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FREEMASONRY IN ULSTER, 1733 - 1813

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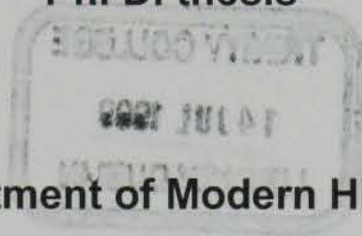
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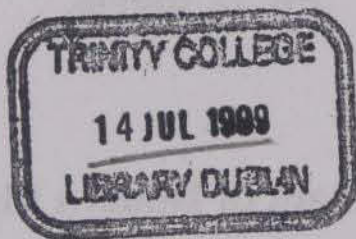
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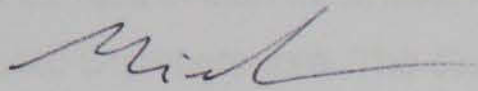
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28 March 1999

SUMMARY

Freemasonry in Ulster, 1733 - 1813

Petri Mirala

This thesis is a study of both the social and political history of freemasonry in Ulster from 1733 to 1813. The period commences when the first warrant for a masonic lodge was issued for a lodge to be held in Ulster. It concludes with the end of a seven-year split in Irish freemasonry and the resignation in 1813 of a controversial grand master, Lord Donoughmore. The study is partly based on masonic records previously unused by academic historians.

An estimated 12 000 - 14 000 men belonged to masonic lodges in Ulster in 1792-93 and perhaps 20 000 were members in 1800. In addition to the secret rituals and convivial gatherings, the masonic lodge had many other roles. The lodge provided a measure of social security for the members and their dependants, sought to instil a code of "respectable" behaviour and arbitrated in disputes between its members. The annual St. John's Day parades displayed masonic ceremonial and symbolism to the wider community.

The masonic ideology was open to many interpretations and the brotherhood was not immune to the political, sectarian or class divisions of the Ulster society. For instance, different lodges often catered for different social classes. There was also a significant number of Catholic freemasons, although some lodges refused to admit any Catholic members. In addition, there were "irregular" or "hedgemasons", lower-class groups of masons not affiliated to the Grand Lodge of Ireland.

Freemasonry first had a political role to play during the 1776 general election. Probably inspired by the example of American freemasonry, many Ulster lodges developed close links with "patriot politics" and the emerging Volunteers. The high point of masonic involvement in politics was the winter of 1792-93, when dozens of lodges took sides over the issues of Catholic emancipation and parliamentary reform. The politically best organised counties were Armagh and Tyrone: Armagh was dominated by conservatives, Tyrone by reformers.

Contrary to the common assumption, the loyalists were more successful than the United Irishmen in using masonry for their political ends from the mid-1790s onwards.

There were two varieties of masonic loyalism. Some "regular" lodges (particularly in Co. Armagh) helped found armed loyalist associations in 1795-96 while a lower-class, "irregular" or "hedgemasonic" element organised Orange societies.

Although the Orange leadership soon began to stress the separate identity of the Orange Order, the form taken by their organisation was strongly influenced by the time and place where it was first created - near Loughgall in 1795. In the interim between the disbanding of the Volunteers and the raising of the yeomanry, the masonic-style brotherhood was the most efficient form of organisation available to the early Orangemen. They were well acquainted with freemasonry: the large cluster of masonic lodges around Loughgall was unique by Irish, Ulster, or even Co. Armagh standards.

Although there is no doubt that freemasonry did influence organisations such as the Defenders, Orangemen and Ribbonmen, the extent and some of the details of this influence are often misunderstood. It has become commonplace to refer to various features of these movements as "masonic" based on the writer's own impression of what is masonic - without much study of what freemasonry was like in the past. This misconception works in two ways: phenomena that were widespread in the eighteenth-century Ireland - the swearing of oaths, for example - have since become "masonic" in popular imagination. On the other hand, features such as the public processions that were definitely "masonic" at the time, are not perceived as such since they are no longer practised by masons.

The thesis is organised in thematic chapters (nos. 3-10) covering issues such as the numbers involved in freemasonry, social and religious divisions, the functions of the local lodges, their political involvement and the 1806-13 split in Irish freemasonry. These chapters are followed by case studies on two Ulster towns (Newry and Aughnacloy, chapter 11) which serve to illustrate that Ulster freemasonry was not a homogenous movement and that local circumstances were often more important than rules and principles of the fraternity.

ABBREVIATIONS

- AQC = *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum. Transactions of Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076.*
- BNL = *Belfast News-Letter*
- CC = *The Lodge of Research No. CC., Ireland. Transactions.*
- GLI = Grand Lodge of Ireland, Dublin.
- GOLI = Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland, Belfast.
- IHS = *Irish Historical Studies.*
- IMR = Crossle, Philip: *Irish masonic records* (ed. by R. E. Parkinson); n.l. 1973: publ. by the Grand Lodge of Ireland.
- LHL = Linen Hall Library, Belfast.
- NLI = National Library of Ireland, Dublin.
- PGL = provincial grand lodge
- PRONI = Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast.
- Reb. = Rebellion Papers (620 series). National Archives, Dublin.
- Register = Register of Members, Grand Lodge of Ireland.
- Regulations of 1768 = regulations approved by the Grand Lodge of Ireland in 1768, reprinted in all their books of constitutions such as the *Ahiman Rezon*. Also published as *Rules, orders and regulations, for the better government of the most antient and honourable fraternity of free and accepted masons of the kingdom of Ireland....*
- RIA = Royal Irish Academy, Dublin.
- TCD = Trinity College (University of Dublin).
- UCD = University College Dublin (National University of Ireland).
- UFTM = Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, Cultra, Co. Down.

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This thesis would not have been written without five people in particular. My supervisor, Professor Louis M. Cullen, drew my attention to the uncharted waters of eighteenth-century freemasonry in Ireland and has provided help and support in ways too numerous to mention.

Without An tOllamh Anders Ahlqvist of NUI Galway, I probably would not have come to study in Ireland in the first place. He has helped in a variety of ways - far beyond the call of duty.

Professor Matti Viikari (1943 - 1994) of the University of Helsinki had a profound knowledge of the emerging public sphere in eighteenth-century European society. I very much regret that he did not live to see this thesis completed.

Like all the students of Irish masonic history, I am indebted to Ms Alex Ward, the curator of the Grand Lodge of Ireland museum, whom I have troubled with my requests so many times.

My dear spouse Laura Tuomi had to be prepared to discuss eighteenth-century freemasonry at any time, day or night, for four years. If she was bored, she hid it very well. I hope she finds it worth all the trouble.

I am grateful also to Mr John Ashby (United Grand Lodge of England), Prof. Tom Bartlett and Ms Gillian O'Brien (UCD), Dr Allan Blackstock and Prof. Peter Jupp (QUB), Prof. Stephen C. Bullock (WPI, Massachusetts) Mr David Cargo and Mr Cecil Kilpatrick (Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland), Commander Keith Cochrane (Belfast), Dr David Dickson and Prof. David Fitzpatrick (TCD), Ms Anna-Maria Hajba (Doneraile, Co. Cork), Ms Jessica Harland-Jacobs (Duke University), Mr Leslie V. Johnston (Provincial Grand Lodge of Armagh), Dr James Kelly (St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra), Mr Barry Lyons (Grand Lodge of Ireland), Prof. H. Real (Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität, Münster), Dr Breandán MacSuibhne (University of Stirling) and his late partner Ms Eibhlín Ní Chnámhsí and to all those who contributed comments and criticisms of papers given at various seminars and conferences. Needless to say, the willingness of many freemasons to help an outsider was of crucial importance in bringing this study to completion.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. The scope of this thesis

This study originally started to grow out of issues raised in my M. A. thesis. In that thesis¹ I studied the various elements in eighteenth-century Irish society that contributed to the way the Orange Order acquired its distinctive organisation and ideology. In the course of that research, it became apparent that freemasonry was among the most significant - if also the least studied - of those factors. Although that was my original starting point, in the present thesis I have attempted to avoid a common tendency among historians of Ireland to study freemasonry just as a footnote in the history of other organisations such as the Volunteers, the United Irishmen, the Defenders, or the Orange Order. Freemasonry in eighteenth-century Ireland appears to have been an important social movement in its own right and deserves to be studied as such.

Taking freemasonry itself as the starting point does not preclude examining its links with other organisations, of course. Indeed, several chapters will be devoted to establishing the significance of Ulster freemasons and freemasonry in politics since its first recorded involvement in the 1770s and to the legacy of freemasonry to other movements. However, in order to avoid superficial conclusions on such matters, the primary goal will be establishing what and how widespread freemasonry was in late eighteenth-century Ulster. Surprisingly, historians have not tried to establish what sort of numbers and what type of people were involved. Many individual lodges have been studied, usually by freemasons, often members of the lodges in question. A history of the Grand Lodge of Ireland (the central administrative and regulatory body of all the Irish lodges) was published in the 1920s.² To date, no detailed study of freemasonry in a whole Irish county or province - not to mention the whole of Ireland - has been attempted.

As regards academic research, it is not an exaggeration to say that the received wisdom on other than political aspects of Irish and specifically Ulster freemasonry (such as numbers and social composition of membership) has consisted of a single footnote

¹ Mirala, Petri: "Orangemen and freemasons. Masonic influences on the organization, ideology, symbols and rituals of the early Orange Order in Ireland, 1795 - 1836". (M. A. thesis, University of Helsinki, 1993). Some of the arguments put forward in the 1993 thesis are repeated in chapters 10.3.-10.4. of this thesis.

written by Peter Gibbon in 1972. Gibbon writes that firstly, his impression is that Irish freemasonry would have been less aristocratic in the social composition of its membership than British and secondly, that many members in Ulster were artisans.³ This thesis cannot be an attempt to prove or challenge Gibbon's assumption about Britain, as not enough research data exists for either country to allow such a comparison. I hope to throw some light on Gibbon's second assumption, however - studying who the eighteenth-century Ulster freemasons were does contribute towards our knowledge of both Irish freemasonry as a whole and eighteenth-century Irish society in general.

If the quantitative significance of freemasonry in eighteenth-century Irish history has not received the attention it deserves, neither have the activities of the freemasons and their lodges been looked into in detail. Political historians have only been interested in the few occasions when the freemasons appeared on the political scene. These moments are just the tip of the iceberg, however - what lies beneath them is a complex network of activities that should be of interest to the social historian, perhaps to the sociologist and the folklorist as well. Consequently, the focus of much of this thesis is on local lodges as part of their local communities rather than on the high politics of the grand lodge in Dublin.

The reasons for limiting the scope of this thesis to one Irish province is dictated by several factors. The above catalogue of research that has not been done should be a sufficient warning to anyone not to attempt too much at one time. The Irish grand lodge had issued approximately 900 lodge warrants by 1800.⁴ Collecting the numerical data from the grand lodge membership registers alone for all those lodges would have been a massive undertaking that could not have been achieved without sacrificing some of the in-depth research and case studies that I deemed essential. Although the emphasis of this study is on Ulster, parts of it may be relevant to any future study of eighteenth-century freemasonry at large or in other regions.

The choice of period covered, 1733 - 1813, may sound eccentric as the years do not correspond to any major developments in the Irish society or politics of the period. With some poetic license, they may be said to mark the rise and fall of Ulster freemasonry

² The first volume (Lepper & Crossle 1925) covers the history of the grand lodge until 1813. The second volume was delayed; it was finally published in 1957, after the death of both the original authors (Parkinson 1957).

³ Gibbon 1972, p. 162, fn. 9.

⁴ 888 consecutively numbered warrants and some re-issued ones. Unless otherwise specified, the information regarding warrants issued by the Irish grand lodge is drawn from *Irish Masonic Records* by Philip Crossle (abbreviated IMR in the footnotes).

- at least in its eighteenth-century manifestation. 1733 was the year when the Grand Lodge of Ireland granted its first warrant for a lodge to be held within the province of Ulster, the first documented instance of an organised masonic lodge in the modern sense of the word operating there. By 1813, the secession (since 1808) of a large number of Ulster lodges from the Grand Lodge of Ireland was practically over. The choice of that year is an attempt to mark a turning-point (for the worse) in the fortunes of Ulster and indeed, Irish freemasonry. After a period of rapid growth and intensive activity in various political causes by several masons and their lodges, there followed a period of division and decline. The reunification of 1813 turned out to be a pyrrhic victory: although the dissident Grand Lodge of Ulster collapsed, the masonic movement never regained its former strength. The intensified sectarian tensions of post-1798 Ireland no doubt contributed to this. Moreover, in the early 1810s, the Catholic clergy finally started enforcing the long-standing papal ban on freemasonry. Although the precise events have not been studied, many if not most of the Catholic members appear to have left the movement en masse during the early decades of the nineteenth century.

There is one exception, dictated by the availability of sources, to the above time limits. The statistical study of the numbers involved in freemasonry in Ulster (chapter 3) is limited to the years 1760 - 1800. Those years are the period covered by the first extant series of grand lodge membership registers.⁵ These registers are the only consistent, if deficient in many ways, series of eighteenth-century sources of such information. Sources for the period before 1760 are so few and scattered that any statistical analysis is impossible. Extending the statistical series beyond 1800 (e.g. to 1813 to coincide with the scope of the rest of the thesis) would require sorting out problems caused by an overlap with the second series of the register. In practice, this would mean a long and painstaking manual comparison of the two massive series of volumes - lodge by lodge, name by name. For the purposes of the objective of the chapter in question - to provide the first quantitative estimate ever of masonic membership in a whole Irish province - I realised that in the absence of computerised records, the effort required for such an exercise would outweigh any significant gain in information that might be obtained.

One more thing needs to be clarified - what this thesis is not about. I made a conscious decision not to try and trace the history of the various masonic degrees and rituals, of great interest to many freemasons but of very limited interest to others. Ritual and related matters are only discussed when relevant from a more general, social history

⁵ Abbreviated "Register" in the footnotes.

point of view. Scores of masonic enthusiasts have tackled these issues with varied success; the results of their research can be read in the various masonic journals.

1.2. A note on sources

By far the most important body of sources used in writing this thesis are masonic records: documents produced by masonic lodges including their governing body, the Grand Lodge of Ireland, and mostly deposited in masonic archives. As most of them have not been previously used by (academic) historians, some unusual and challenging methodological problems are encountered. Consequently, a review of these sources at some length is required instead of a customary paragraph in the appendices.

It is a common complaint among researchers that "there is insufficient material on [freemasonry] to develop an adequate account of its significance".⁶ However, it needs to be said that the "paucity of eighteenth-century masonic records - mainly membership lists for individual lodges and a frustratingly bald set of grand lodge minutes" bewailed by some⁷ is more apparent than real. Such observations are correct, if one is searching only for sources comparable to political correspondence or other similar sources beloved by historians. The nearest eighteenth-century Irish masonic equivalent to say, the Rebellion Papers, would have been the grand lodge correspondence, practically none of which survives. Most of the grand lodge minutes have been preserved, but by themselves they can indeed seem frustratingly bald, as the correspondence which occasioned them, and to which the minutes constantly refer, has been lost.

The other extant masonic sources were compiled for purposes very different from those of the "general" sources of the period and need to be read in conjunction with these and with one another. Perhaps the most user-friendly, if also the most voluminous of eighteenth-century set of sources are the grand lodge registers. A series of membership lists for the masonic lodges recognised by the Grand Lodge of Ireland, a register (there are several series) lists the lodges by number and under these, names and registration dates in what is roughly chronological order, of those members that the lodge reported to

⁶ Gibbon 1972, p. 162, fn. 9.

⁷ Smyth 1992, p. 87.

the grand lodge. Using the reference work *Irish Masonic Records*⁸ one can easily locate, for instance, all the lodges in a particular town and then proceed to the register.

The first series of the register, covering approximately the period from 1760 to 1800, comes in three massive bound volumes. The fourth volume has been lost, but much of the missing information can be gleaned from the appropriate volume in the second series (from c. 1800 onwards). In this study, the grand lodge registers have been used mainly for estimating the numbers of freemasons in the various lodges, towns and counties. Using the registers is not unproblematic, however: their reliability, or otherwise, will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 3.

For a real insight into eighteenth-century masonry one has to go beyond (or below) the grand lodge level and study the records of individual lodges. These usually consist of lodge minute books, accounts and bye-laws, although it is unusual to come across a complete set of all these. Many of these records have been lost over two centuries but a substantial number are preserved at the Grand Lodge of Ireland archives in Molesworth Street, Dublin. The Provincial Grand Lodge of Antrim in Rosemary Street, Belfast, seems to have become an alternative central repository for some lodges in Northern Ireland. In addition, some masonic records have been deposited in public archives.

In addition to these major collections, a wealth of material survives in masonic halls all over Ulster - most of it previously unused, except by local masonic historians. These documents are still in the possession of individual lodges and for access to them, one has to apply to the lodge in question. The use of these documents is also hampered by the fact that no one has yet attempted to list comprehensively the old masonic documents scattered in the records of the local lodges.

For this thesis, the writer has attempted to trace all pre-1813 masonic documents originating within the nine Ulster counties that could be located. Unfortunately, the early documents of many lodges have been lost. Some have been lost in fires, many forgotten and lost when the lodge ceased to meet and some apparently destroyed in deliberate attacks on masonic halls during the post-1969 troubles in Northern Ireland. Many of these irreplaceable records have also been lost through simple neglect or members failing to

⁸ IMR. I am grateful to Ms Alex Ward for her lists of lodges in each Ulster county and in Belfast, which were a very helpful shortcut in compiling data on a county basis.

realise the value of the records in their possession. In one case, the lodge members even burnt their old records after buying new books and thinking the old ones were now useless.⁹

The typical eighteenth-century lodge minute book is a chaotic patchwork of various records. Actual minutes can be followed by accounts followed by more minutes, bye-laws or perhaps an attendance record for a St. John's Day party. Miscellaneous information has often been inserted in empty spaces later, further confusing the chronological order. Records of the "craft" lodge (ordinary freemasonry consisting of three degrees) are sometimes interspersed with those of the so-called "higher degrees": Royal Arch and the Knights Templars. Needless to say, lodge records were not written for the historian but for day-to-day practical purposes such as keeping track of those who had paid their membership dues.

One shortcut to much masonic data is the so-called Crossle collection in the archives of the Grand Lodge of Ireland. A result of the antiquarian efforts of F. C. Crossle, these scrapbooks and boxes contain transcripts and drawings from a variety of sources. These include items of masonic interest in newspapers.

Of the general sources for the period, one would assume that the Donoughmore Papers would have a special significance for the study of freemasonry. However, although Richard Hely-Hutchinson, the 1st Earl of Donoughmore (1756 - 1825), was grand master of Irish freemasons and two of his brothers also occupied high positions in the grand lodge, their collection of family papers is largely devoid of any references to this side of the family pursuits. The few references to freemasonry in the collection date from a later period (1807 - 1822) and are thus of limited value for this study. Another important group of sources for the period that includes very little of significance for the purposes of this study are the various secret committee reports of the Irish parliament.

As with most studies of Ireland in the late eighteenth century, the single most important group of non-masonic sources is the Rebellion Papers. This collection of documents originated in Dublin Castle, the centre of British administration in Ireland¹⁰ and is used here mainly for the purpose of tracing links between political movements (radicals and loyalists) on one hand and masonic lodges on the other.

⁹ Bartlett 1994, pp. 8-9.

¹⁰ For the provenance and organisation of the Rebellion Papers, see Cullen 1994, pp. 413-420.

2 FREEMASONRY: ORIGINS AND RESEARCH

The origins and later history of freemasonry (with the regrettable exception of Irish freemasonry) have been the subject of innumerable books and articles. For a long time, the field was left to masonic enthusiasts and people with strong anti-masonic views. It is only lately that professional historians have taken up the study of masonry. This chapter is intended to offer a brief summary of what was said before. The first part will look at the various contexts and concepts that have conditioned research into freemasonry: especially definitions and interpretations such as secret society, conspiracy, and brotherhood. The second part will look at the age-old argument over the origins of freemasonry, particularly as revised recently by David Stevenson. The third part of the chapter will review the still minute but growing body of research on Irish freemasonry by both masonic and academic authors.

2.1. Secret brotherhood in European history

No thesis on freemasonry can possibly dispense with a brief consideration of the concept of a secret brotherhood in European history. Not that there was much that was secret about Irish freemasonry itself in the period studied here - in those days the members of the various masonic lodges celebrated St. John's Day (two days in fact - 24 June and 27 December) with a public procession. The freemasons marched to a place of worship wearing all their masonic regalia, often placing an advertisement in a newspaper about the event beforehand and publishing thanks to the officiating minister afterwards. Nevertheless, freemasonry has often been grouped together with other societies under the heading of "secret societies"; in the much-quoted book "Irish Secret Societies",¹ for instance. That book uses a few convenient, superficial similarities in order to lump together phenomena as varied as Whiteboys, freemasons, the IRA and communists - an approach that hardly does justice to any of the groups included. Thus the secret society is a concept that can hinder more than help the researcher.

Frances Yates has studied the origin of the obsession with secret brotherhoods that permeated European thought since the Rosicrucian Manifestos of 1614-15. These mysterious documents, published in Germany, were supposed to originate with a secret brotherhood, the Rosicrucian Order. Yates shows how soon the idea of a benevolent

¹ Williams 1973.

brotherhood was transformed into that of a sinister conspiracy.² But the golden age of conspiracy theorists came much later, with the Bavarian revolutionary group of the 1770s, the *Illuminati*, and the alleged masonic contribution to the French Revolution.

The leading conspiracy theorist of the French Revolution was Augustin de Barruel, whose book (1797) was soon translated into English³ and seems to have had a wide circulation. His translator Robert Clifford wrote a pamphlet of his own with the aim of applying Barruel's theories to Ireland and Britain (as an advertisement he also reprinted a letter by Edmund Burke, praising the first volume of Barruel). Clifford's pamphlet is not very original - as regards Ireland, he just reports the history of the United Irishmen, sometimes pausing to comment on how this or that aspect resembled something that Weisshaupt, the *Illuminati* leader, had said.⁴

Another British follower of Barruel's was John Robison, a professor of natural philosophy and secretary to the Royal Society of Edinburgh.⁵ He defined the distinction between British and Continental masonry, repeated in many different formulations by many writers ever since:

*having chiefly frequented the lodges on the Continent, I had learned many doctrines, and seen many ceremonials which have no place in the simple system of free masonry which obtains in this country. I had also remarked that the whole was much more the object of reflection and thought than I could remember it to have been...at home. There, I had seen a mason lodge considered merely as a pretext for passing an hour or two in a sort of decent conviviality, not altogether void of some rational occupation.*⁶

Robison later said the same with slightly different emphasis - noting not only the convivial aspects of British freemasonry but also the potential political role of the continental lodges:

*...us Britons, who are accustomed to consider the whole [freemasonry] as a matter of amusement for young men, who are glad of any pretext for indulging in conviviality... But in France, the civil and religious restraints on conversation made these secret assemblies very precious; and they were much frequented by men of letters....*⁷

² Yates 1986, pp. 103-105.

³ Barruel, the Abbé: *Memoirs, Illustrating the History of Jacobinism...*

⁴ [Clifford, Robert]: *Application of Barruel's Memoirs...* pp. 1-28.

⁵ For a short biography of Robison, see de Montluzin 1988, p. 142.

⁶ Robison, John: *Proofs of a conspiracy...*, pp. 1-2.

⁷ Robison, John: *Proofs of a conspiracy...*, p. 40.

These conspiracy theories and theorists are not altogether irrelevant to the study of eighteenth-century Ireland: Robison's book was reprinted in Dublin in 1798, suggesting that there was a market for such ideas. Contemporary sources contain hints that these books were read by the landlord and country magistrate class and that some of these people had a very high opinion of such literature, particularly in the paranoid atmosphere of the late 1790s. The government even seems to have distributed Robison's book to magistrates (see chapter 8.1.2). At least two refer to it by name in their correspondence with the authorities in February 1798, one thanking for a copy of the book and another requesting more copies. According to one of the recipients, the Society for Discountenancing Vice was planning to publish an abridged edition of Robison.⁸

The attitudes and terminology in conspiracy literature definitely affected the way people looked at things. A good example is the Mayo landlord John Denis Browne, the 3rd Earl of Altamont. Probably another recipient of Robison's book, he described United Irish activity that had come to his attention using expressions like "*the Dublin Illuminati*", who were attempting to "illuminate" (i.e. convert to their revolutionary ideology) unsuspecting tradesmen from Connacht, when these came to do business in Dublin.⁹ The man behind the idea of fuelling the paranoia of already beleaguered magistrates by sending them copies of Robison may have been the chief secretary of Ireland, Thomas Pelham. It is difficult to tell whether Pelham himself believed that the *Illuminati* in the guise of the United Irishmen were out to get him. Nevertheless, when a panicking magistrate sent him a suspicious masonic handbill, Pelham obediently replied that he too had detected "*evident marks of the spirit of the Illuminati*" in it.¹⁰

The conspiracy theorists retained and probably increased their readership after the events of 1798.¹¹ When the Roman Catholic church in the 1810s ended its policy of de facto toleration of freemasonry, Catholic clergy started to quote Barruel and Robison as if they had almost scriptural authority. Archbishop Troy of Dublin cited both authors (and several Continental books and articles in the same vein) to demonstrate the dangers of

⁸ Andrew Newton (Coagh) to NN (9 February 1798). Reb. 620/35/133; Joseph Pollock (Newry) to Pelham (23 February 1798). Reb. 620/35/152.

⁹ Lord Altamont to Cooke (26 March 1798). Reb. 620/36/71.

¹⁰ Pelham to Joseph Pollock (copy, 27 February 1798). Reb. 620/35/156 (enclosure).

¹¹ The conspiracy theorists did not reign unchallenged, however. Another French royalist emigré, Jean-Joseph Mounier, argued in his *De l'influence attribuée aux philosophes, aux francs-maçons et aux illuminés sur la révolution de France* (1801) that the French Revolution sprang from purely political causes. De Montluzin 1988, p. 122.

freemasonry.¹² Likewise, "a sensible and well-educated Catholic priest" defended in 1814 the papal ban on freemasonry, having been influenced by "perusal of L'Abbe Barreuille's [sic] and Robinson's [sic] publications". The writer of the above report did not bother explaining who the two authors were: he assumed that the recipient, a royal duke, already knew.¹³

2.2. Early freemasonry in Scotland and England

The first "history" of freemasonry was published in 1723 by Dr. James Anderson, a Scottish-born minister and one of the first leaders of the Grand Lodge of England. In his fantastic account, Anderson made freemasonry to appear as an institution as old as mankind, originating with Adam in the Garden of Eden. In a 1738 edition, this imaginary history was elaborated and every historical figure who had ever patronised architects or masons was pressed into service as a grand master of freemasons. Although Anderson may not have been writing a history in the modern sense "but producing an apologia to give a relatively new institution an honourable descent",¹⁴ popular myths regarding the supposed ancient origins of freemasonry, originating with Anderson, have proved durable.

Many later scholars would have been well advised to read Laurence Dermott's introduction to his *Ahiman Rezon*, arguably the most influential masonic book ever published. Mocking the likes of Anderson, Dermott first "apologised" for the fact that his book did not include a history of freemasonry, as

it has been the general custom of all my worthy brethren, who have honoured the Craft with their books of constitutions, or pocket-companions for free-masons, to give us a long and pleasing history of masonry from the creation to the time of their writing...having called to mind the old proverb, Better out of the world than out of the fashion.

¹² Troy to W. Harvey Esq. (9 December 1814). An enclosure entitled "Memorandums" includes 1) an extract of Troy to Donoughmore (9 September 1811) and 2) a longer condemnation of freemasonry, including the references to Barruel and Robison, apparently not a part of the letter to Donoughmore. Like the covering letter to Harvey, it was probably written in 1814 as it refers to the pope having "very lately" confirmed the condemnations issued by his predecessors (see chapter 5.2.1). The "Memorandums" may have been a draft intended for publication as it is on a separate sheet. The other antimasonic works cited by Troy are given as Feller's *Journal Litteraire* (15 March 1775, 15 April 1792 and 1 June 1792), *Proces de Joseph Balsamo Cagliostro* (Liege 1791) and *La Voile levé pour les Curieux: ou le secret de la rivolution de France revelé a l'aide de la Francmasonnerie* (Paris 1792). Miscellaneous letters Ms 27796(7). NLI.

¹³ Col. A. D. O'Kelly (Belfast) to the Duke of Sussex (9 October 1814). McPeake papers, T/3048/A/31. PRONI.

¹⁴ Hamill 1986, pp. 16-17.

After this introduction, Dermott's literary alter ego sets out to produce an even stranger history starting at a time before the creation. Having obtained books by Anderson, Spratt, D'Assigny, Desaguliers and other famous masonic scholars of the day, Dermott starts writing. Fantastic adventures follow, including an episode reminiscent of an *aisling* poem (Dermott was Irish, after all) in which the author is revealed the secrets of King Solomon's temple in a vision or dream. Tragically, when Dermott wakes up, he finds a puppy eating his manuscript: the story then moves on to an argument with the dog's owner over whether the pup should be hanged. Thus *Ahiman Rezon* appeared without a history of freemasonry.¹⁵ Unfortunately, many subsequent writers have not learned from Dermott's satirical advice. Even when the popular "history" was dismissed, as for instance by Thomas Paine, the critic usually offered an equally fantastic theory of his own in its stead.¹⁶

The traditional view is that freemasonry developed, in one way or another, out of medieval stonemasons' guilds. The practical rituals of admission, required in order to guard the craftsmen's trade secrets, were transformed into a philosophical pursuit for inner enlightenment. Non-masons were accepted into the societies in increasing numbers, this process culminating in the founding of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717. Consequently, the researchers into the prehistory of freemasonry have been very interested in the minutiae of this supposed transition from "operative" masonry to "speculative" masonry, i.e. from craftsmen's associations into gentlemen's clubs. Where, when and why did it take place? That has been the focal point of any study into the origins of the movement. Due to its later pre-eminence in masonry, England has been the focus of this approach. Many attempts have been made to tie isolated pre-1717 (the year when the Grand Lodge of England was founded) English sources mentioning "freemasons" or "lodges" into a consistent story. As the few sources available range from medieval manuscripts setting out rules for stonemasons to eighteenth-century antiquarians' notes, no one has quite succeeded in the task.

Serious research into masonic history can be said to have begun in the 1940s, when Knoop and Jones published their studies into the early stages of English freemasonry. A good recent introduction to both the history of masonry (especially in its

¹⁵ "The editor: to the reader" in *Ahiman Rezon* (Belfast 1782 edition), pp. ix-xviii. According to Dermott, his preface was "a full account of the transactions of the first grand lodge, particularly the excluding of the unruly members as related by Mr. Milton". In case anybody missed the joke, this was further explained in a footnote: "See *Paradise Lost*".

¹⁶ Paine's theory was that the freemasons were basically sun-worshipping Druids in disguise in order to escape Christian persecution. Paine, Thomas: *Origin of free-masonry*, pp. 293-303.

English form) and into the different schools of thought on the issue of its origins can be found in *The Craft* by John Hamill.¹⁷ Although a fine piece of scholarship, Hamill's book has to be read in its historical context. It was originally published in 1986 when the English freemasons were very much on the defensive, as a sensational best-seller book had accused them of various corrupt and sinister practices.¹⁸ That book (*The Brotherhood* by Norman Knight) and Hamill are thus the latest pair in the cycle of exposé-apologia that seems to occur every now and then in the history of freemasonry. In a revised edition, Hamill admits as much by rewriting his "Attacks on the Craft" (!) chapter which had "quickly been overtaken by later events".¹⁹

Recent research has questioned the validity of the Anglocentric interpretation which sees the foundation of the first English grand lodge in 1717 as the focal point in the development of freemasonry. In a thorough reappraisal of the extant early masonic sources, David Stevenson has shown that there is no evidence of any such operative-speculative transition having taken place in England, whereas in Scotland at least twenty-five masonic lodges had come into existence by 1710. Twenty of these survive to the present day and can (unlike any English or Irish lodge) trace their roots back to seventeenth-century associations of craftsmen. According to Stevenson, the prerequisites for the birth of freemasonry were laid out in the tradition of "Old Charges" - manuscripts, originating in England, setting out the rules that regulated the trade of the medieval stonemasons. However, he argues that the second and decisive phase occurred in eighteenth-century Scotland, where "non-operatives" first joined masonic lodges (societies of stonemasons organised or re-organised in 1598-99 by William Schaw, master of works to the King of Scots). The Scottish phase in the development of freemasonry was followed from 1717 onwards by a third phase, again dominated by events in England. Further developments such as the addition of a grand lodge (a central body controlling the lodges) took place during the third stage and finally produced freemasonry as we know it. In Stevenson's view, this was only "icing on the cake", however - all the essential ingredients were in place by the year 1600.²⁰

According to Stevenson, the rise of freemasonry in Scotland around the year 1600 reflected the Neoplatonist intellectual climate of the late Renaissance. Other forms

¹⁷ Hamill 1986, pp. 15-25 or Hamill 1994, pp. 19-29. For a thorough review of older research, see Knoop & Jones 1949, pp. 1-6.

¹⁸ Hamill 1986, p. 143.

¹⁹ Hamill 1994, p. 14.

²⁰ Stevenson 1988, pp. 213-216, 231-233.

that the quest for spiritual perfection took in that era included alchemy, astrology and magic. That quest was often pursued in small groups of adepts, with much emphasis on secrecy. This general tendency was combined with the traditional exclusiveness of trade associations such as the lodges of "operative" masons. Adherents to the Neoplatonist world-view also explained the universe through elaborate systems of symbols, often supposed to derive from ancient Egypt - another feature inherited by later freemasonry.²¹

Stevenson links the later development of freemasonry with the movement towards deism or at least religious tolerance by men tired of the religious disputes of the mid-seventeenth century. The post-1717 "English" freemasonry (which incidentally was organised and codified by a Scot, James Anderson) incorporated many originally Scottish features such as catechisms, more than one "degree" (class or step) of membership and permanent societies called lodges (as opposed to occasional meetings called by that name in England). The most important element to originate in early eighteenth-century London was the organisational model of modern freemasonry - a grand lodge and subordinate lodges. The other changes were more superficial: increase in the number of degrees of membership from two to three and the term "free and accepted mason".²² The eighteenth-century development has also been linked to the rise of the "self-help movement" i.e. friendly or benefit societies. For example, it has been noted that the tailors of Newcastle-upon-Tyne opened their benefit society to non-tailors while retaining the style of "Friendly Society of Tailors".²³

Stevenson's theory has not been seriously challenged to date. Hamill, in a modestly revised edition of his 1986 book, sticks to the dogma of English origins for freemasonry. This is achieved not so much by contradicting Stevenson's evidence (in fact, Hamill chooses to ignore Stevenson's research almost completely),²⁴ but by sticking to a different definition of what constitutes freemasonry. In Hamill's opinion, the very features (such as the existence of a grand lodge) not regarded by Stevenson as central are in fact the defining characteristics. Although any account on the origins of freemasonry will always depend partly on circumstantial evidence, Stevenson's is the only one that offers an explanation for the imbalance (ignored by English historians) between the massive Scottish source material and the (comparatively speaking) few isolated scraps of English pre-1717 evidence.

²¹ Stevenson 1988, pp. 79-82.

²² Stevenson 1988, pp. 228-233.

²³ Durr 1983, pp. 176, 181.

2.3. Research into Irish freemasonry

In Ireland, freemasonry was until very recently considered to be a topic beneath the status of academic historians, an eccentric subject best left to the freemasons themselves. Even had they been inclined to study it, many scholars thought that the sources for such research would not exist or would not be accessible to outsiders. Fortunately, this perception has been changing slowly, thanks to the publication of several pioneering studies that touch upon the topic of freemasonry in Ireland. However, there are still many pieces missing from the jigsaw of Irish freemasonry. It has not attracted the sort of research making intensive use of masonic records that has been done in other countries - such as David Stevenson's study of the origins of freemasonry in seventeenth-century Scotland, or Steven C. Bullock's fascinating research on American freemasonry in the colonial and revolutionary periods.

Although academics have avoided the topic, countless masonic scholars have dug deep into the old records of the organisation. Irish masonic scholars usually credited with starting serious research into the history of their movement include W. J. Chetwode Crawley (1844 - 1916), Francis Clements Crossle (1847 - 1910), Henry F. Berry (later Twiss, d. 1932), John Heron Lepper (1878 - 1952) and Philip Crossle (d. 1953). Henry F. Berry was the first masonic historian to use state papers then kept in Dublin Castle (including what are now known as Rebellion Papers).²⁵ As with amateur historians of any organisation, much of the history written by masonic historians is of limited value to their academic colleagues except when their writings point towards new source material. Unfortunately, this advantage is sometimes negated by incomplete or absent footnotes.

Many of the results of these and other scholars were published in the *Transactions* of the Lodge of Research No. 200 (often abbreviated CC). The articles in this journal are of variable academic merit. Some of them are just brief talks on local history involving little or no original research, suitable for welcoming visiting brethren before moving on to the more convivial side of things. There are well-researched exceptions, of course. However, the CC *Transactions* are of great interest to the professional historian also, as the writers of the articles have often used sources not available in public archives (i.e. in the possession of local lodges and individuals). The English counterpart of the journal, *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* (AQC) also sometimes carries items of Irish interest.

²⁴ Hamill 1994, pp. 173-174, fn. 1. Hamill has merely added Stevenson to a list of books on "Scottish operative masonry".

The *tour de force* of the early twentieth-century masonic scholars is the massive first volume of the history of the Grand Lodge of Ireland, covering its history to 1813. Unfortunately the authors, J. Heron Lepper and Philip Crossle, quarrelled and the publication of the second volume was delayed until 1957,²⁶ after the death of the two original authors. Lepper and Crossle had collected immense amounts of information but never quite digested it all: much of the book consists of summaries of the grand lodge minutes in a chronological sequence under headings such as "Grand Lodge in 1804", "Affairs in 1805" etc. Despite the title, it also contains much general information on Irish freemasonry outside the grand lodge. To date, it is the nearest thing that we have to a history of Irish freemasonry and as a reference work it retains much of its value. Philip Crossle also wrote the invaluable guide *Irish Masonic Records*, the main part of which is a list in numerical order of all lodge warrants issued to Irish lodges.

Being a freemason does not disqualify one for writing history of freemasonry, of course. Nevertheless, many masonic scholars have narrowly focused on a history of their organisation as if it was a completely separate phenomenon, untouched by the outside world; or on degrees, rituals and regalia that are of very limited interest to outsiders. Many masonic researchers have also looked at the past as an imperfect version of a flawless present: deviations in the past from principles held sacrosanct nowadays, have been subjected to anachronistic criticism. The most notable blind spot in Irish freemasonry has long been the link between some masonic lodges and political radicalism in the 1790s. This connection has been treated only as an unfortunate aberration from the (*nowadays* generally accepted) rule of keeping politics separate from masonry:

There is one chapter in the history of Lord Donoughmore's Grand Mastership that we would willingly omit: while not feeling justified in so doing, for without an allusion to these particular events no history could be considered complete, we shall make it as short as possible, for it is the record of an attempt to use our Order as a political lever.²⁷

Later Irish masonic scholars include William Jenkinson (Armagh), Samuel Leighton (Belfast and Antrim), R. E. Parkinson and Aiken McClelland (d. 1981); the last-named also wrote on the history of the Orange Order. Keith Cochrane's *The county committees in Ulster* marks a new departure in masonic research activity as he uses material both from masonic archives and other contemporary sources (mainly

²⁵ Berry 1913.

²⁶ Parkinson 1957.

²⁷ Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 292.

newspapers). Cochrane has brought to light and organised systematically for the first time a considerable body of evidence on the phenomenon of masonic county committees that had been all but ignored previously.²⁸

As noted above, freemasonry has not been one of the most popular topics in Irish history among academic historians. One is tempted to quote, *mutatis mutandis*, John M. Roberts's admonishment to English historians for abandoning freemasonry "to masonic antiquarians or to cranks". Roberts emphasised the significance of freemasonry as a shared European phenomenon and warned that "the effect of the neglect of this subject has been the impoverishment of English historians' understanding of European history and even, though to a less important degree, of their own".²⁹

As regards Irish history, it is usually people studying other related topics who have touched upon freemasonry, often as an excursus while concentrating on topics of more general interest such as the Volunteers, the United Irishmen, the Defenders or the Orange Order. For example, the 1840s historian of the United Irishmen, R. R. Madden, mentioned the masonic membership of Henry Munro without comment other than that "he was grand master [sic] of the freemasons' lodge in Lisburn; and from his connexion with that body, being known as a ready speaker, he was often called on to preside at public entertainments".³⁰ Another such brief mention without further study is that by Eoin MacNeill, in his foreword to the Rev. Patrick Rogers's book on Volunteers. MacNeill noted that "we find the cause of Catholic Emancipation more ardently taken up by Protestant Volunteer Corps, Masonic Lodges, an English Protestant Bishop of Derry [i.e. Frederick Augustus Hervey, 4th Earl of Bristol and bishop of Derry in 1768 - 1803], than by a large part of the Catholic community, and even by a number of leading Catholics".³¹

The first non-masonic historian to have tried to interpret and put in context the references to freemasonry in the Rebellion Papers is the Rev. Brendan McEvoy. In his series of articles on the United Irish movement in Tyrone, McEvoy expresses surprise that the masons seemed to have caused "a certain amount of trouble" to the authorities in the turbulent political situation prevailing in the county in 1797. McEvoy obviously has had to struggle with the contradiction between his sources and the twentieth-century Catholic and nationalist dogma concerning freemasonry. Consequently, some of his comments on

²⁸ Cochrane 1994 (publishing date on the cover; actually only available in 1996).

²⁹ Roberts 1969, pp. 323-324.

³⁰ Madden n.d, p. 228.

³¹ Rogers 1934, p. vii.

masonry are not really integrated into his narrative on United Irishmen as if he was not quite sure what to make of the references to masons in his sources. At first, McEvoy dismisses the northern masons in a couple of lines: they seemed, "prior to the troubles, to have been liberal, in sentiment at least".³² However, in his concluding article, McEvoy returns to the topic. Acknowledging Catholic involvement in freemasonry and the masonic resolutions in favour of the Catholic emancipation, he notes that "there seems to have been some rivalry and hatred between the freemasons and Orangemen". Nevertheless, the role of masonry in McEvoy's opinion was passive: the United Irishmen seem to have secured the control of many lodges and used masonry as "a channel of propaganda" and a cover for their real activities.³³

Leaving aside various theologically motivated ecclesiastical denunciations,³⁴ the general view (among historians) on the character of Irish freemasonry has echoed that of MacNeill's ever since: freemasonry was ranked among the progressive (howsoever defined) forces of Irish history. According to Hereward Senior, "Irish masons were found in all political factions but were, in general, inclined to be critical of the penal code imposed on Catholics and were not enthusiastic Orange patriots".³⁵ As will be shown later (see chapters 7-8), this view is much too loaded in favour of the liberals. Although descriptive of significant and influential elements within the order, it plays down the role of more conservative elements. Senior was also not aware of the existence of an exclusively Protestant faction within Ulster freemasonry (see chapter 5.2.2).

