<sup>14</sup>Report on Armagh disturbances and notes on Jackson estate, PRONI T/1722.

building stone walls, erecting ditches, planting an orchard of fruit trees and building houses for himself and his under-tenants, among other improvements. He also agreed to put in six days of labour of man and horse on the estate each year, most likely repairing roads and buildings.<sup>15</sup>

Jackson also attempted to capitalize on the strength of the Ulster linen industry by attracting linen drapers and weavers to settle on his estate, bringing capital to the district and providing a trade for his tenants.<sup>16</sup> In 1764, he placed notices in the Belfast News-letter advertising mills and bleach greens in Forkhill to be leased “forever,” an unusually generous lease in the eighteenth-century. A more detailed notice appeared in the News-letter the next year, this time seeking a “Company of rich Linen Drapers,” recommending the quality and quantity of local water supply, the impressive height of falls to several mills, and improved access to cloth markets by a new road from Dundalk.<sup>17</sup> In 1762 Jackson took out a patent for a weekly market and two annual fairs, in a further effort to attract commerce and industry to Forkhill.<sup>18</sup> If any drapers or weavers were attracted to settle on the estate in the 1760s, their experience must not have encouraged them to stay: twenty-five years later the Reverend Mr. Hudson lamented the want of industry among the Forkhill people.<sup>19</sup> Hudson’s remark

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<sup>15</sup>Chambre papers, PRONI D/294/97.

<sup>16</sup>Linen had been a major export for Ireland since the 1730s, and the industry was concentrated in Ulster from the middle of the eighteenth-century.

<sup>17</sup>Belfast News-letter, 3 January 1764; BNL, November 1765; BNL, 11 October 1771.

<sup>18</sup>W.H. Crawford, “The Reshaping of the Borderlands, 1700-1840.” Borderlands, 99.

<sup>19</sup>Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 7 December 1789, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 15 No.67.

about the state of industry in Forkhill was part of a longer and more scathing description of the people and the parish which he included in a letter to the Earl of Charlemont in 1789.

Your Lordship will hardly believe how little appearances of civilization there are here tho' so little removed from the best parts of the Kingdom – Many traces of savage life still lie amongst us – the same laziness and improvidence – the same love of intoxication, the same hereditary enmities handed down from generation to generation – add to this that they are all related to each other and I believe there are not at this moment Ten Families in this Parish which are not related to almost every other in it...<sup>20</sup>

The Reverend Edward Hudson's remarks about the people of Forkhill were the impressions of a Protestant gentleman living among the mainly Catholic poor, and they capture the late eighteenth-century tension between two cultures (or to use Hudson's own vocabulary, between two *civilizations*) in a way that civil surveys and ethnic ratios fail to do. Hudson could barely mask his distaste for the Catholic people in the parish, but there is a measure of truth behind his words. He really did marvel at the poverty and "savagery" of the people of Forkhill, despite their living within reach of the most prosperous, thriving economic region in the country. The concentration of the linen industry in Ulster, and in Armagh in particular, brought tremendous prosperity to the region at the end of the eighteenth-century. Rapid economic growth spurred an equally rapid increase in population and Armagh's "linen triangle," with its three points at Newry, Dungannon and Lisburn, was the most densely populated district in the country.<sup>21</sup> Overall, Armagh was the most populous county in Ireland in relation to its size, with an average number of 511 persons for every

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<sup>20</sup>Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 7 December 1789, R.I.A.Charlemont MS 12 R 15 No. 67.

<sup>21</sup>W.H. Crawford, "The Linen Triangle in the 1790s." The Turbulent Decade, passim.

square mile, and Charles Coote noted in 1804 that even the bleak, hilly terrain in the southern and “wildest parts” of Armagh was “thickly inhabited.”<sup>22</sup> Unlike the linen region to the north, however, south Armagh had not been opened up by a network of roads until the early eighteenth-century, was not part of established trade routes, and consequently was a much poorer part of the county. A countryman described the miserable condition of the people in 1792. “The inhabitants of Forkhill and its adjacent neighbours are very illiterate, from their mountainous situation, that scarcely affords them potatoes and goat’s milk, of course the English language in many families, is scarcely known.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Charles Coote, Statistical Survey of the County of Armagh (Dublin, 1804), 34, 245, 366.

<sup>23</sup>J.Byrne. “An Impartial Account of the Late Disturbances in the County of Armagh.” in Peep O’Day Boys and Defenders: Selected Documents on the County Armagh Disturbances, 1784-96 [hereafter Peep O’Day Boys and Defenders] ed. David Miller (Belfast: PRONI, 1990), 105. Throughout the course of this paper I prefer to use the term “non-literate” to describe the people of Forkhill (with the exception of a literacy survey in chapter four, which divides the leaseholders according to their ability to sign their leases.) Where “illiteracy” suggests ignorance, “non-literacy” denotes a person or culture which has no written language, and which prefers orality over literacy. Accompanying notes in the Oxford Dictionary remark that the term *non-literate* is “colorless [and] conveys its meaning unambiguously.” See The Oxford Dictionary, vol. x, second edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). The fact that Irish remained the native language of most rural Irish Catholics in the eighteenth-century was a barrier to literacy among this population, although many of the people in Forkhill (especially the men) likely had some understanding of English, and spoke English at the major markets in Newry and Newtownhamilton. When William Neilson’s Introduction to the Irish Language was published in 1808, the subscribers included the Protestant clergyman of Forkhill, Rev. Charles Atkinson, and Julia Eliza Ogle, niece of the late Richard Jackson and daughter of Susanna Barton. Julia Eliza was married to Colonel John Ogle, head of the Forkhill yeomanry from 1796. Perhaps these two Protestant English-speakers sought to communicate more effectively with the undertenants on the estate, or perhaps, as A.T.Q. Stewart suggests, the Protestant clergyman tried using *a chuid Gaeilge* to convert them! Padraig O’Snodhaigh, Hidden Ulster: Protestants and the Irish Language (Belfast: Lagan Press, 1995), 67-68; A.T.Q. Stewart, “‘The Harp New-Strung’: Nationalism, Culture and the United Irishmen” in Ireland and Irish-Australia: Studies in Cultural and Political History (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 266.

The thriving community Richard Jackson envisioned in the 1760s had failed to materialize in Forkhill, and the people were still poor, backwards and largely isolated in 1792. The Reverend Mr. Hudson blamed Jackson's mismanagement of the estate for this pitiful state of affairs and expressed his views privately in a letter to Charlemont in December 1789. "[I]t unfortunately happens that this place was for 35 years possessed by the most indolent man on Earth. He kept more than half of it waste during that time on which they in fact subsisted..."<sup>24</sup> These remarks suggest that Jackson controlled his Forkhill estate somewhat loosely and allowed large tracts of land to remain unsettled, perhaps for use as a local commons. Hudson also complained of "some hundreds of arrears" in rent that he had been forced to forgive the people after their landlord's death, which suggests that Jackson did not evict tenants who failed to pay their rates. Beginning in 1788, this system of the commons and the flexibility of rental payments disappeared as the trustees tightened up settlement on the estate. The "resettlement" of the Forkhill Estate caused great upheaval in the parish among a people who were not accustomed to outside interference. In the words of the Reverend Mr. Hudson, the idea of the land being let by competitive bidding "set them mad."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 7 December 1789, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 15 No.67.

<sup>25</sup>Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 7 December 1789, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 15 No.67.

## CHAPTER TWO: SETTLEMENT IN FORKHILL, 1788-1790

Consider the following two accounts of the origin of trouble on the Forkhill estate. In 1792, a pamphlet entitled “An Impartial Account of the Late Disturbances in the County of Armagh” was circulated in Dublin. The author, known only as “J. Byrne,” traced the recent troubles in Armagh between Peep O’Day Boys and Defenders from their outbreak in 1784 to their terrible climax in 1791, with the mutilation of a Protestant schoolmaster and his family in Forkhill. Byrne’s detailed description of the Forkhill attack and his background to trouble on the estate included the following revelation. “By the will of the late Mr. J —n. it seems that whenever a Papist’s lease was expired, that they should be banished their rocky habitations, and Protestants reinstated into the land of their fathers.”<sup>1</sup> The “banishment of Papists” from their lands eventually drove an “exasperated peasantry” to a terrible brand of revenge, in January 1791. More than forty years later, in his testimony before the Select Committee on Orange Lodges in 1835, an Orangeman named Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Verner described events in Forkhill rather differently. “A gentleman of the name of Jackson died and demised his property to religious and charitable purposes, and required by his Will that a Protestant colony should be established upon his property in that part of the country...” The panel asked Verner if the “plantation” of this “Protestant colony” required a general clearing of lands in Forkhill. Verner said that as far as he knew, the lands set aside for the

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<sup>1</sup>J. Byrne, “Impartial Account” in Miller, Peep O’Day Boys and Defenders, 104-107.

colony at Forkhill had been unoccupied, but the local Roman Catholics were determined that no Protestants should live among them.<sup>2</sup>

Byrne and Verner viewed the situation from different perspectives, and betray different sympathies, but both men trace the Berkeley outrage to the same event: the settlement of lands on the Forkhill estate in the wake of Richard Jackson's death in 1787. Since then, history has linked the eruption of "sectarian" outrage in Forkhill to the controversial settlement of the estate, without investigating the matter in any depth. Using Richard Jackson's will, as well as the available leases and land returns for the Forkhill estate, I will attempt to determine if Jackson intended to establish a Protestant colony on his estate, and if the trustees "banished papists" from their lands in order to carry out Jackson's intentions. The settlement of the Forkhill estate cannot be studied without first addressing the conditions of Richard Jackson's last will and testament.

#### *Richard Jackson's Extraordinary Will*

The late landlord of the Forkhill estate left a remarkably complex legacy which required an act of Parliament to clarify its intent and a board of trustees to supervise its execution. When Jackson wrote his will in 1776, eleven years before his death, he had already acquired a considerable fortune and owned extensive property in the city of Dublin and the counties of Cavan and Armagh. He left his Cavan estate to his wife, Nicola Ann Jackson, his Dublin property to his widowed sister, Susanna Barton, and his Forkhill property in trust to nine Church of Ireland bishops and rectors, who would manage the

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<sup>2</sup>Orange Lodge Inquiry, Minutes #29-75, 91.

business affairs of the estate. When all his debts and legacies had been paid, Jackson reserved half of the interest in his Forkhill estate to Susanna Barton and her daughter Julia Eliza, and upon their deaths to the propagation of the gospel in the east through the work of Protestant missionaries. Mindful of his “poor fellow-creatures, who [were] destroyed by the advice of quack doctors.” Jackson awarded one hundred pounds to the infirmary in nearby Dundalk, in addition to a small annual allowance. He also set aside one hundred pounds to buy looms for his poorest tenants on the Forkhill estate, and left one hundred great coats to be distributed among one hundred of his oldest tenants. Even after these charitable endowments were made, however, a very substantial portion of the estate remained, which Jackson set aside for the controversial purpose of “*clothing and educating as many, as the fund will allow, children of the church of Ireland, and in giving, at the age of twenty-five years, to each five pounds and a loom, and a small holding in preference to other tenants who may offer.*”<sup>3</sup>

By giving preferred rights to the land to the minority of Protestant tenants who lived on the Forkhill estate, Jackson appeared to be encouraging the establishment of a Protestant colony in Forkhill through the gradual supplantation of the native Irish Catholic population. His exclusive reference to “children of the church of Ireland...in preference to other tenants who may offer.” makes it difficult to read this clause in any other way. The trustees of Jackson’s estate interpreted the clause this way, but hoped to avoid its complications by

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<sup>3</sup>Italics appear in the original document. The will of Richard Jackson, the draft bill of the act of Parliament and related documents are held in PRONI T/529/16. Jackson’s will is reprinted in Coote’s Statistical Survey and in Miller, Peep O’Day Boys and Defenders, 91-93.

seeking legal grounds for altering the terms of the will. After meeting in February 1789, the trustees resolved that the clause “which directs a small holding to be given to each of the poor children...cannot without great inconsistency with the general intent of the said Testator...be observed.” The trustees sought an act of Parliament altering some of the financial arrangements, which freed them from a “literal performance” of the troublesome clause. Instead of receiving five pounds, a loom and a guaranteed holding on the estate upon reaching the age of 25, the Protestant children of Forkhill would receive ten pounds and a loom, or another article to the value of a loom. This additional five pounds would be considered as “compensation” in place of a holding on the estate.<sup>4</sup>

When Richard Jackson singled out “children of the church of Ireland,” and gave them preferred rights to the available land in Forkhill, he was looking ahead several generations to the gradual replacement of the native Irish Catholic population by a Protestant tenantry — Jackson *did* intend to establish a Protestant colony in Forkhill. Considering the conditions of his will, however, I suspect Richard Jackson was not an ardent anti-Catholic, but a zealous Protestant. In 1767 he drew extensively on his own resources to build the Protestant church in Forkhill, and later reserved substantial funds for assisting the work of Protestant missionaries abroad, as they spread the “religion of our blessed Saviour.”<sup>5</sup> But Jackson’s final effort to plant a colony of the faithful among heathens was frustrated by the legal

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<sup>4</sup>Will of Richard Jackson and related documents, PRONI T 529 16.

<sup>5</sup>Richard Jackson’s 1776 bequest to missionaries in the East is a good indication of his zeal for the Protestant faith, as determined missionary work to India was not begun until first quarter of the nineteenth-century.

manoeuvring of the trustees whom he had appointed to govern his trust, who had their own plans for the Forkhill estate.

### *Settlement on the Forkhill Estate*

In October 1787 the trustees placed a notice in the Belfast News-letter advertising ten townlands to be leased on the Forkhill estate. According to the notice, the lands consisted of “good Arable, Meadow, Pasture and Mountain,” and were especially suitable for linen manufacturers. The following summer, a second advertisement appealed directly to linen weavers, and even offered to build houses for prospective linen leaseholders as an incentive to settlement.<sup>6</sup> Enquiries were directed to Susanna Barton, who remained the titular head of the estate for some years under the close guidance of the trustees.

The bundle of paperwork concerning the settlement of Forkhill estate after Jackson’s death has proved difficult to sort through, and I expect there are pieces missing from the collection that would make the land transactions easier to follow. Proceeding on the available records, it seems that settlement on the estate was divided into two separate phases: the first lasted from November 1788 to March 1789; the second from November 1789 to 1791. On 20 March 1789, Reverend Hudson signed a document headed “Return of Lands in Forkhill Estate...[let] commencing the first day of November 1788.” This return listed 39 separate land agreements between Susanna Barton and various leaseholders for previously “untenanted” lands on the estate, totalling more than 2700 acres and yielding average farms

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<sup>6</sup>Belfast News-letter, 17 October 1787; BNL, 8 August 1788.

of 69.9 acres.<sup>7</sup> By March 1789 most of the lands on the Forkhill estate had been properly leased, rents had been agreed and settlement was probably underway. Not all the available land was leased during the first phase of settlement, however, and seven months later the trustees embarked on another drive to settle vacant lands.<sup>8</sup> Beginning in November 1789, 67 leases were signed between Susanna Barton and new leaseholders, totalling more than 1330 acres on the estate, yielding average farm sizes of only 24.2 acres.<sup>9</sup> According to these figures, 67% of the vacant lands on the Forkhill estate were granted to leaseholders during the *first* phase of adjustment on the estate, and the leases signed during the second phase (between November 1789 and 1791) account for only one-third of the allotted lands.

Were the leaseholders who arranged leases after 1790 deliberately excluded from participation in the first phase of settlement, from 1788-89? The trustees must have had a reason for reserving lands to select leaseholders in the first phase of settlement, before opening the lands to other bidders less than two years later. Is it possible that J. Byrne and Lieutenant-Colonel Verner were correct, that the trustees had attempted to plant a Protestant

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<sup>7</sup>“Return of Lands in Forkhill Estate that were in the possession of the late Richard Jackson Esq. and Let by Mrs Susanna Barton commencing the first day of November 1788.” PRONI D/294/10.

<sup>8</sup>The second round of settlement was not advertised in the Belfast News-letter, which suggests that the trustees sought local tenants and leaseholders to lease land on the estate.

<sup>9</sup>Twelve of the 67 leases signed between 1789 and 1791 appear to correspond with holdings that appear on the Returns of March 1789, but this is impossible to confirm. To avoid duplicating figures, I have excluded these twelve leases from consideration in my calculations for the second period of settlement. The figures in the text are based on calculations including 39 land arrangements in the first phase and 55 leases in the second phase. Leases appear in Chambre papers, PRONI D/294/11-83 and D/294/101-104.

colony in Forkhill?<sup>10</sup> The only way to answer this question is to distinguish between Protestant and Catholic leaseholders and then determine when each lease was agreed.<sup>11</sup> In eighteenth-century Ulster, it is possible to divide a community along sectarian lines according to their surnames: Arbuthnot, Best, Brown and Hudson are staunch Protestant names which stand apart from the native Irish Murphys, McParlans and O'Neales.<sup>12</sup> This method of distinction is not infallible, but in the absence of a proper census it is adequate and in a study of sectarian tension it is necessary.

When analyzed from this deliberately sectarian perspective, the early return of lands on the Forkhill estate displays a clear imbalance in favour of Protestant leaseholders. Of the 39 leases arranged between November 1788 and March 1789, 64% were granted to

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<sup>10</sup>References to "Protestants" refer to both members of the Church of Ireland (Anglicans) and Dissenters (Presbyterians), and there was a small community of each denomination in Forkhill.

<sup>11</sup>In a recent article in The Turbulent Decade: Ulster in the 1790s, W.H. Crawford wrote that since most leases were for three lives and expired at different times, "any analysis of leaseholders based on estate records would prove to be a very defective indicator of the relative strength of Catholics and Protestants." For my evaluation of settlement in Forkhill, I do not attempt to determine the numbers of the Protestant-Catholic *population*, but the number of *leaseholders* who signed leases during the concentrated period of settlement from 1788-1791. W.H. Crawford, "The Linen Triangle in the 1790s." The Turbulent Decade, 45.

<sup>12</sup>Protestant surnames: Arbuthnot, Berkeley, Best Brown, Carlisle, Dick, Dickson, Duncan, Forde, Gibson, Hudson, Humfrey, Johnston, Read, Stokes, Turkild, Tufft, Wilson. Catholic surnames: Bennett, Conry, Crilly, Dealy, Doyle, Galogly, Graffan, Groogan, Hanratty, Hughes, Lawless, Lennon, Magill, Magrath, McAtee, McCann, McGlade, McIver, McKeown, McLoughlin, McNamee, McParlan, Morgan, Murphy, Nugent, O'Hanlon, O'Heer, O'Neale, Quigley, Rice. In the few instances where the surnames did not offer clues, I used the Christian name of the leaseholder and the names of his relations and in-laws (who were named as "lives" in each lease) to determine his background. Some of the indentures were shared between and among leaseholders and, in a very few cases (3%), they were shared between Catholics and Protestants. To accommodate these partnerships, I created a third group of "mixed" leaseholders and did not include them in any profile.

Protestant leaseholders, the remaining one-third were awarded to Catholic leaseholders.<sup>13</sup> An evaluation of the total acreage confirms the dominant Protestant presence on the estate: Protestant leaseholders controlled 86% of the land, holding average farms of 93.8 acres: Catholics leased only 12.5% of the land, with average holdings of 26.17 acres.<sup>14</sup> At the close of this first period of settlement, there are two points to remember: first, the number of Protestant leases among the majority Catholic population in Forkhill was disproportionately high: second, individual Protestant holdings far exceeded the size of individual Catholic holdings.

During the second phase of settlement Catholic leaseholders in Forkhill experienced a reversal of fortune as the Protestant-Catholic balance of land tenure shifted considerably. Of the 55 new leases arranged during the period from November 1789 to November 1791, 27% were held by Protestants, who controlled 33% of the land. Two-thirds of the new leases were signed by Catholics, who controlled 62% of the land.<sup>15</sup> This time around, the individual holdings of Protestants and Catholic leaseholders were much closer in size: the average size of a Protestant farm fell to 29.16 acres, bringing it much closer to the 22.3 acres of an average Catholic farm.

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<sup>13</sup>I studied 39 lease agreements: 25 with Protestants; 13 with Catholics and one mixed agreement, which accounted for 1.5% of the land.

<sup>14</sup>The principal Protestant leaseholder on the Forkhill estate was Thomas Read Esq. After November 1788, Read controlled 1014.7313 acres or 37% of the land, much of it in the mountains, and his huge interest in the estate inflates the overall strength of the Protestant leaseholders. When his lands are excluded from consideration Protestant control of the land falls from 86% to 78% and Catholic control of the land rises to 20%. Even with this adjustment, Protestant farms remained, on average, twice the size of Catholic farms.

<sup>15</sup>55 leases: 15 Protestant leases and 37 Catholic leases; 3 mixed agreements.

In order to obtain an accurate demographic representation of land tenure on the Forkhill estate at the end of the eighteenth-century, an aggregate set of the figures from both phases of settlement must be calculated. By 1791, 94 known leases were agreed between Susanna Barton and her leaseholders. 43% of these leases were signed by Protestants, who controlled 69% of the land and held farms of 69.5 acres on average. Catholics signed 53% of the leases, holding 29% of the land, with average farms of 23.3 acres.<sup>19</sup> I must emphasize that these respective estimates of Protestant-Catholic interests in the estate apply to the leaseholders only – they do not represent the constituency of the undertenant population Forkhill in the 1790s, which remained overwhelmingly native, Irish-speaking and Catholic. Also, they do not reflect lease agreements signed before 1788, which are not on record.

The question remains, did the trustees “banish Papists” from their lands, or otherwise discriminate against Catholics during the settlement of the estate, in order to achieve a disproportionately high number of Protestant leaseholders? Since Jackson’s trustees were all leading clergymen of the Established Church, they may have felt an obligation to carry out the missionary spirit of Jackson’s will by seeking Protestants to settle on the estate first, and Catholics later. But as managers of the estate who were entitled to a share of its income, it seems more likely that the trustees simply exploited the potential of the estate by throwing open the lands to a wider public for investment. Prosperous men engaged in industry were the most attractive candidates for landlords seeking leaseholders, and in eighteenth-century Ulster these candidates were far more likely to be Protestants than Catholics. As late as

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<sup>19</sup>94 leases: 40 Protestant leases; 50 Catholic leases; 4 mixed agreements. When Read’s interest in the land is excluded from consideration, Protestant leases accounted for 58% of the land and Catholic leases for 38%.

1795, few Catholics were head linen bleachers and drapers in Ulster, and “almost every shilling [was] in the hands of Protestants.”<sup>17</sup> When the trustees embarked on the settlement of the estate by placing advertisements in the Belfast News-letter, they were deliberately targeting a middle-class Protestant readership. If settlement did proceed on a discriminatory basis, it may have been economic rather than religious discrimination, apparently driven by sectarian prejudice, but actually driven by a much more ecumenical spirit of capitalism.

### *Some Notes on the Size of Holdings*

Many historians argue that competition for land in Armagh was much less fierce at the end of the eighteenth-century, since the strength of the linen industry had compressed the size of an average farm in that county to less than five acres.<sup>13</sup> Weavers paid high prices for land inside the Armagh linen triangle, so they would be near to linen markets, but because they earned their income at the loom, and not on the land, they needed only very small holdings for themselves and their families. The compression of holdings in Armagh squeezed out the “lazy middleman,” who sub-let plots on his land to undertenants in exchange for labour or other services. According to Charles Coote, the middleman was the principal parasite of the landholding system in Ireland and Coote applauded his near-extinction in County Armagh.<sup>19</sup> The middleman survived in areas where attitudes to the land

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<sup>17</sup>Robert Stevenson's View of the County of Armagh (1795), PRONI D/562/1270.

<sup>18</sup>Crawford, “The Linen Triangle in the 1790s,” *passim*. The arguments of L.M. Cullen and David Miller concerning the disturbances in Armagh and their relationship to the linen industry are outlined in the historiographical section in Chapter Three.

