

Reflections on Centenaries and Commemorations
(Discussion 5)

**James Craig's quest to secure
and embed Partition**

Dr Margaret O'Callaghan

compiled by

Michael Hall

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mikehall.island@yahoo.co.uk
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Introduction

The Fellowship of Messines Association was formed in May 2002 by a diverse group of individuals from Loyalist, Republican and other backgrounds, united in their realisation of the need to confront sectarianism in our society as a necessary means to realistic peace-building.

In 2020 the Association launched its ‘Reflections on Centenaries & Anniversaries’ programme. This programme comprised a series of discussions which were intended to create opportunities for participants, from various backgrounds and political viewpoints, to engage in discussion on some of the more significant historical events of 100 years and 50 years ago, the consequences of which all of us are still living with today.

The discussions also afforded an opportunity for those taking part to engage in the important process of challenging some of the myths and folklore associated with past events, by means of an open and respectful engagement with factual history.

In 2021, a further series of talks and discussions was initiated, focusing on the topic of Partition and its legacy. Each event was to comprise a presentation by a well-known historian, followed by a wide-ranging discussion involving invited participants from a diverse range of backgrounds.

The discussion detailed in this pamphlet had as its focus James Craig’s efforts to secure and embed Partition. The keynote speaker was **Dr Margaret O’Callaghan**, Reader, School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics, Queen’s University, Belfast. Her interests are in Irish political thought, the politics of Irish literature, British high politics, the politics of commemoration and memory, and modern Irish cultural and political history.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, it was not possible for the participants to meet indoors face-to-face, and so the discussion, chaired by **Deirdre Mac Bride**, was conducted on an online basis (via a ‘Zoom’ conference).

Harry Donaghy, Project Manager, Fellowship of Messines Association

James Craig's quest to secure and embed Partition

Dr Margaret O Callaghan

I have stated elsewhere – in an *Irish Times* article in the special supplement on Partition published a few months ago – that the partition of Ireland was not an act but a process. I argued there that partition was imposed by the British imperial government as an instrument of policy that marked that government's failure in the wider problem of governing Ireland.

It provided a precedent for later British imperial partitions, a landmark in the genealogy of partitions. In all partition cases the imperial government purported to respond to so-called facts on the ground.

We know that in the Irish case these facts were the resistance to Home Rule since 1886 of Irish Unionism. This marked the fact that democratisation and polarization came together to Ireland in the 1880s on the question of the Union. So those three decades from the 1880s up to the passing of the Parliament Bill in 1911 were decades during which nationalist Ireland waited for Home Rule and Unionist Ireland hoped to avoid it.

We know that Irish Unionism was distilled into Ulster Unionism in concentrated if truncated form by the Ulster campaign following the Parliament Act of 1911. This piece of legislation, introduced to remove the legislative veto of the House of Lords which had blocked David Lloyd George's People's Budget – and which was the single greatest barrier to the passage of Home Rule – made the passage of some kind of Home Rule Bill ostensibly inevitable.

We know too that no British government, Liberal or Tory, had wished to introduce a Home Rule Bill since the defeat of the Second Home Rule Bill by the House of Lords in 1893. The Tory – or Conservative and Unionist – Party had the Empire at the heart of their anti-Home Rule policy and were committed to killing Home Rule by kindness. The Liberals after Gladstone appreciated that there were no votes in England or Scotland in supporting Home Rule for Ireland (bar what could be obtained in Liverpool and Glasgow). Many of their key figures like Herbert H. Asquith and Lloyd George

were in any case Liberal Imperialists, and sympathized to a degree with Tory outright opposition.

So, despite a Liberal landslide in 1906 the Liberal party did not seek nor had they any intention of introducing Home Rule for Ireland. The post-Parnellite Irish Parliamentary Party in its various manifestations therefore had little leverage on this issue between 1893 and 1911.

The Third Home Rule Bill was introduced by Asquith only because he required the votes of Redmond and his party to stay in power. Bizarrely this need coincided with and was partly a consequence of the removal of the veto of the House of Lords through the Parliament Act of 1911. So two domestically driven alterations – a change in the British constitution that shifted the balance of power between Lords and Commons, and the need for Irish Nationalist votes for the Liberals to stay in government as a consequence of the upheaval contingent on that – changed the agenda for Irish Home Rule.

The Parliament Act meant that once a piece of legislation passed through the Commons it could no longer be vetoed by the House of Lords. Once it went through legislatively three times it became law. This fact and the ‘prickly hedge’ of over two years that it opened up, became the forcing ground or rather the space of Unionist mobilization.

Unionism was stronger in Ulster and the cabinet, particularly Winston Churchill and Lloyd George, knew that some protections or provisions or remediation would be required to preserve that constituency from immersion in a Home Rule Ireland, which neither party had intended to grant up to 1912. The hiatus delay period provided Unionism with the space and time to build resistance.

The Para-militarization of Ulster through the Ulster Volunteer Force and the signing of the Scottish-style Ulster Covenant pledging to resist Home Rule by all means in 1912, and the British Conservative Party’s unequivocal support for that endeavour under the leadership of Andrew Bonar Law, was strengthened further by the Curragh Mutiny in March 1914, when senior British Army officers refused to deploy force against Ulster Unionists if they were ordered to do so. When the First World War broke out the Third Home Rule Bill was put on the statute book with the proviso that something would be done for what was called Ulster at its end.