The numerical strength, social composition and cultural impact of Irish freemasonry was not touched by academics until Peter Gibbon's already quoted footnote. Writing in 1972, Gibbon suggested that "freemasonry appears to have had a fairly substantial, popular basis in eighteenth and early nineteenth century Ulster, especially among the artisanate. In some areas it appears to have cleared the path for the development of the reading societies and debating clubs...In others its ideological

³² McEvoy 1961, p. 19.

³³ McEvoy 1969, pp. 37-38, 54, 64-65.

³⁴ Among these was the one published in the late 1920s by the Rev. Eugene Coyle, P. P. He regarded freemasonry as an anti-Christian organisation which threatened "that glorious heritage of Faith, as well as that great spirit of Nationality that has been interwoven in our history, and which are the chief glories of our race". Among the more eccentric of Coyle's conclusions were that the Cumann na nGaedheal government of the day only survived because the freemasons supported it and that the partition of Ireland was a masonic plot. He regarded the Orange Order as a more "democratic" front for freemasonry and claimed that all leading Orangemen from masters of local lodges upwards were also masons. Interestingly, Coyle was either unaware of or ignored the masonic links of some leading United Irishmen: on the contrary, their defeat was just another evil deed engineered by the masons. Coyle [1929], pp. 6, 18, 25, 45-51.

influence seems to have died out...while its organisational forms appear to have remained in the culture". Gibbon's assumption was apparently based on intuition rather than sources as he does not quote any; he thought that there was "insufficient material on the subject [=freemasonry in Ulster] to develop an adequate account of its significance".³⁶ His purely speculative (self-admittedly so) footnote nevertheless had to pass for research and was sometimes quoted in other books and articles as the latest authority on the topic. Unfortunately, it did not trigger any follow-up studies. An article written by Terence de Vere White in the following year outlined the history of Irish freemasonry but was apparently not based on original research. It is interesting to note that De Vere White referred to the easing of political and ecclesiastical pressure towards freemasonry in Ireland at the time of writing.³⁷

During the 1980s, Irish freemasonry was hardly touched by academics, with the exception of Philip Robinson's pioneering article on fraternal societies in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ulster.³⁸ Finally, in the 1990s, several historians have given more than a passing thought to the topic. Among them are L. M. Cullen, Jim Smyth, A. T. Q. Stewart and Kevin Whelan; they may be said to have made freemasonry a respectable topic of study for academics. All of them have studied masonry in connection with the political events of the 1790s. However, except for cursory use of the grand lodge register by some of them, they have stuck to the general political and literary sources for the period and not used masonic archives.

The existence (if not details) of links between the radical political society of the United Irishmen and masonic lodges is well-known, but L. M. Cullen has attributed to the masons also some aspects of the Defenders: their adoption of the term lodge and numbered lodges.³⁹ Jim Smyth has stressed the role of masonry in the transmission of Enlightenment ideas to Ireland and identified many freemasons among the people involved in the post-1782 reform movement, the Catholic Committee and the United Irishmen.⁴⁰ However, Smyth's emphasis is on those other movements. As a consequence, his reading of masonic records (the grand lodge register) is sometimes hurried and erratic. In this thesis, it will be argued that Smyth has based some of his

³⁵ Senior 1966, p. 3.

³⁶ Gibbon 1972, p. 162, fn. 9.

³⁷ De Vere White 1973, De Vere White's article does not have footnotes; much of the material seems to derive from Lepper & Crossle 1925, Geoghegan 1921 and possibly other masonic authors.

³⁸ Robinson 1986.

³⁹ Cullen 1990, p. 124.

conclusions on United Irish activity on an incorrect interpretation of the information in the masonic registers (see chapter 8.1).

A. T. Q. Stewart, in his fascinating and thought-provoking book *A Deeper Silence*, has drawn attention to the many and varied links between freemasonry on the one hand and the reformers and radicals of the 1780s and 1790s on the other. However, Stewart also presents assumptions that are not supported by evidence. For instance, Stewart assumes that Henry Grattan was a freemason, and then proceeds to base conclusions on this assertion: "the importance of this for the conduct of Volunteer policy...should not be underestimated".⁴¹ Grattan was indeed elected member of the exclusive lodge 620 - the "First Volunteer Lodge of Ireland" - in 1783. However, he was snubbed by the Grand Lodge of Ireland which refused to sanction his admission.⁴² Such conflicts within freemasonry suggest that it is not safe to assume an automatic connection between liberal or radical or indeed any particular brand of politics on one hand and masonry on the other.

Kevin Whelan devoted a chapter in his *Tree of Liberty* to "Radical freemasonry and popular mobilisation".⁴³ However, as Whelan's main interest is not freemasonry, but the political events of the period, his work on masonry suffers from the same limitations as Smyth's and Stewart's. Like Smyth's, Whelan's use of masonic sources is limited to the grand lodge register. Whelan also subscribes to generalised, sweeping assumptions of what freemasonry was, apparently based only on the situation in revolutionary France and on the years of United Irish activity in the 1790s.

In the 1990s, making a passing reference to freemasonry has become something of a fashion among the historians of eighteenth-century Ireland. In these brief references, the writers often unintentionally reveal that they are puzzled by the topic, although aware of its potential significance. Jacqueline Hill, in describing the extent to which the

⁴⁰ Smyth 1992, p. 85-87.

⁴¹ Stewart 1993, p. 174.

⁴² Geoghegan 1921, pp. 16-19. The lodge minutes record that Grattan was admitted unanimously on 6 November 1783. However, he apparently soon lost interest in membership, probably owing to the dispute with the grand lodge. There is no reference to his being initiated or attending a lodge meeting. Lodge 620 minutes 1783 - 1793 (6 November 1783). GLI. The matter was still causing discord between the grand lodge and lodge 620 ten years later; the latter claimed that they had "suffered the loss of the Right Hon. Henry Grattan...through some delay or mismanagement of the Inspection Committee of Grand Lodge, altho they were afterwards passed by the Committee". Grand lodge minutes (13 June 1793). GLI. Geoghegan 1921, pp. 17-19. The Grattan dispute was also referred to in De Vere White 1973, p. 50.

⁴³ Whelan 1996, pp. 85-88.

aristocracy and gentry dominated eighteenth-century Dublin, notes that these groups "rubbed shoulders with merchants in masonic lodges" without any further comment as to whether this was the only or a significant avenue of such contact.⁴⁴ Thomas P. Power, in his study of Tipperary politics, notes in passing the masonic role of the famous crypto-Catholic MP and provincial grand master of Munster, Thomas Mathew. Power speculates that "it is possible that Mathew's position as head of the freemasons - an egalitarian and non-sectarian body at this time - is indicative of his wider standing in the country",⁴⁵ without discussing either the relative importance of Mathew in contemporary freemasonry or of freemasonry among Mathew's many interests.

Nancy Curtin honestly admits that "little is known about the freemasons" but at the same time she has made efficient use of the sources that have come to her attention. For example, she notes the flood of resolutions passed by masonic lodges for and against the Catholic emancipation in December 1792 and January 1793. However, the contradiction between the assumed innate radical nature of masonry and the more diffuse reality somewhat hampers Curtin's conclusions. Following Margaret Jacob, she argues that "masonic lodges could reinforce acceptance of a radical or republican ideology" yet admits that the first resolutions (by a considerable number of lodges) were conservative in tone.⁴⁶

To sum up, historians have studied Irish freemasonry (e.g. unlike French), as background to other things that are more directly connected with political history. Freemasonry has been the topic of much learned speculation, but it has not been studied much as a complex historical phenomenon in its own right. Academic historians have tended to pick out only the exciting bits, those relating to the high politics of the 1790s. Masonic historians have concentrated either on the grand lodge only without giving much thought to the local level, or one (or a couple of) lodges, tending to ignore the outside world and concentrating on the lodge in question.

There have been few attempts to fill the gap between the national level and the level of the individual lodge. The lack of research at sub-county (embracing all the lodges in a particular town or district), county and provincial levels is a serious handicap that needs to be addressed, if a definitive history of Irish freemasonry is ever to be written.

⁴⁴ Hill 1997b, p. 291.

⁴⁵ Power 1993, pp. 228-229.

⁴⁶ Curtin 1994, p. 56.

The first attempt in this field was Samuel Leighton's book on freemasonry in Antrim.⁴⁷ Leighton was the first scholar to use records of local Ulster lodges from the collections of the provincial grand lodge of Antrim, and reproduced some of these in print. Unfortunately, he did not attract followers.

It took almost sixty years before the next contributions on freemasonry at county level appeared. Larry Conlon, in two articles published in 1997, has sought to explore the links of masons in Meath, Westmeath and East Cavan with the Volunteers, Defenders and United Irishmen. Unfortunately, he sometimes stretches the available evidence rather too far. For instance, Conlon tends to assume that geographical proximity between a masonic lodge and Volunteer corps automatically proves that there was a close link between the two or even that their memberships are identical.⁴⁸ Another very welcome contribution to the research on local aspects of Irish freemasonry is Patrick Fagan's study of Catholic participation in the masonic lodges of Dublin. Although Fagan's use of masonic sources is sometimes inaccurate, his is the first serious attempt to study the vibrant and hitherto neglected Dublin masonic scene.⁴⁹

Finally, it must be noted that research into masonry need not be an end in itself. Some recent theses on other topics have treated freemasonry as a relevant point of study.⁵⁰ An interesting recent attempt at such "applied research", or the study of freemasonry in order to throw light on other social and political issues, was completed by Jessica Harland-Jacobs. She studied freemasonry and the Orange Order in the British colonial context, mainly in what is now Canada. She came to the conclusion that freemasonry in British colonies "was an officially sanctioned agency of British imperialism" while Orangeism was only tolerated as "colonial governors came to rely (albeit reluctantly) on Orange support". Colonial officials "encouraged Freemasonry for its inclusiveness and

⁴⁷ Leighton 1938.

⁴⁸ Conlon argues, for instance, that "it was probably the officers of the Ashfield Volunteers, that first formed Masonic lodge No. 842" despite the fact that the corps was raised in 1781 and the lodge was formed fifteen years later, in 1796. Conlon 1997a, p. 794.

⁴⁹ Fagan 1998, pp. 126-158. Fagan has assumed that the grand lodge register is a complete record of the actual masonic membership. Thus his study of individual Dublin lodges shows peaks or periods of apparent inactivity which do not necessarily reflect the reality: "The lodge [no. 54] declined in the years 1762-9 with only one new member admitted in that period". Fagan 1998, p. 134. For an alternative reading of the register, particularly the entries made in the 1760s, see chapter 3.3.

⁵⁰ E.g. O'Brien, Gillian: "Spirit, impartiality and independence: The *Northern Star*, 1792-97" (unpublished M. A. thesis, University College Dublin, 1997).

discouraged Orangeism for its exclusiveness, even though members of both institutions professed loyalty to the British empire".⁵¹

It must be emphasised, however, that the above conclusion is based on Harland-Jacobs's research into the situation in North America; it is not the intention of this writer to rely on it (or on any other of the views reviewed above) as an underlying assumption in this work. Hopefully, the following chapters will show that the reality of eighteenth-century Irish freemasonry was much more diverse than any description of it published thus far.

numerical strength of freemasonry in the region in 1782. There is also the Grand Lodge of Ireland which was established in 1725. The picture is complicated here, as there are many other lodges in existence. The original charter of these lodges is not known, but it is known that the lodges in the first order were not in contact with the Grand Lodge until 1782, when they were all united. These probably included lodges in Ulster, as well as others in the south.

Only from 1780 onwards is a history of freemasonry in the region to be found. The evidence for the first century of freemasonry in the region is thus limited to the records of the Grand Lodge of Ireland, which are the only source for any period to study these matters. It is not known if any primary source exists at all, though it is possible that some of the records of the Grand Lodge of Ireland in the period, a detailed description of freemasonry in the region, as well as an attempt to determine the situation in the region, will be found in the records of the Grand Lodge of Ireland.

3.1. The origins of freemasonry in Ulster

In the case of Ulster, there is no primary evidence for the origins of freemasonry in the region. It is not known if any primary evidence exists for the origins of freemasonry in the region, and it is not known if any primary evidence exists for the origins of freemasonry in the region.

⁵¹ Harland-Jacobs, Jessica: "Maintaining the connexion: Freemasonry, Orangeism, and the construction of imperial identities in British North America". (M.A. thesis, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, 1995), pp. 78, 83.

3 THE EXPANSION OF FREEMASONRY IN ULSTER

The purpose of this chapter is to chart the geographical expansion and the numbers of people involved in eighteenth-century freemasonry in Ulster. This study is limited to the years 1760 - 1800 as the availability of sources dictates these unavoidable cut-off points. For the decades up to 1760, the aim must be more modest due to the absence of any central registry of members. Fortunately, grand lodge records list the locations to which warrants were issued. Thus the geographical expansion (if not the numerical strength) of freemasonry can be mapped from 1733, the year when the first Grand Lodge of Ireland warrant was issued for the first Ulster town, Enniskillen. The picture as portrayed here is not necessarily complete, as there are gaps in the lists of warrants. The original location of many lodges warranted in the eighteenth century is not known. Of the first three hundred warrants that were issued by the grand lodge, the destination of sixty-six is not known.¹ These blanks in the first extant series of registers indicate that the lodges bearing those numbers had probably ceased activity or lost contact with the grand lodge prior to 1760, when that series of registers was begun. These probably included lodges in Ulster, all trace of which is now lost.

Only from 1760 onwards is it possible to attempt an estimate of the numbers in masonic recruitment and of trends in it. The outstanding methodological problem facing the researcher in this exercise is the coverage and reliability of the obligatory primary source for any attempt to study these matters - the grand lodge register. As it is the only primary source aiming at - though in practice falling short of - listing all the freemasons of Ireland in the period, a detailed discussion of its nature and shortcomings is necessary. In an attempt to complement the incomplete register, estimates based on other sources are given where possible.

3.1. The origins of freemasonry in Ulster

In the light of David Stevenson's theory that modern freemasonry originated in Scotland, it would not be surprising if this was reflected in Ulster because of the close cultural links between parts of that province and Scotland. However, little evidence has

¹ Number 300 was reached in 1758. According to IMR, numbers 39-40, 42, 46-48, 50, 52, 53, 56-59, 62, 65-66, 68-69, 72-73, 75, 78-83, 88, 98, 102-103, 108-110, 114-115, 119-122, 124-125, 127, 129, 139, 143-144, 147, 149, 152, 154, 159-160, 162, 164, 170, 185, 187, 191, 204, 213, 219, 226, 239, 260, 298 are blank in the Register [i.e. first series] and there is no other information as to the original location of the lodges.

been found so far for the suggestion that Scottish settlers brought freemasonry with them.² According to Lepper and Crossle, a connection can be traced between seventeenth-century Scottish masonry and Ulster in the person of a Hugh Doak (+ 1669), first mentioned in Scottish records as a leading mason in Ayr and later in Ireland as burgess and sovereign of Belfast.³

It would be tempting to assume that some of the later differences and difficulties between the Ulster masons and the grand lodge in Dublin arose because Ulster masonry ultimately was derived from pre-grand lodge Scottish masonry. However, no evidence to support such a proposition has been found to date. There is no evidence of Doak or anybody else setting up a masonic lodge in Ulster in the seventeenth century. Unless scholars of that period unearth new evidence, it must be assumed that the spread of freemasonry in the whole of Ireland was closely linked to the fortunes of the Dublin grand lodge from the very beginning.

The earliest reference to freemasonry in Ireland is an isolated, possibly anecdotal reference to a lodge of freemasons in Trinity College, Dublin in 1688. In a satirical speech written in bad Latin, the college wit who wrote it asserted that

*it was lately ordered that for the honour and dignity of the University there should be introduced a society of freemasons, consisting of gentlemen, mechanics, porters (etc. etc.), who shall bind themselves by an oath never to reveal their mighty no-secret, and to relieve whatsoever strolling distressed brethren they meet with, after the example of the fraternity of freemasons in and about Trinity College.*⁴

Lepper and Crossle suggest that by the 1710s, aristocratic families such as the St. Legers (Viscounts Doneraile) may have held "lodges" - in the sense of occasional meetings rather than regularly meeting clubs - of freemasons.⁵

The first reference to organised freemasonry in Ireland involving more than one meeting, club or society is a Dublin newspaper report from 1725. On St. John's Day (24 June), "above a 100 gentlemen" belonging to "the six lodges of gentlemen freemasons,

² Suggested in Simpson 1924, p. 5.

³ Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 117.

⁴ Lepper 1920, pp. 17-18.

⁵ This theory is based on the legend of the "Lady Freemason", Elizabeth St. Leger, who was reputedly caught eavesdropping on a lodge meeting presided over by his father and initiated into the brotherhood to ensure her silence (see chapter 6.3.3). Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 38-39. For English evidence of "lodges" as occasional meetings, see Hamill 1986, pp. 30-33.

who are under the jurisdiction of the grand master" met in a tavern in Werburgh Street to put on their aprons, white gloves and other regalia. They then travelled in a procession of coaches (as it was raining) to the great hall of King's Inns for the election of a grand master. This is the first occasion on which a grand lodge is mentioned, composed of the grand master, deputy grand master, grand wardens and the masters and wardens of all the lodges. The election and investiture of officers was followed by a dinner and entertainment.⁶ In the formation of a body presumably authorised to supervise all the lodges, the Irish masons were following the example of the London lodges that had formed the first grand lodge in 1717. Irish gentlemen were definitely aware of the new London fashion: the proceedings of the English freemasons and their eccentric grand master, the Duke of Wharton, had been reported in the Dublin press in the early 1720s. Moreover, there were family connections between the early officers of the two grand lodges.⁷

Putting any starting date on a study of freemasonry in Ulster (as in Ireland or indeed, anywhere) is bound to be a more or less arbitrary decision. There is a 1724 reference to a lodge at "O-h in U-r" [Omagh in Ulster?] taken by some as evidence that a lodge existed in Omagh at that date. However, as the reference is in the satirical pamphlet *A letter from the grand mistress of the female free-masons*⁸ published in Dublin and attributed by some to Swift,⁹ it is hardly a primary source on freemasonry in Ulster. Moreover, if Omagh was such a cradle of early Irish masonry, it would be surprising that the first lodges warranted (see below) by the grand lodge were set up in Co. Tyrone (including Omagh) only in 1759. One can suspect that the point of mentioning "O-h in U-r" has nothing to do with freemasonry in the first place; possibly the author was making fun of somebody from Omagh.

⁶ *Dublin Weekly Journal* 26 June 1725 (reprinted in Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 55-58). The report may suggest that a grand lodge (and lodges of freemasons) had existed in Dublin for some time as a "new" grand master was elected.

⁷ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 43-44. For the extraordinary masonic career of the Duke of Wharton (grand master of England, 1722-23), see Haunch 1967, pp. 59-60.

⁸ *A letter from the grand mistress of the female free-masons to Mr. Harding the Printer*, Dublin 1724 (reprinted in Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 449-462), p. 451.

⁹ Although the pamphlet was included in some eighteenth-century collections of Swift's writings, its authorship is not regarded as proven by most modern scholars. I am grateful to Prof. H. Real of the Englisches Seminar, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität, Münster, for a thorough review of Swiftian scholarship on this issue.

3.2. The first warranted lodges, 1733 - 1760

In the early 1730s, the Irish grand lodge decided to issue *warrants*, written charters permitting named people (the first officers of the lodge) and their successors to hold a lodge in a particular location. The first of these were issued in February 1731/2, but many lodges were slow in recognising the need for such a document.¹⁰ Consequently, it is impossible to estimate how old the lodges were at the time when they decided to accept grand lodge leadership by taking out a warrant. Lepper and Crossle assume that the foundation of most of the early Ulster lodges may have predated their warrants.¹¹ There was a definite interest in freemasonry, and probably some freemasons, in Ulster before the first warrant was issued to Enniskillen in 1733: at least one of the subscribers to a 1730 book of masonic constitutions was from Co. Antrim and another one from Newry (see below).¹² Thus it could be argued that Ulster freemasonry is older than 1733. On the other hand, only the acceptance of a warrant turned a group of local enthusiasts into a regular society and a part of a nation-wide movement.

The 1733 Enniskillen warrant (no. 17 on the Grand Lodge of Ireland register) was the first one issued for a lodge held - or to be held - in Ulster.¹³ Of the sixteen warrants issued before it, ten were for the city of Dublin, one for Co. Dublin, two for Co. Wicklow, one for Co. Wexford, one for Limerick and one for an infantry regiment. In the following year, warrant no. 34 was issued for Cootehill, Co. Cavan. Very little is known of these two early lodges. The first extant grand lodge register of c. 1760 does not mention them, which probably means that they had disappeared by the time it was compiled.

The first Ulster lodge of which more is known is the third one, no. 77 set up in Newry in 1737. In the 1730s, warrants were also granted to Cavan (no 90, 1738), Armagh (no 104, 1739), and Lisburn (no 112, 1739), bringing the total in Ulster to six. Again, these years were not necessarily the actual years of foundation as lodges could and apparently did exist for years without warrants. Indeed, William Ponder, the master of 77 Newry when it was warranted, is on record as having subscribed for the 1730 book of masonic constitutions - seven years before the warrant was issued.¹⁴

¹⁰ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 94-95.

¹¹ Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 120 fn.

¹² Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 88, 120.

¹³ All dates for lodge warrants are based on IMR, unless stated otherwise. I am grateful to Commander Keith Cochrane (who is in the process of producing a revised version) for pointing out some inaccuracies in IMR.

¹⁴ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 119-120.

The first six lodges were all located in southern Ulster. During the 1740s fourteen more lodges were warranted, Two of these were located in Belfast and two nearby in Lisburn, Co. Antrim. The other locations in the south and east of the province where lodges were set up were Cootehill (Co. Cavan), Sporthall (the residence of the Corry family of Rockcorry, Co. Monaghan), Lurgan (Co. Armagh), Gilford and Killyleagh (Co. Down). For the first time, warranted lodges were set up in the north of the province: in Ballymoney (Co. Antrim), and four in Co. Londonderry: two in Coleraine and one each in Derry and Muff (Eglinton). The enthusiasm for freemasonry in these towns was reflected in the list of subscribers to a book of masonic constitutions published in 1751. The addresses given included forty-one from Ulster: 23 from Derry, six each from Muff and Newry, two each from Strabane and Coleraine, one each from Enniskillen and Ballymoney.¹⁵

During the 1750s twenty-nine more lodges were warranted, bringing the total to 49 (see table 10). These included the first lodges in Donegal and Tyrone, the last two counties in Ulster without warranted lodges. Seven of the forty-nine disappear from records by 1760, the year of the first extant membership register, including the two oldest Belfast lodges (nos. 182 and 183, both warranted in 1748). Neither of these Belfast lodges has left any traces in the grand lodge registers, even though one of them is reported to have been revived in 1784.¹⁶ Comparing Crossle's list of lodges in IMR with the first extant series of grand lodge registers shows that the remaining 42 lodges were located as follows (table 1):

¹⁵ Spratt, Edward: *The new book of constitutions of the most ancient and honourable fraternity...*(1751).

¹⁶ IMR gives (incorrectly) the revival date as 1782. In 1784, the grand lodge "ordered that the W[arran]t No 182 formerly held in Belfast, be revived there by Brs. Jno Brown, Jas. Lewis & Joseph Wallace on payment of [£3 8s]". Grand lodge minutes, 11 March 1784. GLI. The other early Ulster lodges that disappear from records by 1760 are 34 Cootehill (Cavan), 200 Muff/ Eglinton (Derry) , 264 Middletown (Armagh), 270 Carrickfergus (Antrim), 328 Richhill (Armagh).

TABLE 1: ULSTER LODGES WARRANTED BEFORE 1760¹⁷

Belfast 2 (nos. 257, 272)
Antrim 14 (112, 135, 178, 193, 229, 240, 253, 258, 294, 313, 314, 316, 317, 335)
Armagh 4 (104, 134, 266, 315)
Cavan 5 (90, 184, 201 ¹⁸ , 310, 320)
Derry 4 (123, 132, 138, 235)
Donegal 2 (215, 287)
Down 5 (77, 126, 180, 269, 336)
Fermanagh 1 (17)
Monaghan 2 (232, 301)
Tyrone 3 (318, 332, 333)
Ulster total 42

It may be observed that of the lodges founded or sanctioned by the grand lodge before 1760, exactly one third (fourteen) were in Co. Antrim. Some of these were long-established, others of recent foundation. On the other hand, freemasonry, or at least in its official, "warranted" form, had only just reached Co. Tyrone. The three lodges there (including the one at Omagh, the reputed location of an early lodge) all date from 1759. Donegal and Monaghan were also frontier regions of expanding masonry - none of the lodges was older than ten years in 1759, judging by the dates of their warrants.

3.3. The grand lodge registers

The first extant series of the grand lodge register was begun in 1760.¹⁹ Although it contains some names of members, whose registration dates were as early as the 1740s, this information must be regarded as incomplete and second-hand, copied as it was from an earlier source. The second series was begun about 1800 (although some post-1800 registrations were also entered in the first series books). As a consistent series of sources can thus only be found for the bracket 1760 - 1800, this period will be used to provide the following statistical "snapshot" on the numbers of Ulster freemasons.

¹⁷ This table includes lodges with pre-1760 warrants originally issued for Ulster (thus excluding lodges such as no. 181, warranted in Dublin in 1748 and only to Cootehill in 1760 - IMR p. 50) that sent returns in 1760 or later, except known "revivals" of lodges later, under the same warrant number.

¹⁸ Lodge 201 was founded in Sporthall, Co. Monaghan but moved to Cootehill, Co. Cavan between 1758 and 1773 (here counted among Cavan lodges). IMR p. 54.

¹⁹ Horton 1986, p. 65.

3.3.1. Coverage

A count of all the entries for freemasons registered for Ulster lodges during 1760 - 1800, arrives at the total of 13 884 (see tables 2 and 13). It must be emphasised that this does *not* represent the number of Ulster freemasons but only the number of freemasons *registered at the Grand Lodge*. For reasons which will be discussed below, there is a considerable difference between the two figures. The fundamental mistake that many scholars have made is to assume that the number of registrations equals the number of actual initiations; an assumption that may and frequently does affect the conclusions reached.²⁰

Taking the above total as a starting point, one has to adjust it to take into account several factors. The first minor adjustment is downwards as some people occur more than once: those who had been members of one lodge and then moved to another one. However, the number of such cases appears to be fairly insignificant. In fact, the important adjustment to be made is upwards: the real number of masons in the Ulster lodges was much higher than the registered total as for a variety of reasons lodges were neither prompt nor accurate in reporting their membership.

Before 1768, the temptation not to keep the grand lodge informed must have been irresistible. According to the "Regulations of 1768", every lodge was to pay 10s. 10d. annually to the grand lodge *"for relief of Sick and Distressed Brethren, and for defraying other incidental Charges of the said Grand Lodge... This annual payment to be in lieu of the One Shilling and One Penny formerly paid by each Member"*.²¹ Consequently, before 1768, the more members there were, the more money was lost by truthfully reporting the new members to Dublin. By being not too punctual about reporting, money could be kept for other uses locally: for charity perhaps, or for food and drink - both of the latter figure very prominently in most surviving lodge account books.

After the change, one would expect that the lodges would be more straightforward about the numbers of members as they now had to pay a lump sum irrespective of the

²⁰ For instance, McClelland 1968, p. 76; McClelland 1975, pp. 23-24. Patrick Fagan, throughout his otherwise innovative chapter on Catholics and Dublin masonry, has also assumed that the register is a complete record of masonic membership. However, the incompleteness of the register may actually strengthen Fagan's argument of strong Catholic participation as not all Catholics (or Protestants) were registered. Fagan 1998.

²¹ *Regulations of 1768*, rule XVI.

TABLE 2
NUMBER OF FREEMASONS REGISTERED AT THE GRAND LODGE 1760 - 1800

	Belfast	Antrim	Armagh	Cavan	Derry	Donegal	Down	Ferman.	Monagh	Tyrone	TOTAL
1760	1	13	9	18	2	0	10	1	13	23	90
1761	1	15	12	1	1	7	11	16	10	9	83
1762	6	36	30	4	34	9	23	16	16	0	174
1763	4	94	83	19	21	12	33	34	14	27	341
1764	1	84	28	21	12	0	28	22	17	40	253
1765	0	48	5	13	6	24	33	6	17	7	159
1766	0	8	0	0	1	5	31	9	2	2	58
1767	0	14	0	6	5	0	4	8	4	0	41
1768	0	0	16	0	26	0	3	3	0	2	50
1769	11	102	74	28	61	4	39	44	22	51	436
1770	0	19	27	1	5	5	5	8	4	49	123
1771	3	20	11	15	1	1	12	3	1	17	84
1772	0	6	13	1	19	1	8	2	0	30	80
1773	5	11	9	10	2	17	7	4	1	22	88
1774	4	7	7	15	2	0	12	3	10	6	66
1775	5	21	61	12	6	0	15	2	11	6	139
1776	7	38	30	7	44	5	26	6	2	54	219
1777	28	32	22	28	37	0	24	0	6	33	210
1778	0	2	5	13	3	8	0	0	18	22	71
1779	0	76	10	9	4	7	4	1	4	40	155
1780	0	40	20	23	25	7	11	0	6	43	175
1781	83	13	15	22	57	39	24	19	6	30	308
1782	28	113	30	10	27	72	15	9	1	38	343
1783	99	51	44	9	18	33	20	0	27	28	329
1784	24	98	21	12	59	42	11	3	14	50	334
1785	66	42	26	6	66	95	1	1	6	57	366
1786	18	68	24	3	36	71	15	7	23	73	338
1787	19	22	83	13	50	23	18	21	15	79	343
1788	33	35	55	3	24	12	64	13	43	116	398
1789	50	51	26	11	60	14	35	49	49	111	456
1790	18	54	41	6	87	6	38	14	40	159	463
1791	3	53	52	20	58	22	82	16	58	97	461
1792	42	79	108	13	107	10	77	27	42	185	690
1793	61	41	9	29	88	13	56	20	71	128	516
1794	43	98	124	42	39	12	51	34	73	77	593
1795	70	109	101	41	87	16	137	55	41	67	724
1796	156	211	89	45	226	22	224	146	38	327	1484
1797	59	110	3	61	106	1	103	35	130	102	710
1798	47	194	4	25	65	26	44	31	53	36	525
1799	86	133	78	53	29	69	166	112	84	83	893
1800	41	106	34	31	54	22	121	59	13	34	515
TOTAL	1122	2367	1439	699	1660	732	1641	859	1005	2360	13884

actual number. However, they still had to pay a once-off registration fee (one British shilling) for each new member registered.²² New members could be charged a registration fee - for instance, a lodge in Benburb, Co. Tyrone, charged a "report money" of 2s. 8 1/2 d. in addition to the initiation fee of 16 s. 3.d. However, according to Crossle, the 2s 8 1/2 d fee "like other good intentions...seldom found its way to Dublin".²³ Certainly, many lodges regarded grand lodge registration as optional rather than compulsory. This is evident in the two sets of bye-laws of a lodge at Ballintaggart, Co. Armagh. In the paragraphs that deal with the penalties for a breach of masonic secrecy, the lodge is firstly, directed to register expulsion in such cases in the minutes and secondly, send a copy of the relevant minute to the grand lodge, "*if he [the expelled member] be regestired [sic] in the grand [lodge]*".²⁴

How far removed the relationship between the grand lodge and the local lodges was from total obedience can be gauged from a 1798 resolution passed by the grand lodge: "*Ordered that a Committee be ap[p]ointed to form an eligible plan or mode, to oblige the several lodges in this kingdom to have a due sense of their duty & obedience to this G[rand] L[odge]*".²⁵ Lodges, particularly those located outside Dublin, seem to have suspected that rather too much of their dues was used for the "other incidental charges" of the grand lodge in Dublin rather than "for relief of sick and distressed brethren". For example, a lodge in Lurgan gave charity in their own neighbourhood and then tried to deduct these sums from their dues to the grand lodge.²⁶ Tensions like those described here no doubt contributed to open schism in the early years of the nineteenth century, when a group of Ulster lodges left the Grand Lodge of Ireland and founded another in Ulster (see chapter 9).²⁷

Ulster lodges were not unique in non-registration although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to establish precisely whether they were more or less economical with the truth (and consequently, their money) than the average Irish lodge. Let just one example suffice: of the 52 members mentioned in the first extant minute book of a lodge at Birr, King's County, only 13 (25%) were ever recorded in the grand lodge books.²⁸

²² *Regulations of 1768*, rule X.

²³ Crossle 1925, p. 41.

²⁴ Lodge 527 minutes, bye-law 8 (first set), bye-law 9 (1793 set). GLI.

²⁵ Grand lodge minutes (1 February 1798). GLI.

²⁶ Lodge 134 members' personal cash book, 1743-1843, quoted in Smyth 1950.

²⁷ The traditional if simplistic explanation for the schism offered by Lepper and Crossle is that Alexander Seton, deputy grand secretary from 1801 to 1805, "engineered" the secession "for his own ends and for his own aggrandizement". Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 315.

²⁸ Crossle 1923, p. 129.

Consequently, some caveats about interpreting these figures are necessary. Naturally, the most difficult problem is estimating how much higher the real number of members could be. There is no other source listing (even in theory) all the masons in all the lodges. It would be possible to estimate an average percentage of omissions in the grand lodge register by comparing the names of the members recorded in the minute books of individual lodges with the corresponding entries in the register. A sufficiently large number of minute books with reasonably complete records of the entire membership of the lodge would be required for the purposes of producing a plausible estimate. Unfortunately, as none of the records in question have been computerised to date, constraints of space and time preclude such an attempt here. However, a few examples will suffice to demonstrate the wide divergence between the practices observed in different lodges. In a lodge based in Middletown, Co. Armagh, twenty new members were accepted in the years 1788 - 1791. Only six of them were ever reported to Dublin.²⁹ At the other extreme was a lodge in Raphoe, Co. Donegal: their minutes record 47 paying members at the end of 1782. Compared with the figure of 59 registered members (since 1762) this indicates a policy of very conscientious reporting.³⁰

Most lodges would seem to fall between the two extremes. A Coleraine lodge reported 91 names between its foundation in 1792 and 1800 (inclusive). In the relatively well-preserved minute book, 143 names are mentioned. At least eleven of them may have been members of other lodges as they are first mentioned only when they receive a Royal Arch or another "higher degree" (see chapter 6.4.2.). However, even if we ignore them, a considerable discrepancy of 43 unreported members remains, or roughly one third of the revised total of 132. Nearly one third (thirty-eight) were soldiers, mostly militia and fencible regiments: they may not have found registration necessary or particularly useful.³¹ Of the sixteen names in the "night book" of a Lurgan lodge in 1799, only seven (44%) had been reported to the grand lodge by 1803.³² If we should hazard a guess based on these last two lodges alone, the figures (at least the 1790s figures) in the grand lodge register should be revised upwards by about one third to one half.

²⁹ Lodge 437 accounts book and bye-laws. GLI.

³⁰ Lodge 346 minutes (27 December 1782). Register, 1st series, lodge 346. GLI.

³¹ Lodge 754 minutes. GLI.

³² Transcript of lodge 134 minutes (7 January 1799). Register, 1st series, lodge 134. GLI

3.3.2. Delay in registration

Another methodological problem is that the dates in the grand lodge registers are not the dates of admission but dates when the names, forwarded to Dublin by the secretaries of the local lodges, were entered in the grand lodge books. Thus, interpreting these figures would be much easier if we knew what was the average delay between a person in a faraway Ulster townland joining his local lodge and his membership being registered in the grand lodge books (if it indeed was ever recorded there). Do the figures for 1792, for example, show a great wave of enthusiasm for freemasonry in 1792, or 1791, or 1790 perhaps? For instance, the last great peak of 1799, could, depending on interpretation, show a massive rush to the lodges in the politically tense period before the Act of Union. On the other hand, it might be explained (in part at least) by a backlog from 1798, when communications were disrupted and registrations presumably delayed as a consequence. Sending or carrying lists of members of a masonic lodge at a time of unrest was probably not a popular - or safe - thing to do, given the suspicious attitude of the authorities that is so evident in the Rebellion Papers.

Once again, the definitive solution is beyond the scope of this study and a few examples will have to suffice. The lodge in Middletown that reported six of the twenty new members, took an average of one year and eight months to do so,³³ but this sample is far too small for a definitive conclusion to be based upon it. In any case, some delay was inevitable as registration took place (if it ever took place) only after the member had reached the third degree of master mason, usually a couple of months after first joining the lodge.

3.4. Registered membership, 1760 - 1800

3.4.1 Slow growth, 1760 - 1780

The period studied here can for the sake of convenience be divided into two periods: 1760 - 1780 and 1781 - 1800. The division corresponds roughly to the emergence in Ulster of a new-style, politicised freemasonry with close links to Volunteering. During the first period, the number of new registered members varied wildly from year to year, but was usually in the region of fifty to 250 per year (all but four of the

³³ Lodge 437 accounts book and bye-laws. GLI.

21 years fall in this category). There are a few exceptional years: 1763 (341), 1764 (253), 1769 (436). A less spectacular peak shows in 1776 (216) and 1777 (207).

It would be tempting to assume that rising political tensions and developing popular mobilisation would show in the peaks of the 1760s. However, that assumption would require other evidence to show that Irish freemasonry was politicised in any meaningful sense of the word at such an early date.³⁴ A simpler if less exciting explanation can be found - it would appear that these peaks have more to do with grand lodge campaigns of pursuing registrations more vigorously, than with the reality of membership increase at local level. It is difficult to find any other explanation for the wild fluctuations in the numbers of registered members. For instance, not a single new member was registered for any of the Co. Antrim lodges in 1768. In 1769, the number was 102, higher than in any previous year, although the figures for 1763 and 1764 were nearly as high. The disparity is further highlighted by the fact that a great number of new lodges were formed in Ulster in the 1760s (see table 11): thirteen in 1763 (which was a peak year in registrations) and sixteen in 1765 (which was not: only 159 registrations were recorded in that year). The 1765 record of sixteen new warrants issued for Ulster during a single year was not exceeded except in three years in the 1790s (1790, 1792 and 1796).

Campaigns to make the lodges register their members and pay their dues had been attempted before. For instance, in 1750 the grand lodge had placed advertisements in newspapers, urging all lodges to settle their arrears under threat of being "*obliterated or struck off...registry, and be no further taken notice of*".³⁵ At this stage, the grand lodge was apparently not interested in the names of individual members. However, in 1759 the lodges were ordered "*to send (immediately) an exact list of all the members in their respective lodges, their place and time of meeting, to the secretary of the grand lodge*".³⁶ This appeal appears to have led to the compilation of the first series of the grand lodge register (see chapter 1.2.).

Appeals in newspapers were repeated 1768 and 1774.³⁷ However, apparently the results of the newspaper advertisements were not considered satisfactory as more effective ways of enforcing discipline were developed. On at least two occasions during

³⁴ For discussion of the origins of masonic politicisation in Ulster, see chapter 7.1.

³⁵ BNL 18 December 1750.

³⁶ BNL 4 September 1759.

³⁷ Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 198. BNL 17 May 1774.

the 1760s, grand lodge officers actually left Dublin in order to tour the lodges and collect (or to attempt to collect) dues and registration fees in person. The fact that such tours that took place in 1764 and 1769 is consistent with the above-mentioned peaks in membership registrations. Moreover, the records of lodges visited show that members registered had in many cases been members for many years.³⁸

A tour to the provinces such as Ulster involved travelling over a considerable time and distance. The exact routes of the circuits cannot be now traced, but in 1764, grand secretary Calder is known to have visited at least Lurgan (20 August),³⁹ Richhill, Co. Armagh (30 August)⁴⁰ and Raphoe, Co. Donegal (27 December),⁴¹ the gap of four months between August and December may suggest two separate tours. On the 1769 tour, the then deputy grand secretary Corker is known also to have visited Richhill (20 May),⁴² Downpatrick (6 June),⁴³ Coleraine (30 June)⁴⁴ and Raphoe (3 July). According to the Raphoe minute book, Corker was specifically referred to as being "*on circuit for the first time*".⁴⁵ As Corker was appointed in 1767, this shows that such visits were not annual; annual visits to every lodge in Ireland could have been impossible to carry out by one man anyway.

Explaining the peak of 1776-77 is more difficult. The first documented instances of masonic lodges getting involved in politics occurred at this time - they took place in the context of the 1776 general election (see chapter 7.1.2). Unless evidence of another intensive registration campaign is found, it may not be implausible to suggest that is the starting point of a link between freemasonry and political involvement - the seemingly sudden interest in freemasonry during the Volunteer era would thus have started already at the time when the American crisis first had its impact on popular opinion in Ulster. This would correspond to what is known to have happened in the American colonies: masonic lodges there, although far from being unanimously behind the cause of independence, also experienced a phase of rapid expansion during the war.⁴⁶

³⁸ E.g. the minutes of a Downpatrick lodge reveal that several of the members registered as a result of the tour of 1769 had been members by 1766. Lodge 367 records 1765 - 1783. Downpatrick Masonic Hall.

³⁹ Lodge 394 minutes (20 August 1764). GLI.

⁴⁰ Lodge 328 minutes (30 August 1764). Quoted in Jenkinson 1946b, p. 85.

⁴¹ Lodge 346 minutes (27 December 1764). GLI.

⁴² Lodge 328 minutes (20 May 1769). Quoted in Jenkinson 1946b, p. 86.

⁴³ Lodge 367 minutes (6 June 1769). Downpatrick Masonic Hall.

⁴⁴ Lodge 123 minutes (30 June 1769). Quoted in Tait 1926 pp. 148-149.

⁴⁵ Lodge 346 minutes (3 July 1769). GLI.

⁴⁶ Bullock 1996, p. 113. The expansion affected mainly the lodges of the "Antient" faction within English freemasonry.