<sup>19</sup>Coote, Statistical Survey of County Armagh, 136-37, 232.

had not been transformed by the linen industry, however, and Forkhill retained its middlemen. Following the period of settlement on the estate, the average size of a holding was 43 acres, far above the average acreage of holdings elsewhere in Armagh. When the available figures are broken down further, they show that only three leases were for farms of less than 5 acres. Clearly, the Forkhill estate did not fit the county profile.<sup>20</sup> The comparatively large farms on the estate indicate that many of the Forkhill lands were settled with undertenants, who remained under the thumb of their immediate landlords, vulnerable to increased competition for land as the population increased, and utterly dependent for their subsistence on a small plot of ground over which they had no real claim.

### *Occupation and Industry*

The vast majority of leaseholders on the Forkhill estate were farmers, although there were some exceptions to this rule, including a miller, a schoolmaster, two gentlemen, two widows and two Catholic priests. Reverend William McCullen leased nearly six acres in 1788 as part of the early land return and Reverend Nicholas McIvor signed a lease for fourteen acres in the townland of Longfield in December 1790.<sup>21</sup> The willingness of the trustees to negotiate leases with Catholic priests indicates a level of tolerance, if not approval, for the presence of Catholic clergy on the estate. The three linen weavers included among the Forkhill leaseholders were Alexander Berkeley, William Duncan and Thomas

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<sup>20</sup>Thirty leases were for farms of 5-10 acres, thirty were for farms of 11-20 acres, seventeen leases were for farms of 21-50 acres, and fourteen were for farms of more than 50 acres.

<sup>21</sup>PRONI D/294/10 and D/294/74A.

Forde. These men were included on the early list of land returns and most likely had responded to the notices printed in the Belfast News-letter advertising lands in Forkhill which were especially suitable for linen weavers. Duncan and Berkeley each received substantial loans for building on their premises – thirty four pounds, two shillings and sixpence, to be exact. One week after these leases were signed, Reverend Hudson informed Charlemont that he had finally introduced some “decent manufactures” into the parish, adding “...if it lasts I hope to make our Savages happy against their wills by establishing trade and industry among them.”<sup>22</sup> Despite Hudson’s best efforts, the linen industry did not prosper in Forkhill as it did elsewhere in Armagh. Robert Stevenson reported in 1795 that a weekly linen market had been established in the village of Newtownhamilton, around ten miles from Forkhill, and the linen trade had pushed its improvements into the formerly “black” mountains of south Armagh.<sup>23</sup> Yet in 1804, Charles Coote remarked that the Barony of Orior was “much less engaged in weaving” than elsewhere in county Armagh, and Susanna Barton still offered generous linen leases to prospective leaseholders who undertook to establish the linen industry locally. Thirty years later, the situation had not changed: the linen and cotton manufactures in Forkhill were conducted to a “limited extent” and the

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<sup>22</sup>Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 7 December 1789, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 15 No.67.

<sup>23</sup>Robert Stevenson’s View of the County of Armagh (1795), PRONI D/562/1270.

principal industry remained agrarian; four corn mills in the parish exported a large quantity of meal through the port of Dundalk to Liverpool.<sup>24</sup>

### *Chapter Summary*

Based on an analysis of the available documents, Protestants were over-represented as leaseholders and Catholics were seriously underrepresented in the early land returns on the Forkhill estate. Although the second phase of settlement displayed greater balance, Catholic leaseholders failed to match the Protestants acre for acre on the estate – it was never even close. But the disproportionate representation of Protestant leaseholders should not be immediately ascribed to the sectarian bias or missionary enterprise of Reverend Hudson and the trustees. These men were entitled to a share of the profits generated by the Forkhill estate and most likely decided to open the lands to investment by wealthy men and prosperous linen drapers, a majority of whom were Protestants. When this appeal had been exhausted, the remaining land was opened up to local leaseholders, most of whom were Catholics.

The trustees' rationale was irrelevant to the local people, however, especially those who occupied untenanted lands on Forkhill and felt threatened by the prospect of large-scale settlement. In December 1789, the Reverend Mr. Hudson assured Lord Charlemont that he

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<sup>24</sup>Coote, Statistical Survey of County Armagh, 351; Samuel Lewis, A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland (Dublin, 1849). W.H. Crawford, who has written extensively on the Ulster linen industry in the eighteenth-century, has confirmed this pattern of development. Crawford writes that the linen industry was "concentrated on the northern side of watershed of the south Armagh mountains," and made few inroads into parishes along the Armagh-Louth border. Crawford, "The reshaping of the borderlands, 1700-1840." Borderlands, 97-98.

had acted judiciously throughout the business of settlement and dismissed a rumour that several Forkhill tenants had been dispossessed in order to make room for Protestants: "I do most solemnly assure your Lordship that in not one instance has even one acre been taken from any man."<sup>25</sup> Although this statement may have been technically correct, Hudson did not acknowledge that local people had been living on these waste lands and had been cleared off their ground to accommodate settlers with proper leases. Instead, Hudson blamed the Catholics for what happened next. "They found some Protestants had taken land whom they determined to drive out. They therefore assembled the Defenders from all parts of the Country and struck such Terror that none of those Protestants but Half a Dozen ever appeared here afterwards."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 7 December 1789, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 15 No.67.

<sup>26</sup>Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 7 December 1789, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 15 No.67.

### CHAPTER THREE: TROUBLE IN FORKHILL, 1789-1792

The Reverend Mr. Hudson's determination to place the trouble in Forkhill entirely in the context of hostility between Catholics and Protestants, and his persistent representation of the Defenders as a Catholic terror squad, reveal more about his antagonistic relationships with the people of Forkhill than about the nature of the people's relationships with each other. The hatred which Hudson believed was directed towards all Protestants in Forkhill was in fact concentrated in his own direction, and the terror which he maintained had gripped all Protestants had its firmest grip on himself. Indeed, the disturbances in Forkhill which followed close on the heels of settlement were far more complicated than Hudson allowed. In this chapter, I will consider historical interpretations of the Armagh disturbances to see how they apply to the situation in Forkhill. As well, I will discuss the rise of the Forkhill Defenders, the ideology of the Defenders, and their role in the series of outrages on the estate between 1789 and 1792. All this discussion forms the necessary background for a significant revision of the 1791 attack on the Forkhill schoolmaster, which is the focus of this chapter.

#### *Defenders and the Disturbances: Contemporary Views and Historical Revisions*

The troubles in Armagh between the Peep O'Day Boys and Defenders achieved considerable notoriety in Ireland at the end of the eighteenth-century and contemporary correspondence, both official and personal, is full of commentary on the disturbances. Contemporary accounts cannot be accepted uncritically, however, since letters written for the

benefit of government were urgently pro-establishment, and most correspondence reflected the experiences of a landed gentry whose views were not representative of the general population. Moreover, all the accounts were written during a period of deep political division, social tension and national insecurity, and suffered in varying degrees from alarmism and prejudice. Yet contemporary explanations are worth evaluating to see how the men on the ground understood the situation.<sup>1</sup>

When Protestants invited Catholics into the ranks of the Volunteers in the 1780s in an effort to strengthen their faltering campaign for parliamentary reform, they underestimated Catholic zeal for political representation. The gradual repeal of the penal laws increased Catholic expectations of entrance into the polity and this swell of confidence unnerved elements of the Protestant population. Relations between the two communities were particularly tense in north Armagh where Catholics had grown more affluent due to the prosperity of the linen trade and had raised the price of land by bidding high against their Protestant neighbours. "This was the real cause of our ill-humour," Richardson confided to Abercorn in 1797.<sup>2</sup> Acting out of fear, jealousy and bravado, local Protestant gangs in

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<sup>1</sup>See the various correspondence received by the Earl of Charlemont. R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 14-18. Also, John Ogle to Edward Cooke, Rebellion Papers ISPO 620/24/37; William Richardson to the Duke of Abercorn, PRONI D/623/A/156/4-5; an anonymous letter to Dublin Castle, ISPO 620/26/51. The best-known contemporary work on the origins of the Armagh disturbances and the early Defenders is J. Byrne's "Impartial Account of the Late Disturbances in the County of Armagh" (Dublin, 1792). This pamphlet is reprinted in David Miller, Peep O'Day Boys and Defenders: Selected Documents on the County Armagh Disturbances, 1784-96 (Belfast: Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, 1990), 10-108. Richard Musgrave draws on Byrne's pamphlet and personal correspondence to support his litany of Defender violence, abuse, crime and conspiracy in the 1790s. Richard Musgrave, Memoirs of the Different Rebellions in Ireland (Dublin, 1801), passim.

<sup>2</sup>PRONI, Abercorn papers. D/623/156/4.

Armagh attacked and ransacked Catholic homes in a transparent effort to enforce the surviving penal law that forbade Catholics from bearing arms. The raids and robberies of the Peep O'Day Boys (so named for surprising their victims at dawn) inspired the Catholics to form organizations for self-protection and local groups of "Defenders" appeared in Armagh from the mid-1780s.<sup>3</sup> Early clashes between Peep O'Day Boys and Defenders escalated into a series of provocative and retaliatory attacks that increased hostility between Protestants and Catholics in the county: this was the theme of J. Byrne's narrative in his "Impartial Account" of the disturbances printed in 1792, and it recurs in virtually every contemporary account of the period. According to the Reverend Edward Hudson, the disturbances in south Armagh flared into a civil war fuelled by the "infernal rancour of religious party."<sup>4</sup> Because the conflict between Peep O'Day Boys and Defenders in Armagh generally broke along sectarian lines, every robbery of a Catholic by a Protestant, and every attack on a Protestant by a Catholic was reported as a sectarian outrage. Not everyone was convinced that the problem was so easily explained, however. A local Protestant clergyman, the Reverend William Campbell, expressed his unease to Charlemont in 1788: "If in remote parts of the county, or among the mountains about Newtownhamilton, outrages and *Religious Wars* are carried on, I know it not. But this I know, that every drunken quarrel or rescue of

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<sup>3</sup>"Impartial Account" in Miller, Peep O'Day Boys and Defenders, 19.

<sup>4</sup>Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 26 August 1789, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 16 No.51.

cattle, or unfortunate accident that happens, is immediately ascribed to these parties, tho' in no sort connected with them."<sup>5</sup>

Two centuries later, the historian L.M. Cullen is not persuaded by the sectarian thesis either, and tends to side with astute observers such as Reverend Campbell. Cullen believes such a thesis is too malleable to be of real value to an historian, especially when it is applied to the causes of conflict in areas of mixed religion. In places like Armagh, where the population was fairly evenly distributed among Anglicans, Presbyterians and Catholics, and where the trouble began between rival factions of Peep O'Day Boys and Defenders, it seemed natural to trace the disturbances to sectarian causes.<sup>6</sup> But making general assumptions about relationships within communities solely on the basis of their religious balance can lead the historian away from the actual causes of tension and into serious error. In many cases, local levels of tension, the character of disturbances in a parish, and the receptivity of a community to radical discourse were determined by factors which were peculiar to individual parishes and even townlands, including the local balance between social classes, which could never be discovered through a simple Protestant–Catholic population return.

A determined effort to resist the trap of a sectarian explanation for the Armagh disturbances, without ignoring the presence of sectarian conflict, has produced more sophisticated and locally-based explanations, and the lines of interpretation adopted by L.M.

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<sup>5</sup>William Campbell to Charlemont, 8 February 1788, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 15 No.5.

<sup>6</sup>L.M. Cullen, "The United Irishmen: Problems and Issues of the 1790s," The Turbulent Decade: Ulster in the 1790s, 9.

Cullen and David Miller have proven particularly instructive. Cullen resists the argument pioneered by the nineteenth-century historian W.E.H. Lecky that the disturbances in Armagh were rooted in land hunger, as part of an unbroken series of agrarian outrages in the county. Cullen points out that the Armagh economy was increasingly proto-industrial as a result of the linen industry and this transformation had actually *reduced* competition for land among Catholics and Protestants. Instead, he suggests that political fragmentation among the leading Armagh gentry over issues of Volunteering, parliamentary reform and Catholic rights created tensions at a local level which fostered the spread of Defenderism and led directly to the foundation of the Orange Order.<sup>7</sup>

Miller believes that Cullen's focus on county politics is too narrow and preoccupied with issues that were irrelevant to the lower classes. He prefers a socio-economic explanation for the Armagh disturbances, arguing that the growth of the linen industry in the

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<sup>7</sup>For information on the disturbances in Armagh during this period, consult the following sources. Brendan McEvoy, "The Peep Of Day Boys and Defenders in County Armagh," (Parts I and II) Seanchas Ardmhacha 12, nos.1-2 (1986-87). This is a somewhat partisan, but still useful essay with a good bibliography. David Miller's essay on the Armagh troubles in the collection by Clark and Donnelly is essential reading. "The Armagh Troubles, 1784-1795," in Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, 1780-1914, eds. S.Clark and J.S. Donnelly (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983). See also David Miller, Peep O'Day Boys and Defenders: Selected Documents on the Disturbances in County Armagh (Belfast: 1990), and L.M. Cullen's review in Irish Economic and Social History 19, (1992). See L.M. Cullen, "Late Eighteenth Century-Politicization in Ireland," Culture et Pratiques Politiques en France et en Irlande (Paris, 1988). Miller and Cullen debate the causes of the Armagh disturbances in a recent edition of Irish Economic and Social History 23, (1996). Writing on the Defenders includes L.M. Cullen "The Political Structures of the Defenders," Ireland and the French Revolution, eds. Gough and Dickon, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1990); Marianne Elliott, "The Defenders in Ulster," The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism and Rebellion, eds. Dickson, Keogh and Whelan, (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1993). The most comprehensive study of the Defenders is Jim Smyth, The Men of No Property: Irish Radicals and Popular Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century (London: Macmillan, 1992).

county transformed attitudes to the land among a generation of young linen weavers who no longer relied on the land to earn their living. Once the land lost its former economic significance, fathers and landlords were stripped of influence over thousands of young, mobile and prosperous weavers in Armagh.<sup>8</sup> These farmer-weavers, both Catholic and Protestant, wanted to be treated according to their new social status and expected to be allowed the right to bear arms. Conflict over this issue, followed by panicked efforts to contain local disturbances, created conditions which encouraged the spread of Defenderism and Orangeism in the county.

The strength of the linen trade is an important part of the arguments advanced by both Miller and Cullen, although they both make generalizations about the extent of the industry in Armagh. The social and economic conditions which prevailed within the “linen triangle” did not apply by extension to the rest of the county.<sup>9</sup> The linen trade was not nearly as strong in south Armagh, and the industry had not transformed landholding relationships among the people of Forkhill. Unlike the small holdings and direct leases between landowners and their weaver-tenants which prevailed in mid-Armagh, the population in Forkhill was a population of undertenants who were utterly dependent on their immediate landlords, and competition over land remained fierce. L.M. Cullen has recently acknowledged that

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<sup>8</sup>There were between 16 000 and 20 000 weavers in Armagh during the 1780s. Miller, “The Armagh Troubles, 1784-95” in Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, 157.

<sup>9</sup>The “linen triangle,” with its three points at the major linen markets in Dungannon, Lisburn and Newry, was situated partly in north Armagh, at a distance of twenty-five or thirty miles between markets. Although Forkhill is less than ten miles outside Newry, the mountains and rough terrain made transport to the town difficult, and the parish evidently did not prosper from the linen trade.

conditions in south Armagh were different from those in the northern part of the county and the outrages on the Forkhill estate, in particular, must be examined in light of local circumstances.<sup>10</sup>

The second major revision in the historiography of this period concerns the representation of the Defenders, a secret society which originated among rural Catholics in Armagh during the disturbances of the 1780s. The historical pedigree of the Defenders is generally traced to the Whiteboys, the Steelboys and other rural protest movements which had conducted sporadic campaigns of terror and intimidation against local "oppressors" in various places around the county for several decades. The grievances of the Whiteboys were broadly agrarian: they objected to the enclosure of the local commons by landlords who were anxious to let the land for profit; they attempted to regulate conacre rates by publicly declaring "fair rents" and punishing tenants who agreed to pay more; and they attacked "middlemen" who collected tithes for a fee on behalf of the local clergymen.<sup>11</sup>

Early Defenderism appealed to the same instincts of self-preservation which drove the Whiteboys into oath-bound secret societies seeking the redress of perceived injustice, according to a particular rural code of conduct. But the political acumen and organization

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<sup>10</sup>L.M. Cullen, "The Political Troubles of County Armagh: A Comment," Irish Economic and Social History 23, (1996): 20-22.

<sup>11</sup>Jim Smyth, The Men of No Property: Irish Radicals and Popular Politics in the Late Eighteenth-Century (London: Macmillan, 1992), 33-37. Tithes were dues owed to the Established church by members of every denomination, and rates and methods of payment varied among parishes. In the first half of the nineteenth-century tithes were sometimes paid in kind (corn, potatoes etc.), but they were usually paid in cash. D.H. Akenson, The Church of Ireland: Ecclesiastical Reform and Revolution, 1800-1885 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 87-95.

of the Defenders soon elevated them above narrow agrarian protest movements. Recent scholarship has replaced the old view of the Defenders — as loose bands of Catholic peasants engaged in agrarian protest and inflamed by sectarian hatred — with a closely-argued thesis which acknowledges the social and political complexity of the movement. In the most comprehensive study of the Defenders yet published, Jim Smyth states the point flatly: the Defenders were not drawn solely from the ranks of the peasantry, and their aims cannot be dismissed as agrarian. Both the members and leaders of the Defenders were drawn from a cross-section of rural society, including the middle classes, the “middling sort,” artisans, schoolteachers, and the Catholic peasantry.<sup>12</sup> At a regional level, the Defenders were managed by a group of relatively wealthy, middle-class Catholic families who lived along the Ulster borderlands. Members of these families were active in the Catholic Committee in the early 1790s and cultivated contacts with the Society of United Irishmen as early as 1792. Both Jim Smyth and Kevin Whelan provide ample evidence of an early overlap between the leadership of these three organizations, suggesting ways in which the Catholic Committee, the Defenders and the United Irishmen may have used the political contacts, articulate leadership and/or brute force of each other to achieve their vaguely shared purpose of parliamentary reform.<sup>13</sup> Like the United Irishmen, the Defenders professed sympathy with the cause of the French Revolution and groped towards an embryonic Irish nationalism during the 1790s, but their grassroots appeal was based on the radical social

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<sup>12</sup>Smyth, Men of No Property, 114-15.

<sup>13</sup>Kevin Whelan, The Tree of Liberty: Radicalism, Catholicism and the Construction of Irish Identity, 1760-1830 (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), 40; Smyth, Men of No Property, 116-120.

reforms they promised to deliver to their overwhelmingly lower-class Catholic constituency. As Smyth explained, the Defenders developed a “chameleon ideology” which could be adapted to a variety of local conditions; it was sometimes sectarian, sometimes agrarian, always Catholic and anti-ascendancy.<sup>14</sup>

The secrecy and general illiteracy of the Defenders meant that they left very little written material behind them, and the origin and designs of the movement remain in dispute. M.R. Beames’s remark about the relationships between agrarian discontent, sectarian nationalism and United Irish republicanism still applies: they “remain to be unravelled.”<sup>15</sup> Part of the unravelling will be to answer two questions: are the Defenders better described as social bandits or political activists? And was Defenderism, in either of these forms, a sectarian movement? Using the disturbances in Forkhill between 1789 and 1791, I will present a case study of Defenderism and its role in agrarian protest, sectarian conflict, social banditry and radical politics.

### *Early Defenderism in South Armagh*

In April 1789 the Reverend Mr. Hudson arrested a suspected Defender near Jonesborough, a village just four miles from Forkhill. Hudson had been touring the neighbourhood with a military party in his capacity as a local magistrate and chaplain to the Volunteers. The suspect, known as “Sharky,” was taken to Dublin Castle for questioning but was later released. There is little doubt that Sharky was a Defender, for he carried a set of

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<sup>14</sup> Smyth, Men of No Property, 120.

<sup>15</sup>M.R. Beames quoted in Smyth, Men of No Property, 2.

incriminating documents which linked him to the organization, and the Castle's failure to secure his conviction remains a mystery.<sup>16</sup> What is known is that by early 1789, the Defenders formed an organized, well-connected, oath-bound secret society with a substantial membership in County Armagh and an expanding presence in County Louth. In July 1789 Hudson expressed fears that the "spirit of combination" was spreading and parts of south Down and north Louth had been completely infected. An alarmed loyalist observed that the south Armagh countryside was in "absolute Rebellion & Confusion," and one night in July, Jonesborough barracks was attacked by bands of armed "papists" who regularly assembled in their thousands.<sup>17</sup> By January 1790, Hudson reported that the state of affairs in south Armagh was "alarming." From Newtownhamilton through the parish of Creggan the country was in the hands of the Defenders.<sup>18</sup>

The incriminating documents Sharky carried at the time of his arrest provided both Reverend Hudson and the authorities in Dublin Castle with a good deal of information about the structure and character of the Defenders at an early stage. Richard Musgrave printed a set of documents in his Memoirs in 1801, which he claims were the same ones confiscated

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<sup>16</sup>Miller. Peep O'Day Boys and Defenders, 78-79.

<sup>17</sup>Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 11 July 1789, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 15 No.54; John Moore to Charlemont, 15 July 1789, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 15 No.56.

<sup>18</sup>Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 10 January 1790, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 16 No.37.

from Sharky in 1789.<sup>19</sup> The documents included the rules of the association, a copy of the Defenders' oath, and a certificate of discharge for a Defender who had applied for a transfer from Armagh to a lodge in county Louth. The rules were signed by 55 Defenders of the number 18 lodge in Drumbanagher, and revealed a substantial membership in an already advanced network. The structure of the Defenders appeared to be modelled on the society of Freemasons: the association was headed by a grand master; local lodges were headed by deputies and committee members; and strict secrecy was enforced. Sworn Defenders vowed to obey the rules of association which prohibited rowdy behaviour, drunkenness at meetings, and the revealing of passwords. Rule #4 declared that no person who formerly belonged to another organization would be accepted into the Defenders without a written

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<sup>19</sup>Richard Musgrave, Memoirs of the Different Rebellions in Ireland (Dublin, 1801), 57-58; Appendix 8-9. There are grounds for dispute on this issue, but I am virtually convinced that the documents date from early 1789. Two things are certain: Hudson arrested Sharky in 1789, and Hudson seized the documents which are printed in Musgrave, but did Hudson seize the documents from Sharky *in 1789*? In a letter to Charlemont in February 1795, Hudson referred to a recent murder by the Defenders at Scarva which had finally convinced an acquaintance that the Defenders were a serious threat. Hudson continued, "tho' after I had seized the copy of their association and a Certificate and discharge granted to a man from the company No.18 - Armagh he declared he was convinced there was not a company of Defenders in the Kingdom." It is difficult to know if Hudson was referring to a seizure he had made one month before, one year before, or six years before, in 1789 - he is not clear on this point. But because Hudson had overseen both the arrest of Sharky in 1789 and the confiscation of precisely the same documents Musgrave includes in his appendix (which are dated April 1789), the two events are linked persuasively. Most convincing is Hudson's remark that his acquaintance continued to deny there were Defenders in Ireland, even after he was confronted with their oath, rules and list of members. After the Berkeley outrage in 1791 and the armed outrages of 1792, no one doubted the existence of the Defenders. This precision-dating is important because the wording of the oath reflects a political awareness among the Defenders, which elevated them above earlier agrarian outrage movements and confirms their relative sophistication and organization at an early stage. In addition to the Musgrave reference above, see Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 15 February 1795, R.I.A. MS 12 R 18 No.65; J. Byrne "Impartial Account" in Miller, Peep O'Day Boys and Defenders, 78-79.

recommendation. Already the Defenders were protecting themselves against infiltration by outsiders and very little intelligence was gathered in the early years of the association. Rule #6 stated that no Defender could “go to a challenge” without the consent of three other members, and Rule #9 required members to arm themselves with a gun and bayonet. Sharky’s documents reveal that by 1789 the Defenders had moved a good distance beyond its original mandate as a crude defensive organization.