The 1916 Rising reinvigorated the issue and the government proposed a form of temporary exclusion for six Ulster counties and a very limited form of Home Rule for

the rest of Ireland. It could not get through the Tory party, though Redmond and Devlin almost succeeded in selling it to nationalists as a temporary measure.

Getting the US into the war had been the main aim of British strategy through 1916. The Irish Convention of 1917 to 18 was set up partially to demonstrate to US opinion that the British government was doing something. It is clear from the records and reports that we have of this Irish Convention held in Trinity College Dublin through 1917 and into 1918 that though most Irish Unionists aspired to an accommodation with a wider Irish nationalism, the Ulster Unionist representatives had already concluded that hanging back was their best policy.

1918, the last year of the war saw the attempt of Lloyd George's coalition government to introduce conscription into Ireland allegedly in deference to the sacrifices of the Australians, Canadians and South Africans in particular. The crisis which this precipitated further politicized and radicalized nationalist Ireland as the Irish Parliamentary party, the Catholic church, women's and trades union movements united to oppose such a move.

The very dubious German plot of the late summer of 1918 saw most of the new leadership of Sinn Féin locked up again, and by the December 1918 election it was clear that Lloyd George had no intention of doing anything for nationalist Ireland in the short term. He had other matters to deal with. This despite the almost wiping out of the Irish Parliamentary Party and its replacement by Sinn Féin everywhere except in Ulster.

Ignoring utterly the new electoral situation Lloyd George chose the reactionary Walter Long, a political dinosaur even before the war and a fanatical supporter of Irish unionism, as chair of the cabinet's Ireland committee. This indicated the direction of British policy to come.

It seemed as if John Redmond's support for the war effort had been forgotten and all nationalists whatever their shading would retrospectively be punished for 1916, the results of the 1918 election, and most particularly the international declaration of Dáil Éireann in January 1919.

Lloyd George wished moreover to keep his wartime coalition partners – who were largely Conservatives, some Liberal Unionist as in the case of Chamberlain – in cabinet inside. This partly explains his sympathy for Ulster and just how Ulster-centred that cabinet's policy became.

But if one recalls the position of the Conservative party before the war on supporting and protecting Irish Unionism and Ulster Unionism as bulwarks for the

empire it is perhaps not so surprising. Lloyd George also shared Walter Long's sentiments on the need to punish Irish nationalists and had a series of imperial problems on his desk from the day that the war ended. He genuinely had serious matters to attend to in Versailles and felt that nationalist Ireland could wait.

But as 1919 progressed many things changed on the island of Ireland and returning ex-servicemen changed the map of what many places looked like.

As what was to become the British-Irish war escalated in 1919 that Irish committee chaired by Long came up with a new Bill – the Fourth Home Rule Bill of 1919 which represented the biggest new initiative on Ireland since 1886.

It was effectively a new bill, a Bill for the partition of Ireland creating two new entities to be called Northern and Southern Ireland and it was for these entities that elections were to be held.

Its key novelty lay in this intention to establish two limited devolved entities on the island of Ireland which would remain within the UK and Empire, but the imperative from the government's point of view was to establish the new Northern Ireland immediately and make it a fact on the ground.

Time was spent all through 1919 discussing with James Craig rather than Carson if the new entity should be four, six or nine counties. It was effectively Craig's call. My key point here is that once this Government of Ireland Act is in train, guiding steering and shaping what a partitioned northern entity might look like and be shaped like was effectively Craig's call.

Once decided, the provision for administration was in train. The basic structure of a devolved administration was in place from shortly even before the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 was passed. Thus in the words of Ronan Fanning 'Partition ... would be imposed by the British, but the ending of partition would be a matter for the Irish'.

The Government of Ireland Act had a second reading in the House of Commons on 24 Feb 1920, and on 10 March 1920 the Ulster Unionist Council endorsed the Bill, with Carson in the chair. This decision was a key one since it effectively indicated what the lie of the border would be. It was said that this would take Ulster out of the Irish question 'which it has blocked for a generation' and it would take Ireland out of English party controversies. Bonar Law was asked 'Will Ulster bit be put in place if the bill is rejected by 'the rest of Ireland?' 'Most certainly' was his reply.

By the time the Government of Ireland Act, often referred to as the Fourth Home

Rule Bill, an act effectively for the partition of Ireland, became effective on 3 May 1921, Craig thought he could feel secure. He had Sir Ernest Clark in the Scottish Provident Building by the side of City Hall already in place with an embryonic structure of administration in place. The future of basing administration in Cabin Hill was apparently safe as a short-term measure.

But things in Ulster were not as smooth as they had seemed. Elections under PR to local government elections had produced a Nationalist mayor of Londonderry. It had also produced a large majority for nationalists in that city and in many areas like Fermanagh and Tyrone.

While PR was widely canvassed as a means of protecting minorities it was 'first past the post' as an electoral system that proto-partitioned Ireland before 1920. In other words the 'first past the post' system obscured, hid or just buried minorities from representation all over Ireland. Substantial Unionist electorates in Munster and Leinster were incapable of returning a member; similarly nationalists in Ulster. But the local elections of 1920 with PR revealed the true state of demographics on the ground and made the partition line even more problematic before it was drawn. Tyrone and Fermanagh had nationalist county majorities but 'first past the post' in constituencies not congruent with the counties masked this fact.