3.4.2. Rapid expansion, 1781 - 1800

In 1781, the number of registered members (see table 2) suddenly jumped to over 300 per year and remained constantly over that threshold for the rest of the century. For most of 1781 - 1791, the annual number of new registered members rose slowly, with only small, temporary decreases lasting a year or two. Then suddenly in 1792, there was a peak of 690 registrations, an increase of roughly 50% compared with the previous year. A decrease to a lower rate of 500+ members a year followed in 1793-94. However, even these figures are much higher than in any preceding year except 1792, showing a continued and increasing interest in membership (or in registering membership). The peak of 1792 was exceeded for the first time in 1795 (724 registrations), followed by the highest annual figure of all: 1481 names in 1796. Again, a decrease followed, although the numbers remained higher than in any pre-1792 year. Yet another peak in 1799 (862 registrations) was followed by a decrease in 1800.

How are we to interpret this curve? It is obvious that the figures now bear more resemblance to the real number of people joining. The growing enthusiasm of the early 1780s is shown in local records also. A lodge in Raphoe met only five to nine times a year in the late 1770s, the number of meetings slowly increasing towards the end of the decade. In 1781, the number of meetings of the lodge suddenly shot up to nineteen and during 1782 alone, a record of forty meetings were held. The increase was spectacular: the frequency had risen from one meeting perhaps every second month to a meeting once during most weeks of the year on the average. In December 1782 alone ten meetings were held: the lodge met on the 5th, 7th, 12th, 18th, 19th, 20th 21st, 23rd, 26th and 27th of that month. As the most important feature of the meeting was typically proposing, balloting for and admitting candidates, this shows an unprecedented rush for lodge membership.⁴⁷ The steady rise in registrations (and as we may assume, membership) throughout the 1780s showed a rising interest in freemasonry in Ulster which, though no doubt linked to politicisation and radicalisation of Ulster politics, was sustained also in uneventful (politically speaking) years.

The interest in membership continued to rise in the 1790s and was not seriously dented even by the 1798 rebellion, contradicting Kevin Whelan's argument that as "by 1797 pressure was being exerted on the Grand Lodge to excise 'that most dangerous system grafted onto freemasonry'...there was a marked hiatus in the spread of masonry

⁴⁷ Lodge 346 minutes (1775 - 1782). GLI.

subsequently" and that there was "a massive downturn in the spread of masonry".⁴⁸ Whelan regards here freemasons as nearly synonymous with political radicals and consequently, assumes that the fortunes of freemasonry were dictated by the fortunes of the radicals. Whatever the grand lodge may have been trying to do in relation to radicalism, they obviously could not possibly be expected to strive to stop "the spread of masonry" of which they were the governing body, after all. A hiatus - if the resources and means of control available to the grand lodge were sufficient to produce one - would be a hiatus in the spread of the United Irish movement, not one in the spread of masonry. That curbing the excesses of the radical lodges did not mean a wholesale political purge is shown by the relative ease with which the radical brethren were forgiven after 1798.⁴⁹

In Ulster, although the numbers registered in 1797 and 1798 were lower than the record peak of 1796, they were still much higher than in any year before 1792. Whatever the case may have been in other parts of Ireland, Whelan's "massive downturn" gives too dramatic an impression when compared with the Ulster data presented here. Moreover, the 1799 peak of over 800 members registered for Ulster lodges alone suggests that the downturn was only temporary. If we assume that the 1799 peak consisted in part of registrations that would have been made in 1798 but for disrupted communications, we may for the sake of the argument substitute for it an average figure calculated over a period of several years - say, the average annual number of registrations in 1798 - 1800. However, even this average figure (611) is higher than that of any individual year before 1792 and higher than 1793 or 1794, showing a continued high level of interest in lodge membership after 1798.

Campaigns to enforce the rules (and to charge the fees) on registration continued into the 1790s. The grand lodge had to repeat attempts to impose control - in 1795 a rule was passed requiring all lodges to register new *members "within three months after their being raised to the degree of a master mason, under the penalty of 1 l. 2 s. 9 d. for each"*.⁵⁰ Such a drastic measure might also show in the peak of 1796 but to what extent is debatable. As we have seen, lodges were not over-eager to send money to Dublin. The dramatic rise in the numbers of the lodges would also have made it practically impossible for the grand officers to visit any significant percentage of lodges in person, as they had

⁴⁸ Whelan 1996, pp. 86, 120. Whelan uses the quote (from General Knox) on the "most dangerous system" out of context as it refers specifically to the allegedly radical county committee of the Tyrone freemasons rather than directly to the United Irishmen (see chapter 8.1.2.).

⁴⁹ Grand lodge minutes (14 February 1799). Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 298-299.

⁵⁰ "Rules, orders and regulations, approved of by the Grand Lodge of Ireland, since the year, 1768" in *Ahiman Rezon* (Dublin 1804 edition).

been doing in the 1760s. Certainly many lodges did fall into arrears. In 1806, when the grand lodge had split in two, the Dublin faction could accuse many of their Ulster opponents of having neglected to pay their dues and thus having lost their say in grand lodge matters:

It appears...that the lodges in different parts of the North...who have lately sent memorials to the grand lodge, and, who it is presumed, the persons appearing on the 5th of June and 3d of July [a reference to two extremely turbulent grand lodge meetings] affected to represent, are all of them more or less in arrear...many of them 4, 5 and 6 years, some of them 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 18 years, one of them 26 years; several have never paid any dues; and that one of them, No. 102, of which the master appears as chairman of the meeting of 19 lodges held in Cavan on the 4th of March last, the warrant is cancelled.⁵¹

3.5. Other ways of estimating membership

3.5.1. Number of new lodges

Another way of looking at the spread of masonry is to study the number of new lodges each year. In the 1780s and early 1790s, the average number of new Ulster lodges receiving warrants from the grand lodge stood at about ten annually (see table 12). Again 1796 was unique with 25 new lodges. This coincidence, if it is one, might indicate that the delay in registering members was not very long after all and that 1796 really is exceptional. Looking at this peak year, seven of the new lodges were in Co. Tyrone, five in Fermanagh and five in Londonderry. In East Ulster new lodges were opened at a more constant pace, probably because there most towns of any significance already had a lodge or two.

Estimating the number of masonic lodges in Ulster at any given time is not without its pitfalls. Jim Smyth relies on the 1804 "Downes" list (so called after the printer) of Irish lodges. That list, however, is regarded as inaccurate and purposefully misleading by Lepper and Crossle.⁵² Kevin Whelan quotes a figure of 94 lodges in Antrim and 46 in Down in 1798. His source for these figures is not clear; the ambiguous reference to "Members' Registers" of the grand lodge suggests a simple count of all the lodges ever warranted in those counties up to 1798. However, only 75 such lodges for Antrim (adding

⁵¹ *Committee of the Grand Lodge of Ireland, Friday 25th July 1806* (grand lodge circular). GLI.

⁵² Smyth 1992, p. 46; Smyth 1993, p. 170; Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 413-414. The list in question is *A List of lodges...* printed by C. Downes of Dublin but apparently compiled by deputy grand secretary Alexander Seton, a party to the internal disputes within the grand lodge in the early 1800s.

the 15 Belfast lodges brings the total to 90) and 45 for Down can be found in IMR.⁵³ Despite the slight discrepancy, Whelan's numbers for each county are "about right" - an exact count for a county is laborious and often impossible as lodges often moved across county boundaries in search of a new meeting place. In some cases of lodges meeting near such boundaries, even IMR occasionally contradicts itself as to in which county a lodge was located.⁵⁴ A more serious oversight by Whelan, however, is failing to inform the reader that these figures (howsoever obtained) only show the number of warrants issued for each county. In fact, many of these lodges had disappeared by 1798 (including even the two oldest Belfast lodges), making the 1798 totals much lower.

3.5.2. Average number of members per lodge

Estimating the grand total of freemasons over a long period tells us little of how many people, or what percentage of the adult male population of Ulster were members at any given time. As there is no record of any such "census" of freemasonry ever having taken place, the key to such information is finding sources that could throw light on the average number of members per lodge. The 1782 Belfast edition of *Ahiman Rezon* includes the number of members claimed by each Belfast lodge: 220 members between the four lodges plus a military lodge, the membership of which is not known. One of the lodges had approximately 120 members and the others 30-40 each.⁵⁵ As the largest lodge was also the most fashionable (lodge 257, or "Orange Lodge"), it may be presumed that the others are a more typical sample for the period. Unfortunately, we have no comparable figures for other parts of the country. Thus it is difficult to say whether the figure of 30-40 members is applicable to lodges outside Belfast.

For the 1790s, there is fortunately more evidence as political resolutions published by groups of lodges in the winter of 1792-93 sometimes included claims of the number of members represented (not necessarily present) at the meeting. However, the pitfalls of this "method" are clearly demonstrated by the wide variations in the average numbers of members (see table 3). The average number of members per lodge varied from 43.5 at the conservative Armagh meeting to 97.7 at the reformist meeting in Lisburn. Ironically, the Lisburn masons whose total (both absolute and average per lodge) was by far the highest, emphasised that their figure represented "*effective, not paper men*". The

⁵³ Whelan 1996, p. 86.

⁵⁴ IMR p. 3. The locations given by Philip Crossle, who collected the material, sometimes differ from those given by Aiken McClelland, who compiled the index.

⁵⁵ *Ahiman Rezon* (Belfast 1782 ed.)

TABLE 3
MEMBERSHIP CLAIMED BY GROUPS OF LODGES AT POLITICAL MEETINGS, DECEMBER 1792 - JANUARY 1793

Location	Armagh ¹	Maghera ²	Stewartstown ³	Dungannon ⁴	Lisburn ⁵	Enniskillen ⁶
County	"	L'derry	Tyrone	Tyrone	Antrim	Fermanagh
Date	17 Dec 1792	29 Dec 1792	2 Jan 1793	7 Jan 1793	10 Jan 1793	28 Jan 1793
Character	Conservative	Reformist	Compromise	Reformist	Reformist	Reformist
No. of lodges	26	7	9	30	9	14
No. of members	1131	534	404	1432	879	715
Average per lodge	43.5	76.3	44.9	47.7	97.7	51.1

NB:

Character = whether the resolutions passed were reformist or conservative, i.e. for or against parliamentary reform and Catholic emancipation. The Stewartstown resolutions are difficult to place in either category (see chapter 7.3.2).

No. of members = the total number of members (not necessarily present) claimed by the lodges

¹ *Gordon's Newry Chronicle* 20 December 1792, BNL 21 December 1792.

² *Northern Star* 2 January 1793.

³ BNL 8 January 1793. The number of members claimed was given as "upwards of 404".

⁴ BNL 22 January 1793.

⁵ *Northern Star* 12 January 1793.

⁶ *Northern Star* 6 February 1793.

Dungannon meeting is the only one of which the number of members claimed by each individual lodge is known; these vary from five to 146.⁵⁶

Cautiously taking the lowest average number of members per lodge (43.5 at the Armagh meeting) as the basis for an estimate and multiplying it by the number of members in Ulster, one can perhaps assume that the resulting total would be a minimum figure not too far off the mark. As regards the applicability of this crude device for the whole province, the wide geographical distribution of the documented meetings shows that there is no reason to believe that the average figures for other parts of Ulster should have been lower. The number of lodges in Ulster in 1792 is estimated at 273 for this exercise. This includes all lodges that got their warrants in 1792 at the latest. Lodges that did not send returns to the grand lodge at least once between 1792 and 1800, or of which no other contemporary evidence exists, have been excluded, thus adjusting the figure to eliminate defunct lodges from the calculations.

TABLE 4: NUMBER OF LODGES IN ULSTER AT THE END OF 1792

Belfast	11
Antrim	55
Armagh	35 ⁵⁷
Cavan	13
Derry	31
Donegal	10
Down	32
Fermanagh	17
Monaghan	16
Tyrone	56 ⁵⁸
Ulster total	276

This figure multiplied by the average number of Armagh masons per lodge (43.5) gives a hypothetical figure of 12 006 for the whole province. A round figure of fifty, close to the 47.7 average of the Dungannon and the 51.1 figure of Enniskillen, would give a total of 13 800. Thus an estimated total membership of 12 000 - 14 000 masons in the whole of Ulster in 1792-93 would not seem unreasonable. The groups of lodges which

⁵⁶ BNL 22 January 1793.

⁵⁷ According to IMR, Lodge 681 moved in 1792 from Caledon, Co. Tyrone to Killylea, Co. Armagh. Here it has been counted among Armagh lodges. Lodge 328 Richhill did not send returns in 1760-1800 but subscribed to the loyal declaration of Co. Armagh lodges in 1792. BNL 21 December 1792.

⁵⁸ Lodge 318 (Stewartstown) sent its last returns in 1788 and 726 (Bush House) in 1790. However, both lodges took part in the Dungannon county committee meeting of 7 January 1793. BNL 22 January 1793.

met in Maghera and in Lisburn claimed a much higher average membership per lodge. However, as only a small number of lodges was involved (seven in Maghera and nine in Lisburn), their meetings may not be representative.

As this estimate represents the Ulster membership at a one given time, it implies a higher membership than the 13 000 plus in the grand lodge books, which represented all the people registered over a forty-year period (1760 - 1800). Although most of the meetings of which we have detailed information were reformist in character, there seems to be no reason to believe that the average conservative lodge was significantly smaller than the average reformist lodge.⁵⁹

Using the 1792-93 figure as a basis, it should be possible to attempt to estimate the total membership at the conclusion of the period covered by the first set of the grand lodge registers, in the year 1800. In 1793 - 1800, a total of 5814 masons were registered. These are the people registered in the grand lodge registers alone; as we have seen, the real number must be higher, perhaps by a third or even half. Even allowing for some people leaving the order through death, emigration and resignation at the same time as others are joining, unless new evidence of a mass exodus in this period should be found - a figure of 20 000 (c. 12 000 in 1792-93 plus the c. 6000 registered by 1800, revised upwards by a third, i.e. 2000) should be considered as a minimum for the year 1800. Given the cumulative effect of the repeated choice of the most conservative options in the above estimates, the actual figure may in fact be higher, unless new evidence of a mass exodus from masonic membership in this period should be found. Three lodges in Glaslough, Co. Monaghan claimed a total membership of 275 in 1797.⁶⁰ On the average, there were 91.7 members per lodge, a considerably higher figure than our estimate of fifty in 1792-93. However, the sample is both geographically and quantitatively far too small to form the basis for any estimate of the average size of an Ulster lodge in the late 1790s.

Although any of the three methods proposed above (the study of the registered membership, the number of new lodges and the average number of members per lodge) would be highly unreliable on their own, taken together they all point in the same direction. This was definitively a period of rapid growth in membership for Ulster freemasonry, even a period of transformation into a mass movement. For the sake of comparison, the masonic membership in Ulster the late 1790s would have been

⁵⁹ A conservative lodge in Hallsmill, Co. Down, claimed an attendance of 120 members at a meeting on 28 December 1792. BNL 4 January 1793.

approximately equal to that of the yeomanry in 1798-99.⁶¹ However, unless the above estimates are far too low, the masonic membership is not of the same order as the figure of over 34 000 that the Volunteers boasted they could muster when that movement was at its zenith⁶² - not to mention the figure of 118 000 that the United Irishmen claimed they could summon to battle. Even at the height of its popularity, freemasonry appears to have retained some of its exclusiveness.

3.6. Variations from the pattern

Looking at the figures from the grand lodge books (see table 2) at county level (treating Belfast separately) the trends are slightly different in different areas. The 1796 peak showed in Belfast, Antrim, Londonderry, Down, Fermanagh, Tyrone but not in Armagh (where the greatest rise was in 1794), Cavan and Monaghan (1797), Donegal (as early as 1785). In Belfast, the first significant peak coincided, as might be expected, within the Volunteer era. The figures for 1781 and 1783 were not exceeded again before 1796. In Antrim, the figures of 1782 and 1784 were the highest until the late 1790s but in Down, there was no significant increase in registrations in the 1780s; 1788, 1791-92 were peak years before the great increase around 1796.

One may question whether the county is a logical unit for such comparisons at all - whether socially and economically more consistent regions such as the Lagan valley (irrespective of county boundaries) would be better units to study. In some cases, county boundaries obviously hinder more than help: the town of Newry was in Co. Down, but from 1775 also the neighbouring settlement of Ballybought across the river in Co. Armagh had its own lodge. The county boundary was not an obstacle for recruitment: about one quarter of the members of lodge meeting in Benburb, Co. Tyrone, came from Co. Armagh. Likewise, the boundary between counties Donegal and Londonderry was no obstacle to a Lifford lodge: the members decided to move temporarily to adjacent Strabane as no suitable meeting-place could be found in Lifford.⁶³

⁶⁰ BNL 26 June 1797.

⁶¹ The strength of the yeomanry in Ulster was recorded as 15 550 in 1798, 26 550 in 1799 and rose to over 36 000 by 1810. Blackstock 1998, p. 117.

⁶² Stewart 1992, p. 6.

⁶³ Lodge 569 minutes (15 November 1795). GLI.

4 LEADERSHIP AND ORGANISATION

4.1. "Chiefs of the enlightened men" - the Grand Lodge

4.1.1. The Grand Masters

*"We chiefs of the enlightened men of the most antient and right worshipful lodge of St John..."*¹ Thus began the text on certificates issued by the Grand Lodge in Dublin. In practice, the chiefs of these chiefs, the grand masters of the Irish craft, were usually young, high-ranking noblemen who left the day-to-day running of masonic affairs to others. The activities of some of them confirmed that the already quoted passage by Robison the conspiracy theorist: *"...us Britons, who are accustomed to consider the whole [i.e. freemasonry] as a matter of amusement for young men, who are glad of any pretext for indulging in conviviality..."*² This seems to have been a good description of Irish masonry too, at least in upper-class Dublin form.

Being the grand master of freemasons was often just a secondary pastime to these peers and heirs of peers, who usually were in their twenties or thirties. The first grand master, Richard Parsons, 1st Earl of Rosse, was in his time more famous for various scandals than for his masonic role³ and one wonders whether freemasonry was for him just another practical joke. Others apparently took the office more seriously, yet it remained a young man's job: William Robert Fitzgerald, Marquess of Kildare (later 2nd Duke of Leinster) was made a mason at the age of eighteen while on a grand tour of the Continent. He was only twenty-one when elected grand master for the first time, and about twenty-eight years old when he resigned the office for the last time.⁴ Towards the end of the century, the grand masters tended to be slightly older, perhaps a reflection of the increased prestige of the office. Two County Down notables in their thirties held the office in the 1780s: Arthur Hill, Lord Kilwarlin (later the 2nd Marquess of Downshire) became grand master in 1785, at the age of thirty-two; his political ally Francis Charles Annesley, 2nd Viscount Glerawley (from 1789 the 1st Earl Annesley) succeeded him in 1787, at the age of thirty-seven.⁵

¹ Certificates in the Grand Lodge museum, Molesworth Street, Dublin.

² Robison, John: *Proofs of a conspiracy...*, p. 40.

³ For differing opinions on Rosse's character, see Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 61-62.

⁴ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 202-203.

⁵ Lepper & Crossle, p. 218 (Hill), pp. 220-221 (Annesley).

Being a Catholic was no barrier to the highest office in Irish masonry - the 4th Viscount Barnewall of Kingsland, grand master in the 1730s was one, although connected by family ties to the previous grand masters.⁶ The leaders of the Irish craft also included many people that Kevin Whelan included or might have included in the "convert interest" that he has defined.⁷ Thomas Nugent, 6th Earl of Westmeath (grand master in 1763-64) had served in the French army on the Continent when a young Catholic nobleman; later he was the first peer in his family to conform to the established church.⁸ Other representatives of previously Catholic families were James, 4th Lord Kingston (grand master in 1731-32, 1735-36 and 1745-47), who was the son of a pardoned Jacobite;⁹ Nicholas, 5th Viscount Netterville (grand master in 1732).¹⁰ In Ulster there was Randal William MacDonnell, 6th Earl (later Marquess) of Antrim, grand master in 1772-73 and 1778-81.¹¹ The MacDonnell family was the most important of the pre-seventeenth century landed families in Ulster who succeeded in holding onto their land - the MacDonnells are credited by Whelan as having "succeeded in keeping the Glens [of Antrim] predominantly Catholic".¹² Another prominent Ulster nobleman and freemason was John O'Neill, later Lord O'Neill of Shane's Castle, a second-generation Protestant.¹³

Yet another Catholic, or convert, family much involved in masonry were the Mathews of Tipperary with their various relatives and in-laws.¹⁴ Thomas Mathew (d. 1777), a candidate in the fiercely contested 1761 election in Tipperary, was supported largely by the convert interest. Laurence Dermott (1720 - 1791), the author of *Ahiman Rezon*, who had such a revolutionary influence on English freemasonry, also apparently came from an Irish Catholic background and may have been linked to the Mathews by family ties.¹⁵ In the light of these observations, it would seem that the role of freemasonry in the strategies of survival and advancement of the Catholic "underground gentry" could well be a subject worth further study. However, owing to the unique circumstances of

⁶ Lepper & Crossle, p. 150.

⁷ Whelan 1996, pp. 6-7.

⁸ Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 190.

⁹ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 146-147; Murphy 1994, p. 79.

¹⁰ Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 148.

¹¹ Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 208-209. MacDonnell was registered as member of a lodge at Larne, Co. Antrim in 1784. Register, 1st series, lodge 615 (12 January 1784).

¹² Whelan 1996, p. 39.

¹³ McClelland 1968, p. 82.

¹⁴ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 167-168, 194, 238.

¹⁵ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 236-242. Thomas Mathew was grand master of the Antients' Grand Lodge of England for four of the nearly thirty years when Dermott held high office in that body. Hamill 1986 pp. 50, 160. For a brief account of Mathew's political career, see Dickson 1987, pp. 131-132.

Ulster - few Catholic gentry survived there¹⁶ - that topic falls mostly outside the scope of this thesis.

The most influential by far of families with Catholic links involved in the affairs of Irish freemasonry were the Hely-Hutchinsons, descendants of John Hely (d. 1794), an MP and Provost of Trinity College. His son Richard, the 1st Earl of Donoughmore was an active spokesman for Catholic relief, thus differing sharply in political opinion from his predecessor as grand master, Lord Downshire.¹⁷ Donoughmore was also very active in a cause of more immediate personal relevance: trying to secure patronage for his family in any field of life in which he happened to be involved. According to A. P. W. Malcomson, the "view of the 1st Earl presented by the Donoughmore Papers [a collection of family correspondence] is not consistently flattering".¹⁸

Lord Donoughmore became grand master of Irish freemasons in 1789 and his way of running the order would seem to confirm Dr Malcomson's observations to some extent. Elected at the age of thirty-three, Donoughmore proceeded to turn the Grand Lodge of Ireland into a part of the expanding Hely-Hutchinson empire of land, connections, places and titles (he himself was to attain a viscountcy in 1797 and an earldom in 1800). Unlike any of his predecessors, he stayed in office for twenty-four years and it could be argued that the Irish grand lodge was fast turning into a Hely-Hutchinson family business. The apogee of their power was reached in 1807 with the earl as grand master and his two brothers in the next highest ranking positions of deputy grand master and senior grand warden. One of them was Lord Hutchinson of Alexandria, (General Hutchinson of "The Races of Castlebar" fame in 1798) who had a long career as a pro-Catholic emancipation MP in the Irish parliament.¹⁹

Irish peers did not confine their activities to the Irish grand lodge but several served as grand masters of England. The 1720s saw a succession of noblemen with Irish

¹⁶ Cullen 1990b, p. 73.

¹⁷ Bartlett 1992, pp. 159, 207. Lepper and Crossle attribute Donoughmore's political opinions to the significant number of Catholic freemasons, the masonic ideal of fraternity and the earl's Irish ancestry: "At the period Lord Donoughmore was elected our Grand Master the majority of the freemasons in Ireland were Catholics...within the walls of an Irish masonic lodge there were no such things as distinctions of class, of creed, of politics...and this very fact may have exercised no small influence upon Lord Donoughmore's character when he championed the Catholic cause - indeed in his own person he was a representative of an ancient Irish race, being one of the O'Hely sept". Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 423.

¹⁸ Malcomson 1981b, p. 12.

¹⁹ For brief biographies of the Hely-Hutchinson brothers, see Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 422-427, 429-431, 441.

titles in the chair of the grand master of England: 4th Earl of Inchiquin, 3rd Lord Coleraine²⁰ and 4th Lord Kingston. Coleraine and Kingston went on to become grand masters of Ireland, Coleraine in 1743 and Kingston on three occasions in the 1730s and 1740s.²¹ Likewise, several Scottish peers also served as grand masters of both England and Scotland during their "masonic careers".

In the 1740s, a faction refusing to acknowledge the authority of the English grand lodge emerged. In 1751, they set up the "Antient" grand lodge of England in opposition to the one founded in 1717. The split was ostensibly a result from a disagreement over the correct way to perform ritual. However, it also had social overtones. The original English Antients included men of lower rank. Many of them were of Irish birth like Lawrence Dermott, their chief organiser. As they deemed themselves the sole custodians of ancient masonic rituals, the Antients dubbed their opponents the "Moderns".

The division spread to wherever English masonry had taken root, such as the North American colonies. Steven C. Bullock has shown that the dispute there was not only a disagreement over obscure ritual but also very much a matter of different levels of wealth and social standing. While the Moderns in Boston and Philadelphia were predominantly merchants (over sixty per cent in both cities) and professionals, the Antients of America were dominated by artisans (two thirds of members in Philadelphia) and sea-going trades, mainly ships' captains (a third of the members in Boston). The Antients' popular appeal won the ensuing struggle for the leadership of American masonry. In Philadelphia, for instance, the transformation from the Modern lodges of the colonial elite into Antient ones with a more lower-class membership began in 1757: a new lodge refused to follow the lead of the older ones and declared that their allegiance was to the Antients. By 1800, nearly all then existing American lodges were Antient.²²

During the Antient-Modern split, Irishmen moving to England had to choose between the two camps. Cadwallader, 9th Lord Blayney was grand master of Moderns in 1764-66; he was later elected grand master of Ireland but did not take office.²³ Another

²⁰ Henry, 3rd Lord Coleraine (1693 -1749) is a good example of the close personal links between early English and Irish freemasonry. He was a friend of Dr John Theophilus Desaguliers, a multi-faceted Enlightenment figure who was a lecturer in Newtonian "experimental philosophy", an inventor, chaplain to the Prince of Wales and one of Coleraine's predecessors as the grand master of England. Both Coleraine and Desaguliers were fellows of the Royal Society. Weisberger 1993, pp. 38-47.

²¹ Hewitt 1967, p. 267.

²² Bullock 1996, pp. 85-95.

²³ Hewitt 1967, p. 272.

Irish grand master, William, 1st Earl of Blesington, went on to become the head of the "Antients" of England as did Thomas Mathew who simultaneously held the position of provincial deputy grand master of Munster in Ireland. Randal William, 6th Earl of Antrim had joined an English lodge while a student in Oxford. He later became grand master of Ireland (1772-73, 1778-81) and also went on to become grand master of the Antients.²⁴

Although no split comparable to that between the English Antients and Moderns developed in Ireland, it is clear that of the two, the Antients were the faction with closer Irish connections. For instance, their book of constitutions, the *Ahiman Rezon*, was soon adopted by the Irish.²⁵ Twenty years after the formation of the Antients, their rivals still talked of the "Irish faction".²⁶ The mutual recognition was demonstrated clearly in 1786 when

*a very singular occurrence on the annals of freemasonry took place...the Right Honourable Lord Viscount Kilwarlin did preside in the grand lodge in London as locum-tenens to the Right Hon. the Earl of Antrim, who is grand master of England, while at the same time the Earl of Antrim presided in the grand lodge [of Ireland] as locum-tenens for Lord Kilwarlin, who is grand master in Ireland.*²⁷

No such co-operation took place with the Moderns. There seems to have been a perception that ancient masonic rituals had been better preserved among Irish and Scottish lodges, along with some English lodges outside London who eventually set up the "Antients"; this perceived superiority set them apart from the Modern upstarts. According to the Antients, the birth of the Moderns (and of the first grand lodge in the world) was a far from solemn event:

*About the year 1717, some joyous companions, who had passed the degree of a [fellow] craft, though very rusty, resolved to form a lodge for themselves in order, by conversation, to recollect what had been formerly dictated to them, or if that should be found impracticable, to substitute something new, which might for the future pass for masonry amongst themselves.*²⁸

Yet another prominent member of the Irish aristocracy closely involved in English masonry was Francis Rawdon, 2nd Earl of Moira. When the Prince of Wales (later

²⁴ Hewitt 1967, p. 275. The earl later joined a lodge in Larne. Register, 1st series, lodge 615 (12 January 1784).

²⁵ McClelland 1968, p. 79. *Ahiman Rezon* was first published in 1756 and the first Dublin edition appeared in 1760, followed by many Dublin and provincial Irish editions.

²⁶ Bullock 1996, p. 89.

²⁷ BNL 27 June 1786.

²⁸ Donovan, John: *Sublime friendship delineated*, p. 130. This passage is reprinted from the second edition of 2nd edition of *Ahiman Rezon* (1764).

George IV) accepted the honorary office of the grand master of the Moderns in 1787, Moira was appointed acting grand master.²⁹ Moira, the owner of Montalto estate at Ballynahinch, was a liberal peer. Before the 1798 rebellion, he warned the British and Irish Houses of Lords of the dangers of British prejudice in treating everybody in Ireland as a rebel and the consequent illegal military repression.³⁰ Moira was also among the five Whig peers who supported Arthur O'Connor during his trial in England in May 1798.³¹ When the Unlawful Societies Act was passed in Britain two years later, Moira succeeded in persuading prime minister Pitt to grant masonic lodges exemption from its provisions.³²

Although many Irish aristocrats were freemasons, aristocrats did not need freemasonry to achieve or retain their station in life. They might take advantage of it fleetingly: Arthur Wellesley, later the 1st Duke of Wellington, joined a lodge while running for MP at Trim, County Meath. However, Wellesley only received the first degree and soon lost interest in freemasonry, later in life even refusing his permission to allow the lodge at Trim to be named after him.³³

4.1.2. Administration and contact with the lodges

The eighteenth-century Grand Lodge of Ireland was a concept rather than a physical place. Its infrequent meetings were held on various rented premises, such as taverns, sufficiently large to accommodate the grand officers and such delegates of lodges (usually mostly of Dublin lodges) that wished to take part. At the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth, the grand lodge usually met in Tailors' Hall, Back Lane.³⁴ The most important officers of the grand lodge were the deputy grand master, two grand wardens (junior and senior), the grand secretary and the grand treasurer. According to the biographies compiled by Lepper and Crossle for the first volume of their *History of the Grand Lodge*, the holders of these offices were an interesting mix of Dublin high society: sons of peers and gentry, lawyers, physicians,

²⁹ Hamill 1986, p. 49.

³⁰ Stewart 1995, p. 217; Pakenham 1992, p. 54.

³¹ Pakenham 1992, p. 129.

³² Hamill 1986, pp. 49-50. Moira was later one of the main facilitators of the union of the two English grand lodges in 1813. In that year, Moira (now the 1st Marquess of Hastings) left his masonic "career" to become governor-general of Bengal. Clarke 1967, pp. 125-127.

³³ Crawley 1902, pp. 118-122.

³⁴ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 84, 357. Owing to the infrequent nature of grand lodge meetings, A. T. Q. Stewart's description of Tailors' Hall as "the headquarters" of the grand lodge is misleading. Stewart seems to suggest that because the Dublin Society of United Irishmen also met there, there must have been a close link between the two. Stewart 1993, p. 163. However, the hall was made

merchants (particularly wine merchants), army officers and the occasional mathematician, actor or playwright thrown in. Some families were particularly well-represented: three brothers of the LaTouche banking family served as grand officers.

Grand masters with strong provincial connections sometimes brought in their own friends and protégés. Ulster gentry were particularly well represented during the grand masterships of Kilwarlin (later the 2nd Marquess of Downshire) and Annesley in the late 1780s. For instance, the junior grand warden elected in 1786 was Richard Magenis of Waringstown, a 22-year old lieutenant of dragoons who went on to become MP for Enniskillen (1790-93 and 1812-28) and Collector of Cavan. The grand secretary elected in the same year was Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Ross of Rostrevor, MP for Newry.³⁵ In addition, the post of grand treasurer had been held by Major Holt Waring of Waringstown since 1762. Thus three key grand lodge officers (in addition to the grand master, Kilwarlin) were County Down men linked to the Downshire interest.

The day-to-day running of the Irish grand lodge was originally the business of the grand secretary. Some of the grand secretaries came from humbler stock than the other grand officers; for instance, John Pennell was a bookseller and John Calder a turner, wheelwright and pump-borer.³⁶ However, this office later became an honorary one and from 1767, a deputy was appointed. The deputy grand secretary was the only salaried officer of the grand lodge. As his income depended on the number of members registered, warrants and certificates issued and the like³⁷, and as the grand lodge was constantly at loggerheads with lodges over these various dues, the deputy grand secretary was at the front line of the conflict. These officers sometimes inspected lodges in situ, collecting outstanding dues and writing a receipt in the lodge account books.³⁸

These tours were not necessarily pleasant for the officers concerned. On one such tour in 1769, the Dublin surgeon and then deputy grand secretary Corker was not treated very hospitably by a Coleraine lodge. The minutes record that Corker produced the 1768 rules booklet, read aloud the paragraphs concerning lodge dues and then *"Inform'd this Lodge that his principal business here was to collect the arrears due the*

available to a wide range of functions, including meetings of the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland. Grand Orange Lodge minutes 1798 - 1818, p. 180 (19 August 1800). GOLI/A/M/98.

³⁵ For Magenis and Ross, see Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 219-220.

³⁶ Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 155 (Pennell), p. 187 (Calder).

³⁷ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 270-272.

³⁸ The earliest known reference to such a visit to Ulster is the 1759 visit to Coleraine by grand secretary Calder. Lodge 138 minutes (25 January 1759). Hezlett papers D/668/O. PRONI.

Grand Lodge". In response, "Br. Wood our Mas'r [Master] told Br. Cocker [sic] that our Lodge look'd upon this demand of the Grand Lodge (with great submission to their Worshippes) as arbitrary & unreasonable...". Consisting as this Coleraine lodge did of wealthy people, it could condescendingly give a crown per member to the building fund for a proposed masonic hall in Dublin. At the same time, the members asserted that "this be in full for any pretended demands they [the grand lodge] might have for the time past".³⁹

Despite the snub received at Coleraine, poor Corker carried on with his tour. Four days later he was in Raphoe, and judging by the deferential tone of the minute book of the local lodge, he got a warmer reception there.⁴⁰ That not all the lodges were constantly at odds with the grand lodge, is demonstrated by the fact that even much later, the Raphoe lodge obediently undertook to pay their outstanding dues "with all convenient speed". As to what "convenient speed" meant, however, it took over three months after the previous resolution until the lodge actually instructed their secretary to pay the sum in question to the grand lodge.⁴¹

Belonging to an organisation that attracted so many aristocrats was obviously a matter of pride to many freemasons. The institution of the grand lodge attracted admiration and deference, as James Orr's poem shows:

*We'll join in a ring, the craft and the King
We'll honour with bumpers o'erflowing.
May the Grand Lodge of worth, the Pole-Star of the North,
From its pure light never cease glowing.*⁴²

However, the admiration had its limits when it came to giving money to the faraway grand lodge. Although the grand lodge claimed to use at least part of the money received for charity purposes, many Ulster lodges felt that the money would be better used nearer home. Paying their dues to the grand lodge in 1774, a Lurgan lodge tried to claim credit for payments made to charity locally, subtracting them from the sums payable

³⁹ Lodge 123 minutes (30 June 1769). Quoted in Tait 1926 pp. 148-149.

⁴⁰ Lodge 346 minutes (3 July 1769). GLI.

⁴¹ Lodge 346 minutes (27 December 1781 and 1 April 1782). GLI.

⁴² From "The craftsmen of Ballycarry" in *The country rhymes of James Orr*, p. 98. Orr was probably referring to the Grand Lodge of Ulster rather than to the Dublin one. He was definitely associated with the Grand Lodge of Ulster: he acted as secretary at a 1812 St. John's Day meeting in Ballycarry, where at least some if not all of the lodges present belonged to the Grand Lodge of Ulster. BNL 3 July 1812.

to the grand lodge.⁴³ This kind of continuing disagreements was probably among the reasons why in the early years of the nineteenth century, the discontent among the Ulster lodges led to the secession of over three hundred lodges and the formation of a new grand lodge in Ulster (see chapter 9).

4.2. Provincial leadership and pre-1790 ad hoc committees

Originally, there was no intermediate (provincial or county) level in the Irish masonic organisation between the grand lodge and the individual lodges. From the 1750s onwards, "provincial deputy grand masters" were appointed for Munster, Ulster and Connacht. They were to receive the contributions of the lodges on behalf of the grand master, hear appeals and judge when disputes arose among the masons of the province. In the 1770s, the reasons behind the appointment of these officers were explained by describing the state of affairs in the provinces as not entirely conforming to the new rules passed in 1768:

*Whereas it has been represented to us the great necessity there is of a close inspection being made into the conduct & behaviour of the several lodges in Ulster. To enquire into the causes of their decay, the reason of their failure in point of duty to us which by their warrant or authority for assembling they are bound to, and their neglect in not annually sending their contributions and a return of their members names as the rules direct....*⁴⁴

There was nothing peculiar to Ulster in this admission of insubordination in the province: another patent issued at the same time for Munster used exactly the same formulation to justify the necessity of the appointment.⁴⁵ Between the grand lodge (including its apparently largely titular provincial representatives) and the local lodges there was no other organisation at provincial or county level, except for meetings that sometimes took place between delegates of several lodges. Apparently such meetings were not officially sanctioned but neither were they particularly discouraged by the grand lodge - as long as they did not interfere with matters that the grand lodge regarded as belonging to its sole jurisdiction. Only in Munster was there a more or less formally constituted "provincial grand lodge", apparently a legacy of its old independent grand lodge, which had merged with the grand lodge of Ireland in 1731.⁴⁶

⁴³ Smyth 1950, pp. 49-50.

⁴⁴ Patent appointing William Irvine provincial deputy grand master of Ulster (1 August 1776). GLI.

⁴⁵ Patent appointing Robert Davies provincial deputy grand master of Munster (1 August 1776). GLI.

⁴⁶ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 64-70. Lepper and Crossle give contradictory information on the formation of provincial grand lodges. On one hand, they assert that these were not formed until the

Although these meetings (with the exception of Munster) did not constitute a permanent intermediate layer, such as the United Irish county committees or the Orange county grand lodges set up in the 1790s, they could and did on occasion attract representatives from a group of lodges spread over a large area. Those represented at one such meeting in 1787 included lodges from Lurgan, Waringsford, Waringstown, Dromore, Portadown (3 lodges), Newry, Ballykeel and Ballintaggart.⁴⁷ Many such meetings were no doubt just one-off events, ad hoc meetings convened to deal with disciplinary or other routine matters at hand. For instance, a lodge at Donaghrisk (Co. Tyrone) decided to send delegates to a meeting at Maghery *"in order to deliberate on certain abuses of the Ins[tit]ution committed by lodges in this and the adj[a]cent countys of Armagh and Derry"*.⁴⁸

Unfortunately, the brief newspaper notices of such meetings convey very little information on what the meetings were actually about. For instance, ten lodges met in Dromore in 1788 to *"take into consideration the present state of masonry" as "the conduct of some who were called brother is alarming"*. In their strongly worded resolution, measures were demanded *"for the suppression of vice and eradicating evil doers"*. The lodges also agreed *"to strengthen the hands of the magistrate in the preservation of good order"*.⁴⁹ However, it is not clear whether the problem was agrarian trouble, faction-fighting, poteen-making or something else. Sometimes we get a glimpse of a more permanent and regular local committee, as suggested by the wording of a 1788 notice:

*The several lodges who send delegates to the Masonic Association, held in Dr Agnew's in the town of Templepatrick, are desired to take notice that the next half-yearly meeting will be on Monday, the 29th day of December inst....As there is business of importance to be transacted, it is hoped there will be a regular attendance and that such lodges as wish to join the Association will embrace the present opportunity.*⁵⁰

Coincidentally or not, Agnew's tavern was later to be a place of meeting for the United Irishmen.⁵¹

1820s, yet they acknowledge the existence of the Munster provincial grand lodge in 1790. Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 280, 287-288.

⁴⁷ Transcripts of lodge 134 minutes (1 July 1787). GLI.

⁴⁸ Lodge 668 minutes (29 October 1789). GLI.

⁴⁹ BNL 2 December 1788.

⁵⁰ BNL 24 December 1788.

⁵¹ Stewart 1995, p. 66. Stewart thinks that the final decision for the Antrim rising was made at Agnew's on 5 June 1798.

4.3. The post-1790 county committees

In 1790, a select committee of the grand lodge recommended forming a permanent committee consisting of all the masters of Co. Armagh lodges. The reasons given for such action are interesting: "*many shameful irregularities have been committed, and very improper persons admitted into some of the lodges in [the] said county*". Accordingly, such a committee was set up and in turn, authorised the setting up of sub-committees in the various parts of the county.

Each sub-committee was to "*enquire into the general character and situation in life*" of candidates seeking admission to any of the lodges in its district. A successful applicant was to be charged a minimum fee of two guineas, apparently to prevent people from too lowly "situations in life" from being accepted. The rules for applying for new warrants were tightened also - the recommendation of five of the seven members of the relevant subcommittee as well as that of the chairman and secretary of the county committee itself was required. The committee was also to have the power to veto the election of masters and wardens of lodges. The report of the select committee was written very much with the peculiar circumstances of Co. Armagh in mind, as it ended in a kind of afterthought:

*Your Committee are also of opinion, that if the above resolutions and powers granted to the County of Armagh, were in like manner granted to the County of Down...and all the other counties in Ireland, the same would tend much to the advancement of masonry in general.*⁵²

The county committee was a uniquely Irish feature of eighteenth-century freemasonry; no similar bodies existed in English or Scottish masonry.⁵³ Dublin had its own Committee of Inspection - the one that rejected Grattan's membership - but no such mechanism existed in other parts of Ireland until 1790. Not all the lodges welcomed the formation of the committees. In addition to the financial obligations that the lodges may have found difficult to comply with, there were political disagreements. Despite the ambitious plans to set up a committee for every county, only the Armagh and Tyrone committees really got off the ground. However, they developed in very different directions politically: Armagh was dominated by conservatives, Tyrone by radicals (see chapter

⁵² *Fratrimonium Excelsum* (Ahiman Rezon, Dublin ed. 1790). Also reprinted in Cochrane 1994, pp. 19-23.