By mid-1789, the Defenders were firmly established in the parish of Creggan and had almost certainly penetrated the neighbouring parish of Forkhill as well, although Hudson claimed few in his own parish had been sworn. According to Hudson’s information, the Creggan association held monthly meetings and was formally organized with a proper “Cabinet,” headed by a man known as the “Deep Fellow,” who was assisted by a secretary. The movement had organized court martials for trying local delinquents and had proven able to assemble its associates almost instantly using a system of whistles.<sup>20</sup> Considering this was an oath-bound, secret society, Hudson’s intelligence about the mechanics of the movement was impressively detailed, but he still could not put his finger on the aims of the movement. He described to Charlemont several recent offenses committed by the Defenders – the brutal assault of a Presbyterian in Crossmaglen, the rape of a pregnant Catholic woman in Creggan, the terrorization of Protestant settlers in Forkhill – but he never sought a rational explanation for the attacks, beyond sectarian hatred or sheer barbarism. To be fair, Sharky’s papers had outlined the procedures of the movement, but not its principles, and the character

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<sup>20</sup>Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 7 December 1789, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 15 No.67; Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 10 January 1790, MS 12 R 16 No.37.

of early Defenderism is shrouded in some mystery. But if the operations of a subversive movement are good indications of its aims, the covert operations of the Defenders in Forkhill fit the profile of social banditry.

*The Forkhill Defenders and Social Banditry*

In a landmark study of rural disturbances in Ireland published in 1836, George Cornwall Lewis described offenders who committed crimes of revenge and general intimidation as “administrators of a law of opinion.” They looked not only to the present, but also to the future, not only to particular, but to general results, not to themselves alone, but to those with whom they shared a certain set of interests.<sup>21</sup> Lewis limited his discussion to the Whiteboys and rural protest movements in Ireland, but he was in fact addressing a more universal phenomenon, and Eric Hobsbawm has defined “social banditry” in terms which are almost identical to Lewis’s description of the Whiteboys. Bandits, Hobsbawm writes, “right wrongs, they correct and avenge cases of injustice, and in doing so apply a more general criterion of just and fair relations between men in general...”<sup>22</sup> What Lewis called “administrators of a law of opinion,” Hobsbawm called “bandits.” The people of south Armagh called them “Defenders,” and there are striking parallels between outbreaks of social banditry worldwide and the rise of Defenderism in Forkhill.

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<sup>21</sup>George Cornwall Lewis, On Local Disturbances in Ireland (London, 1836), 94-95.

<sup>22</sup>Eric Hobsbawm, Bandits (Middlessex: Penguin Books, 1985), 26. Historians Jim Smyth and A.T.Q. Stewart have suggested a close relationship between bandits and Defenders. See Smyth, Men of No Property, 40-45; Stewart, The Narrow Ground: The Roots of the Conflict in Ulster (Hampshire: Gregg Revivals, 1993), 113-127.

Bandits flourished in remote, inaccessible areas cut off from the traffic of civilization. Mountain terrain was ideal, for it offered hideouts for men on the run and was often poorly patrolled by law enforcement officers. As well, the poor soil and pastoral economies of rough, mountain terrain provided a permanent surplus of unemployed, restless young men, mired in poverty, who were likely candidates for banditry.<sup>23</sup> Epidemics of banditry usually broke out during periods of social upheaval, when a community or society was confronted with outside forces which threatened to transform or dissolve the traditional order. Banditry represented the resistance of a community to change and the classic programme of bandits was the protection or restoration of the old order. In pursuit of this aim, they engaged in campaigns of terror, intimidation and vengeance, dispensing their own brand of rural justice according to a highly particular code of moral behaviour. Crimes committed to further the bandits' programme of resistance were not only considered legitimate, but commendable, and among their own people, bandits were heroes, liberators and even martyrs, who were immortalized in story and song.<sup>24</sup>

Like such social bandits, the Forkhill Defenders emerged in a remote community in south Armagh and flourished in the rough, inaccessible mountain terrain. The region was occasionally patrolled by parties of the Volunteers, but there was no law enforcement presence in the immediate area until 1795, when the extent of local disturbances forced the authorities to establish a barracks in Forkhill. The people of the parish were desperately poor, their economy was one of subsistence and survival, and Forkhill almost certainly had

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<sup>23</sup>Hobsbawm, Bandits, 21, 31, 70.

<sup>24</sup>Hobsbawm, Bandits, 17-26, 47, 63-67.

a large pool of restless and landless young men with no industry who would be attracted by a life of social banditry. The blood-soaked history of the borderlands gave them plenty of encouragement. Less than one hundred years before, the most infamous outlaw in Irish history, Redmond O'Hanlon, had operated out of south Armagh with his band of fifty men: and Cosgrove's popular history of "Irish highwaymen, Tories and Rapparees" (c.1760) was hawked around the country and sold through numerous editions in the eighteenth-century.<sup>25</sup>

Together, these conditions created a situation which was ideal for the emergence of social banditry – the only thing missing was a crisis. This came in 1789, when the parish was thrown into upheaval with the settlement of the untenanted lands on the estate: local people were shuffled around, a "foreign" population was introduced, a measure of outside authority was established and Reverend Hudson announced he would finally reform these "savages" by importing industry into the parish. Alarmed by this sudden interference, the local people called on the Defenders to protect their interests and succeeded in scaring off some of the new settlers. Hudson viewed the situation with little sympathy for the native population, and explained to Charlemont, "they found some Protestants had taken land whom they determined to drive out."<sup>26</sup> Hudson defined the conflict in sectarian terms in an attempt to transfer blame for the outbreak of trouble in his own parish, lest he be held responsible for the disturbances. His emphasis on the sectarian character of the intimidations cannot be fully trusted, and I suspect that the Forkhill intimidations proceeded from a different impulse.

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<sup>25</sup>Smyth, Men of No Property, 40-41.

<sup>26</sup>Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 7 December 1789, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 15 No.67.

Quarrel over the land has dictated the history of Ulster for as long as the historical record can remember and raids among warring clans made the province a battlefield even before the twelfth-century Norman invasion of Ireland. But attitudes to the land hardened after the seventeenth-century Ulster plantation, and the native sense of dispossession was mirrored by the apprehension of the settlers, who never felt fully secure in their ownership of the land. On both sides, these feelings were intensified by the people's utter dependence on the land for survival; this dependence was especially acute in areas where the linen industry had not replaced traditional systems of landholding. A government commission set up in 1845 to inquire into the occupation of land in Ireland heard remarkable testimony about rural attitudes to the land, it was guarded jealously, measured carefully and defended with violence. Men and women who had been turned out of their land became "demoralized," "savage" and "wild." If you touch the farm and turn a man out, one witness said, "the mind gets changed, and there is sure some misfortune to follow from that."<sup>27</sup> Holding land became a cultural obsession and the circumstances behind the letting of land in a community were "engraven on the minds" of the local people for generations.

Testimony heard before the Devon Commission also revealed that popular consensus about land rights in rural communities was far more significant than the conveyance of legal title. Throughout rural Ireland, an unspoken code of ethics governed the occupation, leasing,

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<sup>27</sup>In 1845 the Devon Commission produced a multi-volume report on the system of land tenure in Ireland, including recommendations for reform in land legislation. A compendium of this report was published in 1847 and the above extracts are taken from this two-part digest. See Devon Commission, Digest of Evidence taken before Her Majesty's Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of the Law and Practice in Respect of the Occupation of Land in Ireland, 2 parts [hereafter Devon Commission Digest] (Dublin: Alexander Thom, 1847), I: 361-362.

transfer and sale of the land, which might appear curious to an outsider. Consider the practice of outbidding a former tenant for his land upon the expiry of his lease: this was a perfectly legal transaction, but among the people "land grabbing" was considered a reprehensible act. As a Down farmer explained, it was "against the will of the people" for a man to take another man's farm. Dispossession (seizing land from a tenant who failed to pay his rent) was the most despicable crime against this rural code of conduct, and land agents often had difficulty leasing farms which had been seized from former tenants.<sup>28</sup> Vigilante groups such as the Whiteboys administered their own brand of justice to offenders of the rural code through acts of intimidation, houghing cattle, arson, assault, and even murder, all carried out under the cover of darkness. Local people viewed these vigilantes as defenders of the community interest and tacit support for such brutal acts made it notoriously difficult to secure convictions against the accused. At the end of the eighteenth-century, combinations by these "protective unions" against incoming leaseholders who violated the rural land code was a part of life in the countryside.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Devon Commission Digest, I: 333-362; John William Knott, "Land, Kinship and Identity: The Cultural Roots of Agrarian Agitation in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Ireland," Journal of Peasant Studies 12, no.1 (1984): 101.

<sup>29</sup>Lewis, Local Disturbances, 124. A threatening letter to a landlord signed by a fictitious "Captain Rock" was reprinted in a Mayo newspaper in 1835. "NOTICE - Take notice Mr. John Waters of Stripe that unless you give up your transgressing and violating and attempting persecuting poor objects or poor miserable tenants remark that the country is not destitute of friends or otherwise if you do not give over your foolishness or ignorance *you will be made an example in the country that never was beheld*. Here is to our foe of Stripe. Mr. John Waters, Esq., and I would be sorry to be in your clothes. Captain Rock, Esq." Lewis, Local Disturbances, 101.

When the Commission enquired if "revenge about the ground" ever proceeded from sectarian motives, one witness replied that Protestant and Catholic offenders were treated in a similar manner, although he conceded that a Protestant would be treated more harshly. Another witness claimed that sectarian prejudice was almost never a motive for attack and justice was administered impartially. In fact, most victims of the Whiteboys in Tipperary between 1802 and 1805 were middle-class Catholic farmers who had been accused of land-grabbing.<sup>30</sup> Virtually all of the evidence presented before the Commission agrees on this point: agrarian protest movements defended local rights to the land against *anyone* who dared interfere, Catholic or Protestant, and the attacks were not driven by sectarian hatred.<sup>31</sup> Because the native population in Forkhill was overwhelmingly Catholic and the incoming settlers were mostly Protestant, however, any combination against the newcomers would look like sectarian intimidation. This point is crucial, because the apparently sectarian disturbances in Forkhill began immediately after the settlement of untenanted lands in 1788-89. Conflict on the estate must be placed in this context of fierce possessiveness of the land and hostility to intruders *in general*. Indeed, this attitude persisted well into the twentieth century. Michael J. Murphy, a writer raised in the valley of Slieve Gullion mountain, several miles from Forkhill, recalls that it was extraordinary difficult for

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<sup>30</sup>Clark and Donnelly (eds.), Irish Peasants, 69.

<sup>31</sup>Devon Commission Report Digest, 333-362.

“outsiders.” Catholic or Protestant, to purchase land on the mountain. By agreement, local men helped one of themselves to outbid the “stranger.”<sup>32</sup>

Although the Devon Commission held its hearings more than fifty years after the disturbances in Forkhill, the possessive, jealous attitudes to the land which the witnesses described had been handed down for generations. It was precisely this pedigree which made them so formidable. The evidence of the Commission concerning rural attitudes to the land casts some doubt on Hudson’s insistence that the conflict in Forkhill was purely sectarian, and instead suggests that the local Defenders were defending their community against outside interference, in the tradition of social bandits.

This representation of Defenderism becomes more convincing once the outrages in Forkhill between 1789 and 1792 are examined. As the Defenders waged fierce campaigns of terror and intimidation in the countryside, the parish remained in a state of disturbance. Richard Musgrave wrote in 1801 that the “new colonists were hunted like wild beasts, and treated with savage cruelty: their houses were demolished, and their property was destroyed,” and to a degree contemporary newspaper reports and assize indictments confirm his accusations.<sup>33</sup> Many of the reported outrages were directed against several Protestant settlers on the estate, specifically the Reverend Mr. Hudson, John Dick, Robert Best, William Duncan and Alexander Berkeley. The attacks were not outbursts of irrational violence,

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<sup>32</sup>Michael J. Murphy, Ulster Folk of Field and Fireside (Dundalk: Dundalgan Press, 1983), 2-3.

<sup>33</sup>Musgrave, Memoirs, 59.

however, but deliberate and meaningful acts, and the victims were not random targets, but men who were perceived as threats to the security of the community.<sup>34</sup>

The Reverend Edward Hudson narrowly escaped an attempt on his life in the spring of 1789, when he was fired on while patrolling the countryside with a party of the military. Less than a year later, he suffered another murder attempt, and it was reported in the Belfast News-letter that “some evil-minded person fired a musket loaded with slugs” at the Protestant clergyman while he was riding on the main road near Forkhill. Hudson’s horse was shot dead beneath him, but he escaped injury.<sup>35</sup> In 1791, a house on Hudson’s premises was destroyed by fire, and in April 1792, three men were found guilty of conspiracy to commit the murders of the clergyman and two other gentlemen.<sup>36</sup> Fearing for his safety, Hudson removed himself and his family from the area after 1792 and resigned as rector of the parish in 1795. One of the Reverend Mr. Hudson’s attackers was a prominent Forkhill Defender, Ferdy McElevy. McElevy was arrested for the attempted murder of the clergyman in 1789, and several years later the Belfast News-letter identified him as “one of

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<sup>34</sup> The following discussion is based on evidence in the Armagh Assize indictment records. For discussion and criticism about the use of assize records as historical documents, see Neal Garnham, “How violent was eighteenth-century Ireland?” Irish Historical Studies 30, no.119 (1997). Although the indictment books do not record the parishes of the parties, using newspaper accounts and leases in the Chambré collection I have been able to identify the names of Forkhill leaseholders and probable tenants on the estate who appeared at the assizes.

<sup>35</sup> Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 26 August 1789, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 15 No.61; Belfast News-letter, 5 January 1790, BNL, 20 August 1790.

<sup>36</sup> 28 April 1791, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 16 No.62; Armagh Assize Indictments, Lent 1791; Freeman’s Journal, 21 April 1792. The two other targets were Richard Johnston and Thomas Lee. Richard Johnston assisted in the arrests of the Murphy brothers for the Berkeley outrage in 1791, and Thomas Lee was a member of the Louth Grand Jury who was active against the Defenders. ISPO Official Papers 18/2; Belfast News-letter, 12 April 1791.

the persons who had the command of the Defenders.”<sup>37</sup> Indeed, throughout the 1790s Ferdy McElevy was Forkhill’s most high-profile troublemaker and a notorious recidivist. Between 1788 and 1798, he appeared before Grand Juries in Armagh, Louth and possibly Monaghan at least ten times to face charges of assault, felony, robbery, shooting, mill burning, and “having arms&being a papist,” in an impressive reign of eighteenth-century anti-social behaviour. McElevy engaged in a particularly bitter war with John Dick, a farmer and miller on the Forkhill estate. In 1789, Dick charged Ferdy McElevy and his brother Patrick with assault and brought additional charges of felony against McElevy, John Hanlon and other local men at the next assizes. In 1791, Dick’s mill was burned to the ground and once again he charged a number of locals with the felony, including McElevy and Hanlon, and others whom the News-letter identified as Defenders. The next year, the *same* crowd of Defenders was charged with shooting at John Dick, setting fire to his house, his corn mill, and a cow shed, as well as setting fire to the dwelling house of the local constable, Robert Best. At their trials, in March 1792, the “Forkhill Rioters... were found *not guilty*, No evidence appearing except that of the approver.” After this string of prosecutions, another attempt was made on Dick’s life, whereupon Ferdy McAlevy was arrested and tried as a matter of course, but again there was no conviction.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Armagh Assize Indictments, Lent 1791; Belfast News-letter, 28 August 1792. Freeman’s Journal claimed “Ferdinand McAlevy...[was] one of the desperate gang called ‘defenders, or tongue cutters.’” FJ, 23 August 1791.

<sup>38</sup>Armagh Assize Indictments, Lent 1789, Summer 1789, Lent 1791, Lent 1792, Summer 1792; Belfast News-letter, 3 May 1791, BNL, 30 March 1792, BNL, 3 April 1792. BNL, 28 August 1792.

William Duncan also fell victim to assault, property damage, felony and theft of firearms after settling on the estate in 1788. He prosecuted two local men, Michael Donnelly and Laurence Connory at the 1789 Summer Assizes for numerous offenses, but he secured no conviction and the attacks intensified in the wake of the prosecution. Shortly after, his house was vandalized and robbed, his brother was assaulted, his daughter was assaulted and someone close to him was allegedly murdered. Duncan brought a litany of charges against John Bennet and John Mullan in 1790, including assault, felony, breaking and entering, theft and murder. Bennet was sentenced to death, but at the last moment the sentence was reprieved through the intervention of Lord Gosford and reduced to transportation. The head of the grand jury had urged Lord Gosford to consider John Bennet an object of mercy if he wished to maintain the "peace & security of the County of Armagh."<sup>39</sup> Duncan fled the parish shortly after.

In the eyes of the trustees, the local magistrates, gentry, clergymen and other genteel elements of the population, the Reverend Mr. Hudson, John Dick, William Duncan and Robert Best, were victims because they were Protestants. From the Defenders' perspective, however, these men were legitimate targets who had threatened the security of the community in some way.<sup>40</sup> The Reverend Mr. Hudson was their sworn enemy: as the trustee

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<sup>39</sup>Armagh Assize Indictments, Summer 1789. Lent Assizes 1790; Belfast News-letter, 13 April 1790; R. Power to Lord Gosford, 11 April 1790, quoted in Miller, Peep O'Day Boys and Defenders, 103.

<sup>40</sup>Jim Smyth has also noted the "often personalised nature of Defender attacks," which counters the historical impression of random Defender violence. The victims of Defender outrage (magistrates, informers, crown witnesses) were carefully selected. Smyth, Men of No Property, 107.

who supervised settlement on the Forkhill estate, he had most likely authorized the clearing of unleased lands to make room for a swarm of settlers into the parish: as a Volunteer, Hudson patrolled with the military, was active against local Defenders, and had arrested Ferdy McElevy and the Forkhill rioters himself. In a similar way, the other principal targets of the Defenders came into conflict with local people because of their roles on the estate. All of these men were tax collectors, in one form or another: as a miller, John Dick received as a standard toll one-sixteenth of the grain he milled; as the local tithe proctor, William Duncan collected tithes in the parish on behalf of the Reverend Mr. Hudson, and kept a portion as a fee for his services; as the local constable, Robert Best arrested several people who had refused to pay the "cess," a local tax levied for road-building and other improvements. Indeed, Best may have been the cess collector himself. This tax was often viewed as excessive by the rural population (it was known in Armagh as the "cut") and had been a key grievance of the Steelboys and Whiteboys in the 1770s.<sup>41</sup>

Eighteenth-century taxes (toll, tithe and cess) were either paid in cash or in "kind," in portions of corn or potatoes which were calculated according to the arable acreage of each tenant. D.H. Akenson has noted that cash payments worked to the advantage of both tithe proctors and tenants, since the disposal of produce was a great inconvenience to the proctor, and he often demanded lower rates if the tithes were paid in cash.<sup>42</sup> But the economic relationship between undertenants and their immediate landlords did not always involve a

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<sup>41</sup>Smyth, *Men of No Property*, 34; Clark and Donnelly (eds.), *Irish Peasants*, 39; D.A. Simmons, *A List of Peculiar Words and Phrases (Armagh and Donegal)* (Dublin, n.d.), 3.

<sup>42</sup>Akenson, *Church of Ireland*, 87-95.

cash-flow: these tenants often offered labour and services in exchange for small holdings, and it is difficult to determine if the undertenant population in Forkhill in the 1790s had ready access to money. In a subsistence economy, however, cash and food amounted to virtually the same thing. At the risk of presenting an overly simple picture, it appears that John Dick, William Duncan and Robert Best were implicated in taking food from the people, and were targeted by the Defenders because the people of Forkhill resented handing over a portion of their crops, or earnings, to tax collectors. The rash of mill-burnings, and the burning of haystacks and cow sheds in Forkhill in 1792 was part of a similar form of protest. For several decades, the Whiteboys had attacked tithe proctors and collectors of the cess, and destroyed mills and storing sheds in order to obstruct the exportation of corn and grain from hungry areas.<sup>43</sup>

Reversing the roles of victim and attacker in this way requires a particular rural logic (the logic of social banditry) but local people naturally responded to the situation according to their own interests. This response could be active, through direct association with the Defenders, but more often it was passive, by tacitly supporting them, giving them refuge, passing them information, and never betraying them to the authorities. In Forkhill, and perhaps in other isolated, rural communities where social banditry flourished, there was an added dimension to local loyalties. In a letter to Charlemont in 1789, Hudson pointed out that most of the families in Forkhill were intermarried. "I believe there are not at this moment

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<sup>43</sup>Lewis, Local Disturbances, 10.

Ten Families in this Parish which are not related to almost every other in it." he wrote.<sup>44</sup> In such a tightly knit community, where the bonds of kinship were so strong, the sentences of imprisonment, transportation and death handed down on convicted Defenders possibly provoked a more inflammatory response than would have been the case in larger, more anonymous communities. It is no coincidence that the murder attempts on Reverend Hudson, John Dick and William Duncan came *after* they had prosecuted local men for criminal offenses.

The Forkhill disturbances and the character of Defenderism in south Armagh were more complex than the standard historical representation of this period has allowed. When the cases are examined closely, a clear pattern emerges: most of the crimes (arson, assault, property damage and firearms offenses) were familiar forms of rural protest; most of the victims were targeted repeatedly and selectively by the same close band of men, many of whom were identified as Defenders. The nature of crime in the area between 1789 and 1792 points to a tradition of organized rural protest revived by the social upheaval of settlement on the Forkhill estate, which is the classic definition of social banditry. At the very least, this survey demonstrates that Defender activity in the area during the early 1790s cannot be dismissed as random terrorization driven by sectarian hatred. In every case I uncovered, the particular circumstances of the victim's relationship with his attacker(s), and/or the victim's role on the Forkhill estate, made the religious differences between them almost incidental. Sectarian tension likely aggravated the disturbances in Forkhill, but the conditions for social

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<sup>44</sup>Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 7 December 1789, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 15 No.67.

banditry already existed outside this historic arena of conflict. The 1791 attack on the local Protestant schoolmaster must be appraised in the light of this revised interpretation of Defenderism and conflict in Forkhill.

### *The Berkeley Outrage*

By early 1791 the Defenders had amassed considerable support in south Armagh and north Louth and had engaged in aggressive public displays of their strength. That spring, the Louth Grand Jury condemned the “many tumultuous and illegal assemblies, in the neighbourhood of Forkhill,” including an incident in Dundalk in February, when a mob of Defenders paraded through the town, reportedly terrorizing its inhabitants.<sup>45</sup> The magistrates’ condemnation came on the eve of the sensational trial of three Defenders who had been implicated in the infamous Forkhill outrage earlier in the year.

On Friday the 28th of January 1791, Alexander Berkeley was at home with his wife and her young brother in Mullaghbawn, a townland in the parish of Forkhill. At around seven o’clock in the evening, a knock fell on the door and the familiar voice of a neighbour called in to the family. When Berkeley opened the door, a crowd of men rushed in and overpowered him. They tied a cord around his neck to force out his tongue, which they cut off. They cut off the fingers and thumb of his right hand and committed the same abuses on his wife, whose young brother had his tongue cut out and the calf of one leg sliced off with a sword. When their business was done, the men paraded up the road with torches, defiant. Both the schoolmaster and the young boy survived the attack, but Berkeley’s wife died of her

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<sup>45</sup>Belfast News-letter, 12 April 1791.

injuries in hospital several days later.<sup>46</sup> On 3 February the Privy Council issued a proclamation offering a reward of five hundred pounds for information leading to the arrest of anyone involved in the attack and several arrests were made shortly after. Thomas Laurence and Peter Murphy (a man and his two sons) stood trial at the Armagh Assizes in April 1791 charged with twelve counts of maiming. Peter Murphy was found guilty and ordered to be hanged at the bridge of Forkhill on 3 May, and then gibbeted. Thomas and Laurence Murphy were ordered to appear at the next assizes to stand trial for the murder of Berkeley's wife, but were eventually freed for lack of evidence. Charges were brought against several other men in 1792, but no other convictions were ever secured.