The vicious sectarian activities in Londonderry and Belfast in Lisburn and Bangor were difficult for Craig to deal with. But the problem was a double-edged sword. The threat that Ulster would fight was what had secured the road to partition, but too heavy a manifestation of new Specials fighting in Ulster itself against local Catholics or expelling them from shipyards was not the image Craig wishes to project to London.

Hence the early establishment of Specials even before the opening of the Northern Ireland parliament by the King in on 3 May 1921 can be seen initially as part of the same process that led to the recruitment of Black and Tans and Auxiliaries in the rest of Ireland. Unlike in the rest of Ireland the recruited tended to be local and almost from the beginning were not under the control of the Royal Irish Constabulary. In the hiatus period after the end of the RIC and the beginning of the Royal Ulster Constabulary the proto-Specials really bedded down.

But this warring over the representation sources of and responsibility for violence in Ulster was to dog Craig for years. Even if the IRA were active the proportion of Catholic deaths at the hands of security forces and nameless others was very disproportionate. The IRA were active and counter gangs confronted shipyard workers

in these years but the scale of deaths on ‘both sides’ was highly disproportionate with Catholics being predominantly those who were burnt out or driven out of their homes.

Nadia Dobryanska, a brilliant graduate student, has pointed out that there is great division in how the respective newspapers report activities against ‘their side’. So the newspapers themselves function as bearers of ‘false news’ to their ‘own sides’ frequently reporting only what is done to ‘their own people’. So if you read the *Telegraph* for example you would believe that all that was going on in Belfast was IRA attacks on state forces while if you read the *Irish News* it is all about the pogrom against the Nationalist Catholic areas backed up by State and Specials.

Craig insisted in communications with London that all attacks on Catholics in shipyards and other places were a response to IRA attacks. IRA attacks did mount up especially in 1922 which we can discuss but it is important to recall that the game changed radically after the signing of the Anglo-Irish treaty in December 1921.

The Treaty of 1921 was negotiated by a team apparently negotiating on behalf of all of Ireland and provided for specific Ulster counties to move to exclude themselves from the terms of that Treaty by December 1922. So this changed the game radically for Craig. He had assumed the battle was won when he had secured six counties in that symbolic moment of the King’s Speech in May 21. But now after the Truce that followed that, never very evident in Ulster in any case, the whole stability he thought he had won for his new entity was thrown up in the air.

Lloyd George infuriatingly seems to open up the so-called partition question again. He has conceded the right of Collins and Griffith to negotiate on behalf of the island of Ireland. The crucial clauses of the Treaty Article 12 provides for a Boundary Commission that at least in theory can consult the wishes of the inhabitants in the light of economic and geographic conditions – unspecified – and can potentially change the lie of the border.

So, Craig’s aims are not over – his job begins again.

This was infuriating for Craig and rather gave the lie to his previous sense of security. Clause 12 of the Treaty which provided for consultation with the wishes of the inhabitants through a potential boundary commission gave Craig pause; he worried that the nationalist majority counties of Tyrone and Fermanagh could slip away and that his whole new territory was potentially in jeopardy. He was careful never again to relax as he had during the Treaty negotiations, and he successfully used the murder and mayhem in the new Northern Ireland over the following two years to secure further

military supplies and licence from London in the name of security.

This is the context through which we can understand the Craig-Collins pacts of early 1922. What were Craig and Collins doing? What was the role of Tallents? Why did Craig actually think of enlisting Catholics en masse into the new Specials?

30 March 1922 Craig – Collins, ‘Peace is today declared’.

They announce a ‘reformed non-sectarian Northern Ireland in exchange for an end to IRA violence’.

They announce a mixed police force and Conciliation Committees based on those of the autumn of 1920.

What did he think of them in any case? Were they there to give jobs and security to the discontented? How well vetted had they been? To whom were they answerable?

Henry Patterson’s recent paper on the burning and driving out of Catholic businesses from Bangor suggests that this was responded to by a Unionist idea that Specials or their equivalents were potentially protection for Catholics. How was this so far at variance with the view that most Catholics took of them and Brown Square barracks in particular?

And how did Craig manoeuvre through 1922? We know that he is rescued by the full outbreak of civil war in ‘the South’ which takes the focus off what was happening in Northern Ireland. But we also know that in the first eight months of 1922 there is serious consideration in LONDON TO NOT GIVING Craig all that he needs to keep his new regime steady.

He may not get all the money he requests from London, but he does manage to secure a security apparatus and special legislation that effectively permits him to lock down the north.

The Boundary Commission would end the partition process; but that was not to be until 1925. Security and the campaign to resist the Boundary Commission consume Craig until 1925.

Zoom discussion chaired by Deirdre Mac Bride

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] Thank you, Margaret, that was stunning. Can I invite any questions?

[**Jim McDermott**] You were saying that Craig, personally, was not a bigot, and certainly he was on good social terms with people like Joe Devlin. His emphasis on the damage done by the IRA was political, he was largely out of control of those forces he was supposed to be in control of. But he certainly was partisan. Michael Farrell's quote was that he said the people of Ulster have suffered more – and he meant Protestant people – than any other people; he was playing to the gallery perhaps. But he was playing to the gallery in October 1920 in a turners' yard, I think, when they unveiled a huge Union Jack, and he said "Do I approve of the work you boys have done? I say 'yes'." Now, that would strike me as not only partisan but actually supporting the shipyard and other expulsions.