⁵³ Cochrane 1994, p. 13.

7.3.). Only a minority of the lodges ever joined the Down committee, and it collapsed in 1796.

The county committee seems to have been an Ulster phenomenon (with the exception of an apparently short-lived committee, or an attempt to form one for Co. Mayo in 1792).⁵⁴ Not even all the Ulster counties were organised in this way: there is no sign of committees for Antrim, Cavan, Londonderry or Donegal.⁵⁵ A committee was established for Co. Monaghan in 1792 but many lodges objected to it and after a few quarrelsome years, nothing more was heard.⁵⁶ An attempt by the grand lodge to set up a committee for Co. Fermanagh in 1793 also seems to have been unsuccessful.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Cochrane 1994, pp. 111-112.

⁵⁵ The conservative lodges in Co. Cavan called a meeting for 15 January 1793 in order to pass loyal resolutions, but it is not known whether the initiative came from a committee, an individual lodge or an influential member. Lodge 560 minutes (27 December [1792]). GLI. NB: page 3 on which the entry appears, is out of sequence in the restored minute book and belongs between pages 6 and 7.

⁵⁶ Cochrane 1994, pp. 107-110.

⁵⁷ Cochrane 1994, pp. 113-114.

5 SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS DIVISIONS

Unfortunately, little research had been done on the social history of Irish freemasonry (as explained in chapter 1.1). This chapter is an attempt to highlight some themes characteristic of Ulster freemasonry at the time under study. The first part of the chapter commences with a survey of the regrettably meagre information on who the Ulster freemasons actually were in terms of occupation and social standing. This is followed by a related study of deference and the limits of fraternity as demonstrated by the existence of lodges which catered for particular social classes or groups. The last section is an attempt to determine to what extent the social composition of Ulster freemasonry underwent a transformation towards the end of the eighteenth century as previously excluded groups sought and were admitted to membership.

The second part (chapter 5.2.) is dedicated to issues relating to religion and denomination. Given the importance of sectarian divisions in eighteenth-century Irish society, no thesis on a social movement can possibly dispense with a study of the denominational composition of the membership. It is not widely known that a significant percentage of the freemasons in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were Catholics. This may seem a manifestation of "fraternity" - a problematic concept which has been used in a simplistic way by historians to describe freemasonry - but in practice religious tolerance was contradicted in some areas by the existence of lodges which refused to admit Catholic members.

Another feature typical of, if not necessarily unique to, Ulster masonry is the role of soldiers (chapter 5.3.). Soldiers were frequent visitors to civilian lodges and also had their own "ambulatory" lodges that met wherever the regiment was stationed. The formation of the locally raised militia regiments in the 1790s added a new dimension to Irish freemasonry as lodges were formed in the regiments on the model of the regular army.

Finally, there is a brief study on unofficial freemasonry or "hedgemasonry" (chapter 5.4.). The "regular" masonry, or lodges affiliated with the Grand Lodge of Ireland, were by no means the whole picture as there were also unrecognised groups of masons. The sources for the study of the "hedgemasons" are even fewer and more scattered than those for their "regular" brethren. Nevertheless, unofficial masonry is a potentially important topic as it may have served as a medium of transmission of masonic ideas that

contributed to the way that later organisations, such as the Defenders and the Orangemen, developed.

5.1. Social composition of membership

As a general rule, eighteenth-century masonic sources include few personal details of the members. The records were not kept for posterity but for immediate practical needs. The name of the member was sufficient for the purposes of the local lodge: keeping track of admissions and fees paid. With the exception of the 1760s when some titles (see below) were still recorded in the grand lodge register, the same applied to the grand lodge archives. Usually no records of other personal details, such as age or occupation, were kept as there was no conceivable need to do so. In the absence of detailed lodge-by-lodge case studies identifying the local masons of individual towns or counties, it is not possible to present anything approaching a precise occupational breakdown for the freemasons like that compiled for the United Irishmen¹ by Nancy Curtin.

If masonic records are of limited use, non-masonic sources are not of much more help in constructing a profile of the masonic membership. Occupations or other personal details of the freemasons as such were not of interest to anyone outside the organisation and thus are not reflected in sources such as government correspondence. The military and civil authorities gathered information on subversive organisations, but freemasons were only caught in the net if they were also members of those other organisations. However, individual masons are sometimes mentioned in official records. As little is better than nothing, these records can be used to complement the scanty information in the masonic archives.

If establishing an occupational profile for the freemasons is difficult, the same difficulty also applies to the question of the ages of the members. With the exception of grand officers and other such prominent individuals, it is extremely difficult to establish an age profile for Irish freemasons. Few of the Irish masonic sources appear to record ages of members or candidates. Of the members of an early nineteenth-century Massachusetts lodge, more than half had joined before they reached twenty-five years of age; more than three quarters had joined before they were thirty.²

¹ For the United Irishmen, see Curtin 1994, ch. 5 and appendix.

² Bullock 1996, pp. 207-208.

Also as regards Ireland, there is some circumstantial evidence which suggests that young men formed a considerable proportion of the membership. Philip Crossle mentions Luke Usher, said to have been the first Catholic in Ireland to be made a justice of the peace, who joined a lodge in Birr at the age of 21.³ An anonymous writer warned in 1785 of the danger to the “*young and uninformed*” of excessive spending of money on food and drink at masonic meetings. Criticising masonic secrecy, he also claimed that many young and credulous men joined masonic lodges in order to find out more about the presumed secrets of the brotherhood.⁴ In addition, references to a long period of membership are not unknown but do not appear frequently in the sources. Those that do, however, suggest that the person must have been relatively young at the time of enrolment to have remained a member for forty, or in one case, seventy-seven years.⁵

The first extant source that may give us a clue as to what sort of people were interested in freemasonry in Ireland is the list of subscribers to a 1730 book of masonic constitutions. The list included country gentlemen, clergymen, a scholar of Trinity College, attorneys, merchants, tradesmen and artisans (particularly weavers), a non-commissioned officer and an astrologer.⁶ It is difficult to say whether the middle-class (using the word here in a very wide sense - people who could afford to subscribe to a book) nature of this selection is typical of the early membership.

The subscribers to Edward Spratt's book of constitutions (1751) included at least forty-one from Ulster (see chapter 3.1.2). Nine of the names were marked “merchant”, two “esquire” and one “gentleman”. Seven of the merchants were from Derry.⁷ Among the subscribers were two of the earliest registered members of a lodge in Derry (warranted 1742) and the three grantees of a lodge warrant in Muff (Eglinton, Co. Londonderry, 1749). A Belfast merchant and founder of lodge no. 182 in Belfast (1748) may be among the subscribers, but the identification is not certain. As regards other parts of Ireland, the

³ Crossle 1923, p. 141.

⁴ *Londonderry Journal* 30 August and 4 October 1785.

⁵ Thomas Campbell, the master of an Armagh lodge, had in 1816 been a mason for 40 years. His thrifty brethren promised to give him a jubilee supper in 1826 “*if the Lord spears [sic] him 10 years longer [!] & he continues a member*”. Lodge 409 minutes (1 February 1816). PGL Armagh. A 99-year-old John O'Hanlon, who had been a freemason for 77 years, was buried in Newry in 1817. *Newry Telegraph* 23 July 1817.

⁶ Pennell, J[ohn]: *The constitutions of the free masons...*(1730). The list of subscribers has been analysed in Crawley 1895, pp. 6-9.

⁷ Spratt, Edward: *The new book of constitutions of the most ancient and honourable fraternity...*(1751).

1751 list showed a great increase in titled noblemen and army officers (commissioned and non-commissioned).⁸

In the 1760s, titles like "Esquire", "Gentleman" or "Reverend" were still often marked alongside the names of the members in the grand lodge register. "Merchant", "M.D." or military ranks were also thought to be descriptions worth mentioning. However, later the registers tend to be just long lists of names. In all of the three massive volumes of the first series, there is only one case for the whole of Ulster of actual occupations being given after the practice of recording titles was dropped: two members of a lodge at Portglenone in Co. Antrim were both called John McFaddin. Accordingly, they were entered in the books as "*John McFaddin (Taylor)*" and "*John McFaddin (Skinner)*".⁹

However, other sources list people who could *not* be masons. The *Ahiman Rezon* advised masons to reject "*the miserable wretches of low-life...some of whom can neither read or write; and when (by the assistance of masonry) they are admitted into the company of their betters, they too often...fall into scenes of gluttony or drunkenness*".¹⁰ The "Regulations of 1768" were even more specific: no "*officer of mace, sheriff's officer, bailiff, constable, livery servant, or any person of such-like occupation*" was to be accepted. In case such people were already members, the lodge should not elect them to serve as lodge officers.¹¹ This contradicts Jim Smyth, who asserts that masonry was not socially exclusive and that even "lowly servants might be members".¹² It is hard to say how strictly these rules were enforced in lodges far from immediate grand lodge control. Smyth's suggestion is not necessarily incorrect as some servants did indeed join (and must have joined if such rules were needed against them). Nevertheless, although membership apparently did become available to previously excluded groups later in the eighteenth century, the emphasis on the "lowly servants" can be misleading as there is no evidence that they ever constituted a significant proportion of the membership.

By the 1780s, a wide range of occupations ranging from nobility to middle class and down to craftsmen could be found among Ulster freemasons. As regards most lodges and regions the evidence consists of scattered references to individual members. Consequently, it is not possible to calculate the social breakdown of the membership with

⁸ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 88-89.

⁹ Register, 1st series, lodge 485 (1770).

¹⁰ *Ahiman Rezon* (Belfast 1782 ed.), p. 15.

¹¹ *Regulations of 1768*, rule XIII.

¹² Smyth 1992, p. 45-46.

any degree of accuracy. The best we can do is to note the wide divergence of people involved and trades represented.

Only in exceptional cases is it possible to present a more comprehensive view. Lodge 346 at Raphoe, Co. Donegal is such an exception. Fortunately, the secretary (unlike most others) did record the occupations of several new members admitted between 1782 and 1785. This sample includes six men deemed to be entitled to be called "esquire"; one of them a doctor of laws (John Lamy, headmaster of Raphoe Royal School), another the son of a late dean of Raphoe. Two members were called "surgeon and apothecary", another was a doctor (of unspecified kind). The other members whose occupation was recorded were a carpenter, a grocer, a shopkeeper and the printer of the Strabane Journal, John Alexander.¹³ Moreover, a local masonic historian has identified two sons of Thomas Montgomery, MP for Lifford and a Presbyterian minister from Convoy (the Rev. Daniel Falloon) among the members.¹⁴

The membership of the Ulster lodges seems to have included a number of printers. In addition to Alexander of Strabane, there were Marcus Ward, master of lodge 587 in Belfast in 1788¹⁵ and William Canning, a Dungannon printer and master of lodge 663, who in 1799 doubled as the secretary of a Tyrone county committee meeting and the printer of its resolutions.¹⁶

Other presumably reasonably well-off masons included "*Jacob White Shipp Master*", a member of a Downpatrick lodge in the 1780s.¹⁷ Estimating the social standing of masons such as the one described for a newspaper as an "eminent" sail-maker¹⁸ is sometimes difficult: was the individual simply good at his trade or did he employ others, and how many? Other miscellaneous trades mentioned include an organist¹⁹ and a revenue officer.²⁰

¹³ Lodge 346 minutes (24 June, 4 July, 7 December 1782; 11 April, 1 May 1783; 9 October, 8 November, 24 December 1784; 4 June, 14 July, 4 August 1785). GLI. For Lamy, see Milner 1938, p. 193.

¹⁴ Milner 1938, pp. 193-194. For Falloon's role in the Volunteers, see chapter 7.2.2.

¹⁵ Leighton 1938, p. 46.

¹⁶ *County Tyrone general masonic committee* (handbill, 1 July 1799). Crossle's scrapbooks, box 2, p. 95. GLI.

¹⁷ Lodge 367 minutes (vol. 1784 - 1793). Downpatrick Masonic Hall.

¹⁸ BNL 21 July 1786.

¹⁹ BNL 30 May 1788

Prominent citizens were often invited to serve as the first master of a new lodge. William Johnston, the first master of a Lisburn lodge may have been Dr William Johnston who held considerable lands on the Hertford estate.²¹ Hugh Hill (later baronet) of a Downpatrick lodge was collector of customs for the Strangford district and later MP for Derry city from 1768 until his death in 1795.²² John McCance of Stewartstown near Belfast was one of the founders of Northern Banking Company and MP for Belfast.²³ Feelings of fraternity were not incompatible with reverence for high rank: when Sir Archibald D. Acheson, baronet, invited himself for dinner, or "expressed a desire" of dining with a Portadown lodge, this was gratefully welcomed.²⁴ Philip Crossle concludes that "almost every farmer or business man in or near the town [Benburb] must have been a member", along with such members of the local gentry as Acheson Houston and Captain Archibald Houston of Tullydowan and Lieutenant William Hall.²⁵

No doubt many Anglican and Presbyterian ministers were freemasons, but it is very difficult to estimate whether a significant percentage of them were members. The title "Reverend" (like other titles) seldom appears in the grand lodge register after the 1760s. Advertisements placed by lodges either before St. John's Day to announce a special sermon or afterwards, to thank the minister, often refer to the minister as a "brother".²⁶ However, it cannot be taken for granted that the minister's membership was always so indicated.

One trade particularly prominent among masons was that of the innkeeper. The inn was the natural focal point of the local community and it follows that masonic lodges and other societies more often than not met in taverns. The inn and its keeper had a focal role in many communities as transmitters of ideas and information. Thus it is not surprising to read of innkeepers who were prominent in several other fields of life. For instance, innkeeper John Megibbon of Saintfield (d. 1790) was also a Volunteer and freemason.²⁷ Moreover, the innkeeper had a not inconsiderable vested interest in masonry, or in whatever society happened to meet in his tavern. Robert Thompson, a founder member of a Ballyclare lodge, is reputed to have owned a tavern, one room of

²⁰ Lodge 409 minutes (3 April 1806). PGL Armagh. The revenue officer, Edward Conyers (Connyer) applied for membership but was in fact "*not ballotted for he being a revenue officer and removed from this district*".

²¹ Allen & Leonard & Nunan 1948, p. 14. Register, 1st series, lodge 178 (27 December 1758).

²² Parkinson 1906, p. 7.

²³ Beattie n.d. [1925], p. 2.

²⁴ Lodge 394 minutes (7 June 1768). GLI.

²⁵ Crossle 1925, p. 62

²⁶ E.g. BNL 18 June, 29 June, 2 July, 6 July 1790.

which was known as "Lodge Room" long after.²⁸ Another lodge at Ballintoy also leased its lodge room from a member, innkeeper Robert McMullan.²⁹ An Armagh lodge decided to move its lodge chest (and consequently, the place of meeting), from the premises of a Miss Lappins to those of Brother William Andrews, who was at the time member of another lodge but later joined that of his patrons.³⁰ In the 1820s, the authorities reputedly suspected publicans of having supported the Ribbon movement simply to encourage customers to meet and drink on their premises.³¹

References to lower-class occupations are not infrequent either, although they have been attested mainly in sources dating from the late eighteenth century or later. For instance, the former master of a masonic lodge in Fintona, a United Irishman called King was described by General Knox as "*a notorious and infamous blackguard - a glazier of Fintona & I believe a warden of the Lodge*".³² Another report in the Rebellion Papers describes "*Bob White a labourer employed in the cotton factory*" and a freemason, who was implicated in concealing stolen gunpowder. The informer, who was a cousin of White's, and the magistrate involved were also both masons and they had a discussion on the ethics of masonic secrecy in situations like this.³³ William Boyd of Coleraine, a stonemason, was expelled for 99 years in 1798.³⁴ John Keenan³⁵ and Robert Wasson³⁶ of 272 Belfast were identified as a carman and a smith respectively in newspaper notices reporting their funerals. A "whiskey-seller" applied for the membership of a Co. Armagh lodge in 1808.³⁷

As the sources are scattered, any conclusions of the social breakdown of Irish freemasons will remain sketchy. It has to be kept in mind that the breakdown did not necessarily remain constant throughout the period covered here - indeed there are indications to the contrary (see chapter 5.1.2 below).

²⁷ BNL 12 January 1790.

²⁸ Grange 1980, p. 219.

²⁹ Bashford n.d., p. 3.

³⁰ Lodge 409 minutes (1 December 1813, 2 June 1814). PGL Armagh.

³¹ Garvin 1982, p. 149.

³² Gen. Knox (Enniskillen) to Cooke (7 May 1798). Reb. 620/37/7.

³³ Thos. E. Higginson (Woodbrook) to Lord NN (15 February 1797). Reb. 620/28/275.

³⁴ BNL 28 September 1798.

³⁵ BNL 29 March 1785.

³⁶ BNL 30 May 1786.

5.1.1. The limits of fraternity: higher and lower-class lodges

*Were our myst'ry declar'd, the most proud would knock hard
At our door and implore to be aided,
For Fox's great heart, kneeling down, kiss'd our art,
And our arch mighty NELSON o'ershaded³⁸*

The mixing of men from various classes in society has been a characteristic of freemasonry ever since the early Scottish lodges initiated gentlemen who were not stonemasons. In popular imagination, this feature has often become a defining one, a virtual *raison d'être* for the whole brotherhood. Jacqueline Hill has placed freemasonry in a specific social context as one of the developing links between the landed and merchant classes of the eighteenth-century Irish society. According to Hill, one of the hallmarks of *ancien régime* society was the forging of closer ties between the landed gentry and mercantile élites, a process promoted by the gentry's role in urban development, and by the growing wealth of the business class: "Through convivial societies such as the freemasons, through the guilds and municipal corporations, who found it advantageous to have a scattering of gentlemen among their members, through the theatre and musical societies...the breaking down of social barriers between gentlemen and merchants was going on".³⁹

Hill's analysis places the social fraternisation aspect of freemasonry (and the other societies mentioned) in a specifically urban context, which may not be fully applicable to freemasonry outside Dublin. And in any case, the combination of men of leisure with craftsmen far lower on the social scale could in practice be an uneasy one. The day-to-day contact between the groups could be limited as they often belonged to different lodges and rarely met each other. Nevertheless, their common adherence to a movement which in its rituals celebrated a common craft trade is a remarkable phenomenon which calls for explanation.

David Stevenson has placed the origins of this ideal in the Renaissance period. The ancient world's contempt for any manual work was overtaken by revolutionary discoveries made by humble "mechanicks" - inventions such as gunpowder, printing, or magnetic compass. Together with the renewed emphasis on the idea of God as an architect or mechanic, this led to a new appreciation of the artisan: study and discovery of

³⁷ Transcript of lodge 459 minutes (24 June 1808). PGL Armagh.

³⁸ From "The craftsmen of Ballycarry" in *The country rhymes of James Orr*, p. 98.

³⁹ Hill 1997b, p. 24.

the mathematical principles governing the world required the co-operation of the scholar with the craftsman. Special place of respect in this cosmology belonged to the "architect", who was ideally an artisan as well as a scholar, a master of all the arts and sciences according to the ancient Roman architect, Vitruvius. The artisan and the philosopher, the lowly stonemason and the gentleman were united in the quest for the skills and knowledge of the idealised architect - both had a contribution to make.⁴⁰

However, the existence of an ideal of fraternity⁴¹ between classes is not evidence of the existence of such fraternity itself - especially if it is anachronistically taken to mean the twentieth-century ideal of near-total equality between social classes. The interpretations given to the ideal of fraternity in different cultures and centuries are much too varied to allow for such sweeping assumptions to be accepted without close scrutiny of the particular circumstances prevailing in the country and period under study. The thinking on freemasonry that has prevailed in much of Irish historiography, particularly of the 1790s as written during the bicentenary decade of the 1990s, is best summarised by Kevin Whelan. He writes that "freemasonry has been exposed as a seminal laboratory of revolutionary thought in eighteenth-century France. The Masonic member, stripped of his religious and class identity, was predisposed towards unity and social harmony across class divides; Masonry accordingly acted as a vector of *fraternité* - of social equality".⁴²

Although the findings of the previous chapter do indicate a wide variety of trades and social ranks involved in one movement, Whelan's assertion is far too emphatic when applied to eighteenth-century Ireland. In the light of the research by Janet M. Burke and Margaret C. Jacob, it may in fact be exaggerated even as regards France.⁴³ Freemasonry was not immune to the traditional patterns of deference and patronage. According to the Old Charges, "*when men of quality, eminence, wealth, and learning, apply to be made, they are to be respectfully accepted, after due examination...they also make the best officers of lodges*".⁴⁴ Anderson's *Constitutions* of 1723 emphatically directed that two masons were to salute each other "*without encroaching upon each other, or derogating from that respect which is due to any brother, were he not a mason: for though all*

⁴⁰ Stevenson 1988, pp. 108-116.

⁴¹ For a discussion of the concept of fraternity, see Hobsbawm 1975.

⁴² Whelan 1996, pp. 85-86.

⁴³ Burke and Jacob note a pattern of "lodges out of control, of incessant and unrelenting social hostility in and between lodges...dissent and deep hostilities surrounding issues of class and status being expressed in letters and orations from almost every lodge [in France] by the late 1770s and escalating in the 1780s". Burke & Jacob 1996, p. 528.

⁴⁴ Old charge III (Concerning a lodge). *Ahiman Rezon* (Belfast ed. 1782), p. 20.

masons are as brethren upon the same level, yet masonry takes no honour from a man that he had before..."⁴⁵

Given such fundamental principles and the overall structure of eighteenth-century society, the Irish mason's version of *fraternité* (had he been aware of such a concept) most definitely did not include social equality. In the higher ranks this was obvious: the grand masters of the Irish masons up to 1800 were all peers or sons of peers (with the exception of two baronets).⁴⁶

Neither was equality much in evidence at local level. In some cases it is possible to identify whole lodges that were largely of the same social standing. This phenomenon was not peculiar to Ireland: an English pamphleteer, who claimed to have learnt masonic signs from a deceased friend's manuscripts, made the distinction between "*lodges of reputation*" and "*others of less note, even where humble porter is drank [sic]*".⁴⁷ That some lodges were more fashionable than others in Ireland also is well demonstrated by the case of Ballycastle, Co. Antrim. On 5 January 1765 the grand master signed eleven new warrants, all of them for lodges to be held in Ulster. Two of these were for Ballycastle. As we have seen, the grand lodge register in the 1760s still fortunately included some titles indicative of social standing. The register entry for lodge 431 begins with an impressive list of "esquires" (four of these with the surname Boyd, the landlord family of the town) and "gentlemen", plus the odd clergyman and merchant. The entry for the other lodge, 432, shows no titles, just a list of very Scottish-looking names that contrasts with the more English-looking mix of names of 431.

One must presume that the events in Ballycastle in 1765 are a case of Anglicans, many of them of high social level, and Presbyterians, not mixing with one another, and thus not co-operating even when about to introduce masonry (and presumably, some conception of "fraternity") into their home town. That the latter lodge, 432, is on record for welcoming "*from England, Hugh Boyd Esq., and his Lady, amidst the congratulations of the gentlemen of the neighbourhood, and of a numerous and respectable tenantry. Lodge No. 432 escorted Mr. Boyd into town, dressed in their uniform*" suggests a later improvement in relations in the aftermath of the 1776 election (see chapter 7.1.2).⁴⁸

⁴⁵ [Anderson, James]: *The Constitutions of the free-masons* (1723), pp. 54-55.

⁴⁶ "Succession of grand lodge officers" in Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 463-474.

⁴⁷ *Jachin and Boaz: or, an authentic key to the door of free-masonry...*, pp. ii-iv.

The most exclusive of all Irish lodges was the Grand Master's Lodge (not to be confused with the Grand Lodge of Ireland) in Dublin. Founded in 1749, it had precedence over all other lodges whatever their number or age, even over no. 1, the "First Lodge of Ireland" in Cork. The list of the brethren of the Grand Master's Lodge included many members of the aristocracy and gentry,⁴⁹ as well as officers of the grand lodge itself. Admission was in the gift of the grand master alone: thus it is not surprising that political allies and connections of the incumbent sometimes gained admittance. For instance, Lord Kilwarlin (the future 2nd Marquis of Downshire, grand master in 1785-86) admitted his political ally, Colonel Robert Ross of Rostrevor, soon after becoming grand master in 1785.⁵⁰ Robert Camden Cope, a reformer, was a nominee of the like-minded Lord Donoughmore.⁵¹ Other members of landed Ulster families cannot be traced in the records of the lodges nearest to their estates; apparently, they generally preferred the company of their own class in Dublin lodges, visiting local lodges rarely or not at all. Among these was William Brownlow Jr, the Co. Armagh magnate, MP and Cope's rival in the 1795 by-election caused by the death of Brownlow's father.⁵²

From the early 1780s onwards, the most fashionable lodge in Ulster was undoubtedly the Belfast "Orange" lodge, no. 257. Of the first 141 members, 65 are called "esquire" in a published list of its members.⁵³ Soon after, they were joined by the Earls of Antrim (grand master of Ireland in 1772-73 and 1778-81) and Hillsborough (later the 1st Marquis of Downshire), the latter's son Lord Kilwarlin (later the 2nd Marquis mentioned above), the Rt. Hon. John O'Neill (apparently the future Lord O'Neill of Shane's Castle, governor of Co. Antrim) and many more local notables (nine esquires are recorded in

⁴⁸ BNL 1 July 1777. For Hugh Boyd, see Register, 1st series, lodge 431 (24 June 1766). For a discussion of the political context of the reception in 1777, see chapter 7.1.2.

⁴⁹ The involvement of Irish aristocracy falls largely outside the scope of this thesis. However, a list of titled members of the Grand Master's Lodge of Dublin well illustrates its extent: William Marquis Kildare (23 January 1771), Lord Belfield (18 April 1771), Lord Dunluce (24 June 1772), Earl Mornington (24 June 1776), Lord Muskerry (27 December 1782), Lord Kilwarlin (8 June 1785), Lord Glerawley (24 June 1786), Lord Kilmaine (28 April 1795), John Lord Loftus (6 June 1796). The dates refer to registration in Register, 2nd series, Grand Master's Lodge. Viscount Valentia was a member of another Dublin lodge. Register, 1st series, lodge 198 (8 January 1795).

⁵⁰ Register, 2nd series, Grand Master's Lodge (7 December? 1785, month illegible in the register). Ross (d. 1799) was MP for Carlingford (1761-76) and Newry (1776-99). For Downshire's and Ross's alliance, see Malcomson 1981a, p. 109 and Bolton 1966, pp. 57, 70, 97, 136.

⁵¹ Register, 2nd series, Grand Master's Lodge (5 May 1796). Cope was elected MP for Co. Armagh in 1799. Bolton 1966, pp. 141-142. For his political career in the 1790s, see Cullen 1990, pp. 122-123.

⁵² Minutes of lodges 409 and 623 (27 December 1794). PGL Armagh. Brownlow was visiting the Armagh lodges as a member of the Dublin lodge 198; possibly the visit was not unrelated to the by-election. For the political rivalry of the Copes and the Brownlows, see Cullen 1990, pp. 122-123; Miller 1996, pp. 11-14; Cullen 1996.

⁵³ *Ahiman Rezon* (Belfast 1782 ed.). For short biographies of many individual members, see McClelland 1968, pp. 80-84.

1784-85).⁵⁴ The membership of the Earl of Antrim is particularly interesting as he was then the grand master of one of the two English grand lodges (the Antients) and had been the grand master of Ireland in 1772-73 and 1778-81.

Lodge 257, originally warranted in the 1750s, was revived in 1781 during the nation-wide wave of Volunteering enthusiasm. The membership also included John Brown, captain of the "Blue Company" of Belfast Volunteers, reputedly the richest man in Belfast, and Captain Todd Jones of the Lisburn Fusiliers.⁵⁵ A lodge with such a prominent membership as 257 could enjoy privileges such as listening to a St. John's Day sermon "*by their Brother the Rev. Wm. Bristow*" who happened to be the sovereign of Belfast.⁵⁶ Allan Searson, an "eminent brewer" was a member both of 257 and the Belfast First Company of Volunteers. His funeral in 1783 was attended by all the lodges of Belfast and by the Belfast First Company of Volunteers: it was performed "*with all masonic and military honours*".⁵⁷

The merchant class seems also to have been well represented: of the sixty-six founder-members of the Belfast Chamber of Commerce (1783), seventeen were members of 257.⁵⁸ A Robert Hunter listed among members may have been the wealthy shipbroker and a future United Irishman of that name.⁵⁹ John Galt Smith was involved in drapery, brewery and ropemaking business; William Seed was a general merchant and miller.⁶⁰ Robert Bradshaw may also have been a merchant and one of the founders of the Belfast General Insurance Company.⁶¹ Thomas Banks, a member of 257, may have been the prominent merchant of that name who, like his son Stewart, also served as sovereign of Belfast.⁶² If he was the "T. Banks" who is on record for having forwarded a donation to

⁵⁴ Register, 1st series, lodge 257. O'Neill is also on record for having lent his band of music to the 1787 St. John's Day procession in Ballymena. BNL 12 June, 19 June 1787.

⁵⁵ Rogers 1934, p. 62; Stewart 1993, p. 165.

⁵⁶ BNL 8 June 1787.

⁵⁷ BNL 9 September 1783.

⁵⁸ McClelland 1975, p. 25.

⁵⁹ Register, 1st series, lodge 257 (13 January 1796). GLI. On Hunter the United Irishman, see Curtin 1994, p. 264-265.

⁶⁰ Chambers 1994, pp. 27, 31. Register, 1st series, lodge 257 (Seed: 4 May 1781, Ga[u]lt Smith: 13 January 1796). GLI.

⁶¹ Register, 1st series, lodge 257 (27 January 1781). GLI. A Robert Bradshaw was a treasurer of the company in 1801. *The Charter-Party of the Belfast General Insurance Company*, p. 4.

⁶² Register, 1st series, lodge 257. GLI. (According to A. T. Q. Stewart, also Thomas's son Stewart Banks and another leading Belfast Volunteer, Waddell Cunningham, were freemasons. Stewart 1993, p. 173. However, their names are not listed either in the Register (1st series) under any of the Belfast lodges, or in the *Ahiman Rezon* (Belfast 1782 edition), which contains a list of the members of lodge 257. Stewart does not give his sources and the assumption is repeated in Chambers 1994, p. 30.

charity in 1753 by an earlier Belfast lodge,⁶³ that would be yet another proof of continuity rather than sudden revival in Belfast masonry. The gentry and merchants were complemented by a sprinkling of physicians and ministers, both Anglican and Presbyterian.⁶⁴

The divisions of class during the mason's lifetime could remain in place after death. The funerals of the carman John Keenan⁶⁵ and the smith Robert Wasson⁶⁶ of the Belfast lodge no. 272 are a good example. In addition to the members of lodge 272, Keenan's funeral was attended by representatives of three other lodges. At Wasson's funeral, seven other lodges were represented besides 272. Some came from as far as Lisburn and Carrickfergus to pay their respects to the deceased brethren. However, the more exclusive lodge 257 was not represented.

Other Ulster lodges of high standing included no. 789 in Portadown. Founded in 1793, its founder-members included Michael Obins of Ballywarren, lord of the manor and son-in-law of the first Viscount Gosford. The other original members were (with the exception of the Church of Ireland vicar of Drumcree) apparently merchants or at least members of families connected with the linen trade.⁶⁷ The Obins family had a connection with masonry dating back to the 1760s at least: a "Michael O'Bins of Portadown Esq." had been admitted into a Lurgan lodge in 1766, with a "Cornet Obins" following suit in 1768.⁶⁸ Yet another lodge of high social standing - at least by the standards of its immediate surroundings - was no. 560 in Belturbet, Co. Cavan. The members included "esquires", ministers and surgeons. However, high local status was not always sufficient for entry (or no defence against local grudges). A John Young, esquire, was "*balloted for & rejected by one black bane [sic]*".⁶⁹

Even a fashionable lodge could sometimes decline and disappear. Lodge no. 123 in Coleraine (called the "Vernon Lodge" after a British naval hero) numbered many high-ranking people among its members. In 1752, it could even afford to reject the application of the mayor of Coleraine. However, in the 1770s the lodge seems to have lost most of its

⁶³ BNL 23 January 1753.

⁶⁴ E.g. Rev. Matthew Garnett (Anglican) and Rev. James Bryson (Presbyterian). Register, 1st series, lodge 257, 13 March 1781 (Garnett), 20 March 1782 (Bryson). GLI. Stewart 1993, pp. 165-166.

⁶⁵ BNL 29 March 1785.

⁶⁶ BNL 30 May 1786.

⁶⁷ Thomas Dickson was Portadown merchant. Thomas Mathews, James Joyce, Francis Magee, William Atkinson were also apparently merchants. Johnston 1990, pp. 100-101.

⁶⁸ Lodge 394 minutes (27 December 1766, 27 June 1768). GLI.

members and the last recorded meeting took place in 1783.⁷⁰ The social status of freemasonry seems to have declined in the town in the subsequent years. In the records of a lodge started in 1792, the only occupation that was considered worth recording - apart from one lieutenant and several non-commissioned officers and privates of passing militia, fencible and artillery regiments - was that of William Crawley, "*a servant to Lord Henry Murray*,⁷¹ commander of the Coleraine garrison.⁷²

If the reputed ability of freemasonry to transcend all social boundaries has been exaggerated, another danger of anachronism lies in over-emphasising the legendary brotherhood between masons even when their nations are at war with each other. In this category belongs A. T. Q. Stewart's explanation for how and why captured French officers who had taken part in Thurot's raid on Ulster in 1760 were on such friendly terms with the local gentry: "as soon as he was mobile, Flobert went to stay with the Earl of Moira... Francis Rawdon, Earl of Moira, was later to be Cornwallis's second-in-command during the American War of Independence. A decade later, he was acting Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England".⁷³

Stewart bases his explanation on two assumptions: that Flobert must have been a freemason and must have received the special treatment because of being one. However, in those pre-nationalist days such fraternisation among gentlemen was not as unusual as it might seem from a twentieth-century perspective. After all, General Humbert's officers, captured in 1798, were treated in a respectful way even though the war in the 1790s was much more an ideological conflict rather than a traditional fight between rival dynasties. If any further proof is needed, it should be kept in mind that Thurot's soldiers seem to have robbed the "*warrant and jewles*" [sic] of a Carrickfergus lodge⁷⁴ - hardly fraternal behaviour by the standards of any century.

5.1.2. Decline in social level?

Burke and Jacob have emphasised that seemingly obscure rituals were important for the purposes of acquiring and once acquired, exhibiting one's status: "[Masonic] rituals

⁶⁹ Lodge 560 minutes, (27 December 1787). GLI.

⁷⁰ Tait 1926, pp. 137, 142, 158-159.

⁷¹ Lodge 754 minutes (2 November 1798). GLI.

⁷² Murray was a younger brother of the Duke of Atholl and the colonel of the 2nd Royal Manx fencible regiment. Stewart 1995, pp. 143-144.

⁷³ Stewart 1993, pp. 171-172.

⁷⁴ Register, 1st series, lodge 270.

were expensive. Each carried with it the obligation of the candidate to fete the assembled, and all required new garments, insignia, and in some cases jewels".⁷⁵ Consequently, masonic membership was a sign of a certain degree of respectability: something to aspire to for groups seeking a higher position in the society.

According to L. M. Cullen, "masonic lodges proliferated in the 1780s and 1790s. The membership rose rapidly in Armagh while the social level of membership declined, and Catholics were often numbered among their members".⁷⁶ Much of the grand lodge minutes in the early 1790s were indeed taken up by troublesome lodges and individuals in Co. Armagh. However, there are signs that indicate a change in the social breakdown of freemasonry in the closing years of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, not only in Armagh but in other parts of the country as well.

From its urban origins, freemasonry had spread to larger towns, then to small towns. In some districts of Ulster, several townlands had acquired lodges of their own by the 1770s and the trend continued well into nineteenth century.⁷⁷ As the number of rural lodges was not inconsiderable, the character of the masonic membership in Ulster must have changed perceptibly. As lodges in such localities could not possibly be sustained by gentry or professional or mercantile classes, we must assume that new groups involved in rural occupations (such as farmers or weavers) became acquainted with, and probably involved in, freemasonry. The rapid increase in membership from the late 1770s onwards also supports this hypothesis.

After the initial volunteering enthusiasm passed, in some localities freemasonry may have emerged with an altered social composition. In some cases the local gentry seem to have lost interest after the early 1780s, leaving the lodge in the hands of people lower down the social scale. For instance, a lodge in Lifford summoned in 1784 an esquire to account for his debts and concluded that "*it appears to us that this lodge seems to decline*"⁷⁸ - an expression which possibly reflected more than a decline in numbers. In 1785, a correspondent of the Londonderry Journal (writing under the pseudonym "Monitor") was complaining that "*men of any description*" who had to "*earn a precarious subsistence by daily labour or manual exercise, whether in town or country*"

⁷⁵ Burke & Jacon 1996, p. 529.

⁷⁶ Cullen 1990, p. 124.

⁷⁷ IMR. The county singled out by Cullen, Armagh, was particularly notable for the expansion of masonic lodges into the countryside. For discussion of one such cluster of rural lodges in the neighbourhood of Loughgall, see chapter 8.3.2.

⁷⁸ Lodge 569 minutes (24 June 1784). GLI.

were being admitted. A critical reply from the pseudonym "Freemason" was published but failed to address the issue of social divisions, apart from praising the "universal benevolence" as practised by the masons. Another reply from a "Working Freemason" was rejected by the editor, who sarcastically commented that he hoped that the writer was better at working than writing. In a second letter, the "Monitor" claimed that *"it has been proved that formerly when free-masonry prevailed in this city [Derry], a bad use was made of it, insomuch that the institution itself came into disrepute...and was discouraged by the better sort of people"*. The writer emphasised that he was not opposed to masonry as such but *"deprecated free-masonry becoming general among our tradesmen and working people"*.⁷⁹

From 1790 on, county committees (see chapter 4.3.) were formed in some Ulster counties to check all applicants, reflecting concerns that membership was being made available to people who were considered unsuitable. Raising fees could be used as a tool to keep undesirable elements out of the brotherhood. A sign of the times was that Armagh lodges were reluctant to obey the minimum fees for initiation laid down by the grand lodge and its local agents, the county committee. For instance, lodge no. 623 in Armagh town was fined by the county committee in 1792 for "making" masons for less than the prescribed £2 11s. 10d. The lodge refused to obey; its secretary, Winwright Proctor, had already been suspended earlier for calling the county committee *"a set of perjured rascals and villains"*. The dispute led to the suspension and then erasure of the lodge and only in 1794 was it restored.⁸⁰

Although the Armagh county committee was supposed to execute and police the grand lodge policy on the fees, it was susceptible to pressure from the lodges - consisting as it did of masters of the local lodges. By the end of the 1790s, the committee was repeatedly petitioning the grand lodge for a reduction in the minimum entry fees. In January 1798, the grand lodge *"read a pet[itio]n of the Co. of Armagh Comm[ittee] praying that they may be allowed to reduce the admission fees, in the lodges of that Co. which border on the counties of Tyrone & Monaghan - for reasons therein set forth"*.⁸¹

As practically all grand lodge correspondence from that time has been lost, one can only speculate as to the reason: probably the fees were lower in the neighbouring counties and Armagh masons were joining lodges there. The grand lodge concurred and

⁷⁹ *Londonderry Journal* 30 August, 13 September and 4 October 1785.

⁸⁰ Jenkinson 1925, p. 85.

"ordered that the lodges in the Co. of Armagh be impowerd [sic] to make masons therein for the sum of £1.14.1 1/2 & the usual fee of 8 s 1 1/2 d - instead of the sums now paid in the said county"⁸² and the same indulgence was soon after extended to Tyrone.⁸³ Yet the Armagh masons were not happy: they requested a further reduction to £1.10.10½, which was rejected.⁸⁴ They tried again, claiming that *"the lodges in the co. of Down, Monaghan & Tyrone, admit Masons for one guinea, & wishing for the like indulgence in that county"* [Armagh]. The grand lodge refused again, ordering instead the president of the Armagh county committee to report the numbers of such offending lodges.⁸⁵ However, not all the lodges in the county agreed with the county committee: an Armagh lodge *"resolved that... the admission money should not be made less than it is at present as we understand a ballot is to take place on Monday the 6th inst. [6 November 1797] in the County Committee to that effect"*.⁸⁶

Comparison between the initiation fees and contemporary wages shows that the 1792 fee of £2 11s. 10d prescribed by the grand lodge would indeed have excluded many people, had the lodges charged it in full. For a skilled craftsman, the sum represented about three weeks' wages. For a general labourer, paying the fee would have meant parting with more than seven weeks' pay. The discounted fee of one guinea allegedly charged by lodges in Down, Monaghan and Tyrone in 1799 was much more affordable as it amounted only to ten days' wages for a craftsman and three weeks' for a labourer.⁸⁷

The change in social composition and the consequent decline in status were not confined to Ulster but evidence is available from other parts of Ireland too. By the 1790s, many Dublin lodges met in the poor Liberties and none in the wealthier eastern half of the city.⁸⁸ In some instances, the tension between the different classes led to rather unfraternal conflict within a lodge. In 1809, a Lieutenant Thomas Burn was dissatisfied with the then existing lodge (no. 555) in Fermoy, Co. Cork and attempted to establish a new lodge there. Burn argued that *"his reason was the bad conduct of the members thereof [of lodge 555] in making all sorts of people free masons and especially livery servants and a serg[ean]t...who he [Burn] sent a bad character [reference] off [sic]"*. The

⁸¹ Grand lodge minutes (4 January 1798). GLI.

⁸² Grand lodge minutes (1 February 1798). GLI.

⁸³ Grand lodge minutes (5 April 1798). GLI.

⁸⁴ Grand lodge minutes (1 August 1799). GLI.

⁸⁵ Grand lodge minutes (7 November 1799). GLI.

⁸⁶ Lodge 409 minutes (2 November 1797). PGL Armagh.