The apparently unprovoked attack on this Protestant family was immediately labelled sectarian, and reports of the barbarity raced through the countryside.<sup>47</sup> On hearing the news, one man claimed that the victims had been sacrificed "to the Bigotry & Barbarity of their

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<sup>46</sup>Edward Hudson to Francis Dobbs, 29 January 1791, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 16 51; Musgrave 61.

<sup>47</sup>Musgrave, Memoirs, 59. The attack on Berkeley, his wife and her young brother was described in contemporary letters, newspaper articles and in J. Byrne's "Impartial Account of the Late Disturbances in the County of Armagh" (Dublin, 1792) reprinted in Miller, Peep O'Day Boys and Defenders. See the Reverend Mr. Hudson's letters to Charlemont, R.I.A. MS 12 R 16 Nos.51, 56, 59, 63; William Drennan to Samuel McTier, 5 February 1791 in D.A. Chart (ed.), Drennan Letters (Belfast: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1931). Hibernian Journal, 2 February, 20 April and 4 May 1791; Belfast News-letter 3 May and 13 September 1791; Freeman's Journal 21 April 1792, 26 March 1793. See the petition of James Davitt in ISPO Official Papers 18/2 and the Armagh Assize Indictments for Spring and Summer 1791, Spring 1792. The attack was also discussed in nineteenth-century documents and publications. See Musgrave's Memoirs, 60-62; Orange Lodge Inquiry, #29-54, 66-75, 91; Ogle Gowan, Orangeism: Its Origin and History, 125-26; W.E.H. Lecky, A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth-Century - Volume III (London, 1913), 422-424.

neighbourhood.” in an attack that “would disgrace the wilds of Africa or America.”<sup>48</sup> Dr. William Drennan, who helped to found the Society of United Irishmen later that year, described the implications of the attack in a letter to his brother-in-law, Samuel McTier.

All the world talks of that horrid affair, near Dundalk, and Lord Charlemont, Brownlow, with all the gentlemen of that country had a meeting. They may now ask ‘Why should we tolerate, why should we commit arms and rights to such savages as these Catholics,’ and the only answer is ‘Why did you make them and keep them savages, for that they are such is without question.’ All this will put off the day of general freedom.<sup>49</sup>

L.M. Cullen believes the Berkeley mutilations had a particular propaganda value for conservatives, who exploited the vaunted sectarianism of the Forkhill attack to split the alliance between lower class Catholics and Presbyterians in south Armagh.<sup>50</sup>

Alleged proof for the sectarian motive behind the Forkhill outrage rests on the claims of Reverend Hudson and several trustees in a letter to the Bishop of Dromore on 3 February 1791. According to their report, in the midst of the attack Alexander Berkeley asked the mob what he had done to offend them, and the men replied that he had done them no wrong, but that it was “the beginning of what he and those like him should suffer.”<sup>51</sup> Hudson and the

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<sup>48</sup>Thomas Prentice to Charlemont, 14 February 1791, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 16 No.56

<sup>49</sup>William Drennan to Samuel McTier, 5 February 1791, in D.A. Chart (ed.) The Drennan Letters; also Smyth, Men of No Property, 50.

<sup>50</sup>L.M. Cullen, “The Political Structures of the Defenders,” Ireland and the French Revolution, ed. Hugh Gough and David Dickson, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1990), 120.

<sup>51</sup>Trustees’ letter of 3 February 1791, reprinted in Musgrave, Memoirs, 61.

trustees interpreted the warning to “those like him” as a sinister reference to the Protestant settlers in Forkhill, who could anticipate a massacre reminiscent of 1641. “There is every reason to dread the most alarming consequences from the effects of this transaction. The protestants are everywhere in the greatest terror; and unless government affords them assistance, must leave the country; as this recent instance of inhumanity, and the threatenings thrown out against them, leave no doubt upon their minds of what the intentions must be against them.” Richard Musgrave was even more explicit, claiming that the Berkeley attack confirmed that “the extirpation of protestants of every denomination was the main design of the defenders.”<sup>52</sup>

Musgrave based his account of the Berkeley outrage and other disturbances in Armagh largely on the pamphlet written by J. Byrne in 1792, who had a completely different view of events in the parish. In his “Impartial Account,” Byrne described the circumstances surrounding the attack on the Forkhill schoolmaster in great detail, and placed the outrage in the context of hostility generated after the settlement of the estate in 1788. I believe his emphasis is correct, although his claim that the papists were “banished” from their lands is likely overstated. A critical part of Byrne’s narrative is his explanation for the attack on Alexander Berkeley himself, which has reappeared in virtually every account of the outrage printed ever since. In late 1790 or early 1791, Byrne claimed, William Duncan (a leaseholder, linen weaver and tithe proctor on the estate) plotted against a popular local teacher who had been promised employment in one of the schools set up by Richard Jackson’s trust. Duncan inebriated the unsuspecting teacher and brought him to dinner with

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<sup>52</sup>Musgrave, Memoirs, 62.

the Reverend Mr. Hudson, where the young man made a fool of himself and was dismissed from consideration for the teaching post in Forkhill. As a friend of Reverend Hudson, Duncan manipulated the situation to ensure that his own brother-in-law was appointed to the post – his brother-in-law was Alexander Berkeley.<sup>53</sup> Local people were furious because the popular young teacher had promised to teach the children their prayers in Irish, and Berkeley, it was rumoured, would not teach the children anything but Protestant prayers. The fury of the people, which had been mounting for several years, finally erupted in the January attack on the newly appointed schoolmaster.

Byrne crafted an impressive tale of persecution and revenge to explain the outrage, but the literary flair of his pamphlet, and the fact that some important details were missing, make it a document of dubious value. First, it is hard to believe that the Irish language was so jealously guarded by the people in the 1790s. A deliberate connection between the Irish language and an Irish national identity would not be made for another century, and many nineteenth-century Irish speakers considered their native tongue a liability which they refused to pass on to their children.<sup>54</sup> Also, it is worth recalling that the schools in Forkhill had been established from funds made available by Richard Jackson's bequest and they were

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<sup>53</sup>“Impartial Account” in Miller, Peep O’Day Boys and Defenders 104-106.

<sup>54</sup>T.W. Moody and W.E. Vaughan (eds.), A New History of Ireland, Volume IV: Eighteenth-Century Ireland, 1691-1800 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 381. Byrne also implicated William Duncan in an attack on the parish priest, Father Cullen, on Christmas morning 1790, when Duncan and some Peep O’Day Boys allegedly tore Cullen’s vestments and destroyed his chalice as he prepared to celebrate Mass. According to Byrne, this act finally provoked local retaliation against Alexander Berkeley one month later. Unfortunately, this claim cannot be verified and this incident is not recorded in other contemporary sources.

supervised by his trustees. Understandably, these were Protestant schools with Protestant teachers and the fact that the pupils recited Protestant prayers should not be interpreted as a sign of religious bigotry, or as a subversive effort to assimilate or convert the Catholic children who attended classes. More important, nowhere in his narrative does Byrne mention that Alexander Berkeley had levelled criminal charges against local men at the Armagh assizes, which is a crucial point. L.M. Cullen claims that the "Impartial Account" was written as an urgent antidote to the anti-Catholic propaganda circulating in Dublin after the Berkeley mutilation, in the months before the all-important Catholic Convention. He argues that such an explicitly political work is a "misleading and unhelpful source for the study of rural unrest in a social or economic context," and I am inclined to agree.<sup>55</sup> The "Impartial Account" must be handled carefully as a historical document, for parts of it were not so impartial at all. The mutilations of Berkeley and his family require a closer explanation than either J. Byrne or the trustees were willing to provide.

Alexander Berkeley's trouble with the Defenders began soon after he settled on the Forkhill estate as a linen weaver, nearly two years before the 1791 attack. In the summer of 1789, he charged two local men, Michael Donnelly and Laurence Connory, with assault, robbery and theft of firearms. Shortly after these prosecutions, Berkeley was stabbed by Donnelly and, along with his brother-in-law William Duncan, he brought charges against his

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<sup>55</sup>L.M.Cullen, "Late Eighteenth-Century Politicization," Culture Et Pratiques Politiques en France et en Ireland: XVIe-XVIIIe Siecle (Paris: Centre de Recherches Historiques, 1988), 138. See his review of Miller, Peep O'Day Boys and Defenders in Irish Economic and Social History 19 (1992):126. L.M. Cullen has suggested that the pamphlet was written by Father James Coigly, a Catholic priest from Louth who was active among the United Irishmen and may have been a Defender. Coigly's role is discussed in Chapter Four.

attacker at the next assizes. Michael Donnelly was sentenced to death and “took it to death with him, that Mr. D--n swore his life away.”<sup>56</sup> Duncan fled Forkhill shortly after and Berkeley, who remained behind, assumed the responsibility of answering for Donnelly’s execution.

The attack on Alexander Berkeley was the work of the local Defenders; both the nature of the crime and the men who were involved place this point beyond dispute. It was a surprise attack, carried out under the cover of darkness by a mob of masked men who had no intention of robbing Berkeley or ravishing his wife, but only to maim their victims. The only man ever convicted and hanged for the attack was a ringleader of the Defenders, known as “Captain” Peter Murphy, who was arrested along with his brother and father, although they escaped conviction.<sup>57</sup> The attack can be regarded either as a crime of revenge or a crime of intimidation — the Defenders specialized in both. Michael Donnelly had twice been

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<sup>56</sup>J. Byrne, “Impartial Account” in Miller, Peep O’Day Boys and Defenders, 106. Also, see Edward Hudson to Francis Dobbs, 29 January 1791, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 16 No.51. In his letter to Dobbs, Hudson referred to “Barkeley who was stabbed by Donnelly.” For prosecutions see Armagh Assize Indictments, Summer 1789 and Lent 1790; Belfast News-letter, 13 April 1790. Also, see Miller, Peep O’Day Boys and Defenders, 106. “Mr. D--n” was a reference to William Duncan, who had shared the prosecution with Alexander Berkeley. Explanatory footnotes inserted into Byrne’s 1792 pamphlet by T.G.F. Paterson identified “Mr. D--n” as James Dawson. “Jemmy Dawson” was a well-known figure in Forkhill, but he is not the man to whom Byrne cryptically referred in his pamphlet. The Assize indictments reveal his full identity to be William *Duncan*.

<sup>57</sup>Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 28 April 1791, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 16 No.63. Also, one of the men who was involved in the attack, James Davitt, turned approver and informed on the Murphy brothers. Davitt’s petition to the governor for the promised reward of five hundred pounds, states he came from the town of Dundalk, some five miles from Forkhill. His participation in the attack suggests a wider, regional interest which may have involved the ends of the Defenders. ISPO Official Papers 18/2 and Musgrave, Memoirs, 63.

arrested for firearms-related offenses, which indicates his involvement with the Defenders, and his execution would have been sufficient grounds for revenge by his associates. The attempted murders of Hudson, Dick and Duncan were obvious precedents, as crimes of vengeance inspired by the universal code of social banditry.

The background of the attack suggests it was a crime of vengeance, but its brutal details fit the profile of a crime of intimidation. Shortly after the outrage, the Hibernian Journal reported that the attack was an attempt to silence Alexander Berkeley, who had planned to testify against local Defenders at the assizes in Spring 1791.<sup>58</sup> Threats, attacks and even mutilations of suspected informers were part of the Defenders' stock in trade. In 1791, Prudence McLaughlin of Killibegs had her ears cut off when she gave evidence on behalf of the Crown. In July 1796, Terence Woods was attacked by a gang of armed men who broke into his home in the middle of the night. He suffered two deep cuts in his tongue, one of his ears was cut off and his other ear was left mangled. There were "strong grounds to believe that the said outrage was committed upon the said Terence Woods, because he had prosecuted two persons to conviction at the last Assizes at Omagh."<sup>59</sup>

Alexander Berkeley's tongue was likely cut out for a similar reason, although he also suffered more extensive injuries. After the attackers carved out his tongue, they cut off the four fingers and thumb of his right hand and committed the same act on his wife, "which operation took them up above ten minutes." This was a cruelly deliberate mutilation which

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<sup>58</sup>Hibernian Journal, 20 April 1791. Also printed in Smyth, Men of No Property, 50.

<sup>59</sup>Journal of House of Commons of Ireland vol.15 (1792-1794), appendix v, page v: Belfast News-letter, 19 August 1796.

was intended to leave both victims without the use of their hands. Berkeley, despite being appointed schoolmaster, was a linen-weaver by trade and had received a substantial sum for establishing the industry on his property.<sup>60</sup> The circumstances surrounding the establishment of the industry on Berkeley's property are unknown, but when his attackers severed every finger from his right hand and the hand of his wife they ensured that neither one would sit before a loom ever again.<sup>61</sup> The attacks on Woods, McLaughlin and Berkeley were deliberate punishments which delivered a message in a code which was universally understood. Cutting out a man's tongue and slicing off his ears severely impaired his capacities of hearing and speech and these gruesome injuries served as a wider warning to the community: "Don't inform," was the message these attacks were meant to convey. These mutilations do not make sense in any other context and it is a grave mistake to dismiss rural violence as irrational, inhuman brutality, for it was anything but irrational.

I cannot challenge the sectarian thesis by pretending it had no effect on relations between Protestants and Catholics in Forkhill. Undoubtedly it did. But the evidence suggests that sectarian tension in Forkhill served as a catalyst to conflict, and did not create the conditions for conflict. The Reverend Mr. Hudson, William Duncan, John Dick and Alexander Berkeley were victims, and they were Protestants, but they were not victims *because* they were Protestants. When the Defenders told Berkeley that the attack was the

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<sup>60</sup>On his lease, Alexander Berkeley is identified as a "linen weaver." PRONI Chambre papers. D/294/12.

<sup>61</sup>In their letter on 3 February 1791, the trustees claimed that the victims were likely to die. "as, if they live, they are incapable of earning their subsistence." Musgrave, Memoirs, 61-2.

beginning of what “those like him” would suffer. they were not referring to all Protestants but to men who threatened the security of the community. Their real enemies were magistrates, law enforcement officers, tithing proctors, toll collectors and (especially) informers. Although Defenderism in Armagh assumed the character of random cruelty later in the decade, a definite rationale directed Defender activity in Forkhill during the early years. The available evidence suggests that this rationale was a compound of resistance to outside interference, and self-protection against the competing interests of an incoming population. In short, the Defenders were social bandits.

This representation of the Defenders tells only part of the story, however, and does not account for the politicization of the movement by 1791. The Defenders’ level of organization, political awareness and contacts with Ulster’s middle-classes set them apart from the roaming bands of peasant outlaws who characterized banditry worldwide. The comparative sophistication of the movement cannot be denied and leaves a nagging question: whose interests, ultimately, did the Defenders serve?

### *The Forkhill Defenders as Political Activists*

At the beginning of this chapter, I put the above question slightly differently: were the Defenders social bandits or political activists? This question demands some background knowledge of late eighteenth-century Anglo-Irish politics and the circumstances which brought the country to the point of crisis by 1798. Although I do not have the space to address fully the issues of parliamentary reform, the redress of Catholic grievances, national security concerns and the militia crisis, a few words of introduction are in order. The social

upheaval which preceded outbreaks of banditry, and which had given the Defenders their mandate in Forkhill, was experienced on a national scale at the end of the eighteenth-century. as the Volunteers challenged the Government, the Catholic Committee challenged the Protestant Ascendancy, Peep O'Day Boys confronted Defenders, and the persistent threat of French invasion gathered momentum. Forces of conservatism and radicalism pulled Ireland in conflicting directions and people at every level in society felt the tension. Much of the upheaval was related to growing public interest in the Catholic question, which debated if legislation preventing Catholics from sitting in parliament and voting in parliamentary elections should be retained, or repealed. A growing body of Protestant opinion (mainly Presbyterian) argued in favour of ending these political disabilities, but the narrow and powerful political elite in Dublin Castle feared that the admission of Catholics to full rights would overwhelm the minority of Protestants in Ireland and strip the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy of its privilege.

The leadership of the Catholic church enjoyed a cosy relationship with the Ascendancy and preferred a policy of supplication on the question of reform. This soft touch had not improved the political prospects of the Catholics in Ireland, however, and no one felt this more keenly than Ulster's rising Catholic middle-class. Families such as the Teelings, the Quigleys, the Coyles, the Magennises and others had risen to fortune through their participation in Ulster's linen trade, and commercial relations with Belfast's radical merchant elite had given them a solid political education. But if Ulster's growing Catholic middle-class had any political aspirations, they were frustrated by the disabling legislation left over from the penal era which kept them frozen out of full membership in the polity. Members

of these families were active in the work of the Catholic Committee in Dublin, where the balance of power had recently shifted from the ecclesiastical aristocracy to the more demanding members of the Catholic middle-class.<sup>62</sup>

The Teeling family and their in-laws the Magennises were not only associated with the Catholic Committee, but helped to organize the Defenders in south Ulster, as well. The leadership of the Defenders appears to have been drawn from the handful of wealthy Catholic families who lived along the Ulster borderlands, and who provided the movement with “overall political direction.”<sup>63</sup> Although no one disputes that the Defenders emerged spontaneously among Armagh’s lower classes in response to the raiding of the Peep O’Day Boys in the mid-1780s, the expanding network of Defender lodges indicates that the movement soon acquired a more sophisticated leadership. The papers seized from Sharky in 1789 reveal that the association was organized and politically literate at an early stage. The Defenders’ oath bound members “to his majesty king George III and his successors to the crown, *so for this present year 1789, we promise faithfully the same obedience, and also while we live subject to the same Government.*”<sup>64</sup> Although the meaning behind this curious

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<sup>62</sup>Smyth, Men of No Property, 54-58.

<sup>63</sup>Smyth, Men of No Property, 116-120; Whelan, Tree of Liberty, 40. Also see L.M. Cullen, “The Political Structures of the Defenders,” *passim*.

<sup>64</sup>Musgrave, Men of No Property, 57; Appendix 8-9.

oath is not developed, the wording suggests that Defender loyalty to the Crown was provisional and even anticipated the future cessation of English sovereignty over Ireland.<sup>65</sup>

Even the grassroots Defenderism of Forkhill displayed features which appeared to link the movement to a wider network of interests. In 1791 Ferdy McElevy was arrested along with a crowd of other men (all Defenders) on charges of mill-burning, rioting and other offenses. He was released on bail and ordered to appear at the next assizes. According to Reverend Hudson, McElevy's bail were "persons of *eminence*," who brought him into Dundalk and "entertained him splendidly for some days," but he took the opportunity to escape and an intensive search of the countryside failed to uncover him. At first the Defenders were furious with McElevy, but "pains were taken to persuade the multitude, that the Bail were acting only to save themselves from destruction..."<sup>66</sup>

Too much information is missing from Hudson's account to determine exactly what happened, but his reference to McElevy's "eminent bailors" suggests an alliance of interests between the Defenders and another association, which may have been the Catholic Committee. Suggestions of a collaboration are not unreasonable, for there were contacts between the Defenders and the Catholic Committee by 1791, and the leadership of these organizations had already overlapped. In 1793 the Secret Committee of the House of Lords investigated a letter written by a member of the Catholic Committee, John Sweetman, which

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<sup>65</sup>An impressive body of scholarship has confirmed the close association between France and Ireland, and between the United Irishmen and the Defenders, in the years before the Rebellion of 1798. Yet this oath (dated April 1789) preceded not only the foundation of the Society of United Irishmen in 1791, but the outbreak of revolution in France.

<sup>66</sup>Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 19 April 1791, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 16 No.59.

appeared to link the committee to the legal counsel of several Defenders in Dundalk. No formal connection could be proven and Sweetman placed notices in local newspapers denying rumours that the Catholic Committee had supported the Defenders with funds and legal services.<sup>67</sup>

An apparent collusion of interests might explain why the suspected Defender Sharky, when he was taken to Dublin Castle for questioning in 1789, was treated “in a manner that would suit a person of a more elevated situation of life,” and was eventually released without charge.<sup>68</sup> The ability of the Forkhill Defenders to escape conviction and punishment upon arrest was equally remarkable. Apart from the executions of Michael Donnelly and Captain Murphy, many of the Defenders who were arrested walked free, including notorious repeat offenders like Ferdy McElevy. When McElevy was finally captured and stood trial in 1791 for his part in the Forkhill rioting, he was freed by an error in the indictment. Hudson speculated that there was “some dirty management and in my opinion some *mismanagement*,” which had frustrated his prosecution. At the same session of the assizes, Peter Murphy escaped capital punishment for burning a house on Hudson’s property through an “error in the indictment,” even though it had been drawn up by the Attorney General.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Report of the Committee of Secrecy of the House of Lords (London, 1798). Appendix I, 37-39. Gordon’s Newry Chronicle and Universal Advertiser, 15 April 1793. It is worth noting that John Sweetman was a leading United Irishmen who was arrested in the Dublin raids in March 1798. Smyth, Men of No Property, 176.

<sup>68</sup>Byrne, “Impartial Account” in Miller, Peep O’Days Boys and Defenders, 78-79. When a suspected Defender was arrested in Louth in 1796, he reported that the local captains of the organization were “men of substance.” Smyth, Men of No Property, 115.

<sup>69</sup>Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 28 April 1791, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 16 No.63; unknown to Charlemont, April 1791, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 16 No.62.

Between 1791 and 1792, the Forkhill Defenders faced numerous charges of arson, property damage, assault and attempted murder, but none were convicted. And despite a large government reward for information, only one man was ever hanged for his involvement in the Berkeley outrage.<sup>70</sup>

Part of the reason for the Defenders' good fortune was the quality of legal counsel hired on their behalf. At the Dundalk Assizes in 1794, eight barristers acted as counsel to the Defenders, including two prominent Dublin lawyers, and this formidable team managed to acquit eighteen of the prisoners of wrongdoing. Precisely how these mostly non-literate farmers, labourers and artisans secured first-rate legal counsel is unknown, but government suspicion that the Catholic Committee was involved are not untenable. In the summer and autumn of 1792, the Catholic Committee had taken an important first step in the mass politicization of the rural population with the election of local representatives to the Catholic Convention the following December. In parishes across the country, male parishioners gathered in Catholic chapels and delegated one or two local men as electors to a county meeting, which returned between one and four representatives to the Dublin convention. More than 230 delegates were eventually elected to the convention, including 48 members of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen who operated as a radical pressure-group within the Committee, and the "Back Lane parliament" achieved its radical objective. A resolution demanding total emancipation for Catholics passed easily, as did a second resolution

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<sup>70</sup>In 1792 several local men were charged with involvement in the Berkeley attack but they secured no conviction. A year later, one of the prosecutors in the 1792 trial, Laurence Harvey, stood trial for perjury in the Berkeley case. He was sentenced to transportation. Armagh Assize Indictments, Lent 1792; Freeman's Journal, 26 March 1793.

declaring that a petition for Catholic relief should be placed before the throne. The Catholic delegation to London was received favourably early in 1793, and a Catholic relief bill extending the franchise to forty shilling freeholders was passed in February.<sup>71</sup> The 1792 elections, the Catholic convention, and the passage of relief legislation (although it fell short of expectation) was a formative experience in the campaign for Catholic relief and proved to be an instructive experience for the Defenders.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>Smyth, Men of No Property, 63-77; Elliott, "The Defenders in Ulster" 227.