[**Margaret O'Callaghan**] I wouldn't dispute that he was a ferociously committed Unionist, so he is definitely partisan, there's no doubt about that. He's an imperialist, and St John Ervine, in his biography, builds him up as the prototype of the 'Ulsterman', but really the Protestant Ulsterman. I don't know if he was, or if he wasn't, a bigot. A lot of people said that personally he wasn't. I would deem it to be perfectly possible for him to be a screamingly partisan Unionist supporter of what he could get for Ulster, and not necessarily be a bigot. But the biographies are so poor. St John Ervine says he isn't, but I'm not sure what that means.

[**Jim McDermott**] He got on very well with Joe Devlin and he gave lands for an extension to the Mater Hospital, and things like that.

[**Margaret O'Callaghan**] There are letters from Prominent Catholic businessmen in Belfast saying he has been of assistance to them. Obviously he's playing his political cards to maximise holding what he's got... 'not an inch', but I think he has

worries about how to deal with the Specials at different times. But if, on the other hand, they are required, then they are required. His primary worry is how it looks to London. So in that he's almost like Terence O'Neill, and understands that's where the decisions are made; he always keeps his eye on that ball.

[**Connal Parr**] Hi Margaret, I really enjoyed that. What I wanted to ask you... you reference an interesting point, the lack of sources, which I think is connected to the differing newspaper angle points which you made as well. It is very telling, and I know you have used the word 'moratorium' before when discussing the way the Troubles are discussed in a later generation, especially in the South; there's a sort of moratorium is there not? It's fascinating that there's a rash of unionist memories and books and publications in the lead up to around about 1912 to 1914, and then it really dries up, doesn't it? But Protestant and Unionist memories writing about the period from 1918 to about 1922 – there are very few accounts.

[**Margaret O'Callaghan**] Probably. I suppose someone like Gillian McIntosh or Patrick Maume would write about ways of representing the 'Ulsterman', but that's more in fiction than in history. It is quite interesting that St John Ervine's biography of Craig is written during the Second World War, and he's constantly putting the boot into what he call 'Eireans', as if they are some kind of strange species from another planet.

[**Connal Parr**] Graham Walker says that that in itself is reflective of a certain Unionist mentality. But it is a weird book and it's a gas to read in lots of ways. I'm interested in this point as to how you actually look into investigating the shipyard expulsions up to Partition, and that grassroots Unionist vision of what's going on in 1920 to 1922, for it's something which is so hard to get at... and that is why I was looking to newspapers to get into the guts of that period.

[**Margaret O'Callaghan**] Well, it's quite a shameful history, isn't it? Through the Bureau of Military History in Ireland we've got every IRA guy announcing, "I killed so-and-so, I did such-and-such..." so you can go "Oh my God!" But we don't have

any equivalence. Like: who were the people who did burn people out of their houses, who did all of this? We still don't have a proper history of that period. We have some recent work, like Jim McDermott's work, or that chap Magill on East Ulster, and my interest at the moment is getting more files opened. And I'm not even sure it's the problem of getting files open, there are a lot of files open, with which we could do a lot more than historians have done. I can understand why during the Troubles people didn't want to say: listen, there were Troubles here before and they were worse, they were shorter but they were worse. I remember when I was doing research on the Boundary Commission quite a while ago, people were saying to me: what do you want to dig up all that stuff for again? Which is kind of hard to hear if you are a historian!

They are not pleasant things; Belfast was not a pleasant place, very ugly things happened. It's quite interesting that had the Civil War not broken out by the summer of '22, London is increasingly worried about whether any stability can be maintained here, so a commitment that Craig thinks he has already got – of the British staying tight around them – mightn't look as secure. But it's all of a piece, for civil war breaks out down South because the British, Churchill in particular, give Collins the guns and ammunition to attack the Four Courts. I do think you need to look at the North and the South together.

[**Connal Parr**] It's fascinating that's it that perception of it being an ignoble episode in affairs in the North...

[**Margaret O'Callaghan**] It's a very frightening situation for Catholics. Nobody else wants to boast about it. It was just kind of buried.

[**Connal Parr**] As you say, the violence on the IRA side in the rest of Ireland is a level of valorisation, if anything, of that violence, and through memoirs and through books, and people writing about it later on...

[**Margaret O'Callaghan**] You could say it was valorised, with all that kind of Dan Breen *My fight for Irish freedom* stuff, but I think that if you look at the work that

people like Ann Dolan and Trinity are doing on these memoirs now, I don't think they really are being valorised, I think people are looking at them and saying: "And you did *what!*" Like Martin Corry; it really doesn't put people in that great a light when you look at many of the accounts. But at least they're there, at least you have some idea what people thought and did and said. I think that at a high political level there is obvious stuff you could do here on the early twenties. Which is why I'm trying to look at Craig, because nobody else seems to be bothered looking at him.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] Could I ask you two questions, Margaret. One is... you alluded to the question of when do the Specials really come into being. I grew up in a border county and we got stopped outside the house in the sixties and asked where are you going, and you knew nothing about it, but you knew there was a story to tell. And the second question is around, in that period between '20 and '25, presumably there are a lot of administrative decisions being made that start to shape who's in and who's out. Are those files open, or are they researched, and what do they tell us?

[**Margaret O'Callaghan**] I touch on some of that in the Boundary Commission article I did, but I wrote that when I was not here, okay, and I am planning on spending the whole summer in the Public Records Office here. But decisions were made... if you look at Brian Barton's book on Fermanagh, for example, Brookeborough is organising people, they are not necessarily former UVF, not necessarily ex-servicemen, but they are Protestant men in Fermanagh, so he is proto-organising them, I think from 1920. There are analogous groups that Wickham is trying to... I am trying to piece it together for myself. Would you agree, Richard, that it is not very comprehensively told, that story?