⁸⁷ These estimates are based on Kennedy's and Dowling's figures for pay at Castle Coole, Co. Fermanagh: 28 d. [Irish] per day for craftsmen, 12 d. per day for labourers in 1792. The rate in 1797/98 was 26 d. for craftsmen and unchanged for labourers. Kennedy & Dowling 1997, pp. 95-96.

lodge did not deny admitting a livery servant, John Robinson, two years previously. However, Burn's complaint was dismissed as "*slandering and backbiting*" as he had often attended meetings of the lodge during that time without making his complaint public before starting to lobby nearby lodges to support his plan for a new, more socially exclusive lodge.⁸⁹

The more brethren with low incomes were accepted, the more pressure there was on charity funds. The emphasis on safeguarding funds from brethren in poverty was emphasised in the "International Compact" of 1814 regularising relations between the grand lodges of Scotland, England and Ireland. It was agreed that

*for the security of the intercourse which so happily subsists among the brethren of the three grand lodges and also to guard the funds of benevolence from irregular and improper applications for relief it is judged necessary that each of the three grand lodges shall fix a sum, under which no grand lodge certificates shall be granted.*⁹⁰

Commenting on the state of freemasonry in Ulster in 1814, a visiting mason noted with regret that in his opinion,

*throughout this [northern] part [of Ireland], and even in this large town, its metropolis [Belfast], the ancient system of fraternity...has sunk into inaction and obscurity", or if occasionally revived, is destitute of that respectability so necessary to its existence...the few brethren who meet are chiefly of that description whom the friends of the ancient and honourable fraternity would rather reject than admit into their bosoms.*⁹¹

Moreover, masonic literature was increasingly being published as garlands or chapbooks in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Titles such as *The cowan's dream*, *The rejected mason*, or *Every true brother amen* were published by printers in Belfast, Derry, Newry and Strabane. The popularity of this medium is consistent with a downward trend in the level of "respectability" of freemasonry: the cheap little pamphlets were aimed at readers with low incomes.⁹²

The respectability of contemporary Dublin freemasonry was not above suspicion either. The colourful radical journalist, Watty Cox, made fun of the drunken crowds taking

⁸⁸ Fagan 1998, p. 133.

⁸⁹ Transcript of lodge 555 minutes (2 February 1809). United Grand Lodge of England library.

⁹⁰ Grand lodge minutes (1 December 1814). GLI. Parkinson 1957, p. 22.

⁹¹ Col. A. D. O'Kelly (Belfast) to the Duke of Sussex (9 October 1814). McPeake papers, T/3048/A/31. PRONI.

⁹² McClelland 1986, pp. 50-53.

part in a masonic parade in Dublin in 1815: Cox derided the grand master, the Duke of Leinster, for presiding over "*one of the most ridiculous and ragged rabbles ever exposed to public ridicule*".⁹³ By the 1820s, masonry was not regarded as "respectable" by many people who liked to use that adjective of themselves. The 1823 obituary of the former president of the County Armagh committee, Thomas Greer, extolled his virtues in setting up an association for the relief of sick poor and praised his efforts to quell local unrest as a volunteer and yeoman. However, his colourful masonic career was not even mentioned.⁹⁴ In 1822, the former grand master, Lord Donoughmore, was advised by his brother not to bother subscribing any money for a planned masonic hall in Dublin "*as I consider the Order to be going rapidly down the hill...Upon the whole, I do not think it at present, in this country, a creditable order to belong to*".⁹⁵

⁹³ *Irish Magazine & Monthly Asylum for Neglected Biography* December 1815, pp. 574-576. Reprinted in Fagan 1998, pp. 155-158.

⁹⁴ *The Irishman* 7 November 1823. According to Paterson, Greer was a well-known Armagh merchant. Paterson 1942, pp. 51-52.

⁹⁵ Abraham Hely-Hutchinson to the 1st Earl of Donoughmore (6 November 1822). Donoughmore Papers D/50/127. TCD. In another letter to Donoughmore (26 November 1822), Hely-Hutchinson further criticises the project and asserts that "*the order is very much fallen in respectability*". Donoughmore Papers D/50/132. TCD.

5.2. Religious divisions

*The good of ev'ry creed and clime,
Calvinian, Cath'lick, Manx, or Moor,
Shall be accepted, any time,
By us, the Lodge of Ballynure¹*

The above is how the masonic poet, James Orr, put to verse the masonic principle variously formulated as adhering “to that religion in which all men agree”, “the oldest Catholic religion”, “the universal religion”, or “the religion of nature”. A logical consequence of possessing such an universal truth was a ban, reiterated many times in *Ahiman Rezon* and lodge bye-laws, on any quarrelling about religion in the lodge.² The ideal was that of harmony and tolerance between people who held differing views:

The Craft, instead of entering into idle and unnecessary disputes concerning the different opinions and persuasions of men, admits into the fraternity all that are good and true; whereby it hath brought about the means of reconciliation amongst persons, who without that assistance, would have remained at perpetual variance.³

Part of freemasonry's appeal consisted of its claim not to contradict one's own religion, whatever it was. In fact, some argued that practising masonry could be positively beneficial to the chances of salvation, provided one was seriously committed:

it is impossible that the friendly, honest, social man, who fulfils the great plan of nature...can in eternity be excluded the society of kindred spirits for which he is prepared...[but]...If ye are not sincere in heart in endeavouring to form your lives and the actions thereof according to your institution, which is founded on the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, better ye had never engaged yourselves so to do.⁴

Although the freemasons are often regarded as a deist or even agnostic movement, David Stevenson has suggested that the ritual side of masonry was not originally deist or consciously non-denominational in character. Masonic rituals may have been tolerated by the Church of Scotland on the understanding that they were not religious rituals - that is, they did not seek to continue or replace the (Catholic) religious

¹ From the "Song" in *The country rhymes of James Orr*, p. 102.

² Old Charges I (Concerning God and religion), VI (Concerning mason's behaviour) and "A short charge to a new admitted mason". *Ahiman Rezon* (Belfast ed. 1782), pp. 19, 23, 26.

³ *Ahiman Rezon* (Belfast 1782 ed.), p. 11.

⁴ Elliott, Robert: *Freemasonry. A sermon preached in the first Dissenting Meeting-House of Dromore...*

ceremonies of pre-Reformation guilds.⁵ By the time covered in this study, however, the very idea of freemasonry had passed through the filter of Enlightenment thought. Also the *Ahiman Rezon* was a product of eighteenth-century English freemasonry. Although it declared that “no one who rightly understands the Art [of freemasonry] can possibly tread in the irreligious paths of the unhappy libertine, or be induced to follow the arrogant professors of atheism or deism”⁶ it must have been difficult for non-theologians (for masons and their critics alike) to distinguish between the doctrine of “universal religion” and the consequent toleration on one hand, and the dreaded deism on the other.

In the context of eighteenth-century Europe, the issues of religious conformity, dissent and toleration (or otherwise) were of crucial importance. In the particular case of Ireland, one’s political and economic rights depended on whether one was an Anglican, a non-Anglican Protestant or a Roman Catholic. In such circumstances, a widespread social movement actively preaching religious tolerance would have been a revolutionary development. However, it is far from proven that Irish freemasonry ever acted as a united force on the issue of toleration or otherwise. Although Enlightenment ideas were in fashion in Dublin high society from the 1750s onwards, it must be kept in mind that one could be “enlightened” and anti-Catholic at the same time, as indeed many of the French *philosophes* were.⁷ Moreover, what was in fashion in Dublin was not necessarily so in Ulster, or could be interpreted differently in the unique circumstances of the northern province. The following sections are devoted to exploring the extent to which freemasonry in Ulster actually lived up to its ideals.

5.2.1. Catholic freemasons

Choosing the search for Catholic freemasons as an object of study is admittedly a slightly teleological exercise. Catholic freemasons are made more interesting than say, Methodist or Quaker freemasons by the fact that we know that Catholic membership collapsed in the nineteenth century. Irish freemasonry came to be associated with Protestants; therefore many find it hard to believe that there could have been a significant Catholic element among freemasons. Consequently, there has been hardly any research on the topic, with the exception of Patrick Fagan’s study of Catholic involvement in Dublin freemasonry.

⁵ Stevenson 1988, pp. 123-124.

⁶ *Ahiman Rezon* (Belfast 1782 ed.), p.11.

The "penal era" did not prevent some Catholics from acquiring substantial wealth, mainly in the field of trade but also through an interest in land - an indirect land "ownership" achieved by exploiting loopholes in the anti-Catholic legislation.⁸ There was thus an emerging Catholic middle class in Ireland, whom one would expect to show an interest in a social institution like freemasonry. Indeed, Lepper and Crossle claim that the majority of Irish freemasons at the end of the eighteenth century were Catholics.⁹ As Catholic involvement in freemasonry has not been systematically studied for the whole country and may have varied from time to time, it is impossible to conclusively prove or disprove their thesis. However, Patrick Fagan disagrees with Lepper and Crossle. Fagan suggests that around 1770, Protestant majorities in Ulster and Dublin lodges (40 and 20 per cent respectively of the Irish lodges) were probably sufficient to ensure a Protestant majority in Irish freemasonry even if there had been a Catholic majority in the remaining 40 per cent of the lodges, which is by no means certain.¹⁰

In the eighteenth century, there was little to bar Catholics from masonic membership. As far as the freemasons (with the exception of some lodges, see chapter 5.2.2) were concerned, Catholicism and masonry were perfectly compatible. In fact, the man identified by Stevenson as the father of modern freemasonry, William Schaw, was a Catholic and was even described as "a suspected Jesuit" by an English agent at the Scottish court.¹¹ As we have seen, Catholics or recent converts¹² were not uncommon at the grand lodge level of the Irish masonic organisation, on occasion even as grand masters (see chapter 4.1.1). De Vere White comments that in 1769 Jasper Joly, a protégé of the Duke of Leinster "become a freemason, and four months later a Protestant. The order of events is significant".¹³ Catholic priests took part in masonic events, although the extent of this activity remains to be studied. In one frequently-quoted case, a Catholic coadjutor-bishop preached the St. John's Day sermon in Ennis, Co. Clare in 1800.¹⁴

Catholic canon law included papal bulls against freemasonry, but these were ignored by the eighteenth-century Irish bishops. An attempt made by Rome in 1760 to persuade Irish Catholics - including many priests who had allegedly become freemasons -

⁷ Bartlett 1992, pp. 67-69.

⁸ For a review of research on Catholic survival and resurgence, see Bartlett 1992, pp. 45-50.

⁹ Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 423

¹⁰ Fagan 1998, p. 131.

¹¹ Stevenson 1988, p. 28.

¹² E.g. Sir Thomas Prendergast, 2nd Baronet (senior grand warden, 1725-26) and Robert Nugent (Viscount Clare 1769, Earl Nugent 1776; junior grand warden, 1732-33) Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 133 (Prendergast), 154-155 (Nugent).

¹³ De Vere White 1973, p. 54.

to observe the bulls, was largely ignored.¹⁵ However, there was a good reason for the bishops' disobedience. The Irish Catholic church was emerging from the penal era, determined to be regarded as a respectable organisation rather than a subversive one. The obscure bulls were highly embarrassing for the bishops, hoping as they were to be seen as good subjects of the crown. If they were to enforce the church law as it stood, they would have to denounce not only many noblemen and administrators, but the royal family itself. In a document drawn up by Archbishop Troy of Dublin in 1788, the four Catholic archbishops requested Pius VI to revoke the penalty of excommunication for masonic membership.¹⁶

The Irish archbishops' appeal does not necessarily prove that they had any close personal relationship with freemasonry, although Fagan suggests that some of Troy's relatives may have been masons.¹⁷ Significantly, the archbishops also asked the pope to relax certain regulations on fasting that had proved impossible to enforce in the circumstances of constant close contact with Protestants. This context shows that the intended relaxation of the rules concerning masonry was only one part of a set of measures intended to facilitate the Catholics' continuing adjustment and integration as respectable subjects into the Protestant-dominated Irish society.

In practice, however, there could sometimes be tensions between freemasonry and Catholicism. In a single sermon preached in Philadelphia at a masonic occasion, the minister expounded on the truths of rational religion and on the evils of Roman Catholicism, on loyalty to the crown but also on the right to resist oppression, and finally, on the threat of France.¹⁸ It is difficult to tell whether this sort of masonic anti-Catholicism originates with the anticlericalism of the Enlightenment thought or whether it is just another expression of the traditional hostility to all things Catholic that was prevalent within the British cultural sphere. Catholicism was after all, technically all but illegal and its adherents were widely regarded as potential subversives.

In Ulster and probably elsewhere in Ireland too, local circumstances dictated whether Protestants and Catholics actually mixed much in the lodges. Allan Blackstock has pointed out that establishing a definitive denominational breakdown is impossible for the yeomanry and the same applies to freemasonry. In most cases, the best one can do

¹⁴ Crossle 1923, p. 200.

¹⁵ Fagan 1998, pp. 129-130.

¹⁶ Tierney 1978, p. 93.

¹⁷ Fagan 1998, p. 139, fn. 48.

is to "play the typically northern Irish game of deducing religion from name".¹⁹ Patrick Fagan has applied this "game" to Dublin and identified twelve largely Catholic lodges in the city.²⁰

It is beyond doubt that Catholics were very much involved in Ulster freemasonry also. However, establishing the extent of such involvement is extremely difficult in the absence of local studies. Histories of individual lodges, written as they are by modern freemasons, tend not to dwell on denominational breakdown. Some of this neglect may be explained by the fact that until very recently, Irish freemasons have been almost exclusively (and are still predominantly) Protestants. However, an even more likely explanation is that as amateur historians, they have not been interested in, or aware of, other documents in public archives. On the other hand, few local historians are acquainted with masonic records.

As long as this remains the case, one all too often has to hazard a guess based on the only personal information that we have on most freemasons, their names. Consequently, in most cases the only way of finding lodges with significant numbers of Catholics is to watch out for clusters of Irish-sounding names (as opposed to the presumably more English and Scottish names of Protestants) and making a guess as to what number of "Irish" names can be taken as proof of Catholics among the members. Many Ulster names are notoriously hard to utilise for this kind of research bordering on guesswork. However, in Cavan and Donegal, there are several lodges where the overall mix of names is so obviously "Irish" (as opposed to "English" or "Scottish" names) that one may safely assume that they consisted mostly, if not wholly, of Catholics. The two clearest examples in Cavan were 405 Ballyconnell²¹ and 451 Ballymagaveran,²² both set up in the 1760s. The same pattern can be found in Donegal, where 434 Killygordon and 569 Lifford are the most obviously "Catholic" lodges. The names registered for many other lodges, although more mixed, include enough "Irish" names to make the presence of at least some Catholic members very probable.

¹⁸ Huss 1986, pp. 26-27.

¹⁹ For an analysis of the pitfalls of this "method", see Blackstock 1998, p. 129; Stewart 1986 pp. 25-26.

²⁰ Fagan 1998, p. 134.

²¹ Names registered include John Neail, Cormick O'Brien, Conr. Reilly, Pat Doyle, Pat Cassidy, Jno. Connelly, Jno. Reilly, Daniel Flinn, Jas. Murphy, Patk. Reilly. Register, 1st series, lodge 405.

²² Names registered for this lodge include Pat Flinn, John Brogan, Milles Moran, Thos. Reilly, Thady and Pat Finley, Jas. Keegan, Owen Cullen, Bryan Cassidy. Register, 1st series, lodge 451.

Some towns had what appears, on the surface, to be a "Catholic" and a "Protestant" lodge. However, it is difficult to establish exactly how correct these labels are, or how homogenous the lodges were. Lodge no. 502 at Aughnacloy (Mooretown) had members with names such as Pat Cavanagh, Neill Keenan, James Connolly, John Gallagher, Owen Moynagh, and Edward Mullan. The majority of the registered members, however, had more English-sounding names.²³ The membership of lodge 266 at Lurgan probably included Catholics; yet another lodge (no. 394) in the same town banned them from membership (see chapter 5.3.2).

Once a lodge acquired Catholic members, its example and encouragement could help spread masonry among the Catholic population. In 1783, James Strain, John Murphy and Pat Gibson from Tullyherron near Markethill, Co. Armagh, wished to have a lodge in their town. It is likely that they were Catholics - they did not join the lodge at Tandragee which banned Catholics from membership or any of the lodges in Newry, where few if any Catholics seem to have been masons before the 1790s (see chapter 11.1). Instead, they travelled much further, to the Ballintaggart lodge near Portadown, a lodge that had (judging by the registered names) many Catholic members. Strain, Murphy and Gibson were all initiated there and soon applied for a warrant for Tullyherron; the application was supported by the Ballintaggart lodge.²⁴

The atmosphere of toleration during the Volunteer era affected also the masons. In 1753, the Belfast masons had donated £11 7s 6d to "The Society for the Relief of Protestant Strangers".²⁵ Whether this should be regarded as a sectarian act or a logical act of charity remains debatable, taking place as did in a town where the Catholic population was very small at the time.²⁶ However, thirty years later there was no doubt that the relationship between the Belfast freemasons and the Catholic church was good. The "ecumenical" gesture of the Belfast Volunteers, who paraded to the opening of the first Catholic church in Belfast in 1784, was repeated by the freemasons of Belfast. In the following year, the Belfast Volunteer Corps requested the most prominent of the Belfast lodges, the "Orange" lodge no. 257, to "*march in procession to the Roman Catholic Mass-*

²³ Register, 1st series, lodge 502.

²⁴ For the petition for a warrant and the recommendation, see the transcript in lodge 527 minutes. For Strain, Murphy and Gibson, see Register, 1st series, lodge 527 (21 June 1783), lodge 618 (7 August 1783). GLI.

²⁵ BNL 23 January 1753

²⁶ The number of Catholics in Belfast grew slowly throughout the century: from a figure of "not above seven" to one sixth of the population around the year 1800. Beckett 1983, pp. 22-23. Heatley 1983, pp. 130, 133.

house, where the agreeable priest of Belfast has undertaken to preach before them".²⁷

The overall impression is that typically "Irish" or "Catholic" names became more frequent in the membership lists in the 1780s, although the pattern varies considerably from area to area and from lodge to lodge, reflecting local demography and politics. In time, some lodges became mostly or perhaps even wholly Catholic in membership.

By the 1790s, some lodges were actually advertising (maybe even boasting of) the fact that they were mixed, especially if they had radical connections. In 1795 the Northern Star reported on the St. John's Day celebrations of three Co. Down lodges: "*The freemason lodges, consisting of Crossgare, near Downpatrick, No 343; Lisnod, No 659; and Saintfield, No 425; and constituted of different religious persuasions, walked yesterday [24 June] in our town, made a most respectable appearance, and spent the day in the greatest harmony*". It should be noted that their idea of harmony included a violently revolutionary sermon by the Rev. Thomas Ledlie Birch.²⁸ The predominantly Catholic secret society of the 1790s, the Defenders, seems to have had close links with masonry: not only with the popular "hedgemasonry" but in some cases with "regular" masonry as well (see chapter 8.2). Sir Richard Musgrave, the Orange historian of the 1798 rebellion, makes only one reference to freemasons - however, it is specifically to Catholic masons and implies a link between Defenderism and some form of freemasonry:

*In the year 1795, the Romanists, who assumed the name of masons, used frequently to assemble in the neighbourhood of Loughgall, Charlemont, Richhill, Portadown, Lurgan, the Ban-foot and Black-water-foot, and robbed Protestants of their arms.*²⁹

Freemasonry was not immune to the tensions between Catholics and Protestants after 1798, although the relations between the Grand Lodge of Ireland and the Catholic church seem to have been good. The grand master, Lord Donoughmore, remained committed to Catholic rights. The Cork Legion, a yeomanry corps raised by him, including many wealthy Catholics.³⁰ Further evidence in a specifically masonic context dates from

²⁷ McClelland 1968, pp. 77-78.

²⁸ *Northern Star* 29 June 1795.

²⁹ Musgrave, Sir Richard: *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland*, p. 58. Musgrave (d. 1818) was a high-ranking Orangeman. He was reinitiated in the "new system" (see chapter 10.2) and elected grand treasurer of the Orange Order on 12 July 1801. He also served as the grand master of Waterford. He received the unusual honour of having the Grand Orange Lodge pass a resolution, deciding to buy a copy of his book. Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland minute-book, GOLI/AM/98, pp. 225, 227, 230 (12 July and 2 August 1801). Musgrave himself may have been a freemason; he was among the subscribers of a 1789 book on the concept of friendship and on fraternal orders, including freemasonry. Donovan, John: *Sublime friendship delineated*, list of subscribers.

³⁰ Blackstock 1998, p. 133.

1798-99, when a masonic orphan school was set up in Dublin. The grand lodge organised charity sermons to support the school and among their other such fund-raising plans, they decided *"that a clergyman of the Romish Church be requested to preach a sermon in one of their Chapples [sic] in aid of the said school on the 1st Sunday in March"*.³¹

At a local level the picture was not always so rosy and there seems to have been a further escalation of the tendency to have separate "Catholic" and "Protestant" lodges. The Derry magistrate Sir G. F. Hill reported in 1803 that *"the Catholicks...are now prevented from frequenting freemason lodges where Protestants associate with them, and the Catholicks who are publicans have been oblig'd to erase from their sign boards all freemason insignia"*.³² In 1807 Richard Wilson, a Co. Tyrone magistrate and a former MP, published a pamphlet describing how he had incurred the wrath of the Orangemen of his neighbourhood, including the Verner family, by defending the rights of the Catholics.³³ In return, he was abused by anonymous political pamphleteers blaming him for all kinds of things. One of Wilson's critics included an interesting item in his list of Wilson's sins: *"About a fortnight after the 12th of July 1806, Mr Wilson chose the Lord's day to have himself admitted into a Freemason lodge in Benburb, every member of whom is of the Popish persuasion"*.³⁴ When an apparently drunken quarrel occurred between members of an Armagh lodge in 1810, one member was reported to have called another *"you papist dog...with intent to injure him as he is clerk in the prispeterian [sic] meeting house of Armagh"*. It is interesting to note that the lodge (which had many Catholic members) took the sectarian insult so seriously that the offender was reported to the grand lodge.³⁵

Despite the long-standing Catholic involvement in masonry, a change in attitudes was underway, led by the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Having failed to reconcile freemasonry and Catholicism in the 1780s,³⁶ some at least of the bishops adopted a strict ultramontanist position by the early 1810s. How Archbishop Troy's thinking had changed can be judged by reading the comments scribbled into his copy of a book of masonic constitutions, now (1999) preserved in the Grand Lodge of Ireland library. The various Old Charges and General Regulations are annotated with numerous comments along the

³¹ Grand lodge minutes (7 November 1799). GLI.

³² Sir G. F. Hill (Derry) to A. Marsden (13 March 1803). Reb. 620/65/73.

³³ Wilson, Richard: *A correspondence between Richard Wilson, Esq....* For the political context of Wilson's pamphlet, see Connolly 1989a, p. 32.

³⁴ *A Letter to the Rev. Henry Conwell, D.D., Popish Priest of Drumglass and Killyman, Relative to a Pamphlet lately published by Richard Wilson, Esq.*, foreword.

³⁵ Minutes of lodge 623 (1 October 1810). PGL Armagh.

³⁶ For the rejection of the archbishops' call for Catholic toleration of freemasonry, see Fagan 1998, p. 140.

lines of *"Indifference about religion follows from this rule", "By this rebellion is connived at & encouraged"* or *"This impenetrable secrecy [sic] is to be suspected"*.³⁷

In a letter to Lord Donoughmore in 1811, Archbishop Troy first reiterated the church dogma, stressing the bishops' objection to masonic oaths of secrecy and the penalty of excommunication for Catholics who became masons. Troy then made the token admission that *"on your Lordship's authority I may grant that freemasonry as administered in these countries [Ireland and Britain] is innocent & in some instances meritorious"*. However, he went on:

*but your Lordship will allow that an oath impenetrable to every authority may become, even in these countries as it has actually been on the continent of Europe, a band of conspiracy against the constituted authorities in church and state; and therefore in itself dangerous and condemnable.*³⁸

The Catholic hierarchy's challenge to freemasonry is not an isolated phenomenon: it coincides with the rising confidence of Irish Catholics in other respects, as evidenced by the controversy over the proposed royal veto on episcopal appointments.³⁹

Despite the episcopal ban, there is little doubt that Roman Catholicism and freemasonry remained compatible well into the nineteenth century in the minds of many, if not most, Catholics. Many Catholics continued to take part in freemasonry: Daniel O'Connell, for one, was still an active mason in 1814 and defended freemasonry as a *"philanthropy unconfined by sect, nation, colour or religion"*.⁴⁰ As it happens, a crucial turn in the relationship between Catholicism and freemasonry in Ireland seems to have taken place in the very year when O'Connell was defending masonry. The Pope's decision to expel freemasons from the Papal States was reported in Ireland as a reiteration of the long-standing (if ignored) papal ban: *"The Pope has published an edict which prohibits all secret meetings, and especially those of freemasons. The secret denunciations of informers are encouraged and rewarded"*.⁴¹ This prompted a reaction from the Ulster masonic poet, Thomas Stott (1755 - 1829):

³⁷ The book is a copy (without the title page) of John Pennell's masonic constitutions (1730) and bears an ex libris with the name *"John Thomas Troy OSSORY"* and an episcopal coat of arms. GLI. Troy was bishop of Ossory before he became archbishop of Dublin.

³⁸ Troy to W. Harvey Esq. (9 December 1814). An enclosure entitled "Memorandums" includes 1) an extract of Troy to Donoughmore (9 September 1811) and 2) a longer condemnation of freemasonry apparently not part of the letter to Donoughmore (see chapter 2.1, fn. 12). Miscellaneous letters Ms 27796(7). NLI.

³⁹ Connolly 1989b, pp. 53-54.

⁴⁰ Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 427. For details of O'Connell's masonic career, see Crawley 1911.

⁴¹ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* 11 September 1814; BNL 16 September 1814.

*In shades Elysian when old Hiram heard
The potentate of Rome's severe decree
Against the loyal sons of Masonry,
A warm petition he to Jove prepar'd
In favour of the lov'd Fraternity
The Thunderer perus'd it with a frown
And thus replied - 'I swear by ancient Styx,
No mortal power shall put your Brethren down...'⁴²*

The threatened use of "secret denunciations of informers" was a measure taken by the Pope as the temporal ruler of the Papal States in Italy, rather than an order for all Catholics world-wide to begin informing on their local masons.⁴³ In the British empire, where the Catholic clergy held no temporal jurisdiction, openly encouraging Catholics to harass masons would have led to a conflict between the Catholic bishops and the civil authorities. However, Catholic suspicion of freemasonry was encouraged by journalists such as Watty Cox. Deliberately obscuring the difference between Orangemen and freemasons, Cox portrayed the latter as a conspiracy behind all the outrages committed by loyalists in the 1790s.

Freemasonry, besides being eminent in ignorance, has been disgraced by the number of monsters it has afforded to aid extermination; every Orangeman is a freemason; the Shercockers, the priest-killers, the cabin-burners and altar-breakers are, to a man, freemasons. And, indeed, of all the loyal men, eminent in the days of terror, the triangle-men of Beresford's riding-house, the flogging Attornies, the whipping Merchants and Lawyers' corps, each had their lodges of freemasons, their Orange warrants, and torturing machines.⁴⁴

The dissemination of a mixture of old conspiracy theories with a garbled version of what the Pope had actually said, fuelled suspicion of freemasonry among Catholics. Informal peer pressure or even intimidation of individual Catholic masons seems to have been encouraged by some priests. Several incidents took place in 1815: in Galway masons, both Catholics and Protestants, had to defend themselves against the attacks of two local priests. The masons quoted many illustrious names (the masonic affiliation of some of which was doubtful) in their defence:

⁴² BNL 4 October 1814. Reprinted in McClelland 1986, p. 106. "Hiram" refers to the legendary builder of King Solomon's temple and founder of masonry, Hiram Abiff.

⁴³ The deputy grand master of the Irish masons observed that "*The Pope's bull...does not even affect to extend beyond the Apostolick Dominions*". Abraham Hely-Hutchinson to the Duke of Leinster (14 August 1815). Donoughmore Papers, D/51/8.

Abraham Hely-Hutchinson to Lord Donoughmore (28 August 1815). Donoughmore Papers, D/49/248. TCD.

⁴⁴ *Irish Magazine & Monthly Asylum for Neglected Biography* November 1814, pp. 484-487.

*Thundering the most severe anathema of the Catholic Church ...against a society, which contains amongst its members the good, and great, and able, and disinterested advocates of Catholic Freedom, is not the most appropriate return that could be made...for the services of such men as a Sussex, a Kent, a Moira, a Donoughmore, a Grattan, a Fitzgerald, an O'Connell, and many others.*⁴⁵

In the same year, a schoolmaster called Beville attended the funeral of a fellow freemason. The next day, Sunday, his parish priest denounced him from the pulpit. As a result, he lost all his Catholic students in a case of what Abraham Hely-Hutchinson called "*unjust persecution which our Catholic brethren are suffering from their pastors*".⁴⁶

The events of 1814-15 may have been a further blow to, but by no means the end of, Catholic involvement in Irish freemasonry. A 99-year-old John O'Hanlon, presumably a Catholic and "*for 77 years, a free and accepted Brother*" was buried in the "Chapel Yard" of Newry in 1817.⁴⁷ Mathew Fox, the Catholic master of a lodge in Clara, Co. Offaly, remained a mason although other Catholics resigned from the lodge.⁴⁸ The sundering of the ways of Catholicism and freemasonry has not been studied in detail, but it is probable that some bishops and priests adopted a more relaxed attitude than others.

Although the later developments fall outside the timeframe of this thesis, it should be noted in postscript that sources indicating Catholic participation are still abundant for the 1830s, although the exodus of Catholics from freemasonry seems to have been well underway.⁴⁹ In addition to ecclesiastical condemnations, the anti-masonic sentiments then current in America were being reported in the papers.⁵⁰ On St. John's Day, 1835, there were still a couple of places in Ulster where the masonic parades were mixed.⁵¹ But the harmony was not perfect: on the same day, a violent incident took place between Protestant and Catholic freemasons at Grange, Co. Antrim.⁵² And yet, as late as in 1852,

⁴⁵ *Newry Telegraph* 9 May 1815. In fact, Henry Grattan does not appear to have been a freemason (see chapter 2.3).

⁴⁶ Abraham Hely-Hutchinson to the Duke of Leinster (14 August 1815). Donoughmore Papers, D/51/8. TCD.

Abraham Hely-Hutchinson to Lord Donoughmore (28 August 1815). Donoughmore Papers, D/49/248. TCD.

⁴⁷ *Newry Telegraph* 23 July 1817.

⁴⁸ Lewis 1923, pp. 47-48.

⁴⁹ For instance, in 1830 a lodge "*marched in procession to chapel, at Drumkevin, but the celebrated Father Maguire would not suffer them to enter the chapel without laying aside their costume*". *Newry Telegraph* 12 January 1830.

⁵⁰ *Newry Telegraph* 1 June 1830.

⁵¹ Mixed parades were reported in Newry and Garvagh. Testimony of Capt. David Duff (29 July 1835), testimony of J. G. Jones (30 July 1835). *3rd report from the select committee appointed to inquire into...Orange lodges*, pp. 127-128, 166.

⁵² Testimony of Capt. David Duff (29 July 1835). *3rd report from the select committee appointed to inquire into...Orange lodges*, p. 142.

two "Papist" and one "Protestant" lodge sided with one another after they had both taken part in a funeral procession on St. John's Day and been suspended by the grand lodge (which by then disapproved of such public masonic activities).⁵³ One masonic writer remarks, possibly from his own recollection, that "it was not until about the last quarter of the nineteenth century, that [Catholics] found it impossible to continue their connexion with the Order".⁵⁴

5.2.2. Exclusively Protestant lodges

*"The origin and object of our institution...is to meet together as brethren, for the promulgation of knowledge, the advancement of morality, the exploding of bigotry",*⁵⁵ wrote "A Freemason and an Irish Protestant" in a newspaper. The year was 1792 and the paper, the *Northern Star*. But not everyone thought that masonry was about "exploding of bigotry". Despite the extensive Catholic involvement, there seems to have been a Protestants-only subculture in Ulster freemasonry. Examination of local masonic records reveals that some masonic lodges accepted only Protestants as members. There were at least four, and possibly more, lodges that actually had enshrined their policy of not admitting Catholics in their bye-laws or resolutions.⁵⁶

It is intriguing to note that all these lodges were situated on the uneasy sectarian frontier stretching from northern Armagh to mid-Down: a cluster of three lodges within ten miles of one another (Lurgan, Tandragee and Banbridge) and a fourth one in Downpatrick. In 1763 the Lurgan lodge recorded the resignation of one of its founder members: *"Bro. Short at his own request is struck off the lodge Roll and it is ordered that for the future no Papist or reputed Papist shall be admitted a Member of this Lodge on any account or pretence whatsoever"*.⁵⁷ A bye-law in similar vein of a lodge at Tandragee, Co. Armagh, decreed *"that no person be admitted that is not a protestent [sic] and likeways came and derived of a cretable [credible?] stock of protestant parents"*.⁵⁸

In some cases at least the rule excluding Catholics was dropped later. The first bye-laws of the Downpatrick lodge (no 367), drafted soon after the foundation of the lodge

⁵³ Bashford 1993, p. 175.

⁵⁴ Berry 1913, p. 196.

⁵⁵ *Northern Star* 19 December 1792.

⁵⁶ 315 Tandragee, 336 Banbridge, 367 Downpatrick, 394 Lurgan. The lodges were all founded in 1759-63. IMR.

⁵⁷ Lodge 394 minutes (26 April 1763). GLI.

⁵⁸ Lodge 315 minutes (bye-law 14). GLI.

in 1765, had a clause to that effect. However, the clause was omitted in the next set of bye-laws, dating from c. 1783, and may have been abolished earlier. In the original minute book, the clause has been crossed out very thoroughly and is only partly legible: "*No brother who is now entered on lists is to be at the entering passing or raising of any papist - - - or - - - person he knows - - - to be - - - none such to be admitted a member in this fraternity*".⁵⁹

From this anti-Catholic ethos of the 1760s, the Downpatrick lodge no. 367 moved to a moderate position of supporting parliamentary representation for Catholics in December 1792.⁶⁰ Moderate reformist opinion apparently still prevailed in the lodge in 1797 as it resolved to prepare an advertisement for the papers "*expressive of our...support of the constitution under its original and uncontaminated [!] principles, our affection to his Majesty and our disaffection & unanimous opposition to foreign invasion*".⁶¹ If the reference to the "original" or "pure" constitution - as opposed to the near-martial law prevailing at the time - was an indication of reformist or Whig leanings (see chapter 7.3.2), the "opposition to foreign invasion" was definitely a rejection of United Irish radicalism. It is worth noting that the other lodge in Downpatrick at the time, no. 343, was one of the apparently politically radical lodges mentioned above, boasting in 1795 of their mixed composition.⁶²

Lodge no. 336 in Banbridge retained its ban on Catholics until 1804. However, when the ban was finally dropped, a new bye-law was introduced in its stead: "*That no candidate be admitted in this lodge who cannot read the scripture*",⁶³ which can be read as a veiled expression of preference for Protestants. A similar rule was in place in a lodge at Ballygowan, Co. Down in 1814.⁶⁴

It must be noted that some masonic lodges bore names in addition to numbers and "Orange Lodge" was the name borne by several lodges. References to such lodges in the times before the foundation of the Orange Order have caused some confusion

⁵⁹ Lodge 367 Records 1765 - 1783. Downpatrick Masonic Hall. The historian of Downpatrick freemasonry, Edward Parkinson, omits to mention the anti-Catholic rule, noting only that the rules of 1765 were re-enacted "with certain amendments and additions in 1784". Parkinson 1906, p. 9.

⁶⁰ *Northern Star* 19 January 1793.

⁶¹ Resolution (3 July 1797) in Lodge Records 1791 - 1800. Downpatrick Masonic Hall.

⁶² *Northern Star* 29 June 1795.

⁶³ Lodge 336 minutes (bye-law 29, 1787; bye-law 6, 1804). MIC/249/3, PRONI. The original ban on Catholics may have been passed later than 1787 as it is in different handwriting from nos. 1-28.

⁶⁴ Simpson 1926, p. 34.

among historians, as A. T. Q. Stewart has noted.⁶⁵ The name did not necessarily indicate ultra-Protestant leanings as the case of the Orange Lodge of Belfast (no. 257), the most famous Ulster lodge of the 1780s, shows.⁶⁶ However, in some cases the name was apt also in retrospect: the Tandragee lodge requiring Protestant ancestry from candidates was also called "Orange" and was known to drink "*many loyal toasts*" after dinner.⁶⁷ The existence of such lodges raises the question whether it might be worthwhile to regard some of the eighteenth-century masonic lodges as parts of the "Orange tradition" - a term coined by Hereward Senior to describe the set of customs, symbols and modes of behaviour "which gave a kind of moral sanction to the subjugation of Catholics".⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Stewart 1993, p. 165.

⁶⁶ For lodge 257, see chapter 7.2.2. Other recorded "Orange" lodges include 132 Derry (e.g. *Londonderry Journal* 29 March 1791), 590 Doagh (*Belfast Mercury* 8 July 1785), 605 Moy (BNL 20 June 1783). There was also an "Orange and Blue" lodge (317 Ballymena, BNL 19 June 1787) and a "Glorious Memory Orange Lodge" (no. 689 Dungannon, BNL 18 March 1791).

⁶⁷ BNL 1 January 1793.

⁶⁸ Senior 1966, p. 2.

5.3. Freemasonry and the army

Among the professions of potential freemasons, that of the soldier had a special place. A lodge meeting at a stated place and at a regular time was highly inconvenient for military men. Army regiments moved around the British empire. Consequently, even if a soldier joined the local lodge at the town where he was based, he more likely than not had to leave again soon. Military lodges, with special "ambulatory" warrants, were created to cater for soldiers wishing to participate in masonic life. They were an exception to the rule that warrants were issued to a particular city or town: the lodge existed within a particular army regiment and met wherever the regiment happened to be (and when it was peaceful enough to do so). The Grand Lodge of Ireland was particularly active in issuing warrants for such lodges, including the very first one granted to the 39th Foot regiment in 1742. As the military lodges travelled wherever the service of the empire took their host regiments, they had an important role in spreading the idea of freemasonry abroad.¹

A study of "Irish" military lodges as distinct from English or Scottish ones does not constitute a particularly meaningful object of study as it was not of great importance whether a regimental lodge held a warrant from the English, Irish or Scottish grand lodge.² A unit with an "Irish" warrant was not necessarily Irish, although it could have served in Ireland at some stage during its history. Many British regular regiments possessed Irish warrants and even some British fencible regiments of the 1790s acquired them during their service in Ireland. For example, the Fife Fencibles had arrived in Ireland in 1795³ and a lodge was set up in March 1798.⁴ Although the imperial aspect of military freemasonry is beyond the scope of this thesis, this chapter will cover two other aspects more relevant to the overall theme. The first section will study interaction between Ulster lodges and the military; the second, lodges formed in the locally raised militia regiments.

¹ Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 86; Hamill 1986, p. 87; Gould 1899, p. 123.

² In 1813, there were 352 military lodges, 190 of them "Irish". In the following year, the 1st regiment of foot had three lodges in its different battalions: one with an Irish, one with a Scottish and one with an English warrant. Lister 1964, p. 122. Another regiment (the 22nd) lost its Irish warrant "in the Mississippi" in 1759 and applied to the Scottish grand lodge for replacement. Gould 1899, p. 126.

³ Stewart 1995, p. 83.

⁴ IMR. The other British fencible units with Irish warrants were the Essex (no. 852, 1796), Elgin (no. 860, 1798) and Breadalbane (no. 907, 1801) regiments. In addition, there was the Irish 1st Fencible Light Dragoons (no. 384, 1799) regiment, raised by Lord Roden. He is known to have been an Orangeman. (Bolton 1966, p. 131) but his masonic credentials, if any, are unknown. Roden is not listed among the members of 384 (Register, 1st series).

5.3.1. Soldiers in civilian lodges

According to the 1768 regulations of the Grand Lodge of Ireland, military lodges were not allowed to initiate locals where there was a registered lodge and vice versa, ordinary lodges were not to initiate soldiers if there was a warranted lodge in their regiment.⁵ This rule led to the rejection of Rev. Crow, an army chaplain: "*The Rev:d Jos: Crow, by a rule of the grand lodge cannot be balloted for here, as there is a regular lodge in the regt. he belongs to without obtaining a certificate from sd. lodge shewing that they have no objection to his becoming a mason*".⁶ However, soldiers who later set up military lodges had often been first initiated in civilian lodges. Especially passing militia regiments frequently took advantage of the hospitality and willingness of the local lodge to assist in initiating soldiers on the recommendation of other soldiers who were already masons. Given the unusual circumstances of the soldiers, many lodges were willing to be flexible about the practical arrangements of initiation. For instance, a lodge in Downpatrick decided that "*every person who belongs to the army or sea [i.e. navy] shall be admitted on an emergency [i.e. at an extraordinary meeting] provided he or the[y] or any of them are well recommended by a true honest brother*". Soldiers were also exempted from fines levied on members who arrived late at a meeting.⁷

Lodge 754 in Coleraine was particularly active in initiating soldiers of many passing regiments. Armagh Militia lodge (no. 888) was set up in 1800, but before then at least three of its soldiers (a quartermaster sergeant, a sergeant and a private) had joined the Coleraine lodge. Among those initiated there was Sergeant William McCracken, later the first master of the regimental lodge.⁸ By the end of 1800, those initiated in lodge 754 included three soldiers of the Kerry Militia (the soldiers of which were "all" United Irishmen, according to the United Irishman, John Nevin)⁹, two of the Londonderry Militia, two of the Royal Irish Artillery, four of the Somerset and one of Aberdeen Fencibles. The 2nd Royal Manx Fencibles accounted for a full nineteen of the new members. This is probably explained by the positive attitude towards freemasonry of the colonel of the

⁵ The powers of English lodges were not curtailed in this respect until 1813 and the Scottish lodges' were not touched at all during the 18th and 19th centuries. Gould 1899, p. 118.

⁶ Lodge 560 minutes (27 December 1787). GLI.

⁷ Resolutions (4 May 1795, 4 March 1799) in Lodge 367 Records, 1791 - 1800. Downpatrick Masonic Hall.

⁸ Lodge 754 minutes (20 [December] 1799, 8 February 1800). GLI. Register, 2nd series, lodge 888 (6 November 1800). The other two soldiers (Quartermaster Sergeant Griffin Jackson and Private John Hagen) cannot be traced among the registered members of 888.

⁹ Stewart 1995, p. 142.