<sup>72</sup>At this point, I would like to mention the curious case of Francis Dobbs. An eminent Dublin barrister, Dobbs was one of the men who served as counsel to the Defenders in Monaghan and Louth. He was also a leading Volunteer, the author of the famous Letter to Lord North in 1780, and an ardent supporter of parliamentary reform. As a member of Parliament from 1797, he was a vocal opponent of legislative union between Ireland and England. "Millenium Dobbs," as he was known, practiced his politics with religious fervour and linked the anticipated apocalypse to the impending disaster of union with Britain. In a remarkable speech before the Irish parliament, he claimed that "the hand of God has marked this country for his own...the Independence of Ireland is written in the immutable records of Heaven." Dobbs recorded in his Memoirs that the words "Armageddon" and "Ardmah or Armagh," meant the same thing, and on these grounds predicted that Ireland would be the first kingdom to receive the Messiah. As well as acting as counsel for the Defenders, he engaged in negotiation with them in the summer of 1798, when he was sent by Dublin Castle to talk the rebels into surrendering. Francis Dobbs also had close ties to the Forkhill estate. In 1789, Susanna Barton named Dobbs as one of the "three lives" of her lease on the estate, and in her will made in 1803 she conferred title to the Forkhill estate to Francis Dobbs and Nathaniel Alexander. Without wandering into the realm of speculation, Dobbs's ardent campaign for parliamentary reform, his impassioned speeches against legislative union and his expectation of millennial deliverance, considered alongside his work on behalf of the Defenders and his vested interest in the Forkhill estate from the late 1780s, form a curious compound. See Francis Dobbs, Memoirs (Dublin, 1800). Land title references in Registry of Deeds (Dublin), 410.534.270351, 15 August 1789. Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 20 August 1798, R.I.A. Charlemont MS. Chambre Papers, PRONI. T/529/6.

### *Chapter Summary*

Between 1789 and 1792, Defenderism in Forkhill displayed all the characteristics of social banditry: local bandits defended their interests through the intimidation, persecution, assault and attempted murder of their enemies; according to the universal code of bandits, an “enemy” was anyone who threatened the security and stability of the community. The Forkhill Defenders were persistently represented as sectarian guerrillas, however, and there are two reasons for this. First, because the native population of Forkhill was overwhelmingly Catholic and the influx of settlers was mostly Protestant, any combination by the local Defenders against the new settlers would appear sectarian. Second, the Protestant elite in Ireland never felt fully secure as landowners among the majority population of Irish-speaking Catholics and tended to exaggerate the extent of the Catholic threat. Members of the gentry (such as the Reverend Edward Hudson) immediately attributed any unrest among the Catholic lower orders to their deep resentment of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, and Protestants in general, which made them all potential targets. Cries of “religious persecution” and “party spirit” became an automatic response to outrage. It is true that elements of sectarian zeal aggravated the conflict in Armagh, especially in the last few years of the decade, but the original mandate of the Forkhill Defenders was the mandate of social bandits.

The hierarchy of the movement, its political agenda and its alliance with the United Irishmen in 1795 indicate that at some point Defenderism evolved beyond banditry. The Defenders received an early political education from members of the Catholic Committee and later from the United Irishmen, whom they joined in armed rebellion in an effort to

establish a separate republic through revolution in the summer of 1798. But before this mass transference (or duplication) of allegiance from one oath-bound society to another could occur, the people needed to be convinced that there was a cause worth fighting for. The politicisation of the people of south Armagh, their role in the Rebellion of 1798 and the fractious questions of nationalism and sectarianism form the lines of discussion in the final chapter.

#### CHAPTER FOUR: THE YEARS OF REBELLION, 1795-1798

The scale of Defender violence escalated after 1792 and reached daring heights in April 1795 with the murder of eleven revenue officers in County Leitrim.<sup>1</sup> In September, the undersecretary Edward Cooke expressed his frustration at the spread of disaffection. "Defenderism," Cooke wrote, "puzzles me more and more." Nor did the executions of suspected Defenders seem to have any effect and he detected "an enthusiasm defying punishment."<sup>2</sup> Persistent rumours of an alliance between the Defenders and the recently suppressed Society of United Irishmen increased tensions in Armagh, leading to the foundation of the Orange Order in the autumn of 1795. The fallout from this event caused the sectarian temperature in Armagh to increase immediately and dramatically, and soldered the alliance between the Defenders and the United Irishmen in the years before the rebellion of 1798.

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<sup>1</sup>Although I have been fortunate to find documents and correspondence relating to the Defenders in Forkhill between 1788 and 1792 and the United Irishmen in 1797, the historical record is much leaner for the intervening years. The years between 1792 and 1795 were an important stage in Defender organization, however. Briefly, the Defenders amassed considerable support at a regional and increasingly national level after 1792 and soon spread to more than ten counties in Ireland. To an extent, their increased popularity can be interpreted as a response to increased government repression and the use of heavy troops to quell minor disturbances. But much more important are the changes that took place within Defenderism itself: the association became better organised during these years, capitalized on its radical connections, secured a more sophisticated leadership and became more "ideologically complex." Once again, the unfortunate scarcity of documents relating to the Defenders before 1795 and their alliance with the United Irishmen, makes the early history of the association fragmented at best, and inaccessible for the most part. The best source is Jim Smyth, Men of No Property, Chapter 5 "The Rise of the Defenders, 1793-5."

<sup>2</sup>Edward Cooke to unknown, 12 September 1795, PRONI, Pelham TranscriptsT/755/2.

The rebellion in Ulster consisted of a handful of risings in Antrim and Down in June 1798, which were soon crushed by the military, and no histories of the period mention a rising in south Armagh. Yet the United Irishmen had penetrated the parishes of Newtownhamilton, Creggan, Forkhill, Jonesborough and Louth by early 1797 and the region was represented at executive meetings of the society as late as May 1798.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the region was ready for an insurrection in the spring of 1797, but when the rebellion finally did break out in June 1798 the leadership of the United men in south Armagh, south Down and Louth had been thinned considerably and the rebels were unable to connect with the insurgency further north. In this chapter I will address the progress of the revolutionary movement in south Armagh, to account for the enthusiasm of the rebels in 1797 and the crippled state of the United Irish organization less than a year later.

#### *United Irishmen, Defenders and Orangemen*

The rise of the United Irishmen must be considered against the background of radical politics in Britain, America and France during the last quarter of the eighteenth-century. The classical republicanism which inspired the dissent behind the American Revolution and the French Revolution increased the political expectation of the educated classes in Ireland and stirred popular agitation for parliamentary reform. Ulster Presbyterians were particularly receptive to the ideals of the Thomas Paine and the French revolutionaries, and the first

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<sup>3</sup>Information of John Conellan, 10 June 1798, ISPO 620/3/32/8.

Society of United Irishmen was founded in Belfast in October 1791.<sup>4</sup> The founders of the society included William Drennan, a doctor and radical thinker from Newry, and Wolfe Tone, a Dublin barrister. Writing in May 1791, Drennan envisioned a society devoted to the “Rights of Men...its general end Real Independence to Ireland, and Republicanism its particular purpose.”<sup>5</sup> According to the principles of the United Irishmen, the rights of men included the rights of Catholics, and their society demanded the repeal of legislation restricting the political rights of Ireland’s majority population.

As the popular movement for reform gathered momentum, the government attempted to shut down the Society of United Irishmen and other radical groups which threatened the imbalance of power. In early 1793 Parliament passed legislation restricting public assemblies and prosecuted several United Irishmen for printing and distributing libellous material. The following May, the United Irishmen were suppressed by proclamation and

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<sup>4</sup>The founding members of the Society of United Irishmen were middle-class, educated Ulster Presbyterians committed to parliamentary reform and equitable representation. Many of them were persuaded that Catholics should also be admitted to full civil rights and throughout the 1790s Catholics joined the radical movement in greater numbers. When the United Irishmen were suppressed in 1794, the society regrouped underground as a revolutionary organization with the armed support of the Defenders. Many of the moderate reformers (mainly Protestant) abandoned the movement after 1795. A number of them joined the Orange Order, where they practiced a fervent and renewed loyalism, and eventually helped to suppress the rebellion of 1798. See the related essays by R.B. McDowell, A New History of Ireland Volume IV: Eighteenth-Century Ireland, (eds.) T.W. Moody and W.E. Vaughan, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986). Nancy Curtin, The United Irishmen: Popular Politics in Ulster and Dublin, 1791-1798 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), Chapter 1, “Ideology and Aims.”

<sup>5</sup>Drennan to Samuel McTier, 21 May 1791, in Chart (ed.), The Drennan Letters, 54.

forced underground.<sup>6</sup> Within a few years, the society had transformed itself into a subversive revolutionary movement which professed republicanism. An important part of this new strategy was the contact made between the United Irishmen and the Defenders, which resulted in a cooperative agreement between the two associations in 1795. The precise circumstances of this event are unknown, but the alliance involved some of the well-known Ulster families who had provided the leadership of the Defenders several years earlier, and the motives for cooperation between the two associations appear straightforward.<sup>7</sup> The alliance connected the revolutionary United Irishmen with an established subversive network in remote, rural outposts and also provided them with an army of rebels: the Defenders were attracted by the political acumen of the United leaders and their confirmed contacts with French military reinforcements, who pledged to invade Ireland and lead a rebellion against English rule. The United Irishmen also offered the Defenders and their supporters a measure of security, especially after sectarian conflict flared in Armagh during the autumn of 1795.

In late September, a violent battle between the Peep O' Day Boys and Defenders at place called "the Diamond" in north Armagh, pitched the county into near-civil war.<sup>8</sup> Tensions between rival gangs of Peep O' Day Boys and Defenders in the area had been building for several months and finally erupted on 21 September, when a band of Defenders

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<sup>6</sup>Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffry (eds.), A Military History of Ireland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 262. The prominent United Irishman Napper Tandy was arrested in Dundalk in 1793 after distributing a pamphlet entitled "Commonsense." He was charged with spreading a libel. New History, 332.

<sup>7</sup>Smyth, Men of No Property, 116-120; Whelan, Tree of Liberty, 40-49; Cooke to Pelham, 4 December 1795, PRONI Pelham Transcripts T/755:2.

<sup>8</sup>"The Diamond" is a townland near the town of Loughgall.

(including reinforcements from south Armagh) attacked a local inn occupied by well-armed Protestants. The Defenders suffered heavy casualties in the battle which ensued; estimates ranged between sixteen and forty-eight Defender dead.<sup>9</sup> In the wake of the Diamond fight, the Peep O'Day Boys and other elements of the Protestant population established the Loyal Orange Order as a protective league against the Defenders.<sup>10</sup> The Orange Order was an explicitly sectarian organization — the secret articles of the order declared that no Catholic could be made an Orangeman “on any account” — but its manifesto declared that no man would be persecuted for his religious opinions and the Order claimed no responsibility for the sectarian outrages which followed on the heels of its formation. During the autumn of 1795, an undetermined number of Catholic families were forced from their homes in a campaign of persecution referred to as the “Armagh Outrages.” Although it cannot be established that Orangemen organized these raids on Armagh Catholics, there was probably a high level of Orange participation in an unofficial capacity.<sup>11</sup> This phase of persecution, coupled with the inertia of local magistrates, drove both Defenders and lay Catholics into the arms of the United Irishmen. As one leading United man remarked, the formidable numbers

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<sup>9</sup>David Miller, “The Armagh Troubles, 1784-95,” Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, 1780-1914 ed. Samuel Clark and J.S. Donnelly (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), 179-180.

<sup>10</sup>Hereward Senior, Orangeism in Ireland and Britain, 1795-1836 (London: Routledge, 1966), 18-19.

<sup>11</sup>See J.C. Beckett, The Making of Modern Ireland (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), 257-58; Hereward Senior, Orangeism in Ireland and Britain, 30-41. Senior concludes that the Armagh raids were not organized by Orange Order, but likely included sworn Orangemen, and their superior organization made it difficult for the Defenders to mount effective resistance. For persecutions of Armagh Catholics in the spring and summer of 1796, see the correspondence of Cooke to Pelham, 14 July and 27 July 1796, PRONI Pelham Transcripts T/755/3.

of this “undisciplined rabble” might make them “of very great service to the game.”<sup>12</sup> Connections between the Defenders and the United Irishmen had been established as early as 1791, when members of the Catholic Committee, who were also involved with the Ulster Defenders, mingled with prominent United men at the Catholic Convention. Wolfe Tone even served as secretary to the Catholic Committee during this period. But the Armagh persecutions in 1795 increased the profile of both the Defenders and the United Irishmen among the lowest orders of Catholics in Armagh, and helped to spread the idea of rebellion.

According to Hobsbawm, bandits have rarely joined forces with other elements of society to launch a full-scale revolution and the Defenders’ transition from social banditry to revolutionary activity was not inevitable. As he observed, bandits were not “ideologists or prophets from whom novel visions or plans of social and political organization are to be expected.” But in some situations, epidemics of social banditry could serve as precursors to peasant revolutions, especially when the banditry was part of a multiple mobilization and especially when it was fuelled by millennial expectation.<sup>13</sup> When the Defenders linked arms with the United Irishmen in 1795 to form a cross-class, cross-confessional revolutionary front in Ulster, they met the first condition of this transformation. And since both radical movements peaked at the end of the eighteenth-century, there was a volatile connection between the revolutionary intentions of the United Irishmen and the widespread apocalypticism which charged the atmosphere. The influence of millennial expectation in any revolution is difficult to determine, but end-of-the-world prophecies circulated freely in the

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<sup>12</sup>Curtin, The United Irishmen, 163-64.

<sup>13</sup>Hobsbawm, Bandits, 24, 27-8, 102.

countryside during these years and appeared for sale at local markets. A forged manuscript attributed to Saint Colum Cille, which was seized by the authorities, took the form of a prophetic chronicle. "1790/There will be a Rebellion against the French King...1797/Will appear Gog and Magog who will make war against the Inhabitants of the Earth...1799/Will come a Descendant of David who will perform great Acts of Grace...& Destroy Gog and Magog & Cause the Remnants of all Nations to be one Religion and Bannish war from the earth..."<sup>14</sup> The lower classes of Catholics and Presbyterians were particularly susceptible to the millenarian fervour — many of the Catholics who were forced from their homes in the wake of the Armagh expulsions in the autumn of 1795 believed the end of the world was imminent — and it is no coincidence that the ranks of the Defenders swelled during these years. As the two most primitive forms of revolution, millenarianism and social banditry were natural complements — one promised deliverance, and the other desperately wished for it — and the oaths and catechisms of the Defenders in 1795 were full of apocalyptic imagery.<sup>15</sup>

Millenarianism gave the movement an added urgency which helped to transform bandits into revolutionaries, but in order to appeal to the Defenders the movement needed

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<sup>14</sup>David Miller, "Presbyterianism and 'Modernization' in Ulster." Nationalism and Popular Protest in Ireland, ed. C.H.E. Philpin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 97-102.

<sup>15</sup>In 1795, Dublin Castle compiled a digest of Defender oaths, passwods and catechisms. These papers are collected with explanatory notes in Thomas Bartlett, "Select documents XXXVIII: Defenders and Defenderism in 1795." Irish Historical Studies 24, no.95 (1985). There are references to a "tree of liberty," sown in France which will be planted in Ireland by the Defenders. Some of the passages have a distinct millenial theme: "What have you in your hand? The rod of Aaron at command. What do you intend to do with that glorious rod? To clear our passage thro' the Red Sea."

a more radical social programme. In July 1794, the Reverend Edward Hudson intercepted a pamphlet circulating in Armagh, Down and Louth and condemned it as “the wickedest of all I have seen.”<sup>16</sup> The handbill, addressed to “Friends and Fellow-Countrymen” and signed “One of the People,” was almost certainly distributed by the United Irishmen, although the society is not mentioned explicitly. Unlike the United Irish literature which circulated in Belfast and Dublin among the educated middle-classes and which discussed the moral politics of democracy, this pamphlet appealed directly to the masses of poor people whose labour was exploited by a narrow and powerful elite. “Who makes the rich? The answer is obvious - it is the industrious poor. What makes the shuttle fly, and the plough cleave the furrow? - the industrious poor. In whose hands are all the useful arts, the very arts, the improvement of which, enable the rich to make their money, and to display their pride and wickedness? Are they in the hands of the rich? - No! - They must then be in the hands of the industrious poor.” The author encouraged people to “think of politics... think of your rulers: think of republics...think of the money they are robbing you of to keep you in slavery and ignorance...and you may be convinced that the day of emancipation is not far distant; and if you are men, if you are Christians, be united be prepared, and be determined to do yourselves justice.”<sup>17</sup>

Such deep sympathy with rural grievances was somewhat unusual for the United Irishmen, for whom social reform remained a distant priority, but by identifying themselves

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<sup>16</sup>Edward Hudson to Charlemont, circa July 1794, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 18 No.17.

<sup>17</sup>Edward Hudson to Charlemont, circa July 1794, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 18 No.17.

as the enemies of tyrants and despots, they also presented themselves as a remedy to the material suffering of Ireland's poor. Clearly, the United Irishmen read their audience correctly, as the programme of the Defenders in 1795 remained demonstrably rooted in pragmatic social and economic concerns. That year, Dublin Castle compiled a digest of Defender documents which contained valuable information about the principles and aims of the movement in several counties.<sup>18</sup> A handbill posted by the Sligo Defenders explained their ideology - "our forced vengeance is entirely and solely against the oppressors of the poor" - and recommended a radical programme of social reform. They planned to abolish tithes and the cess, and swore that the collector of the church cess would be "threaten'd with death if he shou'd drive for it." They sought to regulate the price of land, and threatened to kill anyone who disobeyed the sanctions they imposed. The following passage is drawn from a notice posted up in all the market towns in County Meath in June 1795. Declaring that "[l]ands in general are set at such an exorbitant rate that the poor of this kingdom are driven to despair which causes them to commit acts of desperation and violence..." the Meath Defenders set "acceptable" rates for the land and demanded landowners to observe them. Any petty landlord who could not afford to let ground at the new rates was ordered to surrender his property to his landlord, and wait for an abatement in his rent. If anyone outbid him for the land in the meantime, he would be punished. "Any person who shall be so misled as to give or promise a higher rent than is here specified to any petty landlord or farmer shall be punished equally with those who extort it." The notice also regulated the

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<sup>18</sup>These documents are available in Thomas Bartlett, "Select Documents: XXXVIII: Defenders and Defenderism in 1795," *Irish Historical Studies* 24, no.95 (1985).

wages of labourers (one shilling per day for one half year, and tenpence per day for the other half of the year) and fixed the price of potatoes and oatmeal.<sup>19</sup> The parallels between the professed aims of the Defenders in Sligo and Meath concerning land, tithes and the cess, and the grievances of the Defenders in Forkhill between 1789 and 1792, are obvious.

Regrettably, the 1795 digest of Defender documents does not shed as much light on the political or revolutionary aspirations of the movement and their political intentions are left in the abstract. "Deliverance" was a major theme, ultimately at the hands of the Creator, but more immediately with the assistance of the French, who would help the Defenders to "pull down British laws." Also popular was the image of the "tree of liberty," which had first been sown in France and would soon be planted in Ireland with the assistance of the French "Defenders." The Defenders' expectation of French deliverance was not entirely fanciful, for the United Irishmen had already engaged in serious negotiations with the French military and eventually persuaded them to invade Ireland at the end of 1796, in an effort to establish a separate Irish republic.

By 1795, the Defenders had a radical platform of social reform which gave them substantial support among the lower orders, and they were part of a revolutionary partnership which was working strenuously to secure foreign aid for a rebellion. None of their aims could be achieved without the mass mobilization of the people, however, who not only needed to be instructed about the principles of the United Irishmen and the benefits of a republic, but sworn into the movement, armed, drilled and kept informed about the progress of the rebellion. The United Irish leadership sent emissaries like Charles Teeling and James

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<sup>19</sup>Bartlett, "Select Documents...Defenders and Defenderism in 1795."

Hope throughout Armagh, Monaghan and Down, spreading the revolutionary message, swearing Defenders into the movement and establishing local chapters of the society. James Hope was an ideal representative of the United Irish society; he had a more developed social conscience than much of the leadership and argued strongly for a connection between poverty and the need for political reform. When he addressed crowds in the rural, poor, mainly Catholic areas around south Armagh, which were also traditional Defender strongholds, he cast the revolutionary message in material terms. I suspect that the message Hope delivered was not substantially different from the one which had guided the covert operations of the Defenders for nearly a decade, and this helps to explain the receptivity of both Defenders and local people to the revolutionary movement after 1795. But Teeling, Hope and the others could not accomplish the tremendous task of rural politicisation on their own - there was simply too much ground to cover - and the circulation of the revolutionary message required other agents.

*Agents of Rebellion: Priests and the Popular Press*

The spread of revolutionary principles is extremely difficult to isolate from the countless other ideas and trends which influenced late eighteenth-century society, and it becomes even more difficult to study when the target population is mostly non-literate and Irish-speaking. There were two obvious agents of revolution in south Armagh, and elsewhere in Ireland, however, which had unparalleled abilities to advance the cause of the United Irish movement among the rural population: priests and the popular press.

For availability and sheer persuasive force, nothing surpassed the popular press, which became the most effective agent of rebellion in the 1790s. After legislation was introduced against public assemblies in 1794, the United Irishmen relied heavily on the written word to spread their message. The society circulated thousands of handbills throughout the country condemning the corruption of government and encouraging Irishmen to unite in the face of despotism, which were often distributed for little or nothing. Newspapers were also cheap and easily available. By the late 1790s, many Irish papers had been "bought" by Dublin Castle and dared not endorse radical politics in print, so in 1792 the Belfast Society of United Irishmen established a radical paper of its own, called the Northern Star. The Star reported extensively on the revolution in France and the evolution of democracy in the American colonies, and contrasted the corruption and tyranny of the Irish government with the progress of the enlightenment overseas. Its editorials supported parliamentary reform and the union of Irishmen through the abolition of religious distinction.<sup>20</sup> The Northern Star faced several financially crippling prosecutions for printing treasonable material and was eventually suppressed in May 1797 by troops under General Lake, who had requested permission to "seize and burn the whole apparatus."<sup>21</sup> Before its suppression, The Star had been widely circulated in Antrim and Down, and had been especially popular in the regions where the rebellion broke out in 1798, but its availability in Armagh and Louth is more difficult to determine. In 1796 the Reverend James Coigly,

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<sup>20</sup>Simon Davies, "The Northern Star and the propagation of enlightened ideas." Eighteenth-century Ireland 5 (1990), passim.

<sup>21</sup>General Lake to Thomas Pelham, 16 April 1797, PRONI Pelham Transcripts T/755/4B.

by then a leading figure in the United Irish movement in Armagh and Louth, expressed frustration about the irregularity of the newspaper's delivery. "I have written once more about the Star... be convinced that the negligence of the proprietors as to that Point has done a Vast deal of Harm to the Cause..."<sup>22</sup>

Where possible, statistics about the distribution of political literature should be accompanied with an index to levels of literacy in the general population, since the radical message must first educate the literate minority before it can be transmitted by word-of-mouth to the non-literate majority. In Ulster, literacy rates swung wildly from region to region. In 1797, 76% of men from the mainly Presbyterian and middle-class areas of Belfast and south Antrim were able to sign their names to written oaths of allegiance, demonstrating an exceptionally high rate of literacy for an eighteenth-century population.<sup>23</sup> The literacy rate in mainly Catholic south Armagh was nowhere near as high, however, and J. Byrne remarked on the "very illiterate" population around Forkhill in 1792.<sup>24</sup> The lease agreements signed between Susanna Barton and her leaseholders in the early 1790s provide a method of evaluating levels of literacy among the people who held land on the estate during this period. An impressive 41.6% of Forkhill leaseholders were able to sign their own names; the

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<sup>22</sup>James Coigly at Dundalk, 27 July 1796, ISPO 620/24/59. A local newspaper, Gordon's Newry Chronicle and Universal Advertiser, was sympathetic to the United Irishmen in the early years, but few issues of the paper survive and I do not know if the paper expressed radical views between 1795 and 1798.