[**Richard Grayson**] Yes, I would. We were talking about the lack of source material about who was involved in Unionist/Loyalist paramilitarism/part-time policing in the early twenties and there is a lack of material in comparison with what we can reconstruct about republicanism, based on the various pension files and medal rolls,

so I would agree with you there. I had a question about Unionist identity, which you might be able to reflect on. I have been doing various pieces of media around the Centenary, and one of the things that often comes up is the development of an ‘Ulster’ identity, as distinct from an Irish identity. I would commonly date the start of that process from the publication of the First Home Rule Bill, when you do get mention of Ulster resistance, and then I would look forward to the formation of the Ulster Unionist Council in 1905 as the next stepping stone of the fragmentation within Unionism. But thinking about somebody like Craig, and perhaps other senior Unionists, what would you say about how they begin to think of themselves, when they spent much of their political careers in a polity that is about *Ireland* being part of the UK, and with no sense of the separation of Ulster, and also where you see aspects of Irishness continue among the Unionists after the First World War. How would you talk about that journey that they go on?

[Margaret O’Callaghan] Well, it is quite interesting, sorry to keep going back to St John Ervine, but he is writing in the forties, and by the forties he is very anxious to say Craig was ‘blood of their blood’, this kind of proto-Scoto language, it is a ‘Scottishising’ of Ulster, which St John Ervine seems to be one of the leaders of the pack on. And that enormous house, Glencraig; Craig was an unbelievably wealthy man, and it was his father’s distillery, Dunville... is that the one on the Falls, so would he have had a largely Catholic workforce?

[Jim McDermott] It would have been a mixed workforce.

[Margaret O’Callaghan] That is quite interesting. He is Presbyterian isn’t he, they educate their sons in Scotland, and then you have the Londonderrys who are completely different, they are like an aristocracy... and what sense of identity did your average small farmer in Cavan or Tyrone have, who was Protestant? I haven’t a clue. The best book on it is Frank Wright’s *Two Lands on One Soil*. It is really on nineteenth-century rural Ireland, and is looking at mentalities of ‘ordinary people’ when they are dragged in to give evidence before commissions or something.

Somebody like Gillian McIntosh would say this hyper-Ulsterising is a post-'21 beefing-up of an attempt to create an identity, for 'Ulsteria', or Northern Ireland, or whatever you want to call it. And of course there are all kinds of disappearances. What about all these women who were related to Unionist families like the Brookes, many of whom would have been in the Gaelic League. What happens to all these people? Is every single Presbyterian in Ulster passionately committed to the Covenant? I don't know, and it is not very easy ... and I just don't know if that's just my ignorance, or there is some gap in the historiography.

I had a student about eight years ago trying to do stuff on Presbyterianism – as a religion – and politics around this period, and a lot of my colleagues were quite critical of that. But I thought: why not? And what was coming out in the sermons... the whole notion of colonial or non-colonial was so controversial during the Troubles, because if you said “Oh, it's a colonial situation”, then people assumed you must support the IRA, for they were “the only other people who say that”. But if you look at the preachings within the Presbyterian church from 1910, 1911 onwards, it is all about “we are set here as a people”, it is about Plantation and being brought to another place, and being the forces of ‘civilisation’ and ‘culture’ and ‘superiority’ here, that is very pervasive. So I would say: analysing church sermons, you get an insight into the mentality of at least how some people see themselves. I also think it has much to do with class and background; and also the so-called sectarianism of the North seems to be very different in different places, and seems to depend upon balance of population. Like obviously the worst place is Belfast in 1920, '21, maybe not.

[**Jim McDermott**] I agree with you. We don't know the routes of what happened, and why people took such a strong position. What we *do* know is that the means of communication became very binary: there were two sets of stories, there was a nationalist experience and there was a unionist experience, and never the twain shall meet. The labour organisations were effectively emasculated from the 1920 expulsions onwards. The danger of that is that you can quickly fail to see any trees

for the woods. For example, you were talking about the Craig family. They were partners in Dunville Whisky, the biggest whisky firm in the world, which was totally, passionately unionist. They also had this philanthropic decent side; the Redburn where they lived, their zoo, formed Belfast Zoo; they put in Dunville Park which previously was Dunville Fields.

[Margaret O’Callaghan] Did the Craigs do this?

[Jim McDermott] No, the Dunville family did this. They had a mixed workforce and all, which might not have to do with the Craig family. The Craigs were partners in Dunville...

[Margaret O’Callaghan] And do the Craigs take over Dunville, is that what happens?

[Jim McDermott] I don’t think so. The Dunville family were in many ways what you could have called liberal unionists, up until the rise of Parnell, and Dunville Park was a local amenity in what was largely a Catholic area, but it was also a break from the violence of the 1880s. And that indicates to me a far-sightedness, a decency. One of the stories about Craig was that the bonded warehouse of Dunville’s was just opposite St Malachy’s chapel. And he reputedly sent a boy over to the priest and asked him to muffle the church bells. And the priest said “Why?” “It’s destroying the whisky, it’s taking the whole taste off it.” And they did. And everyone thought this story was just a myth but James O’Hagan’s book said that when men were doing work on St Malachy’s chapel they found all these mattresses and ropes, possibly used to still the bells. Now, I am sure money or even drink passed palms as compensation but it indicates a broadness in ways all round.