Royal Manx (and the commander of the Coleraine garrison), Lord Henry Murray.¹⁰ Murray was the son and the brother of two English grand masters. His brother, the 4th Duke of Atholl, was grand master of the English (Antients') grand lodge at the time.¹¹ Another initiate of 754 was William Crawley, who was entered as "*Servant to Lord Henry Murray*" in the lodge minute book.¹²

Another lodge with close links with the military was no. 569 at Lifford, Co. Donegal. They admitted a soldier of the Tyrone militia in 1793, at a time when that regiment did not yet have a lodge.¹³ But it was with the Wicklow militia that the lodge had the closest relationship. In May and June 1795, several soldiers from that regiment petitioned for membership and at least two, Sergeant Casiday [Cassidy?] and Corporal Murphy were initiated. Soon after they had attended St. John's Day celebrations together with the locals, the soldiers seem to have left Lifford. Before they left, lodge 569 held a "night of emergency" (extraordinary meeting) "*for the purpose of granting certificates to our members of the Wicklow militia*", thus making an exception of the bye-law that required one year's membership before a certificate could be granted.¹⁴ Among the many soldiers welcomed by lodge 569 at Lifford was also a John Courtney of the 70th Foot, who was recommended by two masons who were soldiers of the same regiment.¹⁵ The initiation took place in the Lifford lodge despite the fact that there was a lodge (with a warrant from the Grand Lodge of Scotland) in the 70th regiment.¹⁶ This occurrence is difficult to explain. However, the Lifford lodge apparently had many Catholic members (see chapter 5.3.1): perhaps Courtney was a Catholic who was not welcome in the "Scottish" lodge or did not want to join it.

The interaction between the local lodge and soldiers who were freemasons could involve judicial aspects too: the soldiers could request the civilians to judge in disputes between them. A lodge at Charleville, Co. Cork, was called upon to adjudicate in one such dispute "*at the particular intreat[y?] of several masons belonging to the Arma[g]h*

¹⁰ Stewart 1995, p. 143-144.

¹¹ John, the 3rd Duke was grand master of the Antients in 1771 - 1774. The 4th Duke (also John) succeeded him as grand master 1775 - 1781 and 1791 - 1813. Hewitt 1967, p. 275.

¹² For the soldiers, see lodge 754 minutes (1792 - 1811). GLI. Crawley was initiated on 2 November 1798.

¹³ Lodge 569 minutes (4 September 1793). GLI. The soldier, John Treacy (no rank given) cannot be traced among the registered members of the later Tyrone militia lodges (no. 846, founded in 1796 and no. 562, founded using a "revived" warrant in 1797).

¹⁴ Lodge 569 minutes (13 May, 19 May, 21 May, 12 June, 9 June, 29 June 1795). GLI. The Wicklow regiment later had two lodges (no. 848 from 1796, no. 877 from 1800) but Casiday and Murphy cannot be found among the registered members of either lodge.

¹⁵ Lodge 569 minutes (4 July 1792). GLI.

Regt of Militia in order to adjust some dif[f]erences subsisting betw[ee]n them". The differences in question related to whether some of the soldiers were regularly made masons. In a partly illegible passage, the lodge reported that "*on a full investigation of the charges brought...Patrick Magee was found not - - - [to be?] duly or regularly made and James McMahan [?] a member of a lodge not under a good report and - - - for being an immoral loose lebertine [sic]...We have detained the certificates from the two above persons*".¹⁷ Interestingly, pursuing a formal charge such as this suggests that there was an organised body of masons in the regiment, though they did not yet possess a warrant and thus did not formally constitute a lodge.

5.3.2. Militia lodges

In 1793, an act was passed by the Irish parliament to enable the government to raise by ballot additional troops, called militia regiments. The decision to form the militia was part of the government's reaction to the increasing political unrest at the end of 1792. The most threatening aspect of this was the creation of Volunteer corps under the French revolutionary title of "National Guards", which convinced the government of the need of a new, reliable military force under their own control.¹⁸

One of the people closely involved in the political process of setting up the militia was Arthur Hill, Lord Hillsborough, who soon after the passing of the 1793 Militia Bill succeeded as the 2nd Marquis of Downshire.¹⁹ Downshire had been an active freemason in the 1780s; he and his father and namesake were members of the "Orange Lodge" (no. 257), the most fashionable Belfast lodge of the Volunteer era. The younger Downshire joined the élite Grand Master's Lodge in Dublin, apparently in preparation for his ensuing election for grand master of Ireland, a position which he held from 1785 to 1787.²⁰ He was later followed in office by his ally and fellow Co. Down magnate, Lord Glerawley, later the first Earl of Annesley.²¹

¹⁶ Gould 1887, vol. III, p. 403.

¹⁷ Lodge 49 minutes (7 February 1796). GLI.

¹⁸ McAnally 1949, pp. 1-13.

¹⁹ McAnally 1949, pp. 14-15. Arthur Hill (1753 - 1801), known as Lord Kilwarlin while grand master in 1785 - 1786; later as Lord Hillsborough; succeeded as 2nd Marquis of Downshire, 1793. For a brief political biography, see Malcomson 1981a.

²⁰ Register, 1st series, lodge 257 (2 February 1784). Register, 2nd series, Grand Master's Lodge (8 June 1785). GLI. Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 218.

²¹ Francis Charles Annesley, Lord Glerawley; 1st Earl Annesley, 1789. Grand master, 1787 - 1789. Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 220.

Downshire's interest in freemasonry was by no means extinguished by having already attained and given up the highest office in Irish freemasonry. On the model of the "ambulatory" lodges in the regular army, masonic lodges were formed in most militia regiments. The Downshire regiment, of which the marquis was colonel and Annesley lieutenant-colonel, was the third militia regiment in which such a lodge was set up.²² A special connection with two past grand masters showed in the form of special favours. Had the normal procedure been followed, the Downshire Militia lodge would have been numbered 803 - the next vacant number in the grand lodge books at the time (in January 1795). Instead, it received the number 212 that had belonged to a defunct Cork lodge.²³ This practice had been begun by the provincial grand master of Munster, who in October 1794 had "recycled" an old warrant (no. 495) to a lodge formed in South Cork regiment. Numerical precedence was felt to be important; the militia regiments themselves were at loggerheads over numbers (complicated by the fact that they were raised at the same time and thus no regiment had obvious historical precedence over the others).²⁴ Thus it is not surprising that the masonic lodges within the regiments indulged in a similar contest.

The grand lodge register entries for the Downshire regiment give the military ranks of only two members: a lieutenant and a corporal.²⁵ Some of the soldiers who joined the lodge were already members of other lodges; the first lodge officers, by definition, had to be freemasons in order to be able to form a lodge. The lodge from which the member came is given for six soldiers (out of the eight first names in the register). Of these six, most were from County Down: two from Banbridge and one each from Downpatrick and Dromore. The very first name (John M. Reed, presumably the first master of the lodge) belonged to a lodge at Cootehill, Co. Cavan and the third one (Smollet Holden, one of the first wardens of the new lodge) to a lodge in the 5th Dragoon Guards.²⁶ Holden was the bandmaster of the regiment, who later published *A Selection of Masonic Songs*.²⁷ Reed

²² There was also the precedent of a lodge in a short-lived fencible corps of 1783, the Ulster Provincial Regiment of Foot. IMR, lodge 612. The first militia lodge was that in the Westmeath regiment (1793) followed by the South Cork (1794). The possible masonic affiliations of their commanders (respectively Lords Westmeath and Doneraile) are unknown to this writer. However, earlier holders of both titles had been grand masters of Ireland (the 3rd Viscount Doneraile, grand master in 1740-41 and the 6th Earl of Westmeath, grand master in 1763-65). Lepper and Crossle 1925, pp.169-170, 190.

²³ IMR. Richard E. Parkinson asserts that the revival of warrant 212 took place despite grand lodge opposition. The warrant had been previously held at Kinsale, Co. Cork. A possible link between Kinsale and Co. Down is that the same landowner [Lord de Clifford] had an interest both in Downpatrick and Kinsale. Parkinson 1946, p. 14.

²⁴ McAnally 1949, pp. 66-67

²⁵ Lieutenant David Boyd and Corporal John Read. Register, 1st series, lodge 212 (4 May 1799).

²⁶ See entries 86-93 of the revived lodge 212. Register, 1st series, lodge 212 (10 January 1795).

²⁷ For Holden, see McClelland 1986, pp. 54-55, 72 fn. 22.

may have been an officer or a non-commissioned officer. Orangemen later secured a foothold in the Downshire regiment, alleging that their lodges enjoyed the approval of Lord Downshire himself.²⁸ However, in 1797 the marquis was not pleased with such activity in his regiment. He had six known Defenders “well watched” and was aware that “lately...Orange clubs are forming in this reg[imen]t all [of] which was watched & stopped”.²⁹

Militia lodges could be very egalitarian as regards admission to membership. In the lodge set up in the Armagh regiment (no. 888) it was not unknown for a commissioned officer and a private to be admitted at the same meeting.³⁰ The fact that only the ranks of officers and privates were deemed worth recording in the minutes suggests that the bulk of the membership consisted of non-commissioned officers. The officers did show considerable interest in the lodge: in 1804 alone, two captains, two lieutenants and an ensign were either initiated or admitted from other lodges and yet others visited the meetings. Having officers as “brethren” no doubt conferred prestige on the lodge and consequently, on the members drawn from the other ranks. The officers were encouraged to join by charging them lower admission fees (half a guinea instead of two guineas for the other ranks). However, their involvement proved transitory and the lodge later tried using the stick as well as the carrot:

*This body resolved that if the officers of the regiment who are members of this lodge do not come forward and make a proper apology for their nonattendance and refusing to attend summonses from the lodge be reprimanded for their misconduct.*³¹

A total of thirty-six warrants were issued to Irish militia regiments between 1793 and 1812,³² a considerable number as the total number of regiments was thirty-eight. Some regiments had two and one (Tyrone) even had three lodges. Of the regiments recruited in Ulster, only the Londonderry regiment did not have a masonic lodge at any stage during its embodiment (although some of its soldiers are known to have joined a civilian lodge in Coleraine).³³ The following (table 5) is a complete list of the lodges in the Ulster regiments:

²⁸ Curtin 1994, p. 169.

²⁹ Lord Downshire to Cooke (10 January 1797). Reb. 620/28/81.

³⁰ Lodge 888 minutes (30 January 1804, 10 May 1804). GLI.

³¹ Lodge 888 minutes (11 April 1805). GLI.

³² IMR. One warrant (no. 50) was granted but never issued.

³³ Lodge 754 minutes (20 December 1800). GLI.

TABLE 5: WARRANTS ISSUED TO ULSTER MILITIA REGIMENTS

number	regiment	warrant issued in
212	Downshire	1795
289	Antrim	1796
552	Monaghan	"
846	Tyrone	"
562	Tyrone (second lodge)	1797
864	Fermanagh	1798
865	Donegal	"
200	Monaghan (second lodge)	1800
888	Armagh	"
300	Cavan	1801
225	Tyrone (third lodge)	1808 ³⁴
214	South Down	1810

For reasons explained earlier, no statistical study beyond 1800 can be attempted here. As regards the eight lodges founded in or before 1800, their numerical strength - as shown by the no doubt incomplete grand lodge register - was as follows:

TABLE 6: REGISTERED MEMBERS OF MILITIA LODGES, 1795 - 1800

	1795	1796	1797	1798	1799	1800	TOTAL
212 Downshire	29	13	0	0	59	1	102
289 Antrim	-	3	43	39	29	8	122
552 Monaghan	-	4	80	0	1	2	87
846 Tyrone	-	3	33	0	0	1	37
562 Tyrone	-	-	20	19	22	0	61
864 Fermanagh	-	-	-	4	21	17	42
865 Donegal	-	-	-	3	0	13	16
888 Armagh	-	-	-	-	-	3	3
TOTAL	29	23	176	65	132	45	470

These 470 registrations represent almost a tenth of the total of 4851 members registered by Ulster lodges in 1795 - 1800. As such, they were an important new development in Irish freemasonry.

³⁴ A warrant granted by the Dublin grand lodge on the condition that the lodge returned a warrant granted earlier by the rival Ulster grand lodge. IMR.

5.4. Hedgemasonry

Although this study is primarily concerned with the movement led (at least in theory) by the Grand Lodge of Ireland, it has to be kept in mind that not everyone who regarded himself as a freemason owed even nominal allegiance to that body. There are numerous references in eighteenth-century sources to masons called “hedgemasons” or “unwarranted”, “clandestine” or “irregular” masons (as opposed to the “regular” masons affiliated to the Grand Lodge of Ireland or to one of the foreign grand lodges recognised by it). Many masonic authors believe that the name “hedgemasons” is derived from their supposed practice of performing their ceremonies clandestinely, perhaps hurriedly, behind a hedge rather than in the comfort of the lodge room. However, it is more likely that the term was a derogatory one, in line with the “hedge-schoolmaster”, for instance.

Many later masonic writers have tended to adopt a legalistic tone, condemning all deviation from the rules laid down by the grand lodge. But in the eighteenth century, it was far from clear that the grand lodge was the “owner” of the concept of freemasonry in the sense that it and only it could define what constituted masonry and what was outside its pale. As early as in 1741, Fifield D’Assigny warned that “regular” masons should not perform “irregular” initiations for financial gain:

Let not poverty or any other motive influence any of you to sell your birth-rights for a mess of pottage...let no clandestine acts eclipse your characters, but like judicious potters see that your clay is well temper’d, free from the least unseemly blemish before you make your vessel.¹

As we have seen, the attempts of the grand lodge to extend and uphold its authority had only limited success even with lodges which held a warrant issued by it (see chapter 4.1.2). If even these “regular” lodges questioned the power of the Dublin leadership to dictate to local freemasons, it is not surprising that “unwarranted” masons rejected it altogether. However, if there has been little research on “regular” freemasons, the “irregular” ones have been studied even less. For instance, it is not clear why they remained outside the nation-wide network of lodges headed by the Grand Lodge of Ireland. Was it a case of a stubborn refusal to submit to the authority of an upstart body, which claimed the right to regulate the affairs of an ancient fraternity and even charge for its services? Or were the “irregular” lodges a later off-shoot of “regular” masonry, with a lower-class membership who would not have qualified for entry into “regular” lodges

anyway? Who rejected whom? The evidence is meagre either way, but on the whole, the latter explanation seems more plausible. However, it is by no means proven that the hedgemasons were a homogenous group and that one explanation can account for all of them.

The grand lodge was certainly aware of freemasons outside their control. When Lord Dunluce (grand master, 1772-74 and 1778-82) visited a Coleraine lodge in 1772, the secretary recorded him as "*grand master of all the regular lodges in this kingdom*".² The "regular" masons were accepting by implication that there were people in Ireland, who had gone through masonic initiation ceremonies yet were not members of one of their lodges. In 1768, the basic rules for the administration of Irish masonry were laid down in the so-called "Regulations of 1768". These regulations specifically ban accepting "clandestinely made" masons into regular lodges, unless they were

*entered and passed through the usual courses over again, as if the same had never been performed before; and any lodge herein transgressing, shall be subject to a fine of one guinea, and not be suffered to sit in the Grand Lodge till such fine be paid.*³

Measures taken against "irregular" masons were by no means an attempt to expand the power of the grand lodge merely for its own sake. Any influx of "irregular" masons, some of whom might have obtained their masonic degrees for the purpose of applying for the financial help of "regular" brethren, was a threat to the lodges' charity funds. This had been the case in England as early as in the 1730s, leading the English grand lodge to take the dramatic step of changing the passwords required for entry into lodges under its control.⁴ The phenomenon of hedgemasonry was also known on the Isle of Man: the master of a lodge there reported "*a great number of irregular masons in this island*" in 1769.⁵

There are many recorded instances of the reinitiation (as prescribed by the "Regulations of 1768") of a hedgemason upon his acceptance into a "regular" lodge. A "*Mr Robert Boyd of St. Johnstown was upon his application admitted into the lodge (and being a clandestine mason) underwent the regular progress* [i.e. had to undergo the

¹ D'Assigny, Fifield: *An impartial answer to the enemies of free-masonry*, p. 14.

² Lodge 138 minutes (21 October 1772). Hezlett papers, D/668/O. PRONI.

³ *Regulations of 1768*, rule XXV.

⁴ Haunch 1967, p. 77.

initiation rituals again] *and therefore enroll[ed] a member of lodge no. 346*".⁶ Similar occasions were recorded in Lifford, Co. Donegal⁷ and in Richhill⁸ and Ballintaggart, both in Co. Armagh.⁹ Like Irish hedgemasons, other unrecognised masons might also have to undergo initiation all over again. A "*Mr John Halbert a Modern mason*" (i.e. belonging to the English grand lodge not recognised by the Irish masons) was initiated at Donaghrisk "*to all the mysteries of Antient masonry, so far as the degree of a master*".¹⁰

The lack of a regular lodge in the locality was apparently considered an excuse for "irregular" initiation. But once a warrant was acquired from the grand lodge, this excuse lost its validity in the eyes of the masons, themselves possibly only newly "regular". In the late 1770s, a Co. Armagh lodge charged a higher initiation fee (£1 2s. 9d. instead of 8s. 3½ d.) if the new member "*hath been admit[t]ed clandestinely within a mile of this place after the erection of this lodge*". The master, senior warden and two members of the same lodge were later suspended for "making" a mason clandestinely. However, a committee of four lodges decided that the candidate was to be "remade" free of charge.¹¹ This conflict took place in an atmosphere of tightening rules of admission into Co. Armagh lodges. Such incidents probably accelerated the process that led to the formation of a county committee to vet all the Co. Armagh candidates for masonic membership. The Armagh committee, formed in November 1790, was the first of its kind in Ireland (see chapter 4.3).

It is very difficult to establish how widespread hedgemasonry was. Apparently no documents originating with the hedgemasons themselves survive and all the evidence consists of references in "regular" masonic records and other sources such as newspapers. Lepper and Crossle argue that freemasonry must have been more widespread in the early eighteenth century than the grand lodge records show. The existence of lodges outside grand lodge jurisdiction is not in doubt: in 1740, lodges which had "not already taken out warrants" from the grand lodge, were urged to do so - otherwise they would be "proceeded against as rebel masons". Lepper and Crossle suggest that this nonconformity was particularly widespread in Ulster, pointing out that the

⁵ Charles Kavanagh of lodge 458, to the Grand Lodge of Ireland (2 January 1769). Appendix to Register, 1st series, lodge 458. This particular Manx lodge had received its warrant from Ireland; others applied to England or Scotland for theirs.

⁶ Lodge 346 minutes (21 December 1782). GLI.

⁷ Lodge 569 minutes (5 December 1783). GLI.

⁸ Minutes of lodge 328 (2 March and 6 April 1764). Quoted in Jenkinson 1946b, p. 89.

⁹ "*Thomas Power made regular*". Lodge 527 minutes (7 February 1777). GLI.

¹⁰ Lodge 668 minutes (22 April 1790). GLI.

first warrant for a Belfast lodge was issued only in 1748. Relying on the questionable evidence of a satirical 1724 pamphlet as to the existence of a lodge in Omagh at that date (see chapter 3.1.1), Lepper and Crossle argue that "if the Craft had reached such outlying places, Belfast would not have missed its ministrations".¹²

Although Lepper's and Crossle's argument is difficult to substantiate in full, it may be supported by the fact that some Ulster lodges preserve a tradition that their masonic "ancestors" were originally hedgemasons.¹³ Particularly in the 1760s there seem to have been many cases of previously existing lodges legitimising their standing by acquiring a warrant or attempting to do so. A newly-regular lodge could provide "irregular" ones with what amounted to introductions or recommendations to the grand lodge. For instance, lodge 328 at Richhill, Co. Armagh (warranted in 1759), received in 1760s many petitions for such recommendations from nearby unwarranted lodges, rejecting some and approving of others. The Richhill masons even provided several such groups with a provisional "dispensation" to meet as a lodge. However, they also suspended one of their members, Barney McKeage, for "*countenancing a clandestin[e] lodge to be held in his house*".¹⁴ According to the historian of a lodge at Newtownards, David Orr, twenty-six of the founder-members transferred from a previously existing unwarranted lodge when the warrant was acquired in 1766.¹⁵ The local masonic records also refer to a later "clandestine" lodge in Newtownards with a Scottish warrant in 1794.¹⁶ The case of Newtownards suggests that historians should perhaps make a distinction between the "unwarranted" lodges in the days before the extension of the authority of the grand lodge to the north, and the "hedgemasons" of the end of the eighteenth century.

In practice, the line between "regular" and "clandestine" freemasonry could be drawn in sand. Lodges that came to be regarded as "regular" might have obtained their warrants by unorthodox means. Warrants could be bought and sold: a group of masons at Cootehill, Co. Cavan, seem to have purchased a warrant with lodge implements in

¹¹ Lodge 527 minutes (17 October 1790 and bye-law 8, 1776). GLI. Lodge 678 Markethill in the 1790s also charged a higher fee from members "*made clandestinely within one mile of this place after the erection of this lodge*". Lodge 678 bye-laws, quoted in Paterson 1946, p. 194.

¹² Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 95-96.

¹³ E.g. lodge no. 430 in Ballyclare, Co. Antrim. Grange 1980, p. 219. Local family tradition recorded at Larne - where the first lodge was warranted only in 1783 - also suggests the presence of hedgemasonry before and after that date. McCutcheon 1993, p. 229.

¹⁴ Several entries in lodge 328 minutes, quoted in Jenkinson 1946b, p. 88.

¹⁵ Orr 1971, p. 12.

¹⁶ Lodge 447 minutes (2 September 1794) quoted in Orr 1971, p. 10. According to local masonic tradition, a "clandestine" lodge actually met and conferred degrees in Newtownards under the "authority" of this Scottish warrant.

Dublin for £4 in 1759. They carried these off to Cootehill and formed a lodge there. Despite being a "regular" lodge, they went on socialising with "clandestine" masons and even seem to have lent their warrant to hedgemasons of Ashfield when these needed one for their ceremonies.¹⁷ A grand officer noted in 1805 that warrants for "higher degrees" (see chapter 6.4) were being signed by people who had been "*suspended from masonry* [i.e. "regular" masonry]...*for gross misconduct*".¹⁸

If hedgemasons could by acquiring a warrant become "regulars", a previously "regular" lodge could sometimes lose this status and slip into the "hedge" category. Lodge no. 335 in Broomhedge was erased in 1788 as arbitration between two rival factions within the lodge had failed. The warrant was not restored until 1795; yet the grand lodge minutes of that year refer to "present members" of 335. The lodge would thus appear to have existed without grand lodge sanction for seven years.¹⁹ A lodge in Loughgall, Co. Armagh ignored the cancellation of its warrant, prompting the frustrated comment recorded in the grand lodge register: "*now at work clandestinely, Ap[ri]l 1801*".²⁰

Hedgemasonry was not only an Ulster phenomenon. A grand lodge resolution specifically condemned members "*aiding or assisting at the works of any lodge in this city [Dublin], not authorised or warranted by a grand lodge*".²¹ The original (1763) bye-laws of a Dublin lodge imposed the fine of one guinea on members who assisted in the "making" of "*a free mason clendistantly [sic] within the city of Dublin or six miles thereof*". Judging by the wording of the clause, one may suspect that in framing the ban, the lodge was more concerned with income than principle. A mason wishing to make new masons (and probably earn some money in recompense) was free to do so once outside the immediate jurisdiction of the lodge.²²

Many lodges, however, had stricter policy on initiating masons outside the recognised lodge: "*Any member...that will be [present] at the making [i.e. initiation] of any*

¹⁷ Crossle 1923, pp. 126-127.

¹⁸ John Boardman to Thomas Harper (10 August 1805). Reprinted in Sadler 1893, p. 18.

¹⁹ Thompson 1957, pp. 95-96. Grand lodge minutes (4 September 1788, 7 May 1795). GLI.

²⁰ Register, 1st series, lodge 462.

²¹ Grand lodge minutes (4 August 1785). Reprinted in Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 266. The reference to the need for the sanction of "a" rather than "the" grand lodge probably refers to the presence of military lodges warranted by other grand lodges recognised by the Irish one - the English (Antients) and the Scottish.

²² Jenkinson 1927, p. 149.

one clandestin[e]ly is to be excluded this lodge" read the rules of one Tyrone lodge.²³ Nevertheless, there was some room for ambiguity as regards "regular" masons taking part in "irregular" initiation ceremonies. The 1770 bye-laws of a Newtownards lodge decreed that a member who had been involved in *"making a mason clandestinely, shall not be admitted into said lodge without giving proper satisfaction"*, possibly implying that there were situations in which such action could be considered justified and an explanation acceptable to the lodge.²⁴

Adding the unknown number of hedgemasons to the already considerable estimates of 12 000 - 14 000 "regular" masons in 1792 and 20 000 in 1800 (see chapter 3.5.2) serves to emphasise that by that time freemasonry had become a widespread and significant movement in Ulster. Whether "regular" or "irregular", a freemason was acquainted with customs and organisational forms that could be put to practical use in the heated political climate of the 1790s. The extent and media of the transmission to organisations such as the Defenders and the Orangemen will be studied in more detail in chapter 10. However, it should be noted that hedgemasons - like their "regular" cousins and indeed all Irishmen of the 1790s - were divided into reformers and conservatives, radicals and loyalists, Protestants and Catholics.

In fact, it is plausible to regard Defenderism and early Orangeism as forms of hedgemasonry, if only sectarian adaptations of it. The writer of an alleged Defender oath denounced *"Orange Men and Regular Masons who believe in damn[e]d Luther & Calvin"*,²⁵ implying that he regarded himself as an "irregular" mason. The presumably lower-class membership of the hedgemasons may also have been susceptible to radical agitation as the Marquis of Abercorn's agent complained in 1797 that *"every hedgemason in this neighbourhood [near Strabane] are United Irishmen"*.²⁶

If Defenders or radicals could be found among hedgemasons, so could loyalists. The correspondent who wrote to the radical *Northern Star* newspaper in 1792 complaining about *"vagrants of the most infamous charectors [sic], who associate under the description of hedge-masons, misleading and completely debauching the rising youth*

²³ Lodge 557 minutes (bye-law 12). GLI. Other lodges which had a similar policy include no. 138 Coleraine (bye-law 12, Hezlett papers D/668/O. PRONI) and no. 529 Antrim (bye-law 13, Rules and regulations. PGL Antrim).

²⁴ Orr 1971, p. 14 (bye-law 14).

²⁵ "A Defenders Test". Tho. Wallis to NN (21 December 1797) Reb. 620/33/78.

²⁶ James Hamilton Jr to Marquis of Abercorn (7 May 1797). Abercorn Papers D/623/A/89/25. PRONI.

*of the country at their meetings*²⁷ was not necessarily making a political statement. However, the most significant appearance of the hedgemasons on the political scene took place in Aghnacloy, Co. Tyrone in 1795 as the political tension was growing on both national and local level. One of the three "regular" lodges in the town (no. 483) was apparently in the hands of loyalists as they concluded an alliance against the Defenders with a group of men called "*clandestine or unwarranted masons*". These hedgemasons "*to the amount of one hundred and upwards*", declared their loyalty to George III and exhorted "*the rest of their brethren throughout this kingdom*" to join them in aiding the "*warranted lodges of free masons...in their aiding the magistrate, in order to suppress all tumults, insurrections, or any disturbances which may arise, contiguous to us*".²⁸

Samuel Leighton, writing as he was in Northern Ireland in the 1930s, chose to ignore completely the sectarian conflict evident in the Aghnacloy narrative. Instead, he wondered with some admiration at the stubbornness with which the hedgemasons clung to their independence: "The reference...is interesting as illustrating the unwillingness of many old masons to give up their independence and join up under the Grand Lodge. Yet they were good men and true".²⁹

A closer reading of the Aghnacloy resolutions reveals that the "clandestine or unwarranted masons" must have been lower-class Protestants, joining with their social "betters" in a wave of Protestant mobilisation of which the birth of the Orange Order was another manifestation. However, it must be kept in mind that the events in Aghnacloy took place on 1 August 1795, almost two months before the battle of the Diamond which led to the formation of the Orange Order. This raises the question of whether the alliance formed in Aghnacloy was an isolated incident or whether the role of freemasonry - either "regular" or "clandestine" - in the loyalist mobilisation of the mid-1790s was more significant than historians have thought (see chapter 8.3).

²⁷ "Amicus" to the editor of the *Northern Star* (21 March 1792). Reb. 620/19/71. The letter was edited in a misleading fashion; the section on the hedgemasons was left out of the published version so that the final wish for measures to be taken now referred not to the hedgemasons but to the absence of magistrates from quarter-sessions.

²⁸ BNL 14 August 1795. One of the other lodges had a largely Catholic membership (see chapter 5.2.1) and the other had radical leanings. For a case study on Aghnacloy, see chapter 11.2.

²⁹ Leighton 1938, p. 27.

6 THE LODGE AS A SOCIAL UNIT

As noted in chapter 2.3, the few Irish historians who have studied freemasonry at all have tended to concentrate on the political activity of some masonic lodges at the end of the eighteenth century. However, such activity by freemasons was the exception rather than the rule. This chapter is an attempt to examine the wide variety of "ordinary" functions that freemasonry could have in the lives of its members irrespective of the passing currents of political excitement. All these activities took place at the meetings of the individual lodges and served in the first instance the local community. Thus the functions and activities of the local lodge - rather than the policies and politics of the faraway grand lodge - are the key to understanding Irish freemasonry in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Although the non-political aspects of masonry have been sadly neglected in the writing of Irish history, one must give credit to Terence de Vere White for being the first to emphasise their existence: "the tone of the various lodges was dictated by its more prominent members, and the proceedings must have been esoteric and convivial rather than religious or political".¹ But for a proper understanding of what masonry was about, we cannot do better than look at Steven C. Bullock's and David Stevenson's definitions. Bullock summarises masonry's appeal, compared with other clubs in colonial America, thus: "Like clubs, masonry gave both public and mutual charity; it offered a satisfying ritual to bind the group together; it sponsored activities such as music, theater, and dining; and it furnished opportunities for conviviality. Masonry's private fellowship was not only the most universal in its reach but the broadest in its practices".²

Most of the functions served by the masonic lodge were already present in the seventeenth-century Scottish lodges. Although some functions did disappear, such as those related to the actual regulation of the stonemason's trade, most of what David Stevenson says of the Scottish lodges can just as well be applied to freemasonry in eighteenth-century Ireland: "In...masonic lodges men found a framework within which the growing passion for informal sociability could be satisfied. In lodges men could find - or at least seek - brotherhood and companionship, a forum for discussion of shared interests as well as sociable eating and drinking. In addition freemasonry offered what new clubs or

¹ De Vere White 1973, p. 51.

² Bullock 1996, p. 71.

societies could not: the satisfaction of belonging to an organisation which claimed ancient origins, arcane knowledge, and elaborate secret rituals".³

Although best known for its pseudo-medieval initiation rituals, a masonic meeting consisted of much more than mere ceremony. To the members, freemasonry could mean also eating, drinking, theatre, poetry, horse-racing and many other things that were not "masonic" in the strict sense of the word, but important parts of the social life of the lodge nevertheless. In its urban, Dublin form freemasonry can be seen as only one variety of fraternal societies and clubs that were popular with the late eighteenth-century gentry during the winter season.⁴ Linda Colley lists masonry as one among many forms that voluntary association took in Britain: "There were street clubs, patronised by the leading inhabitants of a particular district, clubs devoted to hobbies...masonic and quasi-masonic societies, catering to the male delight in secret rituals and dressing-up, box clubs, which poorer men joined to provide themselves with a modicum of insurance, clubs devoted to party politics or food, discussion clubs...and more genteel associations where respectable citizens met to dine well and discuss the local poor".⁵

Masonic membership could thus be only one form among many that the urge for conviviality took. For instance, the excise officer and prominent mason, Amyas Griffith, was also active in many other societies including the Friendly Brothers of St. Patrick, a club dedicated to "good food, plenty of drink and the abolition of duelling".⁶ However, it must be kept in mind that in provincial towns, not to mention the countryside, the variety of available clubs and societies was smaller than in Dublin. As the eighteenth century progressed, the spread of lodges from cities to towns to townlands made Irish freemasonry a more rural phenomenon than most historians realise. Consequently, the local lodge probably had to cater for many and varied needs: they had to be dining, insurance and (at times political discussion) societies rolled into one.

Freemasonry had a serious, religious and philosophical side to it. In addition to the ceremonies at regular meetings, the St. John's Day service could be an occasion for profound reflection on the human condition. A Newry minister - who was himself a freemason - used masonic imagery to illustrate the nature of human existence:

³ Stevenson 1989, p. 157

⁴ Mooney & White 1987, p. 13.

⁵ Colley 1992, p. 88.

⁶ McClelland 1975, p. 29.

We are all mortal - our existence precarious - and ere another anniversary of our patron shall have arrived some of us, no doubt, will have sought the narrow house of our fathers...We are here but employed as temporary workmen. The Great Builder, whom we adore, may require our services in another world. If our labours here have been righteous, His call will bear us to that immortal temple, where our bliss shall be unalloyed....⁷

However, it has to be remembered that in many respects, the lodge was just like any society or a group of friends:

every real, and not nominal mason, hath a number of chosen friends in whom he can place the highest confidence. In the hour of adversity he is not without consolation. In prosperity his joy is increased by the honest congratulations of his brethren, and even the blow of adversity is by them, if foreseen, warded off.⁸

In the countryside in particular, the members could be of practical assistance to a brother as shown by the members of four lodges near Armoy, Co. Antrim.

[F]or the purpose of expressing their kind feelings towards their friend and neighbour, Mr. Hugh Fulton of Mullaghduff, [they] assembled in a large field which he had intended to plough and in a few hours dug it over ready for the seed; and after regaling themselves a little with the mountain dew, returned quietly and peaceably to their respective homes.⁹

6.1. The concept and development of the lodge

According to the *Constitutions* of 1723, the Masonic lodge is "a place where masons assemble and work: Hence that assembly, or duly organiz'd society of masons, is call'd a LODGE, and every brother ought to belong to one, and to be subject to its by[e]-laws and the GENERAL REGULATIONS."¹⁰ This description of a lodge, although short, includes several crucial definitions. The lodge according to the *Constitutions* is first of all, a "duly organiz'd society" as opposed to a mere assembly; participants belong to it as opposed to merely attending; and finally, they are subject to its rules. Although there may have been "lodges" prior to the time when the grand lodges started to exert real control over masonry, these were often just occasional meetings of local enthusiasts.¹¹ In that

⁷ *Newry Telegraph* 25 June 1814.

⁸ Elliott, Robert: *Freemasonry. A sermon preached in the first dissenting meeting-house of Dromore...*

⁹ *Northern Whig* 2 March 1826.

¹⁰ Old Charge III (Of lodges). *The Constitutions of the free-masons...* (1723). The *Ahiman Rezon* has slightly different wording but the same essential definition of the lodge both as a place of meeting and the society itself. (Belfast ed. 1782), p. 20.

¹¹ For such assemblies, termed "occasional lodges" by masonic historians, see Hamill 1986, p. 31.

context, a “lodge” was just a word used to describe the getting together of people who happened to be, or intended to become, masons.

Although it has been stressed above that studying the local lodges is a prerequisite of understanding what freemasonry meant to people, the role of the grand lodge cannot be ignored altogether. It is debatable whether a masonic movement in any meaningful sense of the word actually predated the establishment of grand lodges. The idea of the lodge as a permanent club electing its leaders and members, drawing up rules, charging fees and keeping minutes and accounts does not appear to have existed outside Scotland before the early eighteenth century, when the first grand lodge (the English one) was founded. After the grand lodges extended their influence through granting warrants to (sometimes pre-existing) lodges, these were obliged to “*keep a book containing their by[e]-laws, the names of their members...and also the transactions...that are proper to be written*”.¹² Such regularity in their proceedings made the lodges organised in a way more reminiscent of learned or trade societies than of informal dining or social clubs.

6.1.1. Forming a lodge

When a group of masons wanted to form a new lodge, an existing lodge sometimes gave them a temporary “dispensation” to meet until they had procured a regular warrant. They might also recommend the applicants to the grand lodge, as in the case of a lodge at Richhill, Co. Armagh. The lodge first granted a two months dispensation to a group of masons in Stewartstown, then recommended them for a warrant.¹³ Sometimes the applicants were rejected, possibly because they were not deemed to be respectable or reputable enough. For instance, lodge no. 346 at Raphoe refused assistance to a John Park and others who wanted to acquire a warrant for holding a lodge at a place called Duglass in Co. Tyrone.¹⁴

¹² Old Regulations III in Spratt, Edward: *The new book of constitutions...*, pp. 148-149. This requirement was not included in the “new” general regulations approved by the Grand Lodge of Ireland in 1739. In practice, most lodges seem to have kept such records nevertheless (see chapter 1.2).

¹³ Jenkinson 1946a, p. 23. Lodge 328 in Richhill also sponsored no. 361 in Tandragee. Lodge 328 minutes (7 October 1760, 7 December 1760). Quoted in Jenkinson 1946b, p. 82. Lodge 569 in Lifford recommended “*our worthy brethren of Ballymagorey [Co. Tyrone]*”, and later helped to install the officers of their lodge (no. 633). Lodge 569 minutes (17 March, 2 September 1784). GLI.

¹⁴ Lodge 346 minutes (23 January 1783). GLI. “*Duglass*” may have been the present Douglas Bridge, 7 km south of Strabane.

In the early eighteenth century, a typical lodge met in a city or large town, although there were exceptions such as the military lodges which met wherever their regiments happened to be (see chapter 5.3). Some of the early Irish lodges may have been based at the "big houses" of landed families: for instance, the original location of lodge no. 201 was Sporthall, the residence of the Corry family of Rockcorry, Co. Monaghan.¹⁵ Towards the end of the eighteenth century more and more lodges were formed in the countryside (see chapter 5.1.2). A lodge could exist in the strangest of places: one was set up even among the debtors of the Four Courts Marshalsea, or debtors' prison, in Dublin. The newspaper report describes the brethren proceeding *"in a very regular procession three times round their small precincts"* and then retiring *"to the most convenient room in their power"* for *"elegant (but not sumptuous) entertainment"*.¹⁶

Typically, a lodge met once a month in a room of the local tavern set apart for the meeting. For instance, lodge no. 611 in Glaslough, Co. Monaghan, met on the second Wednesday of the month at 7 p.m. except in the winter at 6 p.m.¹⁷ During meetings, the door of the lodge room was guarded by a lodge officer called tyler, who was sometimes hired for the purpose. A Co. Armagh lodge decided in 1804 that *"John Robinson shall be our Tiler for which he is to be keep [sic] free of expense and get a pair of shews [sic] in the year to be continued during the pleasure of the lodge"*.¹⁸ Much of the meetings was taken up by the various stages of the admission of new members: proposing them, balloting them for membership, and finally, initiation into the three degrees of membership. In some lodges, a new member was elected by a majority vote¹⁹ but often *"one black bean [was] sufficient to reject"*, in other words unanimous consent of the members was required.²⁰

The size of the lodge and the actual level of attendance varied considerably from time to time and from lodge to lodge, but no. 557 at Benburb, Co. Tyrone, studied by Philip Crossle was probably not untypical (see table 7):

¹⁵ IMR p. 54 (lodge 201).

¹⁶ BNL 10 September 1754. IMR (lodge 249).

¹⁷ Lodge 611 bye-laws (rule 1, n.d.). GLI.

¹⁸ Transcript of lodge 459 minutes (10 May 1804). PGL Armagh. Also the Larne lodges had a professional, hired tyler. McCutcheon 1993, p. 236-237.

¹⁹ Lodge 611 bye-laws (no. 10). GLI.

²⁰ E.g. lodge 557 minutes (bye-law 5); lodge 569 minutes (bye-law 3); lodge 881 minutes (bye-law 8). GLI.

TABLE 7 MEMBERSHIP AND AVERAGE ATTENDANCE AT LODGE NO. 557, BENBURB

	membership	average attendance
1782	21	12
1787	30	8
1792	66	24
1797	96	27
1802	79	27 ²¹

Crossle's figures would seem to indicate that despite the considerable increase in membership in the 1790s, the number of the active members did not rise at anything like the same rate.

6.1.2. Joining and leaving a lodge

According to *"the general custom of masons in all ages and nations"*, as portrayed in Ahiman Rezon, *"no man can be made a regular free-mason, but such as is free from bondage, of mature age, upright in body and limbs, and endued with the necessary senses of a man"*. In addition, a reasonable income was necessary in order to defray the costs of membership. According to Laurence Dermott, applicants should *"first consider their income and family, and know that free-masonry requires ability, attendance, and a good appearance, to maintain and support its ancient and honourable grandeur"*.²² Particularly in the more fashionable lodges, wealth and status did play a role in the decision on whether to accept or reject a candidate. But even the humblest of lodges required that the candidate was recommended by members. Often the candidate had to pay a deposit before he was balloted for.

In addition to restrictions arising from the masonic rules and constitutions, there could be others arising from the local interpretation of them. In Ulster, one such was the belief that persons of illegitimate birth were not "freeborn" in the sense required by the rules of the fraternity and thus could not join. An Alexander Miller was admitted to a lodge in Lifford only when his brother John made an *"affidavit that a report which had prevailed with us (on account of his [Alexander's] illigitamacy [sic] was erroneious [sic])"*.²³ As late as in 1848 a lodge at Saintfield, Co. Down passed a resolution allowing such people to join from then on - not from any humane consideration, however, but because the lodge was

²¹ Crossle 1925, p. 61.

²² *Ahiman Rezon* (Belfast ed. 1782), p. 16.

²³ Lodge 569 minutes (10 March 1792). GLI.

"falling into decline". The writer of a history of the lodge refers to the existence of this belief as late as at the time of writing, in the 1920s.²⁴

The admission of masons from other lodges was usually a less complicated procedure, though a ballot did usually take place.²⁵ The "old mason" had to produce a certificate from his former lodge, which was then deposited in the lodge chest. A Robert Baker, moving from a Cootehill lodge to a Belturbet one, was reported as "*having produced a proper certificate...and having taken the usual test*" before admission; it is not clear from the minute book whether the "test" refers to testing Baker's knowledge of masonic passwords and ritual or an oath such as the oath of allegiance.²⁶

A member could leave the lodge for a variety of reasons. As in any society, there were the obvious ones of moving to another town, losing interest in the society or disagreeing with fellow-members. Some were suspended or expelled either through neglecting to pay their annual dues to the lodge or attend meetings (usually both), others as a punishment (see chapter 6.5). In addition, there were cases - very numerous in the records of Ulster lodges - of members not being able to keep up with their dues. In such cases, a member could give up his membership temporarily. This was called "declaring off" and apparently carried no social stigma as in many cases, the member could reaffiliate later once his personal finances were in sufficient order. In some lodges at least, the former members were still welcome to the meetings.²⁷

Readmission of old members was usually easy. Three members of a Belturbet lodge had requested certificates (that is, left the lodge) upon "*being commanded on his Majesties [sic] service*". When they returned to the town, they were admitted simply on condition of returning the certificates.²⁸ Another one was granted a certificate upon having to move to Dublin, but the lodge assured him that he would be welcome to attend any time in the future as a honorary member.²⁹

²⁴ Simpson 1924, p. 25.