<sup>23</sup>Whelan, Tree of Liberty, 65-66. 6600 adult men took the oath of allegiance. Historians continue to debate the legitimacy of literacy figures which are based on individual signatures, since a person's ability to sign his/her name might be the extent of his/her literary ability. For this reason, the above figures are more accurate indications of *illiteracy* in the parish.

<sup>24</sup>Byrne, "Impartial Account" in Miller, Peep O'Day Boys and Defenders, 105.

remaining 58.4% of leaseholders signed with an “X.”<sup>25</sup> But this apparent balance shifts dramatically when the leaseholders are divided along sectarian lines: 85.1% of Protestants, and just 22.5% of Catholics, proved able to sign their names. According to these figures, at least three-quarters of Catholic leaseholders were illiterate. I should emphasise that these figures apply only to the small number of leaseholders in Forkhill and do not reflect the levels of literacy in the local population, which would certainly have been much lower. So with the exception of a few individuals who were educated at hedge schools and perhaps secured apprenticeships as clerks or typesetters in Newry or nearby Dundalk, the people in Forkhill were mostly illiterate.

Despite this apparent handicap, the politicisation of the rural population proceeded and entered a phase of intensity during the summer of 1794. In early March, the Reverend Mr. Hudson had reported to Charlemont that the people of Forkhill had “given up all thoughts of Politics,” and appeared sullen and despondent.<sup>26</sup> But within a few months the picture had changed completely. Writing from nearby Jonesborough in August 1794, Reverend Hudson expressed amazement at the political interest of the people. “The change in the *Natives* here is truly astonishing – Formerly a Newspaper would have been a phenomenon amongst them – at Present they may vie with the Northerns in thirst after

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<sup>25</sup>This literacy survey considers 89 signatories to 64 leases signed between 1788 and 1791.

<sup>26</sup>Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 2 March 1794, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 18 No.5.

Politicks – he who can read has generally a large audience about the door of his cabin whilst he is endeavouring to *enlighten* his countrymen...<sup>27</sup>

For disseminating the revolutionary message, the popular press was the leading agent of rebellion in the late 1790s. But in south Armagh, there was another set of effective agents who succeeded in stirring popular agitation: the Catholic priests. In the summer of 1792, the priests had been instrumental in organizing elections at the parish level for delegates to the Catholic Convention, and despite the Catholic hierarchy's condemnation of the Defenders and the United Irishmen, a number of priests were involved in these movements in leadership roles throughout the 1790s.<sup>28</sup> The full extent of the Catholic priests' role in the rebellion of 1798 will never be known, but they were ideal ambassadors of revolution. As educated men, they could read Paine's Rights of Man (which sold through numerous editions in Ireland in the 1790s), as priests they were trusted figures among the rural Catholic population, and as Irish-speakers they could converse with the local people in their first language.

A book of patriotic poetry printed in Newry in 1797 entitled Odes and Elegies Descriptive & Sentimental with The Patriot, A Poem confirms the keen interest of south Armagh clergy (both Catholic and Protestant) in the spread of enlightenment principles.<sup>29</sup> A list in the preface identifying the nearly five hundred subscribers to the book is a fascinating index to the local centres of radicalism on the eve of the rebellion. L.M. Cullen

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<sup>27</sup>Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 3 August 1794, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 18 No.19.

<sup>28</sup>Smyth, Men of No Property, 63-66.

<sup>29</sup>John Corry, Odes and Elegies Descriptive & Sentimental with The Patriot, A Poem, (Newry, 1797), passim [hereafter The Patriot].

has called it a “who’s who” of the United Irish movement in Armagh and Down, and the list also included a number of leading United Irishmen in Belfast and Dublin, including Oliver Bond, William Steele Dixon, William Drennan, Lord Edward Fitzgerald, Henry Joy McCracken, the Reverend James Porter and Thomas Russell.<sup>30</sup> The number of high-profile radicals and rebels on this list suggests that many of the lesser-known subscribers had links with the United Irishmen or, at the very least, sympathized with the radical movement. Nearly fifty of the subscribers to The Patriot lived around south Armagh or in border areas touching the county and, although none was from Forkhill, Nicholas Gausan lived in nearby Jonesborough.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps the most striking feature of the Armagh and Louth subscribers is the number of clergymen who were counted among them: four of the eight subscribers from the area around the Fews mountains were clergymen, and three of these were priests. Elsewhere, the Reverend Coigly from Dundalk received a copy, as did the Reverend Andrew Levins of Kilcurry and the Reverend Joseph Jackson of Newtownhamilton. Coigly was a Catholic priest, the others were almost certainly Presbyterians.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>In hindsight, the Newry publishers of The Patriot may have regretted their decision to print the names and hometowns of their subscribers so prominently, many of whom were United Irishmen. In May 1797, the United movement in Newry suffered a severe blow when most of its leadership was arrested, or forced to flee the country.

<sup>31</sup>In the region of south Armagh, there were 15 subscribers from Dundalk: 9 from Newtownhamilton; 8 from the Fews; 2 from Cooleville; 1 from Jonesborough; 1 from Belleek; 3 from Castleblayney; 1 from Kilcurry. Gausan, the local post-master, was arrested in 1797 for treasonable practices, but never convicted. Freeman’s Journal, 7 September 1797.

<sup>32</sup>L.M. Cullen, “The Political Structures of the Defenders.” Ireland and the French Revolution, eds. Gough and Dickon, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1990), 129-30.

The Reverend James Coigly is a fascinating figure whose role in the insurrection has yet to be fully sorted out. This Roman Catholic priest from Armagh was educated in France, but fled during the terror of the Revolution and returned to his native country near the end of 1789. He possibly assumed a leading role among the Defenders and soon became involved with the Belfast Society of United Irishmen.<sup>33</sup> Operating out of Dundalk throughout the 1790s, Coigly was politically active in the rural regions of Armagh, Down and Louth, and retained close links with leading Defenders in the area.<sup>34</sup> He was well-known to Colonel John Ogle, the head of the Forkhill yeomanry, who put out a warrant for the priest's arrest sometime in 1797.<sup>35</sup> Ogle's warrant confirms that Father Coigly was active around Forkhill in 1796-97, probably spreading the ideals of the United Irishmen.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Smyth 117-119. For information on Coigly's efforts on behalf of the United Irishmen in 1797-98 see Marianne Elliott, Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), Part III. Also see Coigly's short autobiography, The Reverend James Coigly, A Life (London, 1798), passim.

<sup>34</sup>Smyth, Men of No Property, 117; Cullen, "Political Structures of the Defenders," 125-127.

<sup>35</sup>Colonel Ogle even engaged in correspondence with Coigly at some point, for he offered to verify the priest's signature at his trial after his arrest in February 1798. Ogle to Cooke, 25 March 1798, ISPO 620/36/66; Nugent to Cooke, 7 August 1797 and Nugent to Marquis of Hartford, 12 August 1797, ISPO 620/1/4/2-3.

<sup>36</sup>Colonel John Ogle was an English soldier in the 19th Foot Regiment, although little else is known about his background. In 1790 or 1791 he married Julia Eliza Barton, daughter of Susanna Barton and niece of the late Richard Jackson, and Colonel and Mrs. Ogle lived on the Forkhill estate throughout the 1790s. In 1796, Ogle received permission to form a local yeomanry corps and headed the Forkhill Yeomanry throughout the years of rebellion. Local legends abound about Ogle, who was reputed to have been a rough authority figure. The Northern Star, in particular, portrayed him as a brutish soldier. See Senior, Orangeism in Ireland and Britain, 32. Colonel Ogle died in England in July 1830, from injuries sustained after falling from his carriage. His wife, Julia Eliza, had died in Dublin several months before. For obituaries, see Newry Examiner, 24 March 1830 (Julia Eliza Ogle); Newry Telegraph 6 August 1830 (Colonel John Ogle).

Coigly was not the only Catholic priest who was active in the United Irish movement, and at least two other priests from south Armagh were accused of treasonable behaviour. In May 1798, the Dean of Loughgilly recommended the arrest of two priests of “infamous character” who lived in the mountains of south Armagh, Father William Cullen and Father “McKoin” (also Keown or Quinn). Dean Warburton suspected these men of fomenting rebellion and shortly after he sent his recommendation to Dublin Castle two local priests were taken prisoner in Dundalk. Father Cullen had been awarded a lease on the Forkhill estate in 1788 and Warburton claimed that this “Priest of Forkhill...was supposed to be concerned in cutting out the Tongue of the Protestant Schoolmaster there about 7 years ago.”<sup>37</sup> Warburton’s spectacular allegation about Cullen’s involvement in the Berkeley outrage cannot be substantiated, but this may be another indication of the complex network of contacts between the Defenders, United Irishmen and Catholic Committee which operated at the parish level from an early stage. Father Coigly was definitely a priest with radical sympathies, Father Cullen was evidently another. In the nearby parish of Creggan, Father Paul MacDonah was arrested in 1799 for his involvement with United Irishmen, and was also reputed to possess miraculous powers which he directed against his enemies and the “oppressors of his people.” Word of this remarkable man reached the Reverend Mr. Hudson who wrote to Charlemont in 1798 about a priest with supposed healing powers who had

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<sup>37</sup>Warburton to Dublin Castle, 29 May 1798, ISPO 620/37/212; Warburton to Bishop of Ferns, 7 June 1798, ISPO 620/38/77; PRONI Downshire Papers D/607/F/260, 21 June 1798. The “priest McKoin” identified by Warburton was likely Father Patrick Quinn, who served as the parish priest of Lower Creggan. Quinn is a phonetic English spelling of “McKoin,” just as Quigley is the English version of “Coigly.” No “Q” exists in the Irish language.

converted several Protestants to Catholicism. In a story which could have been lifted straight out of the Old Testament, local tradition records that a party of yeomanry who attempted to capture Friar MacDonah were drowned in a bog near Forkhill.<sup>38</sup>

Although priests and the popular press were two legitimate agents of rebellion in south Armagh, ultimately too little is known about their activities and popular reception to draw any certain conclusions about rural politicization in the 1790s. For example, I do not know if priests such as Father Coigly were spreading the secular gospel of the United Irishmen which promised to deliver a nation of free citizens, or a New Testament gospel which envisioned a kingdom of free Christians - the two are very different. And although literacy levels, circulation figures for the Northern Star and the number of handbills which flooded the countryside can give us a rough estimate of how many people may have been exposed to the radical message of the United Irishmen, they do not reveal how many people responded to the movement, nor why they did. Answers to these questions can only be drawn from a study of what the south Armagh rebels actually *did* in 1797 and 1798.

### *The Rebellion of 1797*

A series of attacks, rescues and military drills in the countryside between February and June of 1797 alarmed resident gentry in Armagh, who attributed the outrages to the

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<sup>38</sup>Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 30 November 1798, R.I.A Charlemont MS 12 R 20 No. 52; Rev. L.P. Murray, "Shanroe Barrack, Mullabawn (1795-1821)," Journal of the County Louth Archaeological Society 9, no.1 (1937): 28-29. Friar MacDonagh was arrested in 1799 and ordered for transportation, but he managed to escape and returned to his former parish, where he was causing further mischief in 1803. Percy Jocelyn to Dublin Castle, 4 June 1803, ISPO 620/65/107.

United Irishmen and claimed that the rebels numbered in their thousands. Despite its evident popular support and its crippling effect on Ulster's revolutionary effort in 1798, the "rebellion of 1797" in south Armagh is not addressed in many (if any) historical accounts of this period, and I will outline the major outrages reported in newspapers and contemporary correspondence to illustrate the readiness and enthusiasm of the people to participate in a rebellion in 1797.

The confrontations between local rebels and the authorities in south Armagh followed hard on the heels of an attempted French landing in Bantry Bay in late December 1796. Bad weather prevented the French troops from reaching the shore and, although they lingered off the coast for several days, their presence was soon discovered and they were scared back to France. This failure did not deter the rebels in Armagh, however, who believed the French would return imminently and lead them into rebellion. Shortly after the failed Bantry Bay landing in January 1797, a correspondent to Dublin Castle reported that the Newry yeomanry was full of United Irishmen and the countryside around Jonesborough barracks was particularly badly affected.<sup>39</sup> The gravity of the situation became clear in February, when a man who had been arrested in Newry for a treasonable offence offered to inform against a band of United Irishmen in south Armagh. Twelve men were apprehended near the village of Cullaville one evening near the end of the month, but as the military party led the prisoners away, "signals were given from all the hills, and in the middle of the day they were pursued by between 3 and 4 hundred Men; about an hundred and fifty were armed with Musquets and marched in ranks like Soldiers, the remainder were armed with pikes [and]

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<sup>39</sup>James Dawson to Dublin Castle, 10 January 1797, ISPO 620/28/80.

bayonets..."<sup>40</sup> The armed mob pursued the military party and the twelve prisoners all day and into the night. As they travelled, they alerted the surrounding countryside by sounding horns and lighting fires on the hilltops. Throughout the night, the number of rebels swelled and several witnesses reported that the mob numbered no less than three thousand, including "a vast number of women who appeared to be more violent than the men..."<sup>41</sup> Several militia corps and yeomanry troops were called in to quell the disturbance, including the Forkhill yeomanry under the command of Colonel John Ogle. These corps were fired upon several times during the course of the night but escaped injury. The next morning, two local clergymen intervened and managed to disperse the mob.<sup>42</sup> Local magistrates and military commanders immediately identified the rebels as a mob of United Irishmen and expressed alarm at the level of disaffection in the countryside. The magistrates who supervised the arrests at Cullaville reported to Dublin Castle that "the United Irishmen are encreasing [sic] daily all around us." From his home in Loughgilly, Dean Warburton claimed the whole country was "sworn and united," and Walter Synnot despaired of the countryside, where "almost every man is an United Irish man..."<sup>43</sup>

The attempted rescue of the Cullaville prisoners ended without incident, but several weeks later the country people did not display such restraint. On 15 March 1797, a

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<sup>40</sup>Sir Walter Synnot to Dublin Castle, 20 February 1797, ISPO 620/28/313.

<sup>41</sup>Atkinson to Cooke, 5 March 1797, ISPO 620/29/24.

<sup>42</sup>John Reed to Dublin Castle, 28 February 1797, ISPO 620/28/281.

<sup>43</sup>Goddard, Anderson and Beath to Dublin Castle, 4 March 1797, ISPO 620/29/26a; Warburton to Dublin Castle, 13 March 1797, ISPO 620/29/76; Atkinson to Cooke, 5 March 1797, ISPO 620/29/24; Walter Synnot to Dublin Castle, 20 February 1797, ISPO 620/28/313.

confrontation near Newtownhamilton between local people and the militia became suddenly violent. A suspected United Irishman named Thomas Birch was being transported by a militia party to the jail in Armagh, when the soldiers accompanying him were ambushed by several hundred country people who swarmed the party, fired shots and attempted a rescue of the prisoner.<sup>44</sup> Depositions sworn by a constable and sergeant of the Dublin Militia claimed that Birch attempted to leap over a ditch towards the mob when he was cut down by a soldier.<sup>45</sup> Birch was fatally wounded, but lived long enough to testify against the soldier, who was subsequently convicted of murder.<sup>46</sup>

The killing of Thomas Birch came two days after the commanding officer of the Northern district issued a proclamation which demanded the surrender of arms from the people of Ulster in an effort to prevent rebellion. The disarming of Ulster had begun.<sup>47</sup> In their effort to suppress rebellion in Armagh, Generals Lake and Knox launched an unofficial campaign of terror in the disaffected parts of the county. An article printed in the Northern Star in April reported that a party of militia marching from Monaghan to Armagh, had been instructed to "*load with ball cartridge for they were now in a country of rebels, and if they*

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<sup>44</sup>The prisoner should not be confused with the Reverend Thomas Ledlie Birch, a Presbyterian minister and leading United Irishman from Saintfield in County Down.

<sup>45</sup>A.J. Macan to Dublin Castle, 15 March 1797, ISPO 620/29/77.

<sup>46</sup>For accounts of the attack on Birch see A.J. Macan to Dublin Castle, 15 March 1797, ISPO 620/29/77; unknown to Dublin Castle, 16 March 1797, ISPO 620/29/80; Dean Warburton to Dublin Castle, 17 March 1797, 620/29/81. Walter Synnot to Col. Sankey, 15 March 1797, PRONI Pelham Transcripts T/755/4B; Synnot to Sankey, 23 March 1797, PRONI Pelham Transcripts T/755/4B. Reamonn O Muiri, "The Killing of Thomas Birch, United Irishman, March 1797 & The Meeting of the Armagh Freeholders, 19 April 1797." Seanchas Ardmhacha 10, no.2 (1989).

<sup>47</sup>Belfast News-letter, 13 March 1797.

saw *FIVE of them together they were to fire at them.*<sup>48</sup> The fears of the generals were well-founded, for in late March and early April 1797 an insurrection in Armagh was an actual possibility, and far more possible than it would be twelve months later when the rest of the country eventually did rise in rebellion. The number of United Irishmen in Ulster doubled between January and April 1797 and engaged in several aggressive displays of strength in south Armagh, in particular.<sup>49</sup> In February, an informant in Armagh testified that the United Irishmen intended to join the French on their landing and overthrow the government. In early April, Knox reported that the country around Armagh had grown progressively worse and a rising seemed imminent: “[t]here is but one Report thro’ the Country which is that whether the French come or not (and they are soon expected) the United Irishmen are to rise as soon as the ploughing season is over.”<sup>50</sup> On 12 April 1797, Alexander Hamilton wrote in his diary that several prisoners charged with administering the United Irishmen’s oath had been acquitted that day, and “bonfires were lighted on ye Tops of all the hills round Armagh.”<sup>51</sup> On the same day, a correspondent based in Newry reported to the Castle that “Sam Turner

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<sup>48</sup>Italics appear in the original article. Hibernian Journal, 17 April 1797. This is extracted from the Northern Star.

<sup>49</sup>Carelton to Ross, 12 April 1797, ISPO 620/29/27. Also, see Elliott, Partners in Revolution, Chapter 5.

<sup>50</sup>Information of Bryan McGeough, 28 February 1797, ISPO 620/29/26; Knox to Pelham, 4 April 1797, ISPO 620/29/177.

<sup>51</sup>Diary of Alexander Hamilton Vol. I (1793-1797), 12 April and 15 April 1797. Alexander Hamilton was a magistrate and barrister who was born in Newtownhamilton, where his family owned extensive property.

has been in the mountains and the people are expected to rise on Friday.”<sup>52</sup> In a rebellion which was partially fuelled by millennial aspirations, it is worth pointing out that the day appointed for the insurrection was Good Friday, the most important date in the Christian calendar. The planned coincidence of mass insurrection with the memorial of Christ’s crucifixion suggests that the ideals of blood sacrifice, martyrdom and glorious resurrection embodied by Patrick Pearse in 1916 were not lost on the Armagh rebels of 1797.

After a meeting in March 1797, the magistrates for Armagh requested the Earl of Camden to “proclaim” the most disturbed areas of the region, including the Upper Fews, part of Lower Orior and the parishes of Killeavy and Jonesborough in Upper Orior.<sup>53</sup> Although many of the proclaimed lands were near to Forkhill, the parish was not included in the request for proclamation which suggests that the people were relatively peaceable and remained under the thumb of Colonel Ogle. In fact, Ogle was struggling to keep order in Forkhill and he sent several letters to Dublin Castle between March and June describing his crusade against local rebels. Although Ogle may have exaggerated the effect of his role as a magistrate, there is little doubt that he was a target of the United Irishmen and genuinely feared for his life. “I have quieted Forkhil and neighbourhood, I’ve been three different times shot at when in the execution of my duty as a magistrate, I am now seriously threatened and in danger of assassination by the United Irishmen,” he claimed in March.<sup>54</sup> Two months

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<sup>52</sup>Samuel Turner was a leading United Irishman from Newry. He turned informer later in 1797 and provided Dublin Castle with information about the intended rising in Armagh and south Down.

<sup>53</sup>Meeting of Armagh Magistrates, 9 March 1797, ISPO 620/29/70.

<sup>54</sup>Colonel Ogle to Dublin Castle, 10 March 1797, ISPO 620/29/50.

later, he wrote to the Castle again, giving more information about the activities of the United Irishmen around Forkhill, and his letters confirm that the United movement had penetrated the parish by early May 1797.

On *Monday* a person in this neighbourhood is to administer the United Irishman's oath to one of our Tenants, at same time is to shew him some papers in which are their system...when I mean to apprehend and commit him...this immediate neighbourhood has so far been tranquil...but it now seems to be severely infected with the traitors who surround it. *Twelve* of them conspired against and attacked me on Monday night. I luckily had my pistols and to them I owe my existence — this is the second attack in less than two months. I cannot sufficiently describe to you the villainous disposition of the Northern inhabitants (and who were until of late respectable people) to all who are inimical to their traitorous cause.

Ogle also expressed concern about the recent surge in tree-cutting in his neighbourhood. This was another indication that the people were preparing for rebellion, as the wood would be fashioned into pike-handles. One night in late April, he wrote, the local rebels had loaded twenty cars with trees.<sup>55</sup>

Just one week after Colonel Ogle alerted Dublin Castle to the activities of the local United Irishmen, a violent confrontation took place near Forkhill between a mob of several hundred rebels and a regiment of the Ancient British Fencibles. Although the rebels far outnumbered the forty soldiers, they were badly beaten in the ambush on 13 May 1797; between ten and twenty-five of the rebels were killed and many more were taken prisoner. The precise circumstances of the attack remain unclear, but a detailed report which appeared in Faulkner's Journal claimed that a party of the British Fencibles in Dundalk marched to Forkhill to confront a mob of United Irishmen. Outside the village the soldiers surprised a

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<sup>55</sup>Colonel Ogle to Dublin Castle, 4 May 1797, ISPO 620/30/15.

crowd of “several hundred Defenders, or United Irishmen (the terms are synonymous) collected close to a bog...” The commanding officer of the militia ordered the party to fall back and the United Irishmen advanced towards the soldiers. “[H]e then ordered his men to charge, and in less than half an hour the banditti were completely put to flight. Thirteen of them were killed upon the spot, and eighteen so severely wounded, that it is supposed not one of them can recover; many who escaped were also desperately wounded.”<sup>56</sup> General Lake expressed his regret about the incident in a letter dated 14 May, and hinted that the military had exceeded its mandate: “You will of course of [sic] heard of the behaviour of the ancient British at Forkhill...I feel quite wretched but hope I get out of the scrape and never be in such another.”<sup>57</sup> That same night, when darkness had fallen, a reported mob of 2000 rebels attacked the home of Susanna Barton (Colonel Ogle’s mother-in-law), tore part of it down, and set fire to the premises.<sup>58</sup>

The government declared martial law several days later and throughout the month of June the military exercised brutal force in an effort to stamp out disaffection in south Armagh. Nakedly partisan accounts of the disarming of Ulster, on both sides, make it difficult to estimate how much of the military force directed against disaffection was necessary and how much of it was recreational violence, but even some loyalists began to

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<sup>56</sup> Faulkner’s Journal, 13 May and 16 May 1797; Belfast News-letter, 26 May 1797. For private correspondence see Thomas Gataker to Pelham, 14 May 1797, ISPO 620/30/67; Thomas Gataker to Dublin Castle, 14 May 1797, ISPO 620/30/68; letter to John Lees Esq., 14 May 1797, ISPO 620/30/74; also ISPO 620/52/204; letter of General Lake, 14 May 1797, Lake MS 56 No.73.