But I think the big thing was: when the weapons are out everything changes. When a side was taken the other side became the enemy, and, in the case of nationalists, unionists were the enemy, and easily conflated with Protestants. The same with unionists, who wanted their own state with an ascendancy, essentially a

Protestant political economy, according to Austin Morgan. Nationalists, not just the IRA, because the biggest enemy up until 1916 was Home Rule. One thing I would like to ask: I was watching that programme with Michael Portillo on 1921, and I was unaware of the extent to which Bonar Law was in support of not passing the Army Bill, which would have meant that there was no army at all, if it had've been passed, at the outset, of the Great War. And I am wondering was that bluff, or were they prepared to go to that extent to try and copper-fasten their position on Partition, separate treatment for Ulster? Bonar Law and the Conservatives were willing to bring down the Liberal Party too, but were they willing to do that, not to sign the Army Bill?

[Richard Grayson] I think that across the period that there is a strong element in Unionist thinking in Great Britain that ultimately the British Army will not be prepared to fight against Unionists, if they go for a provisional government, and I think that they felt that the language of provisional government, the legalistic terminology involved in it, and the extent to which major establishment figures would have been involved in any kind of Ulster provisional government was ultimately the thing which will secure an Ulster Provisional government without bloodshed. But it was clear that they thought that they had to threaten bloodshed to secure that. It is a key part of their threat. Obviously one can't be sure, but I think that if you had managed to get senior unionists in Great Britain to talk about what they expected to happen the likelihood of violence would have been very low for them.

[Jim McDermott] But surely, Richard, the very fact that they were willing to take that risk... If you look at the Great War itself; it was not a carefully planned, choreographed event, where the world gets torn apart and empires fall. As in the title of that book *The Sleepwalkers*, our own local situation could easily have been sleepwalked.

[Richard Grayson] I suppose I would come back to say that they would have thought that it was unlikely rather than impossible. And they are prepared to take

that risk, but that's... remember that ultimately this has been the defining issue of politics in Great Britain since the late 1880s, to the extent that the Liberal Party have split and people have taken on the name Unionist. I think it is easy to forget now how much of an organising principle the defence of the Union was across British politics for a thirty-year period. And it is easy to assume that the general lack of interest in Ireland that we see in the one hundred years since then is something that applied prior to Partition, but actually it's the organising principle for the Conservative Party, which ultimately becomes the 'Conservative and Unionist Party', and they call themselves that. And when Austen Chamberlain is leader of that party in the early twenties he is a liberal unionist by background, he's come to that organisation from the liberal unionist part, he has not been a conservative, and his family were not conservatives originally. I think that the extent to which defence of the Union is really important for those kinds of people is easy to overlook now. Would they be willing to risk violence? Yes. They would think it is unlikely but they would expect that they wouldn't have to use it. But it is really fundamental to the political philosophies of a lot of politicians in Westminster. These are not people who are messing about with Ireland as would happen over the next century; these are people who have joined the party whose name is Unionist, and it has in many cases caused them to leave the Liberal Party; it is really fundamental for them.

[**Margaret O'Callaghan**] It is quite interesting though that you could argue that there is a lack of interest in Ireland in the period, which sits alongside his huge commitment to the Union, because it's not Ireland itself they have an interest in, it's what Ireland means for the Empire. It doesn't mean they have the slightest interest in Irish people at all, it's just an essential part of what constitutes the essence of being at the centre of the Empire. So you can easily have it co-exist with *no interest* in the place. It's another argument for Partition in a way because any kind of removal from the Union is problematic, but if you retain Northern Ireland it kind of doesn't look that bad. At least they can keep 'Great Britain and Northern Ireland'. A lot of British

attitudes to Ireland are due to an unwillingness to accept that it became an independent state. And you can see a lot of that in the Brexit debate. And the Tories are still jumping up and down screaming about the Union, and I'm not sure that they have any interest in the place either.

[Richard Grayson] I do agree with that, Margaret, but I would make a contrast with the Conservative Party now. There is undoubtedly a small element that attaches a lot of importance to the Union, and some of them even understand it. For some of them it is simply a wider expression of British nationalism, but I'm talking about an entire generation of politicians, to whom the ending of the Union would have been a traumatic experience, and I don't think you can say that now for the vast bulk of Conservatives.

[Margaret O'Callaghan] And to back up your position, actually, look at someone like Arthur Balfour and people who had spent years in Dublin Castle, going back and forth, mentoring people like Carson, so they are deeply involved in it.

[Richard Grayson] And this is a party who not that long ago put somebody in the position of Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who thought it was news to people, and expressed surprise, that Unionists and Nationalists don't vote for each other's parties! That's the depth of ignorance, and the lack of emotional engagement among people who could rise to that position.

[Jim McDermott] I think one of the reasons that there was so much involvement back in 1920 and which was so different from now, was that people had come through a war, people were used to violence across the world, it wasn't unique to Ulster, it was there in Germany and Hungary and so on, people were using violence for political ends. But most of all the economic reasons. The economic reasons for the retention of the Six Counties were very strong: something like four-fifths of the Exchequer of all of Ireland were delivered by the big shipyards and factories in Belfast and in the surrounding counties. So there was strong economic argument: why should we give that up? It was also before India, which was still part of the

Empire, Canada was still part of the Empire, Australia was still part. That relationship has now gone, so the level of interest correspondingly would have dipped as well. The ins and outs of the differences between the UUP and the DUP wouldn't exercise the minds of many Tory backbenchers any more.