²⁵ E.g. lodge 560 minutes (24 June 1791). GLI.

²⁶ Lodge 560 minutes (2[3?] March 179[8]). GLI.

²⁷ Lodge 418 minutes (e.g. 6 July 1791, 4 July 1792). PGL Antrim. The minutes refer to visitors recorded as having been "*formerly members*" of the lodge.

²⁸ Lodge 560 minutes (29 September 1795). GLI.

²⁹ Lodge 560 minutes (9 April 1789). GLI.

6.2. "The widow's shield": social security functions

*A mason is to be so far benevolent, as never to shut his ear unkindly to the complaints of wretched poverty; but when a brother is oppressed by want, he is, in a peculiar manner, to listen to his sufferings with attention, in consequence of which, pity must flow from his breast, and relief without prejudice, according to his capacity.*³⁰

The *Ahiman Rezon* deals with the subject of benevolence and charity in this couple of lines. The attention given to these issues is minuscule compared to the eight pages long discourse on secrecy, for instance. Consequently, it is easy for present-day researchers to automatically adopt the same emphasis and concentrate on the secret, colourful and exciting aspects of freemasonry. However, it can be argued that for an eighteenth-century freemason or a candidate considering whether to join the fraternity, the priorities may well have been reversed.

Providing some social security to members and their dependants was a major function of the masonic lodge and linked masonry to the wider context of friendly societies. This feature was already part of lodge activities during the early Scottish phase of the development of freemasonry. According to the seventeenth-century statutes of the Aberdeen lodge, lodge funds were to be used for helping members in distress through injury, old age or fire. Masons not members of the Aberdeen lodge were also eligible, though only for occasional and not long-term relief. Children of deceased members could be helped to embark on a career and members' burial expenses were paid, even of those members who had been excluded from other relief through being drunkards or unwilling to work (although able to do so).³¹ This role of the masonic lodge is reflected in the words of James Orr, the Co. Antrim poet:

*The Widow's shield, the Orphan's stay,
The Stranger's guide we'll ever be*³²

It has even been suggested that the origins of modern freemasonry itself lie in the "self-help movement" of the seventeenth century. According to this view, freemasonry was just one of the many "box clubs" that existed within various trades.³³ Interestingly, the oldest surviving friendly societies in Britain originate in lowland Scotland, where the

³⁰ *Ahiman Rezon* (Belfast 1782 ed.), pp. 12-13.

³¹ Stevenson 1989, p. 134.

³² "Song" in *The country rhymes of James Orr*, p. 102.

³³ Durr 1983.

masonic lodges also have their origins.³⁴ Many masons definitely saw the lodge in the terms of a collective or community spirit. In the words of a discourse given in 1808 by a Dr. Murray to the masons of Cavan:

*We are not to consider ourselves as independent beings, possessing each within himself ample means of promoting his own welfare and happiness. That was not the intent of our all-wise Creator...If we consider man abstracted from society - what is he but a weak, defenceless, ignorant creature?...Let him but enter the social state, and avail himself of the advantages which it affords - and we see him presently exalted to a state of perfection, far above the rest of the animal creation.*³⁵

6.2.1. Self-help and charity

Given the Scottish precedents, it is not surprising that charity came to figure prominently in the proceedings of the newly-organised, grand lodge -led freemasonry of the eighteenth century. In the 1730s, the English grand lodge supported a scheme to ship debtors, including "distressed brethren" to the new colony of Georgia, where they could make a fresh start in life.³⁶ Funds paid into and out of the lodge "box" were an important feature of Irish masonry too. Lodge accounts often record sums paid to freemasons in distress; £1 2s 9d to a member of a nearby lodge who had been robbed, for instance.³⁷

Lodge 257's self-congratulatory dedication to the 1782 Belfast edition of *Ahiman Rezon* praised the lodge in biblical metaphor: "You have, gentlemen, releas'd the prisoner, comforted the weary, and given food and raiment to the hungry and naked. Your lodge has been the happy asylum to strangers...".³⁸ Ironically, the man who was instrumental in publishing the Belfast *Ahiman Rezon*, Amyas Griffith, was to be among recipients of masonic charity sooner than he thought. Griffith was one of the most prominent masons of Belfast for a couple of years (see chapter 7.2.2) until he was dismissed from his post in excise in 1785 and moved to Dublin. When he was imprisoned for debt in 1791, Dublin masons together with the Friendly Brothers of St. Patrick - of which society he was also a member - organised a benefit in the Theatre Royal, the proceeds of which were to be used to help him.³⁹ By 1799 at the latest, the Belfast lodges

³⁴ For the first friendly societies, see Beveridge 1948, pp. 21-22.

³⁵ Murray, Dr: *Discourse, addressed to the free-masons of Cavan*, pp. 4-5.

³⁶ Newman 1991, pp. 34-35.

³⁷ Lodge 668 minutes (21 February 1793). GLI.

³⁸ *Ahiman Rezon* (Belfast ed. 1782), pp. vii-viii.

³⁹ McClelland 1975, p. 32. Many grand officers of Irish masonry also held high positions in the Friendly Brothers: for instance, Lord Donoughmore (grand master, 1789-1813) was also "Grand Benevolence" of the Friendly Brothers in 1791-93 while Walter Wade (deputy grand master, 1794-

had a joint charity committee, which was appointed for six months to distribute funds collected from the lodges. Lodges were to give a signed and sealed voucher to applicants for charity and direct them to apply to the committee instead of an individual lodge.⁴⁰

At least some freemasons thought that the charitable works of their order should be primarily directed towards members and their dependants. James Anderson, who wrote the first masonic constitutions in 1723, suggested that a mason employing others should "*prefer a poor brother, that is a good man and true, before any other poor people in the same circumstances*".⁴¹ The preacher at the 1808 St. John's Day festivities in Cavan even quoted scripture to prove that this was right and proper:

*The gospel requires that we should be benevolent or friendly to all; but this does not imply that we may not exercise a superior degree of benevolence towards those for whom we have a particular liking or esteem. All cannot claim an equal share of it - natural relationships, particular merit, and the like, must make a difference.*⁴²

It is not always clear from the lodge records whether the individual recipients of charity were masons or not. It is not clearly indicated whether William Moor "*destresd [sic] by the burning of his house and shop who lived in Balygigin*"⁴³ in the late 1780s and "*Mr And^w Cowan a prisoner now in jail for debt*"⁴⁴ in 1792 were members. Both received the sum of 11s 4 1/2d, which appears to have been the upper limit of charity around that time. However, charity given to collective bodies such as hospitals and poor houses certainly benefited non-members, as did participation in providing relief at a time of threatened famine. At the beginning of 1757, the Coleraine freemasons contributed £8 9s 11d to the poor as there was "*a very great scarcity of the necessaries of life*" in the neighbourhood.⁴⁵ Contributing to non-masonic charities demonstrated the civic spirit that the Belfast freemasons in particular wanted to show: their St. John's Day procession in 1781 was

1800) was grand treasurer of the Friendly Brothers in 1782-96 and grand secretary in 1782-89). *The fundamental laws, statutes...of the Friendly Brothers of Saint Patrick* (1856). For the Friendly Brothers, see also John Boardman to A[braham] Hely-Hutchinson (9 April 1811). Donoughmore Papers D/41/25. TCD.

⁴⁰ BNL 24 December 1799.

⁴¹ [Anderson, James]: *The constitutions of the free-masons...* (1723), p. 56.

⁴² Murray, Dr: *Discourse, addressed to the free-masons of Cavan*, p. 20. The passage from the Bible that Murray quoted to support his argument was from Galatians 6:10: "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all Men, especially unto them who are of the Household of Faith".

⁴³ Lodge 367 records (vol. 1784 - 1793). Downpatrick Masonic Hall.

⁴⁴ Lodge 367 records (vol. 1791 - 1800). Downpatrick Masonic Hall.

⁴⁵ The scarcity of foodstuffs was caused by a wet season and a violent storm which hit the fields on 6 October 1756, before the corn had been reaped. Accounts in lodge 138 minutes. Hezlett papers, D/668/O. PRONI.

attended by civic dignitaries such as the mayor and the corporation. The parade was followed by a service at which about £20 was collected for the Belfast poor house.⁴⁶

The use of charity funds was a source for continuing disagreement between the grand lodge and the local lodges. Disquiet at the grand lodge policy was not confined to Ulster. Correspondence between County Cork lodges shows that they would have preferred funding an orphan school in Cork to sending money to Dublin:

and we further beg leave to think that (Cork being the capital and chief city of this province) the distresses and indigences of our brethren would be more readily relieved and by far at a less expence than would be incurred by such charity being confined to the grand lodge and besides the foundation or institution of a charity school in Munster would be a great convenience and saving to those distressed objects who may have a claim to its charity to what it would be to have them make for Dublin....⁴⁷

By February 1797, the Munster provincial grand lodge had formed its own "Grand Committee of Charity" which sought not only to relieve distressed masons and their dependants but was even *"enabled to institute a charitable loan for assisting industry by the advance of a small capital to be repaid by weekly instalments"*.⁴⁸

In order to visit strange lodges and receive assistance from them, the mason needed a certificate from his lodge (or preferably, the grand lodge). Most lodges would not grant a certificate to a member before he had been a contributing member for at least one year⁴⁹ unless in a case of emergency.⁵⁰ A member obtaining a certificate was deemed to have resigned: some lodges would not re-admit such a member without a new ballot.⁵¹ A Lifford lodge applied such a rule to members who were suspected of having requested a certificate *"through pique or resentment...or to join any other warrant in the City of Dublin Derry or elsewhere"*. However, if the member was genuinely unable to pay the expenses of membership, or moved to another locality, or was unable to attend "as a

⁴⁶ BNL 15 June, 26 June, 29 June 1781. The Derry poorhouse also benefited from the charity of local masons. *Londonderry Journal* 28 June 1785.

⁴⁷ Copy of a letter from lodge 49 (Charleville, Co. Cork) to Br[other] Osburne, master of lodge no. 1 in Cork (4 April 1796); in lodge 49 minutes. GLI.

⁴⁸ Copy of a letter from John Cotter Jr (provincial grand secretary, Cork) to Frans. Dorman, secretary of lodge no. 49 in Charleville (15 February 1797); in lodge 49 minutes. GLI.

⁴⁹ Lodge 611 bye-laws (no. 11), GLI.

⁵⁰ Lodge 569 minutes (bye-law 14). GLI.

⁵¹ Lodge 611 bye-laws (no. 12). GLI.

good mason should" due to business commitments, he was to be received "*when it is convenient for him to return without any expence to him whatsoever*".⁵²

Sometimes the brethren had more exotic objects for their charity than brethren who had been robbed or whose house had burned down. A. T. Q. Stewart describes in great detail how a British colonel discovered that the commissary contracted to feed the French soldiers (captured after Thurot's raid in 1760) was defrauding the crown. The commissary supplied the French prisoners with inferior foodstuffs and fraudulently kept part of the allowance intended to cover the cost of their meals. The colonel raised the alarm by writing to the sovereign and burgesses of Belfast, a committee was set up and the situation of the prisoners improved at once. A masonic lodge shared the general enthusiasm and took part in organising charity for them "*which the said lodge thought to be highly becoming, as two of the French officers were their brethren*". Stewart thinks that one might infer from all this that "the French officers who were Masons communicated their distress to fellow-Masons among the English officers, who in turn activated the Belfast Masons of Lodge 182".⁵³

However, apparently there is no evidence that any of the British officers were masons. It seems likely that the Belfast masons might have taken part in such a unusual and exciting charity event anyway, for the sake of sheer curiosity if for no other reason. A similar event took place in 1784, when the "Orange" lodge of Belfast took care of two Turks who had escaped from Spanish captivity.⁵⁴

6.2.2. Masonic funerals

Masonic lodges could also act as funeral benefit societies. This aspect was already present in the early Scottish lodges; the Aitchison's Haven lodge in 1624 had a keeper of the mortcloth (a velvet cloth used to cover the coffin during the funeral).⁵⁵ So did a lodge at Templepatrick, Co. Antrim: "*The Lodge's [no. 551] mort-cloth is to be given out by Archibald Agnew...Such brethren as have incurred fines to have no benefit therefrom*

⁵² Lodge 569 minutes (bye-law 14). GLI.

⁵³ Stewart 1993, pp. 170-171. *The conduct of the sovereign, burgesses, and principal inhabitants of Belfast...* (1761), pp. 32-33; reprinted in instalments as "The French prisoners in Belfast, 1759-1763" in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vol. IX (1903), pp. 151-156 and vol. X (1904), pp. 20-25, 69-72, 138-141, 187-191.

⁵⁴ McClelland 1968, p. 77.

⁵⁵ Stevenson 1989, pp. 56-57.

until such fines are paid.⁵⁶ A Downpatrick lodge decided to let their pall "to all people at 2s 8½d except a member of this lodge his father and mother wife and children is [sic] to have it gratis".⁵⁷

As regards providing assistance for funerals, the lodges were not different from non-masonic friendly societies. The "Brabazon, Earl of Meath Society" of Dublin made "mourning furniture" available for the burial of the members' close relatives. Like a masonic lodge, it also took care of the widows and orphans of members. However, the sums to be paid out were fixed and the approach was more businesslike: having paid the agreed contributions the members could expect a certain insurance cover irrespective of their financial circumstances.⁵⁸

The funeral relief aspect was also adopted by Orange lodges. The Orange historian, Colonel Wallace, quotes old records entitled *Bye-laws and regulations of the Orange Society meeting in Ballymagerney* to show that from the beginning, the members could apply to the lodge for "benefit" such as funeral expenses, of which there is an entry in 1799.⁵⁹ The whereabouts of the original document (if extant) is unknown.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the general style and content of the mixed bye-laws and accounts book that Wallace was quoting from seems consistent with contemporary masonic minute books, which probably would have served as models for the secretary of a newly-formed Orange lodge. The Orangemen also adapted traditional masonic funeral for their own use. As early as 1798, the newly-founded Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland made regulations for determining who should or should not have a funeral "*with Orange honours*".⁶¹

Masonic funerals were important social occasions for the members and the pageantry involved made them impressive events for outsiders also.⁶² In the 1780s, an even more elaborate form of the masonic burial was developed: funerals with combined masonic and military trappings for men who had been both masons and Volunteers. As

⁵⁶ BNL 4 July 1783.

⁵⁷ Resolution (24 September 1781) in lodge 367 records (vol. 1765 - 1783). Downpatrick Masonic Hall.

⁵⁸ *Rules and orders, to be observed and kept, for the welfare and better regulation of the Brabazon, Earl of Meath Society. Made and agreed upon, the 1st day of February...1797.* Reb. 620/34/41.

⁵⁹ MSS history of Orangeism, vol. I, pp. 155-157. Wallace Papers, D 1889/6/4/1. PRONI. Reprinted in Kilpatrick, Cecil (ed): *The formation of the Orange Order 1795 - 1798*, pp. 67-68.

⁶⁰ In Wallace's time, the 1890s, the book belonged to LOL 670.

⁶¹ Grand Orange Lodge minutes 1798 - 1818, p. 67. GOLI/A/M/98.

⁶² For a description of the protocol followed, see "The ceremony observed at funerals of freemasons" in *Sentimental and Masonic Magazine* (June 1794), pp. 521-522.

the military campaign record of the Volunteers was rather modest, mason-volunteers literally killed in action were few: the one who died of the wounds received when an artillery piece accidentally exploded in College Green, Dublin, probably came closest.⁶³ However, mere membership of a Volunteer corps seems to have qualified the deceased for the "military" ceremony in addition to the masonic one: most notices of such funerals give no indication that the cause of death was anything but natural.⁶⁴ After the Volunteer era, funerals probably reverted to traditional, local customs as in the 1811 case of a wake for a dead mason at Donaghadee, Co. Down.⁶⁵

6.2.3. Travelling and emigration

A masonic certificate seems to have been especially important for those travelling, or emigrating - the nearest equivalent there was to a modern travel insurance policy perhaps. At an extraordinary meeting of a lodge at Raphoe, *"Mr John Blackhall [was] pass'd to the step of a Fellow Craft, and being under the necessity of going immediately abroad upon business, was therefore initiated and rais'd to the dignity of a master mason"*.⁶⁶ The intent to return and become a contributing member later was apparently not necessarily required: another Raphoe man, *"Mr John McCausland entered apprentice, being destin'd for America and having made the same known to this lodge and the ship being in waiting for the first fair wind"* was likewise hurriedly raised to the second and third degrees.⁶⁷ In a Co. Armagh lodge, three members were recorded as *"being bound for America and wishing to have a certificate"*.⁶⁸ A certificate issued by the local lodge seems to have been sufficient for the purposes of travelling. However, some preferred the more "official" and elaborate grand lodge certificate. The lodge secretary of one such emigrating mason asked for a certificate to be issued *"as he is going for America in a few days"*.⁶⁹

Masonic membership probably helped the emigrant, newly arrived at his destination, to settle in the new community. Much like membership of the Orange Order in British North America, membership of a masonic lodge may have "provided a character reference for someone far from home and...smoothed the path to acceptance in

⁶³ BNL 28 November 1788.

⁶⁴ e.g. BNL 11 April 1788, 30 October 1788, 12 January 1790.

⁶⁵ Simpson 1926, p. 83.

⁶⁶ Lodge 346 minutes (11 June 1783). GLI.

⁶⁷ Lodge 346 minutes (26 May 1784). GLI.

⁶⁸ Transcript of lodge 459 minutes (15 April 1801). PGL Armagh.

society".⁷⁰ Masonic as opposed to Orange membership had the additional advantage of being acceptable in the United States, where the Orange Order (with its ideology of loyalty to the British monarchy) would have been less popular and possibly suspect as a disloyal and subversive organisation.

The masonic hospitality to visiting brethren was sometimes taken advantage of. A colourful character arrested in Co. Down in 1771 was found to have used at least seven different aliases during his travels. Moreover, he possessed a certificate from a Letterkenny masonic lodge. In the opinion of the newspaper correspondent, he appeared to be "*a fortune-teller, a quack, a Papist, and a Heart of Steel*".⁷¹ Another such shady character was George Angus, alias William Douglas, a travelling preacher who tried to pass himself off as a Scottish freemason.⁷²

⁶⁹ Francis Little (Secretary of lodge no. 720 in Fivemiletown, Co. Tyrone) to NN [probably the deputy grand secretary], 26 April 1801. Register, 1st series, lodge 720, appendix.

⁷⁰ Houston & Smyth 1990.

⁷¹ BNL 2 December 1771.

⁷² BNL 4 January, 7 June, 2 July 1805.

6.3. Social life of the lodge

For many freemasons, the most important reason for joining was neither the modest degree of financial security provided, nor the secret pseudo-medieval rituals. To contemporaries of the eighteenth-century masons, the best known and most visible expression of masonic membership was the pomp and ceremony of the St. John's Day parade (see chapter 10.5). However, there was also a more informal aspect to the social life of the lodge. Membership involved not only parades and rituals but also eating, drinking, songs, poetry and companionship. It is worth recalling again the words of John Robison, the British disciple of Barruel: in Britain, the masonic lodge was "*considered merely as a pretext for passing an hour or two in a sort of decent conviviality, not altogether void of some rational occupation*".¹

Much of Nancy Curtin's description of the Volunteers of the 1790s fits masonic events just as well - if we substitute for the uniform, an apron and other regalia worn by masons: "Parading in uniform before an admiring populace... assembling at a public dinner, and concluding the evening in respectable intoxication were activities prized by the participants and envied by the observers".² A verse from a song, composed for lodge 257 by Michael Thomson, organist of Hillsborough parish church, illustrates how good-natured companionship and serious self-improvement were not seen as contradictory:

*Tune was made for blessing, not dealt as a curse,
The troubles of life are by pining made worse;
The sullen recluse may disrelish our plan -
But we'll live, and we'll love, and we'll laugh while we can,
Where Wisdom and Beauty and Strength all combine,
Our souls to improve, and our tempers refine;
Where arts of past ages, by compass and rule,
Are taught in our Lodge, as of science the school.*³

6.3.1. Masonic poetry and literature

The "hobby" character of freemasonry was emphasised by the availability of a large number of publications for enthusiasts, some of them printed in Dublin, some

¹ Robison, John: *Proofs of a conspiracy...*, pp. 1-2.

² Curtin 1990, p. 70.

³ BNL 22 January 1782.

imported from London.⁴ J. R. R. Adams has traced the rise in popularity of masonic books in the second half of the eighteenth century when titles such as *Collection of songs to be sung by free masons*, *Pocket companion for freemasons*, *Solomon in all his glory: or the master-mason* became increasingly popular. A special Belfast edition of *Ahiman Rezon*, Laurence Dermott's classic book of masonic history and constitutions was published in 1782.⁵

One such handbook for the initiated or the interested contained in three sections the information deemed necessary for a member. "The Muse of Masonry" consisted of songs and toasts, "The Masonic Essayist" of lectures and speeches on the topic of freemasonry. The third part was "The Free-Masons Vade-Mecum", a reference section that contained purported lists of the "*remarkable events in masonry*" since "*St. Alban formed the first grand lodge in Britain - A.D. 287*" and of the "*Patrons and Grand Masters in England from the time of the Anglo-Saxons*" but also more up-to-date lists of grand officers, provincial grand officers, lodges and chapters.⁶ Other books dwelt upon masonic imagery, symbolism and ritual.⁷

Some of the "masonic" books were clearly aimed at a wider readership than just the freemasons themselves. A book advertised in 1766 covered most of the topics that curious outsiders have been interested in ever since: for instance, "*The lectures, oaths, obligations, &c., of each degree, viz. apprentice, fellow craft, &c., verbatim*"; "*Word and grip of each degree*"; "*Account of the four solemn penalties*". The popular, exposé nature of this sort of books is obvious: this one was said to be "*Illustrated with proper remarks &c., necessary to explain the whole to the meanest capacity, whether brethren, or not*".⁸ A masonic best-seller of the turn of the nineteenth century was *Solomon's temple spiritualized* by the Dublin freemason, Christopher Kelly. A lodge at Markethill, Co. Armagh, had in 1805 the unusual honour of a visit by the author himself.⁹ Some lodges purchased copies of masonic books and lent them to members.¹⁰

⁴ For English masonic literature in the eighteenth century, see Hamill 1986, p. 65.

⁵ Adams 1987, pp. 76, 92. A lodge in Downpatrick purchased a copy of *Ahiman Rezon* in 1798, but the pseudo-Hebrew title was too much for the lodge secretary: it appears in the accounts as "*heman-riason*". Lodge 367 accounts (17 March 1798) in Lodge 367 Records (vol. 1791 - 1800). Downpatrick Masonic Hall.

⁶ Jones, Stephen: *Masonic miscellanies in poetry and prose*.

⁷ See e.g. Finch, W: *An elucidation on the masonic plates...*

⁸ BNL 14 February 1766. The "just published" book was titled *Hiram, or the grand master key to the door of both ancient and modern free masonry....*

⁹ Paterson 1946, p. 199. For Kelly, see Register, 1st series, lodge 153 (20 November 1769). Kelly's book, almost 500 pages of meditation on the theme of Solomon's temple, was published in 1803

Freemasonry as a part of the social scene, especially the Dublin one, also found its expression in a market for masonic or quasi-masonic periodicals. The short-lived *Sentimental and Masonic Magazine* of the 1790s tried to exploit the enthusiasm for masonry. Although the monthly magazine did include items of masonic interest, most of the articles were of general nature. The topics ranged from travel in distant lands to current affairs - a mix not altogether dissimilar from the modern *Reader's Digest* magazine, with a few masonic items thrown in. *The Sentimental and Masonic Magazine* was also the forum for the young Thomas Moore to publish his first poems.¹¹ It was followed by a bi-weekly newspaper, the *Freemason's Journal, or Pasley's Universal Intelligencer*.¹² However, by 1797 that paper was in serious financial trouble. The publisher, John Pasley, complained that Catholics were boycotting his paper, which they regarded as a Protestant one. Pasley's proposed solution was that the government would start publishing its official notices in the paper.¹³ Another attempt along the same lines was the even shorter-lived *The Literary and Masonic Magazine* of 1802. A total of 206 subscribers was listed in the first issue, including many grand lodge officers and eight women. But the readership of such a magazine in post-Union Dublin was much more modest as regards social rank: Lord Donoughmore, the grand master, was the only titled nobleman among the subscribers.¹⁴

Masonic poetry was read by masons and non-masons alike. Amyas Griffith apparently wrote the first masonic poems published in Ulster in 1782. He was followed by a poem by a Brother Dodd in 1786, the year in which Robert Burns published his first book of poetry in Scotland. In the following year, the works of the famous poet and freemason were reprinted in Belfast. They were to be published there in no fewer than eight editions over a period of twenty years.¹⁵

and seems to have been the masonic bestseller of its time. The subscribers included many leading masons, such as John Boardman (grand treasurer) and Alexander Jaffray (deputy grand master).

¹⁰ A lodge in Armagh owned at least a book of constitutions (probably *Ahiman Rezon*) and a copy of *Solomon's temple spiritualized*. Lodge 623 minutes (9 May 1805, 11 December 1806). PGL Armagh.

¹¹ Crawley 1904, p. 152.

¹² Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 317-318.

¹³ "The case of John Pasley, proprietor & printer of the *Freemason's Journal*" (4 November 1797). Reb. 620/33/26 (enclosure).

¹⁴ *The Literary and Masonic Magazine*, Vol. 1 (1802).

¹⁵ McClelland 1986, p. 49. Griffith's poems appeared in an anthology called *Flora's Banquet* and in the Belfast edition of *Ahiman Rezon*. Dodd's "Brotherly Love: A New Masonic Song" was published in the *Belfast Evening Post* 15 June 1786 (repr. in McClelland 1986, p. 73).

In Ulster, also a more popular variety of masonic poetry developed - written by local poets who wrote both in Ulster Scots and in standard English. Although there was no masonic poet in Ulster of stature comparable to Burns, some of the "rhyming weavers" did their best.¹⁶ The best-known of them was James Orr (1770 - 1816) of Ballycarry, Co. Antrim. Orr was a freemason by the time his first book of poems was published in 1804 as that volume includes two masonic songs.¹⁷ He may have been a member already in 1796 as in his elegy on the death of Burns (who died in that year) there is a passage lamenting that "*nane wiss't the love of country mair/ nor wiss't the BRETHREN's peace an' health*".¹⁸ Orr took part in the 1798 rebellion in Antrim and his politics can be guessed by looking at his poem, "The Massacre at Mullahmast":

*Mullahmast's accurs'd by Heaven
Waste, and wither'd every pile
Thence green shamrock's strangely driven
There nought thrives but orange vile.*¹⁹

Orr's political sentiments were shared by another poet and freemason, James Campbell (1757 - 1818), who attacked the established church in poems such as "Adieu to tithe" . He also wrote six masonic poems, in addition to an epitaph for his fellow poet, Orr.²⁰ However, much of Orr's poetry was non-political, describing and praising the convivial gatherings of the brethren:

*The coin that our labour
brings in from our neighbour
(Kind offices duly fulfilling)
In moments of leisure
though temp'rate, with pleasure
We socially sport off a shilling.*²¹

¹⁶ For a modern anthology of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century masonic poetry and short biographies of several Ulster poets, see McClelland 1986.

¹⁷ The songs are "The Dying Mason" and another one simply called "Song", in praise of Orr's own lodge at Ballynure, Co. Antrim, both reprinted in *The country rhymes of James Orr*.

¹⁸ "Elegy on the death of Mr. Robert Burns, the Ayrshire poet" in *The country rhymes of James Orr*, p. 78.

¹⁹ "The Massacre of Mullahmast", reprinted in Orr, James: *Poems on various subjects*, p. 280.

²⁰ McClelland 1986, pp. 62-63.

²¹ "The craftsmen of Ballycarry" in *The country rhymes of James Orr*, p. 97.

6.3.2. Food, drink, and pastime

From the very beginning, the usual meeting-place of the lodge was the public house. The seventeenth-century Scottish lodges already met in taverns²² as did the London lodges which constituted the first grand lodge in 1717. For the publican, masonic meetings meant good business and regular income. Masonic images and symbols were displayed on signs outside public houses.²³ Like many other innkeepers, Matthew Mullan, the Coleraine innkeeper who accommodated the meetings of a local lodge (no. 138) in his inn, was himself a freemason, as was his son and namesake.²⁴ This combination of private profit with membership was apparently not seen as problematic by most freemasons. Like the masons, the early Orangemen met in taverns. In the Orange Order, however, the masters of the lodges had to swear *"that I am not now made master for any private emolument or advantage; that I have not a sitting [=meeting] in my house for the purpose of selling beer, spirits, &c."*²⁵

After the meeting was over, it was typically followed by a supper. The two St. John's Day celebrations (24 June and 27 December) were often occasions for banquets. Some lodges celebrated also St Patrick's Day²⁶ or special occasions such as the fiftieth anniversary of the granting of the lodge warrant.²⁷ In Belturbet, Co. Cavan, the local lodge had specifically designated some of its meetings as "dinner days".²⁸ On one St. Patrick's Day, they decided to substitute for it what they called a "tea and a fiddle" - in other words, to hold a dance to members and friends with their families. Invitation cards were sent and four members appointed stewards. The lodge *"resolved that...every member who shall attend at the s[ai]d dance shall be cloathed in a manner becoming a mason, wearing on that occasion his sash apron and gloves"*.²⁹

²² Stevenson 1988, p. 209. Purpose-built masonic halls did not make their appearance in Ireland until the nineteenth century. Even the Grand Lodge of Ireland met in rented premises in Dublin, such as the Tailors' Hall in Back Lane.

²³ One such sign was discovered in Broughshane, Co. Antrim in the 1990s: it showed two freemasons wearing aprons and the year "1773". Provincial Grand Lodge of Antrim Gazette 1998, front cover and p. 3.

²⁴ Mullin 1977, p. 80. For other innkeepers who were also masons, see chapter 5.1.

²⁵ *Rules and Regulations...for the use of all Orange Societies...November 20, 1798*. [1st] report from the select committee on Orange lodges, appendix 3, p. 4.

²⁶ Lodge 409 minutes (3 March 1803). PGL Armagh.

²⁷ Lodge 409 minutes (1 December 1813). PGL Armagh.

²⁸ Lodge 560 minutes (e.g. 20 September 1787). GLI.

²⁹ Lodge 560 minutes (27 December 1793). A later reference to the dance on 25 March 1794 suggests that it may have been postponed and then cancelled altogether, but as the page is badly damaged one cannot be certain. However, there is no suggestion that the cancellation (if it occurred) would have been due to any moral judgment on the compatibility of freemasonry and dancing; an entry on 6 February 1794 shows the preparations were still going ahead. GLI.

Sometimes the relationship between the innkeeper and his masonic customers soured. The members of a lodge in Lifford, county Donegal, arrived for their meeting but found that *"there was no proper place found for the lodge"*, or that their usual meeting room was not available. Instead of a normal lodge meeting, they settled for *"a song and some drink and a frien[d]ly parting"* but were nevertheless incensed enough to start looking for a new meeting place straight away. They even considered renting a house and converting it into a lodge room. However, that plan apparently failed as eight months after the original insult, a committee was appointed to carry on looking for a new place. After three more years they finally resolved to move temporarily to neighbouring Strabane.³⁰

As the lodges met in places where alcohol was available, it is not surprising that this sometimes led to problems. Excessive drinking was not unknown to Ulster lodges just as it had not been unknown to the first masonic lodges in Scotland. A Dumfries minute book of 1711 contains big splashes of ink, with the written explanation by the secretary, who blamed another member for upsetting the inkhorn while drunk and trying to tear up the minute book.³¹ The drinking habits of English freemasons were also noted and commented upon by observers, sometimes freemasons themselves, in the 1720s.³²

In a varying degree, alcohol remained a feature of lodge nights (though usually only after the formal ceremonies were finished) throughout the period studied here. *"Lodge met, twenty members present, a grate dale [=great deal] of punch drank [sic], but know [=no] business put forward"*, wrote the secretary of a Co. Armagh lodge with admirable honesty.³³ According to a note scribbled in the minute book of another lodge, *"James McFadden is a good boy and hee [sic] is wise but foolish when he gets a drop [of] drink"*.³⁴ In Raphoe, the local lodge decided that since *"the Volunteer brethren could not attend in Lodge on account of some punch which they had to drink, it was thought proper that their nonattendance should be dispens'd with untill Thursday the 8th"*.³⁵

³⁰ Lodge 569 minutes (4 May 1791, 6 July 1791, 7 January 1792). GLI.

³¹ Stevenson 1989, p. 81.

³² Knoop & Jones 1949, p. 6-7.

³³ Lodge 328 minutes (8 August 1793). Quoted in Jenkinson 1946b, p. 85.

³⁴ Lodge 367 records (vol. 1784 - 1793). Downpatrick Masonic Hall. The entry is dated 1 December 1788.

³⁵ Lodge 345 minutes (1 July 1784). GLI.

The amount of punch consumed at lodge meetings did not go unnoticed by outsiders. A correspondent of the *Londonderry Journal* complained that there could not be "a greater bar to industry and sobriety" than the spread of masonic lodges.³⁶ There was also a potential for public scandal: a Co. Tyrone magistrate complained of "*the bad consequences which arise from freemason lodges meeting after night & dispers[ing] almost always drunk in the dead of the night*".³⁷ The surveyor of excise in Omagh listed the masons among the various factions that were making his work hazardous in 1796: "*revenue affairs [are] very difficult to execute: different associations are here, viz. Defenders, Orangemen, & of late, United Irishmen; exclusive of freemasons*".³⁸

Many lodges found it necessary to agree on restrictions on the maximum amount of alcohol to be drunk during meetings. For instance, a Coleraine lodge set the limit at 1s 7 1/2 d in order to avoid "*all irregularitys & inconveniency that might arise from an unlimited use of the bottle*". However, the restriction did not apply to the time after the lodge closed (i.e. the formal meeting was over) or to the two St. John's Days, high points in the masonic year. At those times no other limit was set on drinking except the ruling that "*all manner of Excess be carefully avoided*".³⁹ The 1810 bye-laws of a Lurgan lodge directed the junior warden of the lodge "*to see the drink equally go round*" and "*to be very punctual that none shall be drank [sic] out of the lodge room*".⁴⁰ One lodge admitted a member only "*upon condition that he may not get intoxicated with drink for three months*".⁴¹ Such regulation of the time and amount of drinking was not peculiar to Irish lodges: from as early as the 1730s, there is evidence of it in America as well.⁴² However, according to a Cavan mason, good rules and intentions were not always enough:

*Our institution is accused of leading many into habits of intemperance; and of affording to many, who are naturally addicted to such habits, too frequent opportunities of indulging in them. Nor need we be surprized that the public should entertain such opinions of us, when they see the termination of some of our Bacchanalian meetings (I will not call them masonic) - when they see some of us stagger out of the lodge, and with difficulty scrambling to our homes.*⁴³

Such honesty was not always advisable: a Banbridge mason, Thomas Downes, was cautioned for claiming that "*coming home on St. John's Day the 24th of June last*

³⁶ *Londonderry Journal* 30 August 1785.

³⁷ Andrew Newton (Coagh) to [Pelham] (3 May 1797). Reb. 620/30/11.

³⁸ John Spiller to [George Waller] (postscript of a letter, c. 5 November 1796). Reb. 620/26/19.

³⁹ Lodge 123 bye-law 3, quoted in Tait 1926 p. 138.

⁴⁰ Transcripts of lodge 134 minutes (bye-laws 21 & 22, 19 November 1810). GLI.

⁴¹ Lodge 432 committee meetings 1799-1812 (5 May 1800). PGL Antrim.

⁴² Bullock 1996, p. 73.

[1804]...a number of the members belonging to lodge no. 336 were drunk" and that one member at least "appeared like being drunk having to be supported by another man & staggering through the street". The mildness of the punishment suggests that there was some truth in the allegation. After all, Downes was on trial also for remarks (possibly tongue-in-cheek, but potentially serious, bordering on blasphemy as they were) concerning whether the Bible was suitable reading for a young child, given all the murders and other crimes depicted in it. That Downes did not lie about the drinking habits prevalent in the lodge, is shown by another case tried only fifteen days later. It allegedly involved not only drunkenness, but embezzling of lodge funds by drunken members who wanted more drink. The embezzlement charge was not proven but John Curry, who had made the allegation, was suspended for 31 years for pulling out a knife and threatening to stab others present.⁴⁴

Visiting other lodges and in turn, receiving visiting freemasons, was an important facet of the social life of the lodge. Typically, most of the visitors to Ulster lodges came from nearby lodges or were soldiers whose units were stationed nearby (see chapter 5.3.1). However, occasionally the visitors came from farther away - from Scotland, England or even America. The visitors' names and lodge numbers were often meticulously recorded in the minutes. In some lodges, visitors were only allowed if unanimously approved of by the members,⁴⁵ but judging by the numbers of visitors who made it into the meetings (and minute books), the welcome was friendly more often than not. A visitor could also join the local brethren at refreshment, but was expected to pay for his expenses, "unless it be a night that the lodge does not sup".⁴⁶

Masonic lodges also organised public entertainment, usually for charity purposes. Theatricals were popular with the grand officers in Dublin from the very beginning of the grand lodge,⁴⁷ but Ulster lodges also organised plays. The earliest recorded instance is a night of theatrical entertainment organised by a Coleraine lodge on St. John's Day in Winter (27 December), 1759.⁴⁸ Such events were major social occasions in provincial towns. For instance, in Newry, "an amphitheatre was erected to contain the

⁴³ Murray, Dr: *Discourse, addressed to the free-masons of Cavan*, p. 28.

⁴⁴ Lodge 336 minutes (1802-04). It is also worth noting that the bye-laws of the lodge had separate clauses for dealing with members who came to the meeting drunk; and for those who became drunk during it (minutes 3 August, 18 August 1804; bye-laws 12-13 of 1787). MIC/249/3. PRONI.

⁴⁵ Lodge 569 minutes (bye-law 9); lodge 881 minutes (bye-law 6). GLI

⁴⁶ Lodge 569 minutes (bye-law 9). GLI.

⁴⁷ The very first record of the Irish grand lodge includes a mention of the Dublin masons, headed by the grand master, attending theatre. *Dublin Weekly Journal* 26 June 1725 (quoted in Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 53-54).

brethren...who appeared in full dress" at a play performed for the benefit of distressed freemasons. "A more brilliant audience was never seen on the like occasion in the North of Ireland", enthused the correspondent of the *Belfast Newsletter* afterwards.⁴⁹ Three Belfast lodges held an evening of musical and theatrical entertainment "for the benefit of Mr. Barron", apparently a distressed member, who was himself one of the performers.⁵⁰ The Lisburn lodges walked in public procession to the theatre.⁵¹ J. R. R. Adams notes that the masons shared this enthusiasm for public entertainment with Volunteer corps. In 1782, both the Volunteers of Newtownards and the freemasons of Moira put on a performance of the folk play "The Battle of Aughrim". In Adams's words, this linked "the bourgeoisie of County Down with the peasantry of Carleton's Clogher Valley".⁵²

The above is by no means a complete account of the wide variety of social activities that a lodge could organise. The masons of 248 Loughrea, Co. Galway, "agreed unanimously to subscribe for a prize of fifty guineas, to be run...by 4-year-old horses, etc., the property of freemasons of any regular lodge whatsoever".⁵³ The members of 123 Coleraine made members who married ~~to~~ pay a guinea to the lodge on the next lodge night (no doubt for the purpose of entertaining the brethren who were still bachelors).⁵⁴ Another lodge spent £1 2s 9d on lottery tickets. Winnings of over £3 were to be distributed to the members. Unfortunately, the lodge did not win a penny.⁵⁵ The same lodge also bought a saddle for a prize at the Richhill races. As it happens, the clerk of the racecourse was a member of the lodge.⁵⁶

In the 1770s, lotteries were perceived to be an easy source of funding. A "Free Masons Lottery Scheme" was started by the grand lodge for charitable causes, including an orphan relief fund. The scheme managed indeed to "meet the support of [the] fraternity, and the favour of the public"⁵⁷ as the organisers hoped, but there was a catch: the tickets sold well but many were never paid for. The masonic lottery failed and due to

⁴⁸ BNL 21 December 1759.

⁴⁹ BNL 11 April 1769.

⁵⁰ BNL 29 March and 2 April 1776. Other examples of benefit concerts include the "Grand Concert of Music" held at the Exchange Rooms, Belfast (BNL 26 February 1790) and a benefit organised by a lodge at Drumbridge near Lisburn (BNL 6 July 1770).

⁵¹ BNL 29 June 1792.

⁵² Adams 1987, p. 92 (quoting BNL 8 January 1782).

⁵³ *Pue's Occurrences* 28 June 1757.

⁵⁴ Lodge 123 bye-law 8, quoted in Tait 1926 p. 140.

⁵⁵ Lodge 328 minutes (6 October 1761). Quoted in Jenkinson 1946b, p. 87.

⁵⁶ Lodge 328 minutes (July 1762). Quoted in Jenkinson 1946b, p. 87.

⁵⁷ Crawley 1910, pp. 171-175. For a typical lottery advertisement, see BNL 21 October 1777.

lack of funds, winners could not be paid in full. One was still advertising his loss in the papers in 1782, offering to sell his claim of £251 for £100:

*to any person who may be acquainted with a speedy and effectual method of compelling the defaulters to do justice. It is unnecessary here to comment upon the conduct of the managers of this scheme, who under the sanction of what is stiled the GRAND LODGE, have so shamefully abused the confidence of the public.*⁵⁸

In 1784, the grand lodge had to appeal to the lodges "to contribute according to their abilities, by subscription towards (as far as possible) paying the outstanding prizes" of the lottery scheme.⁵⁹

Pastimes indulged in by lodge members outside the lodge are also sometimes mentioned in the records. A Co. Antrim lodge, assembled on St. John's Day in June 1795, could agree unanimously upon lodge bye-laws, except on one paragraph. Two members objected to a clause against cock-fighting; it is not clear from the minutes whether the article had to be dropped or was adopted by majority.⁶⁰

6.3.3. Women and freemasonry

*But Adam astonish'd like one struck with Thunder
Beheld her from Head to Foot over with Wonder;
Now you have done this Thing, Madam, said he,
For your sake no Women Free-Masons shall be.
Derry down, down, down derry down.*⁶¹

The topic of freemasonry and women has, from the very beginnings of Irish freemasonry, been a subject for satire and fun for the freemasons (all of them men). The 1724 pamphlet, *A letter from the grand mistress of the female free-masons*⁶² draws its power from the presumed absurdity of the very notion of female masons. It is most definitely not proof of female freemasons: from the very beginning, Irish freemasonry (like the English and Scottish branches of the movement) appears to have been a men-only movement. According to Anderson's masonic constitutions of 1723, "the persons admitted members of a lodge must be good and true men, free-born, and of mature and discreet

⁵⁸ *Saunders's News Letter* 27 October 1782 (quoted in Crawley 1910, p. 175).