<sup>57</sup> Lake to unknown, 14 May 1797, Lake MS 56 No.73.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Gataker to Dublin Castle, 14 May 1797, ISPO 620/30/68.

express discomfort about the level of military brutality. Lord Edward Blayney was criticized by a fellow yeoman for the severity of his measures in the parish of Creggan, and an officer in the militia condemned the excesses of soldiers and yeomanry patrolling the countryside of south Armagh and south Down. John Giffard described a search for arms in the mountains outside Newry conducted by the Ancient British Fencibles which turned into a violent rampage. He came upon a clearing in the woods which was littered with “the dead bodies of boys and old men – slain by the Britons though no opposition whatever had been given by them and as I shall answer to almighty God I believe a single Gun was not fired but by the Britons or Yeomenry...”<sup>59</sup> A leading historian of the Orange Order, Hereward Senior, referred to Giffard as a “very damning witness” against the Ancient British Fencibles and the behaviour of this corps was roundly condemned by many witnesses.<sup>60</sup> But the orders of General Knox held firm: “[b]y Terror only they are to be disarmed.”<sup>61</sup>

The policy of military terror in Ulster achieved its intended result. The United Irish network was smashed, the province was almost totally disarmed and thousands of terrified men and women were terrorized out of the revolutionary movement.<sup>62</sup> On 14 June, Ogle

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<sup>59</sup>Norman Steele to Dublin, 8 June 1797, ISPO 620/31/55; Lord Blayney to Dublin, 10 June 1797, ISPO 620/31/71; John Giffard to Cooke, 5 June 1797, ISPO 620/31/36. In his diary entries between 11 June and 17 June 1798, Alexander Hamilton expressed mortification at his inability to recruit men into a yeomanry corps in Newtownhamilton. At first, he wrote, his request met with enthusiasm, but several days later only a fraction of local men agreed to enlist. The rest claimed they would serve as armed volunteers, but would not be associated with a yeomanry corps. Diary of Alexander Hamilton Vol. II (1798-1802), 11 June -17 June 1798.

<sup>60</sup>Senior, Orangeism in Ireland and Britain, 72-73.

<sup>61</sup>Knox to Pelham, 16 June 1797, PRONI Pelham Transcripts T/755/5

<sup>62</sup>Bartlett and Jeffery (eds.), Military History of Ireland, 270-71.

reported that the countryside around south Armagh had been quiet since the capture of several ringleaders in the middle of May and he was confident that “the business of United Irishmen [was] quite at an end.”<sup>63</sup> Ogle’s self-congratulation proved a bit premature, but ultimately he was right, the rebellion in south Armagh was over.

Those rebels arrested for firing on the military and attacking the home of Susanna Barton were tried at the Armagh Assizes in September. Sixteen men were convicted and eight of them were sentenced to death. Attorney-General Arthur Wolfe informed the undersecretary that the other rebels would be kept as hostages and, if there were any further outrages in the area, “those convicts shall, from time to time, as occasion may require, be executed.”<sup>64</sup> After the September executions of eight local men — and with the noose still hanging round the necks of eight others — the revolutionary movement in south Armagh flagged and never recovered its earlier momentum. By mid-1797, many of the leading United Irishmen in Armagh, Louth and south Down had been arrested, and the radicals who managed to evade capture (such as Samuel Turner, Father James Coigly and Arthur O’Connor) fled to the continent, where they worked to secure foreign aid for the insurrection. Turner switched his allegiance sometime in late 1797 and informed against his former associates. Father Coigly, the priest from Dundalk who played such a prominent role in the work of the United Irishmen in south Armagh, was arrested early in 1798, convicted of treason and hanged at Maidstone Gaol.

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<sup>63</sup>Colonel Ogle to Dublin, 14 June 1797, ISPO 620/31/93.

<sup>64</sup>13 September 1797, ISPO 620/32/121-122; Wolfe to Cooke, 17 September 1797, ISPO 620/32/132; Ogle to Cooke, September–October 1797, ISPO 620/32/195.

The virtual collapse of the United Irish organization in south Armagh during 1797 accounts in large part for the failure of the Defender stronghold to rise along with the rebels of Antrim and Down in 1798.<sup>65</sup> After the spring and summer of 1797, the people simply no longer had the means of organization and communication necessary to launch a coherent insurrection, and a Forkhill ballad entitled "The Market Stone" recounts the disappointment of the people at their paralysis in '98. Their pikes were ready, their mountain hideouts were concealed, and the United men had been drilled in formation, "but no man came from Sheelagh/Though we did get news from Down/Brought by a linen weaver/From Carrickfergus town./The word he brought/I'll tell you/It left us very low/ For traitors they were busy/ As in the long ago..."<sup>66</sup> The county Down rebels were defeated in a bloody battle at Ballinahinch before the United Irishmen from south Armagh could take any part in the rising. A United Irishman arrested in Dundalk in June 1798 claimed that the counties of Antrim and Down were supposed to rise first, and the other counties would follow upon receiving word of the insurrection. But Louth was badly organized and the leading United Irishman from south Armagh, William Donaldson, was reportedly "timid" about his own county.<sup>67</sup> Nor could word from Down reach the Armagh rebels, for General Nugent had deployed his soldiers to stop all communication between Down and Armagh.<sup>68</sup> The rebellion

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<sup>65</sup>L.M. Cullen. "Political Structures of the Defenders,"132-35.

<sup>66</sup>Reprinted in Bryan Sherry (ed.), Along the Black Pig's Dyke: Folklore from Monaghan and South Armagh (Castleblayney: Castle Printing, 1993).

<sup>67</sup>Information of John Conellan, 10 June 1798, ISPO 620/3/32/8.

<sup>68</sup>Nugent to Knox, 11 June 1798, Lake MS 56 No.190.

in south Armagh never had a chance, and the Forkhill ballad closed on a note of frustration. "We might have done a little/Had we got the message then."

Although the United Irishmen in south Armagh never rose on a scale remotely comparable to the rebellion in Antrim and Down, the correspondence of Lord Downshire contains two brief references to a small rising in south Armagh near the end of June 1798. One simply said, "[t]hey are up in numbers in the Fewes mountains and over Dundalk and Forkhill." Several days later, another correspondent informed Downshire that "[t]here was a rising a few nights ago at Dundalk. The intention was to drive all the gentry into the town, and then massacre them. It was discovered in time, and the rebels driven towards Forkhill."<sup>69</sup> Two men from Dundalk, John Hoey and Anthony Marmion, were executed for their part in the rising on 25 July, but there were no other known local martyrs in 1798. One hundred years later this fact was received with great disappointment by members of the commemorative committee of the '98 Rebellion in Dundalk, who hoped to claim more rebel sons.<sup>70</sup> But the small rising which broke out near Dundalk and Forkhill in June 1798 failed to connect with the insurgency elsewhere in Ulster and proved ultimately insignificant in a national context.

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<sup>69</sup>Patrickson to Downshire, 26 June 1798; William Hartigan to Downshire, 29 June 1798. PRONI Downshire Papers, D/607/F/276 and D/607/F/291. Colin Johnston Robb provides a more detailed description of the rebellion in Forkhill on 22 June 1798, which is apparently drawn from a letter by General Lake. In the opening section of this paper, I explained that Robb's richly detailed local history tales cannot be relied upon for their accuracy, as he consistently failed to document his sources. In this case, the dates of the rising mentioned by Robb and the Downshire correspondents (between 22 and 24 June 1798) match almost exactly, but I am reluctant to trust Robb's account of events in Forkhill.

<sup>70</sup>Dundalk Democrat, 29 January 1898.

*Some Reflections on Nationalism, Sectarianism, and the Rebellion*

Most historical scholarship places the failure of the 1798 rebellion in Ulster in a context which includes the United Irishmen's dependence on reinforcements from France and their subsequent disappointment when the French failed to appear, the penetration of the United Irish leadership at the highest level by government informers, the lack of communication between the Directory and its member societies, the distraction of the conflict between Catholics and Orangemen in Armagh, and the annihilation of the rebels by General Lake's military machine in the spring of 1797. Lake's complete military triumph had killed the chances of a rebellion in Ulster before it even began, and this was especially true in Forkhill. A barracks had been established in the parish in 1795, very near the site where Alexander Berkeley had been attacked four years before, and a military regiment was close at hand during the years of greatest disaffection. In 1796, Colonel Ogle applied for permission to raise a corps of Forkhill yeomanry and it also policed the parish.<sup>71</sup> The immediate presence of both soldiers *and* yeomen militated against the chances of the Forkhill rebels in 1797, who must have found it very difficult to make plans for rebellion under the watchful eye of Ogle and his men. More than sectarian tension, the failure of the French landing, poor planning and miscommunication, it was the suffocating presence of the military in Forkhill between 1797 and 1798 which ultimately denied local rebels the opportunity to join the Ulster rising.

The basic principles of the rebellion of 1798 have proved more elusive to define. By the end of the summer, the death toll had mounted to 30 000 men, women and children.

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<sup>71</sup>Murray, "Shanroe Barrack (1795-1821)," *passim*.

No doubt many of these were innocents, but thousands of them were rebels who had risked their lives and ultimately gave their lives for the cause.<sup>72</sup> What brought these rebels into the field in 1797 and 1798? Contemporary observers, such as the Reverend Edward Hudson and Richard Musgrave, regarded the rebellion in Ulster as the terrible and inevitable climax to a decade of sectarian turmoil. Nineteenth-century Irish nationalists looked back on the rebellion as the first great attempt at national liberation by the fathers of Irish nationalism, who were cut down by the Orange yeomen. An editorial which appeared in the Dundalk Democrat in January 1898 illustrates how completely the memory of the rebellion had been overtaken by nationalist aspirations and nationalist historiography.

The history of the year whose centenary we celebrate is one that cannot fail to strengthen the national feeling of any Irishman who studies it. The suffering and despair of our fellow countrymen; the lofty patriotism and self-sacrificing spirit of the men who 'rose in dark and evil days to right their native land,' and the gallant fight that a handful of undisciplined and half-armed men waged against a powerful oppressor, cannot fail to awaken in the hearts of the present generation a spirit akin to that of their forebears. And that spirit of resolute and uncompromising Nationalism, placing the country's course above all mean and petty issues, is just what Ireland needs in her sons today.<sup>73</sup>

This received wisdom that local and parochial grievances were somehow forgotten, and a sudden zeal for nationhood gripped the insurgents, is not convincing. By definition, the rebellion of 1798 was not an insurrection of Irish nationalists and any question exploring the forces of "nationalism" in Ulster during this period is inappropriately phrased. Several influential studies on the emergence of national consciousness agree on one point:

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<sup>72</sup>Foster, Modern Ireland, 280.

<sup>73</sup>Dundalk Democrat, 8 January 1898.

nationalism is a thoroughly modern concept. In varying degrees, their authors trace the pedigree of nationalism to a nineteenth-century political idea which applied the principles of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution to a society recast by the forces of industrialization.<sup>74</sup> Nationalism, according to Ernest Gellner, was primarily a political principle which held that “the political and national unit should be congruent.”<sup>75</sup> Before nationalism could summon the support which would turn it into a popular movement, society had to reach a stage of political maturity which made the connection between nationality and nation-state appear organic to everybody. This level of popular understanding would increase as standards of literacy rose, but the principle of nationalism also held an immediate appeal for people who lived in the faceless and anonymous urban centres of the nineteenth-century. When millions of people flooded the towns during the industrial revolution, they left behind the small communities with which humans had identified throughout history, and responded readily to a movement which promised to give them back an identity.<sup>76</sup> In Benedict Anderson’s phrase, the nation became an “imagined political community” for a population which shared some characteristics (language, ethnicity, religion) but whose members were too numerous, too heterogenous and too anonymous to form a natural

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<sup>74</sup>Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1983); Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism (New York: Cornell University Press, 1983); Eric Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism Since 1760: Programme, Myth and Reality (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>75</sup>Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, 1.

<sup>76</sup>Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, 48; Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism Since 1760, 46.

community on their own.<sup>77</sup> Contrary to the myths of history, nationalism was never an inherent human emotion, but a nineteenth-century invention which emerged when a particular set of conditions allowed it to emerge, and not before.

The hard line on nationalism assumed by Ernest Gellner and (to a lesser extent) by Eric Hobsbawm, does not satisfy Linda Colley, who rejects the idea that the history of nationalism has followed a predictable learning curve. She prefers the more nuanced approach of Benedict Anderson, who believes that individual cases of nationalism are best understood by aligning them with the cultural systems that preceded their emergence.<sup>78</sup> One factor which historically coincides with the emergence of national consciousness is the ebbing of religious belief. Yet the virtual equation between Irish Catholicism and Irish nationalism, beginning in the nineteenth-century, makes Ireland an anomaly by Anderson's definition.<sup>79</sup> Aside from this, although Anderson believes the foundation of national consciousness can be traced back to the print revolution of the 1500s and even before, he dates the emergence of modern western nationalism to the last quarter of the eighteenth-century and the first half of the nineteenth-century.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Anderson, Imagined Communities, 6; Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, 110.

<sup>78</sup>Linda Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837 (London:Vintage Press, 1996), preface; Anderson, Imagined Communities, 19.

<sup>79</sup>More troubling for history is that Irish nationalism traced its heritage to a movement (the United Irishmen) with an original intent utterly foreign to nationalism's nineteenth-century purpose. As A.T.Q. Stewart remarked, "republicanism went into the 1798 insurrection Protestant and came out Catholic." Stewart, "'The Harp New-Strung': Nationalism, Culture and the United Irishmen" in Ireland and Irish-Australia: Studies in Cultural and Political History, Eds. Oliver MacDonagh and W.F. Mandle. (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 267.

<sup>80</sup>Anderson, Imagined Communities, 14, 19, 49.

The rebellion of 1798 was not an insurrection of Irish nationalists because nationalism was not compatible with the conditions of agrarian society which prevailed throughout Ireland at the end of the eighteenth-century. The mostly rural, non-literate population could not articulate an argument for the connection between the political unit and the national unit that marked a society's political awakening, and given the insularity of their social organization and the powerful influence of the Catholic church, they would not turn to nationalism out of need. Modern Irish nationalism took shape during the era of Daniel O'Connell's mass political mobilisation of the Irish population in the 1820s and '30s, over the issues of Catholic emancipation and the repeal of the union. The Irish nationalism espoused by patriots writing in the Dundalk Democrat dated from fifty years before, not one hundred years before, and it is fraudulent to pin motives of "uncompromising Nationalism" on the rebels of 1798.

At most, the rebels were patriots who identified with the land of "Ireland" and were hostile to the role of England in Irish affairs. As Hobsbawm points out, it does not take much sophistication to recognize the conflict between "our people" and "foreigners," and the Irish sense of persecution at the hands of Englishmen had always been acute.<sup>81</sup> In fact, "patriots" is how the United Irishmen described themselves, and the extent to which they were committed nationalists (even in theory) remains in doubt. As professed republicans, they apparently supported the principle of a political unit congruent with the national unit, but their programme of reform was ambiguous from the beginning. Marianne Elliott

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<sup>81</sup>Hobsbawm, Bandits, 103; Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism, Chapter. 2; 46. 75-6.

explains that the leading United Irishmen did not harbour a national hatred towards England — “their dispute had been with the English government alone” — and the different sects of Protestants in Ireland identified more readily with one another (and with England) than with the native Irish Catholics.<sup>82</sup> A.T.Q. Stewart agrees and stresses that the United Irishmen were patriots in the cosmopolitan sense, embraced the universal Rights of Man, and would have regarded nationalism as “uncivilized.”<sup>83</sup> Nor can it be forgotten that the members of Belfast’s educated and commercially successful radical elite badly wanted the political representation and commercial freedom they could only acquire in an independent Ireland, so their patriotism was carefully considered. Because the south Armagh rebels were drawn mainly from a non-literate farming and labouring population, they defined their self-interest rather differently, and could never have been “patriots” for Ireland in the way that the leading members of the United Irish society were patriots.

There was another potential barrier to the united Irish brotherhood of Catholics, Protestants and Dissenters envisioned by Wolfe Tone. Among eighteenth-century Irish-speakers, the word “Sasanach” referred to both an “Englishman” and a “Protestant,” without

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<sup>82</sup>Elliott, *Partners*, 369.

<sup>83</sup>A.T.Q. Stewart, “‘The Harp New-Strung’: Nationalism, Culture and the United Irishmen,” 264.

qualification or distinction.<sup>34</sup> As long as the majority of native Irish people were unwilling or unable to distinguish between religion and nationality, and identified “na Sasanaigh” as foreigners and heretics, any rebellion against English rule waged in Ulster would assume the contours of a civil war. Patriotism would become inseparable from sectarianism — it had to be so. Indeed, many historians argue that the rebellion of 1798 in Ulster was defeated primarily by the forces of sectarianism which tore apart the brotherhood of United Irishmen, and blame is placed squarely on the shoulders of the Defenders. According to Roy Foster, when the Defenders joined the United Irishmen, “native sectarian animosity soon swamped imported secularism.”<sup>35</sup> Thomas Bartlett emphasized the “avowed sectarianism” of the Defenders<sup>36</sup>, while Nancy Curtin claimed that the United Irishmen compromised their own “avowed non-sectarianism,” by forming the doomed alliance in the first place. It was inevitable, she wrote, that the Catholics “would regard their burden in sectarian and nationalist terms.”<sup>37</sup>

Some historians do not surrender to these generalizations about Defender ideology. Marianne Elliott does not believe that the Defenders were necessarily motivated by anti-

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<sup>34</sup>The term “Albanach,” meaning “Scottish,” applied equally to a Presbyterian, and “Gaedheal” referred to an Irishman, a Highlander or a Catholic. England was “Sasana,” and Scotland “Albain,” which makes these definitions more correctly of nationality than of religion. See the evidence of McNeven before the Secret Committee of Lords in 1798: “In his language the Irish peasant has but one name for Protestant and Englishman, and confounds them: his aversion, therefore, is not against a religionist, but a foe.” Secret Committee of the Lords. Statement of the Origins and Progress of the Societies of United Irishmen (Dublin, 1798), 42-43.

<sup>35</sup>Foster, Modern Ireland, 273.

<sup>36</sup>Bartlett and Jeffery (eds.), Military History of Ireland 260.

<sup>37</sup>Curtin, The United Irishmen, 284-285.

Protestantism, or else the alliance with the mainly Presbyterian United Irishmen would not have succeeded. Nor does she feel sectarian tensions fundamentally jeopardised relations within the United Irishmen-Defender alliance in the years before 1797.<sup>88</sup> Kevin Whelan argues that the government encouraged the escalation of sectarian hostility in Ulster “as a counter-revolutionary strategy of tension.” and helped matters along by recruiting members of the Orange Order into additional yeomanry forces in the spring of 1797.<sup>89</sup> The government was perfectly aware of popular opinion about the Orangemen: General Knox admitted that the Orangemen were “bigots” who would resist Catholic emancipation, but insisted that the Order formed the government’s only barrier against the United Irishmen.<sup>90</sup> Members of the Orange Order were absorbed into yeomanry corps in June 1797, and soon became an indispensable force of repression in remote parts of the country where the United Irish movement had spread unchecked. By mid-1797, the Order had succeeded in breaking up the formidable alliance among Presbyterian and Catholics in mid-Ulster, and had placed an impenetrable barrier between the Defender strongholds of south Ulster and the United Irish heartland of Antrim and Down, making assistance and communication between these regions extremely difficult.<sup>91</sup> When the Orangemen replaced the Peep O’Day Boys as agents of physical-force Protestantism in Armagh, the sectarian conflict in Ulster escalated. Wild

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<sup>88</sup>Elliott, “Defenders in Ulster,” 226; 233.

<sup>89</sup>Whelan, Tree of Liberty, 129.

<sup>90</sup>See correspondence of General Knox and Secretary of State Thomas Pelham on 19 April 1797, PRONI Pelham Transcripts T/755/4B; 17–28 May 1797, Pelham Transcripts T/755/5.

<sup>91</sup>Whelan, Tree of Liberty, 115-18, 121-124.

reports circulated that the Defenders had sworn an oath to “wade knee deep in Orange blood.” and the United Irishmen capitalized on the terror of Catholics by spreading the same rumour about the murderous intentions of the Orange Order.<sup>92</sup> To the satisfaction of government, the United Irish alliance collapsed and its former associates turned on each other. It was not the Defenders, Whelan claims, but Dublin Castle which should be blamed for the spiralling descent of the Ulster rebellion into a sectarian civil war.

In his autobiography, published posthumously in 1798, the Reverend James Coigly also accused the government of provoking sectarian conflict in Armagh through the enlistment of Orangemen into the yeomanry corps. Coigly claimed several leading gentlemen in the county told him that it was of “great utility” to the government that religious disputes should exist between Catholics and Presbyterians.<sup>93</sup> One of these men may have been the Reverend Hudson, who reported meeting Coigly in 1797, and Hudson had predicted the dissolution of the alliance as early as 1794. “The two Poles will never meet to crush the Equator between them.” he wrote, referring to the alliance of Presbyterians and Catholics in Armagh.<sup>94</sup>

Yet L.M. Cullen believes there was close cooperation between Catholic and Dissenters in 1797, particularly in regions like south Armagh where the Anglican interest

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<sup>92</sup>Smyth, Men of No Property, 172.

<sup>93</sup>James Coigly, Life of the Reverend James Coigly (London, 1798), 12-13, 23.

<sup>94</sup>Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 9 May 1797, R.I.A. MS 12 R 19 No.52; Hudson to Charlemont, 8 April 1798, R.I.A. MS 12 R 20; Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 18 December 1794, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 18 No.48.

was weak, and the subscription list to The Patriot confirms his suspicion.<sup>95</sup> In an earlier section, I pointed out the definite correlation between this list of subscribers and membership in the United Irishmen, and a survey of their surnames reveals a close balance of support among Protestants and Catholics for the radical movement. Forty-two subscribers to The Patriot were from south Armagh and north Louth, between Newtownhamilton and Blackrock: twenty-four of these had identifiably Protestant (almost certainly Presbyterian) surnames, and twenty had native Irish and Catholic surnames. In the United Irish stronghold of Newtownhamilton, where a Presbyterian settlement had been established in the 1730s, Protestant subscribers outnumbered Catholics twelve to five. But three of the five Catholic subscribers were priests and would have carried considerable influence among the local Catholic population.<sup>96</sup>

The subscription list does not prove that the Protestants and Catholic communities in south Armagh cooperated within the United Irish movement, but it does suggest that there was potential for cooperation in rural areas, and the information of a Dundalk prisoner confirms that both Catholics and Protestants were represented in the radical leadership. In early June 1798, John Conellan, an apothecary from Dundalk, was arrested for his involvement with the United Irishmen and agreed to inform on his associates in return for

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<sup>95</sup>L.M. Cullen, "Political Structures of the Defenders," *passim*.

<sup>96</sup>The three priests were Reverend Patrick Hanratty, Reverend Nicholas Murphy and Reverend Patrick Quinn. Father Quinn, or Keown, was suspected of involvement with the United Irishmen and Dean Warburton recommended his arrest in June 1798. Warburton to Dublin Castle, 29 May 1798, ISPO 620/37/212; Warburton to Bishop of Ferns, 7 June 1798, ISPO 620?38/77.

clemency.<sup>97</sup> Several of the men whom Conellan accused of involvement in the United Irish leadership appear on the subscription list to The Patriot, including Pat Byrne, Robert Campbell, Valentine Derry, William Donaldson, James Kelly and the Teeling brothers. Valentine Derry was a leading Defender, a Catholic and a near-relation of Father James Coigly; he had sworn Conellan as a United Irishman in 1797. William Donaldson, a Presbyterian from Newtownhamilton, was the head of the movement in Armagh, and was described by Lord Blayney as “the most leading man in this Kingdom.”<sup>98</sup> Regrettably, little else is known about Donaldson, and there are only one or two references to him in the Rebellion papers.

Conellan’s testimony suggests that the leadership of the Armagh United Irishmen was mostly Presbyterian and the United leaders in Louth were mostly Catholic, but it is impossible to compile a profile of the rank and file. By 1798, there is little doubt that their ranks had been thinned considerably. At an executive meeting of the United Irish society on 10 May 1798, where county leaders had gathered to finalize plans for the insurrection, it was clear that the organisation was in shambles: William Donaldson appeared “timid about Armagh,” and Conellan supplied a return of supporters in Louth which was “so inconsiderable” that the secretary refused to write it down. Upon hearing this, the secretary, Bashford, decided that counties Down and Antrim would rise first, seizing Blaris Camp and Belfast, and the other counties were “not to stir” until they heard news of the insurrection. When he arrived home, Conellan reported these instructions to the leading Louth United men

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<sup>97</sup>Information of John Conellan, 10 June 1798, ISPO 620/3/32/8.