[Deirdre Mac Bride] Is there any mileage in contrasting that with how the Conservative Party, or the Labour Party, would respond to the increasing issues around Scottish independence?

[Jim McDermott] Economically Scotland has more to offer, more than here. It is a complex issue. But the views that were held here in 1920, which determined how you viewed the 'other', have largely remained the same.

[Margaret O'Callaghan] Just in response to what you were saying, Deirdre, I think there will be a lot of resistance; I don't think that Scottish independence is going to happen easily or quickly, but that could just be me. I think it will be very strongly resisted, and isn't the done deal a lot of people think it is.

[Richard Grayson] I think things have certainly changed since the last referendum, and it's partly a product of a particular kind of prime minister who is very much a 'little Englander'. I would suggest that Johnson is even less popular in Scotland than Thatcher was and that's quite striking. And I think that the Covid situation as well has emphasised the differences between Scotland and England, not so much Northern Ireland and Wales. So, who can predict? I would at least say that the result will be considerably closer than it was last time.

[Margaret O'Callaghan] My daughter lives in Scotland and people in Scotland can't stand Johnson, and most people down south can't stand Johnson, but he is very, very popular in England, it is really interesting.

[Richard Grayson] Well, he's a Marmite figure really: the people who don't like him really can't stand him, and the people who really do like him curiously have bought into the idea that he is somehow not your typical politician. Even though

many of the worst things that are said about politicians – about them being careerists and basically only looking out for themselves – is more accurately said about Johnson than any other prime minister I can think about, actually. His whole career has been about his whole career, and self-advancement.

[Harry Donaghy] Large sections of the British Conservative Party, or the English Conservative Party of the time, saw any tolerance of forms of independence for Ireland as a great threat to the Empire. I have heard the analysis being put forward before, that the Irish Parliamentary Party basically was requesting of Britain that they treat them like Canadians or New Zealanders, or Australians, but this was seemingly impossible for Conservative opinion at the time. They could tolerate forms of Home Rule in Canada and Australia but to have that introduced in Ireland was anathema. And again in the modern context is it overblown that the new English nationalism that seems to be pervasive in British politics, that there are sections, perhaps considerably large sections, in the English political set-up who would maybe be quite glad to see the end of any association with their ‘troublesome Celtic friends’ in Scotland – and Northern Ireland being included in that.

Have those paradigms fundamentally changed from the hundred years since Partition in that regard, and how does that translate now into the place where we are here? I get slightly worried when I continually hear Unionists, of various persuasions, talk about ‘our wee country’. There is seemingly no tolerance, or no capability to understand, that this part of the island of Ireland never was, is not, and never will be, one of the English Home Counties.

[Margaret O’Callaghan] I thought the phase you are reflecting on is ‘our wee country’ isn’t that it? Isn’t that coming from Nolan [local BBC broadcaster], isn’t it?

[Harry Donaghy] It has been quite pervasive for a number of years now, but is gaining a louder resonance, as again seemingly there is another threat to Ulster’s God-given position in regard to the Union, as they see it.

[**Margaret O’Callaghan**] Maybe it’s to replace ‘our wee province’?

[**Harry Donaghy**] It is becoming into regular usage, it’s not just on the football terraces that you hear this, it has gone into the broader make-up ... And again is it real or perceived threats that seem to motivate the worst elements of Unionism? Also, I find it really irritating that in recent television documentaries on Partition you could be under the illusion – if you didn’t have an inkling at all about our history, recent and past – that somehow along at the end of the last ice age Ulster just happened to be part of that overall set-up stretching back hundreds of years. And when you get people, some of whom are trained in the law – they are barristers, they’re professional people – talking about Article 6 of the Act of Union of 1801, I mean, what sort of insanity has taken over? That the Act of Union of 1801 is being used as a precedent for challenging the Protocol, the border in the Irish Sea – which Unionists have played such a huge role in making happen? How do we circumvent all the usual nonsense and get conversations going where *everything* is up for discussion? Simply ignoring something doesn’t mean that it is not relevant or it didn’t happen...

[**Margaret O’Callaghan**] On those television programmes in which I was asked to contribute I tried to point out the *non-inevitability* of how things worked out. I certainly was not advocating that anything was there from time immemorial! I mean, that’s why I would be quite critical of say Charles Townsend’s book on Partition; and its contingent historical outcome... anyway, Harry, I just hope I wasn’t one of the ones doing what you claim...

[**Harry Donaghy**] No, certainly not. But it seemed to be that there was some agreed consensus on...

[**Margaret O’Callaghan**] On which? The BBC programme or the Portillo one? I thought that might have been true of the Portillo one – and that was the RTE one. However, I thought the BBC one was actually quite balanced.

[**Harry Donaghy**] My concern is that what I would label as ‘tribal scripture’ is often

being handed down to people in a way that constructs, or invents, how people see their state, or their nation...

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] But, Harry, *all* nations and all states create symbols and origin-stories about themselves...

[**Harry Donaghy**] But I am thinking specifically in relation to the concept of the Union. England's relationship with Scotland has been just as fraught, just as bloody, just as conflict-orientated as its relationship with this island. Take Queen Victoria's husband, Albert, he was instrumental in this English obsession with what is particularly Scottish. All this 'monarch of the glen', the tartans, and Scottish country dancing, type of thing – and which really looks good on shortbread tins as well – but that is basically *an English understanding of what Scotland is*, what its history is, and the difficult stuff about almost three to four hundred years of almost continuous war, kingdom against kingdom, is quietly pushed to the side. And now that English nationalism is seen to become more to dominate England's view of *itself*, how they begin to view *others around them* will be interesting to observe. And I suspect that if the troublesome Celtic fringe would disappear in a short period of time then not a lot of the English would be really worried.

[**Jim McDermott**] I am very interested in the direction this conversation has taken, because I think that's the kernel of the matter. I was over at a conference in East Belfast, and Jackie Redpath said something which I had been used to hearing people like Billy Hutchinson say – an articulate spokesman, it must be said – that “the IRA campaign was to get rid of the British presence, but they didn't allow for me, a Protestant living in the north of Ireland, for I am the British presence. How do you get rid of me?” Jackie said he grew up with the fear that “the South will try to undermine my position and I will end up in an Ireland I do not desire”. He said he used to fear that, but “as time goes by I now fear English nationalism”. And it is this old unrequited love kind of thing, the only type that lasts.

I was interested in what Richard was saying about Boris Johnson, I couldn't

agree more. The Tory grandees like Max Hastings sort of point out, and Jeremy Paxman also says, that Johnson is totally self-interested, but yet he strikes a chord within English nationalism, effectively English particularism. And it could drive us out of the Union, we don't know which way it is going to go. If it comes down to pounds, shilling and pence and looking at how the Brexit debate soured political discourse, they might say: why should we afford to pay that, it doesn't look as if there is going to be any economic miracle as there has been in the nineteenth century in the area around Belfast. It is quite expensive, life is becoming very difficult for everybody, and you can't afford to be sentimental. I can see that sort of reasoning coming in more and more, especially if the Tories manage to establish a permanent majority, getting electoral boundaries organised to their advantage. I think that that is the situation. I think it has been the biggest change. There would always have been a certain amount of jingoism, but now it has had become more particular, and nasty, there's a feeling of 'me first, me first', and I really do think it is a serious worry. And I am not trying to look down my nose at the Union, but I can see Unionist concerns over this all right.

[Deirdre Mac Bride] Margaret or Richard, would either of you like to respond, and is the current debate around the future of the Union, as in Scotland, England and Wales, and in particular Northern Ireland, becoming a bit like the dominance of the conversation that, Richard, you talked about – the Union being the organising principle for thirty years – or is that just a false analogy? Or are we just becoming overly concerned about something which will drift away?

[Margaret O'Callaghan] I don't think that political forces in Britain particularly want the break-up of the Union. It may look like that at the moment but I would be pretty surprised, but that's just my opinion. I can see that Boris Johnson doesn't help... Also, England's idea of itself is so bound up with this notion of the United Kingdom, all the jokes about the Celtic salt leavening whatever... I mean, to rebirth England, what are you going to do? Go back to the sixteenth century? I can't

imagine... I'm sure you could do a kind of revivalist thing like here in the 1890s, I just don't see what it looks like. Demographically I don't really see it anyway. I see the United Kingdom attempting politically to keep itself together if possible.

[Richard Grayson] Englishness has certainly grown very significantly since the mid-1990s, and it did that in response to the growth of calls for devolution, to Scotland and Wales initially, and of course Northern Ireland's devolution came about for different reasons. Don't underestimate the importance of sport here as well. There was a confluence of the devolution debate and also the Euro '96 tournament, when both England and Scotland qualified and this led to a very significant increase in the use of the English flag. If you want to see how big and rapid the change was, if you look back at footage of the England–West Germany semi-final in the 1990 World Cup, most of the flags displayed by the England fans were Union flags, English flags were very rare. Indeed, the only place I really ever recall seeing English flags as I was growing up was on the top of Church of England churches, and that's where it was commonly used. But when England and Scotland both qualified in '96 it led to a ... and of course they played each other... it led to a reflection on: well, what *is* England's flag, and I think it gave the symbolic manifestation to an undercurrent because of the assertiveness of Scotland and Wales. Then, of course, in the late '90s, when Scotland and Wales get their devolution, as does Northern Ireland, and people start asking: well, what about England?

And I think then you had a reduction of the confusion that Margaret was alluding to, about how an English identity was pretty much seen as interchangeable with a British identity, and the terms were just used interchangeably in England. Now, part of the response to that by the then Labour government was to talk about regional devolution within England, but they only got to the point of having one referendum on that, and that was for an assembly in the north-east, and the Conservatives managed to portray it as another layer of bureaucracy rather than an expression of any identity. So that project for regionalising England, as an answer to devolution, failed.

I would say there are huge problems with English identity, because I am sure that the people, for example, living in English cities, have as much in common with people living in cities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as they do with people living in rural areas or towns which make up a very significant part of England outside the cities. So I think it is very strong, English identity, now, and I think that I am less certain than Margaret that the political establishment want to cling on to the 'UK', because, let's face it, if you're a Conservative in England, shedding Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland means more or less permanent Conservative government in England.

[Deirdre Mac Bride] Thank you, Margaret and Richard. I am conscious of the time and that we have to end the discussion now. I don't think we have digressed away from Margaret's talk but I think we have continued that discussion to the present, and it has made us think about how do these states come into being, or what happens underneath the surface.

[Margaret O'Callaghan] I just wanted to say that I enjoyed the discussion, and thank you for inviting me, and it's been a pleasure.

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