<sup>98</sup>Lord Edward Blayney to Dublin Castle, 10 June 1797, ISPO 620/31/71.

who told him shortly afterwards that they did not believe they were prepared for a rising and were determined to remain inactive.<sup>99</sup> Ultimately, the rebellion of 1798 in Armagh and Louth had been defeated by the systematic and brutal disarming of Ulster in 1797.

Again the question arises, why a rebellion? For my own part, I do not think the people of south Armagh came into the field in the spring of 1797 on the strength of religious animosity, planning to wade knee-deep in Orange blood. Nor were these rebels "nationalists" fighting to liberate Ireland, for they had not yet developed the political consciousness which would permit such an expression. If nationalism and sectarianism cannot account for the rebel response in 1798, what did persuade hundreds, perhaps several thousand men and women to risk their lives in battles they would surely lose?

The particular pattern of conflict in Armagh, like the pattern of Defender activity nearly ten years earlier, provides a possible answer. Virtually all of the major outrages were deliberate encounters with specific targets. The incidents near Newtownhamilton and Cullaville in February 1797 were attempts to rescue local men who had been arrested on suspicion of their involvement with the United Irishmen, and who faced death or transportation if convicted; the rebels who assembled, marching behind the soldiers and even firing on the military party, intervened to save their friends and neighbours. The series of attacks on Colonel John Ogle has a similar explanation: as a magistrate and yeoman, Ogle was perceived as an enemy who threatened the security and liberty of the people of Forkhill.

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<sup>99</sup> Information of John Conellan, 10 June 1798, ISPO 620/3/32/8. As a footnote to this story, Conellan was later sent out as a surgeon aboard a convict ship. Out at sea, the convicts rose, "literally cut Conellan to pieces and threw the fragments of his body into the sea." Robert M. Young, Ulster in '98: Episodes and Anecdotes (Belfast: Marcus Ward & Co., 1893), 18.

He was repeatedly fired upon as he conducted military patrols of the countryside and, on more than one occasion, the inside of his house was “utterly destroyed.”<sup>100</sup> Colonel Ogle had replaced the Reverend Edward Hudson as a chief target of local rebels in Forkhill. Likewise, the men who attacked the home of Susanna Barton in May 1797, on the night of the worst clash between country people and the ancient British Fencibles, identified the head of the Forkhill estate as a legitimate target, although their specific rationale is unknown.

The importance of the *individual* in the equation of conflict, whether as friend or foe, is of tremendous significance. Two of the best-known ballads about the rebellion in south Armagh remember the martyrdom of two ordinary men, both blacksmiths, who were put to death by the yeomen in 1797.<sup>101</sup> “The Ballad of Tom McArdle” mourned the death of a young man wrongfully hanged for supplying pikes to the Creggan United Irishmen. “The Carrive Blacksmith” is a more stirring song which describes the martyrdom of Thomas Lappin, a Forkhill blacksmith and United Irishman. Lappin was arrested by the yeomen for fashioning pike heads for the rebels, but refused to reveal any information about his associates, despite a flogging which lasted several days and eventually left him dead. And there is an undeniably sinister note in the song: “Now his murder cries for vengeance, on Captain Farman’s band.”<sup>102</sup> The death of Thomas Lappin called for revenge and, as the

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<sup>100</sup>Ogle to Dublin Castle, 4 May 1797, ISPO 620/30/15; 8 October 1797, ISPO 620/32/195.

<sup>101</sup>“The Carrive Blacksmith” is printed in Sherry (ed.), Along the Black Pig’s Dyke. “The Ballad of Tom McCardle” appears in an article by Kevin McMahon on the United Irishmen in Creggan parish, which will appear in the 1998 edition of Creggan: Journal of the Creggan Historical Society.

<sup>102</sup>The Farney yeomanry were a corps from Castleblayney, County Monaghan, headed by Norman Steele.

catalogue of Defender crimes earlier in the decade clearly illustrates, this was perhaps the greatest rallying cry among the people of south Armagh. This pattern of rebel activity which targeted *individuals*, either punished them or rescued them, and either cursed them or mourned them for a long time after, is vital to understanding the response of the rebels in 1797 and 1798. It is no coincidence that the United Irish activity in south Armagh matched the early pattern of Defender outrage in the region, especially since membership in the two organizations overlapped, and after 1798 many of the United rebels reverted to Defenderism.

Nor is it surprising that the aspirations of the United Irish rebels in 1797 match the aims of the Defenders so closely. At the time of the insurrection in Armagh, the Defenders maintained the radical platform of social reform which distinguished them from the United Irishmen, and which had always been the driving force behind the movement.<sup>103</sup> A Frenchman travelling through Ulster between 1796 and 1797 wrote that he had encountered the language of "equality, fraternity and oppression" among the country people, but it was linked directly to complaints of over-taxation.<sup>104</sup> General Knox expressed the same sentiment in a letter to chief secretary Thomas Pelham in May 1797. Knox claimed that the prospect of Catholic emancipation had been welcomed by those Catholics who held property, but held little appeal for the majority of the population. Only when the United Irishmen "threw in the Bait" of abolition of tithes and lower rents (both standard Defender promises)

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<sup>103</sup>Elliott, "Defenders in Ulster," 227. As late as 1797 some of the Defenders carried out their arms raids and robberies with "red nightcaps and white shirts over their clothes." 21 February 1797, PRONI, Pelham Transcripts T/755/4A.

<sup>104</sup>M. De Latocnaye quoted in Foster, Modern Ireland, 273.

were most Ulster Catholics converted to the principles of rebellion.<sup>105</sup> Finally, after his arrest in February 1797, a United Irishman-turned-informer from south Armagh testified that the principles of the society were “to join the French on their landing in this Country and to pull down all Gentlemen and Magistrates and abolish all Taxes, Tythes and Rents...”<sup>106</sup>

In 1898, an editorial in the Dundalk Democrat claimed that the rebels had not participated in a great insurrection over “mean and petty issues,” but had much more principled aspirations. As far as I can determine, the rebels of 1797 were primarily concerned with mean and petty issues, and altering the course of the nation remained beyond the scope of both their imagination and ability. Throughout the 1790s, Defenderism retained its character as a social protest movement made up of rural factions under local leadership whose interests were primarily parochial, and its fundamental principles were not diluted through association with the United Irishmen. A report in Faulkner’s Journal on the clash between rebels and the ancient British Fencibles near Forkhill in May 1797, included a meaningful aside: a crowd of “several hundred Defenders, or United Irishmen (the terms are synonymous) collected close to a bog...” I expect this statement is perfectly accurate, not only because the alliance between United Irishmen and Defenders had blurred the distinction between these associations, but because the rebels at Forkhill on 13 May 1797 were Defenders who had gathered in the name of United Irishmen.

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<sup>105</sup>Knox to Pelham, 28 May 1797, PRONI Pelham Transcripts T/755/5.

<sup>106</sup>Information at Armagh Assizes, 28 February 1797, ISPO 620/29/26.

If history is traced properly, the failure of the rebellion in Forkhill was ordained in 1750, when Richard Jackson first purchased the Forkhill estate. Over the next forty years Jackson amassed a considerable fortune which was bound up in the clauses of his extraordinary and controversial will. When Jackson died in 1787, most of his interest in the estate passed to his widowed sister, Susanna Barton, and her daughter, Julia Eliza. And it was Julia, a wealthy heiress, who caught the eye of the Colonel, who married her fortune, and came to live on the estate that Jackson bought.<sup>107</sup> Colonel Ogle's presence on the Forkhill estate was instrumental in suppressing disaffection in 1797, but it was a most peculiar set of circumstances which brought an English soldier to live among the people of south Armagh during this decade of turmoil, at the precise moment in history when the local people needed him most – or least.

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<sup>107</sup>Susanna Barton possibly suspected the true intentions of Colonel Ogle, her son-in-law, towards her only daughter. She signed a document stating that if Julia Eliza Ogle died intestate, her share in the Forkhill estate would not pass to her husband, Colonel John Ogle, but to the heirs named in Susanna Barton's own will. In lieu of this, Ogle would receive the sum of one thousand pounds. PRONI T/529/7.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The trouble on the Forkhill estate in the early 1790s coincided with a series of disturbances in Armagh between rival gangs of Peep O'Day Boys and Defenders, who were widely recognized as the physical-force elements of lower-class Protestants and Catholics in the county. When the troubles reached their zenith in the 1791 attack on a Protestant schoolmaster and linen-weaver in Forkhill by a mob of Defenders, the attack was immediately labelled sectarian. Closer analysis has cast doubt on the sectarian thesis, however, and has suggested other explanations for the actions of the Defenders during the furor surrounding settlement of the estate, the series of attacks on Forkhill settlers, the Berkeley outrage in 1791, and the spread of revolution.

1. *Settlement.* J. Byrne accused the trustees of "banishing" Catholics from their lands on the estate in order to establish a Protestant colony in the wake of Richard Jackson's death in 1787. The early land returns display a marked preference for Protestant leaseholders, and it is possible that the trustees discriminated against Catholic leaseholders who bid for land, but it seems equally likely that the trustees sought prosperous leaseholders who would bring wealth and industry to the estate and Protestants proved the most suitable candidates. Recall that it was the trustees who sought an act of Parliament liberating them from the clause in Richard Jackson's will which granted free holdings to children of the Church of Ireland, in preference to any others. Moreover, it was the trustees who granted leases to two Catholic priests, Father (Mc)Cullen in 1788 and Father McIvor in 1790.

2. *Trouble over the Land.* The Defenders' combination against the incoming settlers was blamed on the intolerance of local Catholics, who were furious that Protestants had

taken land on the estate. But evidence heard before the Devon Commission revealed the depth of feeling the people had for their "ground," and a string of witnesses testified that the threats of dispossession, land-grabbing, and an increase in rates drove the people to near-madness. The Defenders acted according to this rural land code, and even incorporated its rules into their social reform agenda in 1795. Combinations against the influx of settlers into Forkhill was inevitable no matter who they were, but given that the newcomers were mostly Protestant and the natives were mostly Catholic, the intimidation appeared sectarian.

3. *Defender Outrage in Forkhill.* Attacks on the Reverend Mr. Hudson, John Dick, William Duncan, Robert Best and Alexander Berkeley were not random acts driven by the hatred of Protestants. All these men had made enemies in the parish by identifying themselves with interests that conflicted with the interests of the local people, and all of them had prosecuted local offenders, in order to make examples of them. The Defenders turned the tables and subjected these men to a period of assault, intimidation, vandalism and attempted murder lasting several years, which drove at least three of them out of the parish. Alexander Berkeley was not attacked because he was an inoffensive Protestant, nor was he a target of the Irish language police, but he had prosecuted a local man to conviction the year before and the people sought revenge. Reports that Berkeley planned to testify against local Defenders at an upcoming trial are equally plausible, and when the angry mob tore out his tongue the Defenders sent him a message he could not misunderstand.

4. *The Years of Rebellion.* The armed defiance of the United Irish rebels in south Armagh during 1797 took the form of pitched battles against the military, and did not exhibit any special degree of sectarian animosity. Colonel Ogle was fired upon many times as he

patrolled the countryside, not because he was a Protestant. but because he was a yeoman. a magistrate and, by most accounts, a thug who himself faced charges of assaulting two men at the 1795 Spring assizes.<sup>1</sup> It is also worth noting that when Ogle reported to Dublin Castle on the level of disturbance in south Armagh. he described the disaffected as “offenders,” “rebels.” “rascals,” “traitors” and “United Irishmen,” but never as “Catholics.”

The Defenders’ rationale for brutality is not an excuse for their conduct – they were still vigilantes who profited by their crime and committed horrendous acts of violence. And although I have insisted throughout that the attacks on the settlers were not motivated by blanket Catholic hatred of Protestants. this does not convey what the atmosphere was like for the Protestant settlers in Forkhill in the 1790s. I do not know if they were subjected to insults, petty vandalism, serious threats, name-calling by children or the cold-shoulder by neighbours. but I expect they were. The Protestants were a clear minority in the parish of Forkhill and the mistreatment of minority groups by majorities must be the longest-running record in history. According to the Reverend Mr. Hudson. some of these settlers left the parish and never returned. Others were afraid to confront the tide of local opinion by bringing charges against their attackers. for they had seen what happened to those who did.

Nevertheless, both during the course of the rebellion and well into the nineteenth-century. the population of Catholics and Protestants in Forkhill lived together in relative

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<sup>1</sup>Armagh Assize Indictments, Spring 1795. See also the remarks of the Northern Star on 23 November 1795. Seventy-six peaceful inhabitants of Armagh “were dragged from their beds by a party of Orangemen headed by two of Colonel Ogle’s crimp sergeants, falsely charged with desertion and released at the eleventh hour by an unnamed magistrate.” At the Spring Assizes in 1796, Ogle was required to pay damages for offences committed by his recruiting officers the previous December. Quoted in Hereward Senior, Orangeism in Ireland and Britain, 32, 36.

harmony. A number of churches in Armagh were burned and attacked by angry mobs in the late 1790s, but the Protestant church in Forkhill was left unscathed. A 1798 return of the Established churches in the rural deanery of Creggan reported that the Forkhill church was "in perfect repair," inside and out, and there was no suggestion that the building had suffered broken windows, arson attacks or other acts of vandalism. If the attacks in Forkhill were driven by purely sectarian, or even primarily sectarian motives, it is curious that the most prominent symbol of Protestantism in the parish remained untouched.<sup>2</sup>

Forkhill also maintained its minority Protestant population into the nineteenth-century. Admittedly it was a tiny minority and the combined total of Dissenters and Established Church members never exceeded 7% of the population, but in 1834 the Established Church could count 479 of its own members living in the parish.<sup>3</sup> In 1826 the commissioners of an Irish education inquiry reported that ten Protestant schools were operating in Forkhill, all of them had mixed populations and some had a near balance of Protestant and Catholic pupils.<sup>4</sup> Borrowing evidence from the nineteenth-century to improve an argument about the eighteenth-century is not the most honest way to write history, but these later census and education figures are the only way to challenge Reverend Hudson's

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<sup>2</sup>See evidence of James Christie in Orange Lodge Inquiry, Minutes #5567-69: Reamonn O'Muire, "Rural Deanery of Creggan, 1798," Creggan 1, no.3 (1989):62.

<sup>3</sup>These figures were copied from available records in Dublin Castle before the original documents were destroyed in the early 1920s. PRONI, Tennyson-Groves Transcripts, T808/14943.

<sup>4</sup>Attendance returns supplied by both Protestants and Catholics, counted 126 Protestant pupils (74 Established church and 52 Dissenters) and 309 Catholic pupils. Second report of the commissioners of Irish education inquiry, (House of Commons 1826-27 [12], xii).

claim that Protestant settlers in Forkhill were driven out by the Defenders and none “but Half a Dozen ever appeared here afterwards.”<sup>5</sup>

Since I have only studied a single parish, I cannot claim that the character of Defenderism and the nature of the disturbances in Forkhill were representative of Defenders and disturbances elsewhere in Armagh. Local studies would need to be conducted in Keady, Mullaghbrack and Tullymore before any regional trends could be observed. But I suspect that the deficiency of the sectarian thesis applies more generally. The temptation to use the sectarian argument in Irish history writing is great, especially when so much contemporary correspondence states absolutely that animosity between Protestants and Catholics was the main source of conflict in Armagh. And who am I to question the testimony of eye-witnesses? But most of the eighteenth-century observers were magistrates, clergymen, officers and gentlemen, and barriers of class and language prevented them from knowing the minds and hearts of the people whom they wrote about so authoritatively. Add to this the fear of Ulster Protestants, always threatened by stirrings of discontent among the Catholic population, and you can understand why these gentlemen were so quick to raise the sectarian alarm. Panic among the gentry played no small part in the escalation of the Armagh disturbances into hate-battles between Orangemen and Defenders in the second half of the decade, and there are grounds for arguing that sectarian conflict became a self-fulfilling prophecy during these years.

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<sup>5</sup>Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 7 December 1789, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 15 67 No.7.

Two hundred years after the Defenders waged a campaign of terror against unwelcome settlers on the Forkhill estate, the pattern of confrontation and resistance has endured. South Armagh is still known as “bandit country” on account of local support for the revolutionary nationalist cause and the strong I.R.A. presence in rural communities along the border. Extreme republicanism is at home here. Since the early 1970s the British army has carved out a presence as well: helicopters hang overhead and military barracks on mountain tops scar the landscape for miles around. In a book describing his experiences as the commanding officer of a parachute regiment stationed in south Armagh, Peter Morton claimed that the active republicans in south Armagh were a “tightly knit and interbred group of lawbreakers.” (Recall Reverend Hudson’s remarks about the people of Forkhill in 1789.) When the troubles broke out in Northern Ireland in 1969, Morton wrote, “it was quite natural that they should take to terrorism like ducks to water.”<sup>6</sup> This absurd statement reflects the legitimately paranoid mindset of a British soldier on hostile ground, but it raises an interesting question: is there an unbroken line of descent from the Defenders to the modern I.R.A., from the Forkhill rioters to south Armagh’s 1st Battalion? And if so, are these modern rebels best described as social bandits or political activists? An answer to the second question appears obvious. The I.R.A. seeks an end to British rule in the six counties and the establishment of a united Ireland; the “Irish question” is a quarrel over sovereignty and therefore political. What this does not explain is why, in early November 1997, two

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<sup>6</sup>Peter Morton, Emergency Tour: 3 PARA in South Armagh (Northamptonshire: William Kimber, 1989), 50.

television license inspectors were harassed by a crowd of locals near Cullaville, who threatened the safety of the two men if they continued to press for unpaid licensing fees. This incident, and others like it, suggests that a link between the bandits of the eighteenth-century and their twentieth-century descendants, or between banditry and south Armagh, is not untenable. Either way, it seems that the original business of the Defenders is not quite at an end.

If Ferdy McElevy participated in the rebellion of 1797, he managed to escape unscathed, and for a short time persisted in his habit as a Forkhill troublemaker. He was arrested and tried for robbery in the summer of 1798, but was acquitted and never appeared before another Armagh Grand Jury.<sup>7</sup> In November 1798, the Reverend Edward Hudson wrote to Charlemont about a meeting of the Defenders in Forkhill which had been dispersed before the yeomanry could make any arrests; he suspected they had gathered to take the latest edition of the Defenders' oath.<sup>8</sup> But 1798 was the end of a turbulent decade for the people of Forkhill: they had lived through the anxiety of settlement and competition for land; they had been surrounded by fierce outrage, arson, assault, shooting and attempted murder; in 1791 they had been witnesses to a violence that approached inhumanity; and during the years of rebellion, they tried to take part in something greater than themselves, but were frustrated by the forces of authority. Did they look back on these ten years in 1798 and realize how

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<sup>7</sup>Armagh Assize Indictments, Summer 1798.

<sup>8</sup>Edward Hudson to Charlemont, 30 November 1798, R.I.A. Charlemont MS 12 R 20 No.52.

formative this decade in their lives had been? It is impossible to know. I have tried to meet W.G. Hoskins' challenge to students of local history, to "hear men and women talking," and I am confident that I have heard the people talking. But from a distance of two hundred years, I am too far away to hear what they were saying.

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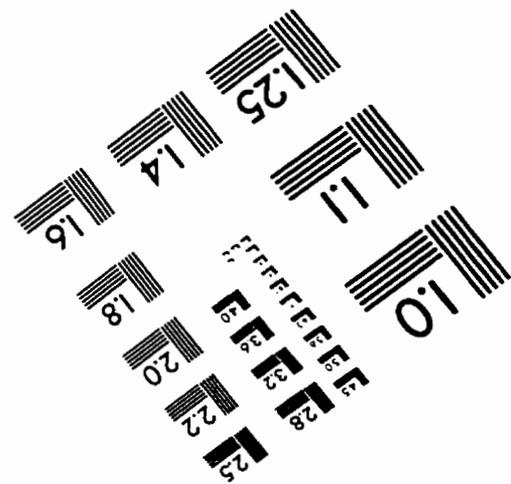
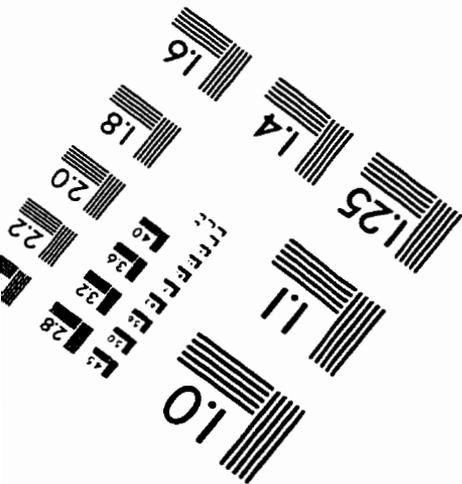
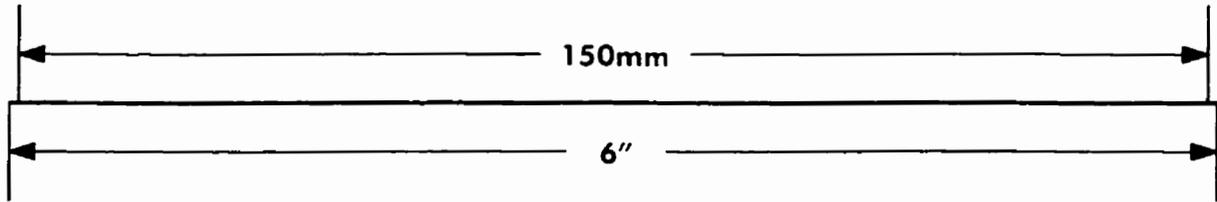
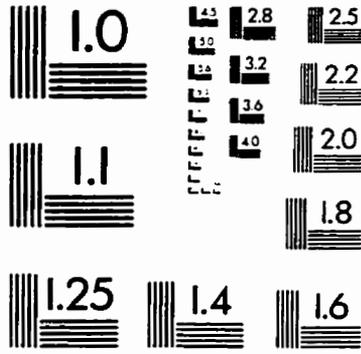
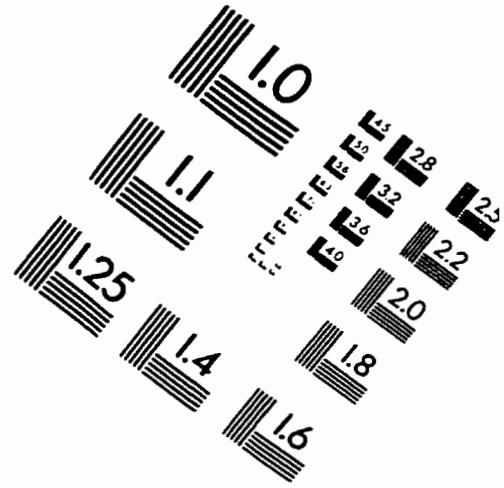
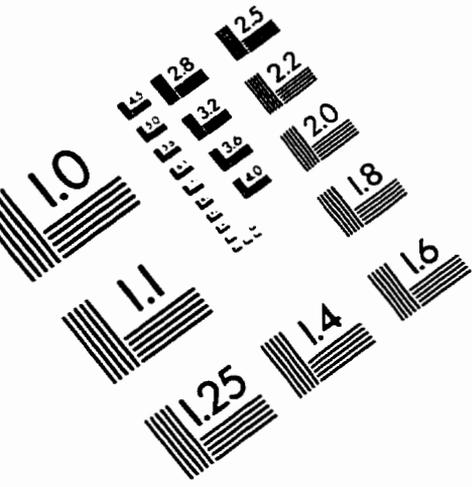
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