⁵⁹ Grand lodge minutes (8 January 1784). GLI. It is not known whether any of the lodges bothered to respond.

⁶⁰ Lodge 418 minutes (24 June 1795). PGL Antrim.

⁶¹ "The progress of masonry" (a song) in *Ahiman Rezon* (Belfast 1782 edition), p. 110.

⁶² *A letter from the grand mistress of the female free-masons to Mr. Harding the Printer*, Dublin 1724, reprinted in Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 449-462; p. 451.

age, no bondmen, no women, no immoral or scandalous men, but of good report".⁶³ In France, there were mixed "lodges of adoption" in the 1740s, and by the 1780s they were so popular that their ritual books were reprinted frequently.⁶⁴

Fifield D'Assigny, a mason writing in 1741, praised the brotherhood for keeping its secrets, resisting alike the temptations of "*generous liquor, that opener of the mind*" and "*the most artful contrivances of persuasive women, who in their soft hours of love, have frequently strove (tho' in vain) to wheedle out this matter from such indulgent men, as had no power of denying them any other favour*".⁶⁵ This theme of women trying to find out the secrets of masonry (and the masons' boyish obsession with that secrecy) is recurrent in masonic literature. Indeed, one of the most cherished legends of Irish freemasonry concerns Elizabeth St. Leger (later the Hon. Elizabeth Aldworth), who as a young girl is reputed to have spied upon a masonic meeting chaired by her father. Caught and made to undergo initiation including a vow of secrecy, she has been celebrated and toasted by Irish brethren as their "only sister".⁶⁶

The "danger" of women discovering the masonic secrets was real, however: in 1770 a Mrs Bell spied upon a meeting of a military lodge in England "*and by that stratagem discovered the secrets of masonry*". According to a newspaper advertisement placed by her, Mrs Bell "*knowing herself to be the first woman in the world who ever found out that secret, is willing to make it known to all her sex*", and requested any interested women to apply to her for more information.⁶⁷

The justification usually given for the exclusion of females was that women were supposedly not able to keep a secret - an important consideration in a semi-secret brotherhood. Consequently, the (male) freemasons no doubt found it highly amusing to read in the paper that "*a society of ladies is forming in Paris, in order to vindicate their sex from the aspersion generally thrown on them, of not being able to keep a secret: A secret is to be the band of this society, in imitation of the free masons*".⁶⁸ The same sense of

⁶³ *The Constitutions of the free-masons...* (1723), p. 51.

⁶⁴ Burke & Jacob 1996, pp. 519-520. See also pp. 513-519 for a critical discussion of (particularly feminist) research on eighteenth-century women's freemasonry.

⁶⁵ D'Assigny, Fifield: *An impartial answer to the enemies of free-masonry*, p. 2.

⁶⁶ For a summary of the St. Leger legend, see Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 38-39.

⁶⁷ *Newcastle Courant* 4 January 1770. Quoted in Gould 1899, p. 127.

⁶⁸ BNL 15 October 1776. In 1785, a lodge was reported to have been formed in Paris by women who did "*not allow any men to be admitted into their lodge*". BNL 8 July 1785.

humour was reflected in the choice of play for the night of theatrical entertainment organised by the Lisburn masons: a comedy called "Wonder - a woman keeps a secret".⁶⁹

However, despite occasionally making fun of women, the masons followed the contemporary codes of paying compliments to them - as was no doubt advisable for an organisation that probably consisted largely of young men. When Mrs Brownlow, the wife of the Lurgan magnate, in her husband's absence permitted the local freemasons to assemble on the Brownlow demesne, these felt obliged to "*bestow a just panegyrick on all the respectable females of Lurgan, who adorned our assembly with a constellation of mental and personal charms which can never be unattractive or viewed without effect by true freemasons*".⁷⁰

The element of flirting and courtship was definitely a part of the masonic social scene as an example from a masonic songbook shows. A mason's daughter initially rejects the advances of her lover:

*None shall unite my virgin-zone
But one to whom the secret's known
of fam'd free-masonry.*

The young man goes off, becomes a mason, and returns:

*The fair comply'd with his request
Connubial joys the couple blest
And long may they remain.*⁷¹

In the same vein, the toasts drunk in lodge no. 257 of Belfast included three dedicated to the ladies: "*To every beauteous, charming She/ Who loves the Craft and Masonry*" followed by "*May she who'd Masonry revile/ Ne'er meet a Mason's gracious Smile/ On Earth be a neglected Belle/ And when from this - lead Apes in Hell*" plus the ubiquitous one (the twenty-first on the list of toasts) to "*The Memory of our Sister, Allworth [sic], of New-Market*".⁷²

Stories of female freemasons and lodges on the Continent or women initiated while disguised as men were popular news items in the press.

⁶⁹ BNL 29 June 1792.

⁷⁰ BNL 27 June 1800.

⁷¹ Holden, S[mollet]: *A selection of masonic songs...*, p. 33. For more of the same, see e.g. the poem which begins "*Of your hearts to take care, now ladies beware...*" in BNL 14 January 1785.

*The assertion that only one woman alone (the Hon. Mrs. Allworth [sic], of Newmarket) was ever initiated...is perfectly erroneous. Madam D'Eon, when thought to be the Chevalier D'Eon, went through every degree of masonry, even to a Knight Templar [sic], in London. The Maid of Orleans was also a freemason, and so was the celebrated Jenny Cameron; and it is said, that female lodges are very common in France.*⁷³

However, the link between women and the masonic pursuits of men was more substantial than tales of eavesdropping and Continental female lodges. The significant financial advantages to the widows and orphans of lodge members have already been noted (see chapter 6.2.). "Masonic" magazines were also subscribed to and read by women. Eight of the 206 named subscribers to *The Literary and Masonic Magazine* of 1802 were women, and the magazine was clearly designed to include items that would be of interest to female readers, ranging from the education of girls to "On the duties of a Hindu widow".⁷⁴

Moreover, a lodge could sometimes have a direct business relationship with a woman in her role as the landlady of the house where the freemasons held their meetings. The owner or keeper of the premises where the lodge met had to be a person whom the masons could trust, as the lodge chest containing their records and regalia was often left in his or her custody between meetings. Elizabeth Campbell of Armagh was obviously such a person as she was given the unusual honour of being called "Sister" in the lodge minutes.⁷⁵ Finally, women were sometimes indirectly involved when cases of alleged adultery came before masonic tribunals (see chapter 6.5.).

Although the "official" freemasonry in Ireland remained closed to women, booksellers offered for sale manuals such as the one called *Freemasonry for the ladies*, possibly a translation of a French original. The author (or translator) regretted that though "*masonry has been cultivated during the present [eighteenth] century with uncommon success in Great Britain*", the exclusion of women was "*a circumstance not favourable to the gallantry of Britons*". He then went on to describe the rituals for opening a mixed lodge

⁷² *Ahiman Rezon* (Belfast 1782 ed.), p. xix.

⁷³ BNL 13 March 1787.

⁷⁴ *The Literary and Masonic Magazine*, Vol. 1 (1802).

⁷⁵ Lodge 409 minutes (27 December 1799). PGL Armagh. The contract between Campbell and the lodge stipulated payments of a guinea for each ordinary and emergency meeting (two guineas for St John's Day meetings), the prices to include the cost of the fire and candles. Each member of the lodge was pay 6 1/2 d for a "snack" whether present or not. Campbell was apparently not an innkeeper or publican as the lodge was to "*furnish their own wine, spirits, porter, beer, ale & sugar &c she finding - attendance as aforesaid [i.e. the fire and candles] & boiling water &c &c*".

and initiating the candidate into the various degrees. The definition of freemasonry given in *Freemasonry for the ladies* is not-too-subtly revolutionary:

This society is the most perfect that ever existed; in it there is no distinction of men by the language they speak, by the dress they wear, by the rank in which they were born, or the titles they possess; the whole world is considered but as one republic, of which each nation forms a family....

However, the equality was not quite universal: the female lodge was presided upon by a male "grand master". The female mason was also put in her place by the ritual questions and answers which formed part of the initiation. For instance, the correct reply to "*What is the duty of a Novitiate Mason [the first degree of the female freemason]*" was "*It is to hear, obey, work, and be silent*". The candidate was also asked whether "*curiosity has any share in her request*", and, after a reply in the negative, she was told that "*if you come to us divested of the prejudices natural to your sex you will be admitted*".⁷⁶

It is difficult to estimate how popular such women's masonic lodges became, or indeed if any were actually ever set up in Ireland. However, the idea of women forming lodges was apparently taken up by the Orange Order. A warrant dating from 1801 survives: it was issued by "*The Mistress Deputy Mistress &c &c of the Female Orange Lodge held in the house of Mr. Jno. Parnell No 18 Cuffe St. Dublin*" to a lady who was to hold a lodge in Bray, Co. Wicklow.⁷⁷

There is no record of any serious Irish discussion on the propriety or otherwise of the exclusion of women. In America, the topic was briefly discussed in the 1790s and the early 1800s. The men did not come up with one single answer; instead, various reasons were suggested for the exclusion of women from American freemasonry. The reasons given included the impropriety of ladies attending secret late-night meetings, the danger of arousing jealousy among the brethren, that freemasonry was meant to teach men virtues that women already possessed, or simply that masonic membership "would be as great a burlesque upon female delicacy" as a doctorate or a commission in the army.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ *Freemasonry for the ladies*, dedication and pp. 3, 16-17.

⁷⁷ *Warrant for No 8 Female Orange Lodge*. GOLI archives. Apparently female Orange lodges did not become popular or did not last long as the present-day Orange women's organisations date from much later. I am grateful to Mr Cecil Kilpatrick of the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland for drawing my attention to this document.

⁷⁸ Bullock 1996, pp. 158-162, 180-182.

6.4. Secrecy and mystery

*Hearing of a secret and willing to be free
I inquired of a brother if I could admitted be
He said my dearest brother that you soon shall know
Now answer me one question and that before you go¹*

An important part of the attraction of freemasonry was its reputation for being the custodian of ancient secrets that would be imparted only to the select few. Already the seventeenth-century Scottish freemasons wanted to ensure that the candidate for initiation was "*sufficiently frightened with 1000 ridiculous [sic] postures and grimaces [sic]*" before revealing to him the secret signs of recognition and any other secrets they may have wanted the candidate to keep.²

Without going any deeper into the psychology or sociology of initiation, one may quote David Stevenson's summary of its functions and the reasons why it often involved some sort of ordeal (suffering, fear, ridicule or even humiliation): "By making the transition from one status to another difficult it [the ordeal] stressed how important the change was, and increased the value of the status sought...The ordeal at once indicated to the candidate how exclusive the new status was and that he had to prove worthy of it. At the same time, it re-emphasised to existing initiates how privileged they were...The fact that all in a group had to undergo the same type of initiation served to create a strong bond between them".³

It may appear that there is a contradiction between such mysticism and the presumably "enlightened" character of freemasonry. However, David Stevenson has pointed out that freemasonry was a creation of the late Renaissance rather than one of the Enlightenment (see chapter 2.2). One should also keep in mind that even the supposedly solemn initiation ceremonies themselves could "contain comic elements of near-horseplay despite their religious and philosophical content."⁴

Secrecy and mystery were powerful and central themes in masonic literature. For example, Laurence Dermott dedicated altogether some eight pages in the main section of his *Ahiman Rezon* to the praise of the virtues of secrecy:

¹ "Brilliant light" (Belfast, n.d.) reprinted in McClelland 1986, pp. 92-93.

² Stevenson 1988, p. 153.

³ Stevenson 1988, p. 155.

whoever will peruse sacred and profane history, shall find a great number of virtuous attempts (in peace and war) that never reached their designed ends...only through defect of secret concealment; and yet, besides such unhappy prevention, infinite evils have thereby ensue”.

In defence of his thesis, Dermott quoted Cato, Horace, Pythagoras, Aristotle and many others. In addition to the classical authors, Dermott’s authorities included King Solomon and even God himself:

before all examples, let us consider that which excels all the rest, derived even from God himself. Who so especially preserves his own secrets to himself, never letting any man know what should happen on the morrow...Whereby we may readily discern, that God himself is well pleased with secrecy.⁵

In short, secrecy and mystery were a powerful attraction for many potential candidates. Daniel O’Connell, himself a prominent freemason, noted in 1812 that “a feeble imitation of freemasonry lent something of mysticism and much of regularity to the Orange lodges”.⁶ The United Irishman, William Drennan, recognised the allure of the masonic secrecy in his well-known proposal for a new radical brotherhood:

The new society [the United Irishmen] should have much of the secrecy and somewhat of the ceremonial of freemasonry, so much secrecy as might communicate curiosity, uncertainty, expectation to [the] minds of surrounding men, and so much impressive and affecting ceremony in its internal economy as, without impeding real business, might strike the soul through senses.⁷

Much of the “programme” at a typical lodge meeting consisted of proposing candidates for admission, balloting for them and, when these formalities had been successfully completed, proceeding to the actual “striking the soul through the senses”, the initiation ceremony. To qualify as a full member of the lodge, the candidate had in fact to pass through three ceremonies: initiation to the successive degrees of entered apprentice, fellow craft and master mason. Much has been written of the origins of the “trigradal” initiation, most of it irrelevant for the general historian. Suffice it to say that by the time covered in this study, it was well established.

⁴ Buckley 1986, p. 12.

⁵ *Ahiman Rezon* (Belfast 1782 ed.), pp. 1-8.

⁶ Quoted in Lepper n.d, p. 253, footnote 1.

⁷ William Drennan to Samuel MacTier (21 May 1791). Quoted in Curtin 1990, p. 71.

"The Craft" is the name often used in masonic literature for the three degrees of entered apprentice, fellow craft and master mason. However, some freemasons were not satisfied with the initiation mysteries of "craft" freemasonry. A bewildering variety of "higher degrees" soon developed.⁸ The most popular such degrees in eighteenth-century Ulster were called the Royal Arch and the Knights Templars. The earliest known references to the Royal Arch degree in Ireland date from the 1740s and to the Knights Templars from the 1760s (albeit in a document printed in 1788).⁹

The "higher" degrees were conferred under the auspices of the local lodges, without any consultation with the grand lodge, which only recognised the three "craft" degrees. For the purposes of conferring some degrees, several lodges joined together in associations called Union Bands. The band, or "United Sacred Band of Templar Priests" to give it its full title, was a phenomenon that existed in Ulster from the eighteenth century to the 1850s. An example of the colourful paraphernalia that was used to dramatise the band activities was the way its officers - a "president" and seven "masters" - issued documents. The eight men all signed and sealed them with their individual seals. On each seal, there was engraved a symbol and one or two words, part of a sentence. Put together, the words read "*Let truth prevail though the universe should sink in ruins*".¹⁰

At first, the "higher degrees" seem to have been confined to the upper end of the social scale: the first mention (1752) of the Royal Arch in a lodge minute book comes from an exclusive lodge in Coleraine.¹¹ As with freemasonry in general, the enthusiasm for (and access to) the fantastic titles offered by the higher degrees seems to have spread down the social scale. However, the higher degrees only became widespread in the 1780s when, according to Lepper and Crossle, two Dublin lodges were particularly prominent in promoting them.¹² In 1780, a lodge in Raphoe was treated to a "*Grand Lecture on different points and parts of the Royal Arch*".¹³ In Ulster, the highly influential 1782 Belfast edition of *Ahiman Rezon* probably contributed to the spread and increased

⁸ For the early history of such degrees and for theories on their origins, see Hamill 1986, pp. 100-104, 117-123.

⁹ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 99-100 and *The rules of the High Knights Templars of Ireland* (Dublin 1788), p. 25 (reproduced in Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 162).

¹⁰ Turnbull & Denslow 1956, p. 164. In the records of one such group, the "Annahilt Band", masons belonging at least 50 different lodges are mentioned (although it is difficult to distinguish between members and visitors). The band met at several locations including Banbridge, Comber and Lisburn. Lodge 683 minutes. GLI.

¹¹ Lodge 123 minutes (16 April 1752). Quoted in Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 99. For lodge 123, see chapter 5.1.1.

¹² High Knight Templars' Lodge (no. 584) and the First Volunteer Lodge (no. 620). Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 249. Both were new lodges: founded in 1781 and 1783 respectively. IMR.

popularity of the higher degrees: its list of toasts drunk in the Belfast lodge no. 257 included several referring to various higher degrees.¹⁴

In the 1780s, references to meetings held to confer "higher degrees" became more and more frequent in lodge records. By 1785, a Carrickfergus lodge was issuing Royal Arch and Knights Templar certificates.¹⁵ In 1787, a Banbridge lodge bought for 6s 6d what was called a "Knight Seal" - apparently a seal for the purposes of sealing Knight Templar certificates and other documents. In the following year, the lodge set aside the second Tuesday in every quarter for a Royal Arch and Knights Templar meeting.¹⁶ There appears to have been a measure of uniformity and organisation, at least enough to permit communication among the lodges conferring the higher degrees, as shown by the need to issue members with certificates.¹⁷

By the 1790s, the enthusiasm for such fascinating titles appears to have been higher in lower-class lodges. One Coleraine lodge could bestow upon the candidate the impressive list of degrees of "*Knights of Malta ark & Mark, Elisian Knights, Knights of St. Paul, Mediterranean [sic] Pass & Knights of the Red Cross*" during a single night.¹⁸ Whether the ceremonies were treated with great reverence or not probably varied from lodge to lodge. The lodge where the above degrees were given might also give a group of candidates all the first three degrees on a single night plus those of Royal Arch and Knight Templar on the following night, which certainly does not suggest much emphasis on any particular degree or any serious attempt to test whether the candidate was worthy of proceeding to the next one.¹⁹ Other lodges were slower to adopt the new degrees: for instance, in a lodge in Clare, Co. Armagh, the first recorded Knight Templar meeting only took place in 1800. After that, references to the higher degrees became commonplace in the minutes.²⁰ In 1805, the then grand treasurer noted that the Knight Templar degree was "*very prevalent among the lower kind of masons and military lodges throughout the kingdom*".²¹

¹³ Lodge 346 minutes (1 July 1780). GLI.

¹⁴ "Toasts originally given in the Orange Lodge of Belfast, No. 257" in *Ahiman Rezon* (Belfast 1782 edition), p. [xix].

¹⁵ Lodge 253. Crossle's scrapbooks, box 5, p. 4. GLI.

¹⁶ Lodge 336 accounts book 1781-1828, pp. 37, 329. MIC/249/1. PRONI.

¹⁷ For 18th-century Ulster certificates for the higher degrees from 1785 onwards (issued by lodges in Carrickfergus, Castlecaulfield, Cookstown, Dromore, Markethill, Moira, Moy and Newry) see Crossle's scrapbooks, box 1, pp. 40-43; box 2, p. 6; box 3, pp. 92, 134; box 4, p. 9, 11; box 5, p. 4

¹⁸ Lodge 754 minutes (18 March 1797, 1 December 1798). GLI.

¹⁹ Lodge 754 minutes (9 March 1800, 10 March 1800). GLI.

²⁰ Transcript of lodge 459 minutes. PGL Armagh.

²¹ John Boardman to Thomas Harper (10 August 1805). Reprinted in Sadler 1893, p. 18.

While the grand lodge did not officially recognise or encourage any of these degrees, they could not and did not ignore them. The president of the Armagh county committee, Thomas Greer, got involved in the higher degrees, possibly with the intent of exercising some degree of control over them: he had himself made a Knight Templar and Knight of Malta in 1792.²² In 1805, the grand lodge decided to take the higher degrees under its control. The historians of the grand lodge, Lepper and Crossle, are vague about the reasons for the take-over: "There is not the slightest doubt that control was badly needed in the case of most of the higher degrees".²³ It seems likely that the "control" desired was of the same kind as that exercised by Greer's committee in Armagh: attempting to keep masonry as exclusive as possible to the "respectable" classes, or at least prevent any further "decline" (see chapter 5.1.2). In any case, the decision helped to escalate divisions within Irish freemasonry and contributed to the 1806 split in the grand lodge (see chapter 9) as many local lodges were not willing to give up their control over the "higher degrees".

The absence of information about what went on in the privacy of the lodge could lead outsiders to believe whatever rumours and folklore were available. According to a critic, masonic secrecy led "*so many young men to become members...and to pry into those misteries [sic], which their imagination hath painted to them as containing something marvellous, wonderful or supernatural*".²⁴ Even supernatural powers were indeed ascribed to freemasons. For instance, they were reported to have expelled a poltergeist that was troubling a house in Co. Donegal. According to the correspondent, the ghost drove out the dissenting minister, Church of Ireland rector and Catholic priest who had tried to exorcise it together. In a ceremony performed at midnight, the local masons were reported to have "*sacrificed a beautiful white cock on a book of curious Egyptian hieroglyphics*". The ghost was successfully expelled from the house, and the correspondent concluded his report by declaring that "*the world need no longer be troubled with ghosts or goblins, when the above society [the freemasons] is possessed of the power of exorcism, and which they will never fail to exert for the benefit of their fellow creatures*".²⁵

²² Thomas Greer's Knight Templar and Knight of Malta certificate, 19 May 1792 (photocopy). PGL Armagh.

²³ Lepper and Crossle 1925, p. 340.

²⁴ *Londonderry Journal* 4 October 1785.

²⁵ *Strabane Journal* 27 November 1786. The episode in which the masons featured was a sequel to an earlier report of 13 November. On 18 December, another correspondent wrote to deny that any ritual or sacrifice had taken place and that some masons had merely visited the house and prayed with the family. The report concerning the successful exorcism could possibly be read as an allegory of masonry banishing superstition where formalised religion failed.

6.5. Discipline and justice

The lodge, as described by a masonic pamphleteer of the 1790s, was an idyllic gathering: "*Harmony and good humour pervade our brotherly meetings. Within our lodges no disorderly or indecent wrangles ever happen, no reproachful expressions are ever heard*".²⁶ As with any society, the reality did not always correspond to the ideal. Because quarrels did arise between members the masonic lodge developed ways and procedures for trying to solve them. The lodge acquired a judicial aspect which extended beyond the merely internal discipline in line with the recommendations of *Ahiman Rezon*, or cases such as drunkenness, swearing and other disturbance in the lodge room.²⁷ Although the bye-laws of the individual lodges were far from uniform, most included clauses against such behaviour. Lodges also censured or fined members who were caught playing cards or dice on a lodge night²⁸ or swearing.²⁹ In one instance, a member was fined two pence "*for blasphemy*".³⁰ Another lodge disciplined its members for going to cock-fights, particularly on an Easter Monday.³¹

The lodge aimed at cultivating a standard of respectability in manners and appearance through a combination of rules and peer pressure. One's outward appearance had to conform to what was regarded as the norm: the member might be required to arrive "*in decent apparel, viz. clean shav'd*". Furthermore, many lodges penalised bad behaviour also outside the lodge room: one could be punished for insulting a brother "*in or out of lodge*" or behaving "*out of lodge misbecoming a brother*".³² An important consideration was the reputation of the lodge and of freemasonry in general:

*If any brother apostatises from the purity of his profession [i.e. freemasonry] and commences a profane swearer, a liar [sic], a backbiter, a cheat, an adulterer, a drunkard or becomes habitually guilty of any vice by which a slur [sic] & discredit may be brought upon our sacred society, he shall be...excluded.*³³

For instance, a James Thomson of Raphoe was suspended because of his "*irregular course of life by drunkenness, gambling and other acts of debauchery*".³⁴ Two of

²⁶ Mullalla, James: *An essay on the origin of masonry*, p. 11.

²⁷ *Ahiman Rezon* (Belfast 1782 ed.), p. 17.

²⁸ Lodge 557 minutes (bye-law 13), lodge 611 bye-laws (no. 7). GLI.

²⁹ Lodge 881 minutes (bye-law 11). GLI.

³⁰ Lodge 888 minutes (8 March 1804). GLI.

³¹ Lodge 418 minutes (7 May, 4 June 1794). PGL Antrim.

³² Lodge 557 minutes (bye-laws 18, 19, 22). GLI.

³³ Lodge 138 minutes (bye-law 8). Hezlett papers D/668/O. PRONI.

³⁴ Lodge 346 minutes (4 March 1785). GLI.

his Raphoe brethren were charged with fighting. However, when the lodge assembled to pass judgement, "*each culprit...answered they were insensibly drunk, and therefore were totally ignorant of the charge against them, and at present appear to be in perfect amity with each other*". Their excuse was not deemed to be sufficient and they were both suspended for seven months.³⁵

Suspension from lodge membership was a typical punishment for a variety of minor offences. It has been recorded for striking another member³⁶, refusing to give up and then breaking the glass case of the lodge warrant, stealing the lodge Bible³⁷ and for two masons "*fighting together in a me[a]dow*".³⁸ When a father charged his son with a "*breach of filial duties and other misdemeanors [sic]*", the son was suspended.³⁹ Occasionally, a sentence of suspension could amount to a *de facto* expulsion as in the case of a Coleraine mason who was suspended for 99 years for unspecified "*improper conduct*".⁴⁰ As the entries in lodge records regarding discipline are often brief, it is difficult to judge the seriousness of the crime. However, sometimes the punishment seems very mild: a Mitchel Shear was "*excluded for one year...for rob[b]ing Robt. Warrick*".⁴¹

If a dispute concerned members of different lodges, the offender could be ordered to visit the other lodge and there publicly apologise. For instance, the ring-leader of a group of Banbridge masons who had beaten a mason from Scarva, was told by his lodge to attend the lodge in Scarva in order to seek forgiveness from the offended party.⁴² In more serious cases, an outright expulsion was a possibility: a James Fairfoot was expelled from a Carrickfergus lodge for "*maltreatment of a brother*".⁴³

However, the judicial function of the lodge extended far beyond swearing and the occasional drunken quarrel. It is not an exaggeration to say that the lodge (or sometimes a committee of several lodges) could act as a "court of first instance" in disputes between members. The Old Charges decreed that a mason involved in a dispute with another mason should first apply to his own or the other mason's lodge and then, if not satisfied, to the grand lodge. He should "*never take a legal course, till the cause cannot be*

³⁵ Lodge 346 minutes (1 July 1786). GLI.

³⁶ Lodge 668 minutes (21 February 1793). GLI.

³⁷ Lodge 569 minutes (16 December 1795). GLI.

³⁸ Lodge 465 minutes (15 February 1799). PGL Antrim.

³⁹ Lodge 346 minutes (4 December 1788). GLI

⁴⁰ BNL 28 September 1798.

⁴¹ Lodge 529 records, vol. 3 (cash accounts, 12 February 1798). PGL Antrim.

⁴² Lodge 336 minutes 1802-04 (7 January, 21 January 1803). MIC/249/3. PRONI.

⁴³ BNL 26 October 1807.

otherwise decided; for if the affair is only between masons, and about masonry, lawsuits ought to be prevented by the good advice of prudent brethren, who are the best referees of differences".⁴⁴ For instance, a dispute concerning wages paid by one mason to the son of another was decided by their lodge, resulting in the doubling of the boy's yearly wages from two to four guineas.⁴⁵ Occasionally the member could resort to both the civil authorities and the good offices of the masonic lodge. In 1796, a mason accused of being an informer chose to deny the accusations both upon oath before magistrates and "also at a full meeting of...lodge no. 701 held in...Moneymore being St. John's Day".⁴⁶

Trying to keep masonry out of court was also grand lodge policy: in 1790, the grand lodge thanked one of its officers for having prevented a masonic dispute in Co. Cavan from ending up in a court of law.⁴⁷ American masons went even further: the 1732 bye-laws of a Philadelphia lodge decreed that quarrels between members could not be made public before the lodge had discussed the matter. In 1820, the Pennsylvanian lodges even considered setting up courts of their own.⁴⁸

Disputes between lodges or factions within lodges could be referred to other lodges for investigation. The exclusive no. 257 of Belfast was frequently involved in such supervision of other lodges. Even when other Belfast lodges were involved, the grand lodge minutes recorded a decision to refer the matter under investigation "to no. 257" and as a kind of afterthought, "& the other lodges in the vicinity for their enquiry & report".⁴⁹ Sometimes it was difficult to get a lodge to co-operate: two Co. Donegal lodges demanded that a third lodge should enquire into a duel between two of its members, threatening to report the matter to the grand lodge.⁵⁰

The lodges tried to preserve their self-established jurisdiction by applying sanctions to members who did not wish to avail of the lodge's arbitration. The rules of a

⁴⁴ Old Charge VII (Concerning lawsuits). *Ahiman Rezon* (Belfast ed. 1782), p. 25. It is interesting to note Allan Blackstock's observation that yeomanry corps "operated idiosyncratic informal discipline codes more in keeping with a fraternity or lodge". Blackstock 1998, p. 105.

⁴⁵ The relations between brothers Brittain and Crawford, the parties to the dispute, did not quite return to the state of masonic harmony as a month later, Brittain was blaming Crawford for "assaulting and abusing him". Five years later, Crawford (the employer in the original dispute) was suspended for three years for throwing a glass of liquor on Brittain's face. Lodge 418 minutes (1 May, 4 June 1793; 12 June 1798). PGL Antrim.

⁴⁶ Mandy Diffin to the editor of the Northern Star (25 January 1797). Reb. 620/28/144. For the political context of this incident, see chapter 8.1.3.

⁴⁷ Grand lodge minutes (5 August 1790). GLI.

⁴⁸ Bullock 1996, pp. 72, 204-206.

⁴⁹ Grand lodge minutes (4 September 1788, 7 May 1795, 3 November 1796). GLI.

⁵⁰ Lodge 346 minutes (19 May 1787). GLI.

Coleraine lodge specifically included disputes *"in such concerns as are foreign to masonry"* and decreed that a member refusing to submit to the decision reached by a majority of the lodge should be fined.⁵¹ In an Armagh lodge, the refusing member was not eligible for a certificate until he accepted that *"any disputes...between any of the brethren...shall be left to the final determination of the master & members of the lodge "*.⁵²

Taking a quarrel with a fellow freemason before the courts was particularly frowned upon. In 1791, two Tyrone masons had an argument over a horse. The quarrel escalated and the complainant, Isaiah Nevins, resorted to courts rather than mediation by the brethren. The accused, Robert Lawless complained to Nevins's lodge, accusing Nevins of being *"instrumental in procuring a warrant against him"*. This was considered sufficient grounds for suspending Nevins until St. John's Day (about five months).⁵³

A lodge at Belturbet, Co. Cavan, had to resolve a dispute over land between two members. The lodge passed a detailed judgement, regulating the rent and the right to cut turf in a particular bog.⁵⁴ Apparently the parties were content with the decision. On another occasion, the same lodge found itself incapable of settling a financial dispute ("a difference in matters of account") between two members. Extraordinary meetings were held, arbitrators appointed and the parties were required to produce any relevant documents to prove their case, but to no avail. Eventually, the lodge decided to *"allow them to go to law or take any other - - - [the page is torn here] which they shall think necessary on the occasion"*⁵⁵ Complicated disputes could take up much of the members' time and patience: one lodge even charged the complainant a deposit, which was apparently refunded if he was successful.⁵⁶

Marital and sexual matters were also sometimes debated before masonic tribunals. In 1791, an Alexander Winning was accused of running away with a Miss Woods, who had been married against her wish to another freemason. The lodge looked into the matter and voted by majority to acquit Winning. Winning seems to have been a troublesome character as three months later he was being accused again, this time for

⁵¹ Lodge 138 minutes (bye-law 6). Hezlett papers D/668/O. PRONI.

⁵² Lodge 623 minutes (bye-law 10, 5 February 1794). PGL Armagh.

⁵³ Lodge 668 minutes (28 January 1791). GLI.

⁵⁴ Lodge 560 minutes (5 January 1792). The page is badly damaged here but apparently the dispute is over a lease of land, of which eleven years remained, at Cromilty [?]. GLI.

⁵⁵ Lodge 560 minutes (29 September, 15 November and 28 December 1793). GLI.

⁵⁶ Lodge 611 bye-laws (no. 17). GLI. The actual sum was in excess of 5 s. (the amount of pence is illegible in the bye-laws).

"collecting a mob" to fight "Papists" at a fair. However, he was acquitted again and went on to become an officer of his lodge.⁵⁷

In another case, a Brother Nevins (apparently the Nevins involved in the earlier quarrel over the horse) was found by another mason, John Kenny, *"in a situation that he the said Nevins would wish to have concealed from the world & his family in particular"*. Nevins attempted to charge Kenny with secrecy, arguing that as they both were freemasons, they should keep each other's secrets. Nevins's wife found out nevertheless, and Kenny was heard to say that he would not receive or keep such a secret. The row escalated, with accusations and threats flying both ways. A witness reported that Nevins had threatened a woman, apparently his mistress, so that she would send an infant child away, probably to be adopted. In retaliation, Nevins accused Kenny of defrauding him *"out of part of the price of a cock of hay"* on another occasion. In the end, male solidarity prevailed - Kenny was severely rebuked by the master and made to pay the expenses of the emergency meeting.⁵⁸

Judging by the few cases recorded, it seems that punishment in sexual matters was not normally very severe. An Antrim mason found *"Trevor Brittain and a brothers wife in an unbecoming posture he seemin[g]ly forcing her against her inclination"*. Brittain was suspended for two years.⁵⁹ However, it needs to be pointed out that masonic lodges were not unique in attempting to protect the sexual morality of its members and their womenfolk. The members of agrarian secret societies of the Defender-Ribbonman type could also swear *"not to wrong a brother's wife sister or daughter in property or chastity"*⁶⁰ or *"not to be unlawful with a brother's wife or daughter"*.⁶¹

Members were also tried by the lodge when they committed serious crimes that had nothing to do with freemasonry or did not involve another mason. A committee of Belfast lodges expelled Patrick Whelan, a tide-waiter and member of lodge 272 for planning a fraud - planting tobacco in a merchant's cargo so that he could find it and receive a reward for the discovery of smuggled tobacco.⁶² Two Newtownards lodges *"having heard with astonishment that some of the members belonging unto our lodges, have been in the habit of passing ILLEGAL BANK NOTES"* declared publicly that any

⁵⁷ Lodge 668 minutes (8 September 1791, 22 December 1791, 27 December 1792). GLI.

⁵⁸ Lodge 668 minutes (28 September 1799, 27 December 1799). GLI.

⁵⁹ Lodge 418 minutes (6 May 1795). PGL Antrim.

⁶⁰ "Defenders Papers received from Mr Rochfort" (3 November 1795). Reb. 620/22/51.

⁶¹ General Payne (Limerick) to NN (21 August 1803). Reb. 620/66/153.

⁶² BNL 10 October 1783.

such members would be "*denied the privileges inherent in masonry in our lodges*" from then on.⁶³ In cases as serious as Whelan's, the expulsion was often published in newspapers. The publicity served a double purpose: it both protected the reputation of the lodge in question and prevented the offender from affiliating to another lodge.

⁶³ BNL 4 April 1814.

7 FREEMASONRY AND POLITICS TO 1793

*We have no idle prating,
Of either whigg or tory;
But each agrees
To live at ease,
And sing, or tell a story.¹*

In the stormy period from the late 1770s to the late 1790s, Irish freemasonry became known for things other than arcane ceremonies and alcohol. Groups of masons, for the first time openly proclaiming themselves as such while attempting to influence local or national politics, were a new feature on the Irish political scene. Such activity was also a novel facet to a hitherto rather sedate society, whose politics had long been best summarised by the song quoted above. The masonic ideology, as expounded by Anderson's *Constitutions*, was not particularly radical:

no private piques or quarrels must be brought within the door of the lodge, far less any quarrels about religion, or nation, or state policy...we are also of all nations, tongues, kindreds and languages, and are resolv'd against all politicks, as what never yet conduc'd to the welfare of the lodge, nor ever will.²

Also according to the Antients' constitution, the *Ahiman Rezon*, a freemason was supposed to be "a lover of quiet...always subject to the civil powers...". However, in the heated political climate of the late eighteenth century, some Irish masons chose to stress the end of the above sentence: "...provided they [the civil powers] do not infringe upon the limited bounds of religion and reason".³

The nature and extent of masonic involvement in Irish politics is a topic which has long puzzled historians. Masonic writers often regard occurrences of such political activity as unfortunate aberrations from present-day norms of masonic behaviour and then extend this anachronistic disapproval to the masons of the past. For instance, in the couple of pages with which Lepper and Crossle deal with the Volunteer era, they admit that there is plenty of evidence of masonic involvement and that lodges formed corps and vice versa. Nevertheless, their general tone is that of anachronistic dismissal: "We must not shrink from expressing our profound conviction that this public association of the name of freemasonry with bodies of men called together for other purposes, no matter

¹ The "XIV Song" of "A collection of songs to be sung by free-masons" in Spratt, Edward: *The new book of constitutions...*, p. 15.

² Anderson, James: *The Constitutions of the free-masons* (1723), p. 54.

³ *Ahiman Rezon* (Belfast 1782 ed.), p. 12.

how laudable in themselves, was a great mistake".⁴ Likewise, Lepper and Crossle deal with the crises of 1792-93 and 1798 as if there was no change in the political circumstances or the role of masonry between those two periods: reformism and radicalism of any sort is treated simply as one continuous story of United Irish infiltration. In their *History of the Grand Lodge of...Ireland*, conservative political activity within masonry in 1792-93 is all but ignored and masonic involvement in loyalism prior to the 1798 rebellion is not even mentioned.⁵

If freemasons have tended to completely ignore any links between masonry and politics, academic historians have not been slow to discover such connections. However, the nature of their findings has changed over time: from an assumption that freemasonry is inherently conservative to a conviction that in the eighteenth century at least, it was on the whole progressive and non-sectarian, sometimes even radical. The Rev. Patrick Rogers, writing in the 1930s, was mystified by the political activity of masonic lodges in 1792 - 1793: "Curiously enough, acute political rancour appeared where one would least expect it - in the ranks of the Ulster Freemasons".⁶ In the 1970s, Terence De Vere White emphasised the non-political aspects of the lodge "the tone of the various lodges was dictated by its more prominent members, and the proceedings must have been esoteric and convivial rather than religious or political".⁷ Of the scholars of the 1990s, Jim Smyth is undoubtedly correct in noting that "the political profile of individual lodges varied from place to place".⁸ However, Smyth also suggested that "masonic 'ideology' was non-sectarian, rationalistic and 'enlightened'".⁹ Despite the slight reservations expressed through the strategically placed quotation marks, some variation of this assumption has in the 1990s become the accepted dogma among historians.

Kevin Whelan has argued that, though "officially apolitical, freemasonry almost unconsciously through its organisation and discipline became a precursor of the concept of citizenship",¹⁰ a phrase which summarises the view dominant in the Irish historiography of the 1990s. Taking into account the diversity of freemasonry in different cultures and centuries, such a sweeping statement can only be an oversimplification. It may have been true in certain places and times, but hardly all: for instance, Jessica Harland-Jacobs's

⁴ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 246-249.

⁵ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 292-299.

⁶ Rogers 1934, p. 288.

⁷ De Vere White 1973, p. 51.

⁸ Smyth 1992, p. 86.

⁹ Smyth 1993, p. 171.

¹⁰ Whelan 1996, p. 86.

view of freemasonry as an "officially sanctioned agency of British imperialism" which helped colonial officials to maintain social harmony (in other words, the status quo), cannot be easily squared with Whelan's.¹¹ It should also be remembered that the American antimasonic party of the 1820s and 1830s suspected that masonry, with its pseudo-aristocratic titles, constituted a "kingdom within the limits of this republic [the United States]".¹² In other words, freemasonry could just as well - in a different historical context - be seen as the very opposite of the republic-within-the-kingdom that Irish historians often assume it to be.

The above caveat is not an attempt to deny that there could be (and in many cases was) a link between freemasonry and what we would perceive as "democratic" thinking, even political radicalism. It may be exaggeration to regard freemasonry as the only or the decisive model for democracy. Nevertheless, the masonic lodge did have "democratic" features by the standards of the eighteenth century. For instance, an egalitarian trend could be detected in some masonic songs:

*Ensigns of state, that feed our pride
Distinctions troublesome, and vain
By masons true are laid aside
Art's free-born sons such toys disdain".¹³*

Moreover, the master of the lodge was elected according to the principle of one man, one vote. From the 1750s onwards, a lodge in Coleraine regularly set up two candidates for such elections.¹⁴ A copy of the printed rules of a Dublin masonic lodge which ended up among the government intelligence files in the 1790s did not contain anything of revolutionary character, unless the stipulation that the lodge officers "*shall be elected...by ballot*" was sufficient to merit such attention.¹⁵

Whether such practices amount to an inherently democratic nature of the whole movement, remains debatable. However, what matters is that by the 1790s many thought

¹¹ Harland-Jacobs, Jessica: "Maintaining the connexion: Freemasonry, Orangeism, and the construction of imperial identities in British North America". (M.A. thesis, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, 1995), pp. 69, 78.

¹² Bullock 1996, pp. 295-296

¹³ "The fellow-crafts song" in [Anderson, James]: *The Constitutions of the free-masons* (1723), p. 83.

¹⁴ Lodge 138 minutes. Hezlett papers, D/668/O. PRONI.

¹⁵ *The rules and regulations of lodge no. 190/15*, rule X, p. 6. Dublin 1792: printed by Robert Rhames. Reb. 620/19/135. In the title of the leaflet, 190 is the number of the lodge's warrant from the Grand Lodge of Ireland, 15 a "local" number indicating seniority among Dublin lodges. Jenkinson 1931 (also reprinted in IMR, pp. 7-14).

that it did - that freemasonry more or less equalled radicalism. For instance, Thomas Paine's idea of freemasonry was outlined in a short essay "An essay on the origin of freemasonry" in the 1790s.¹⁶ Full of admiration of primeval "druidic" religion and opposition to Judaeo-Christian dogma, it can arguably be read also as a praise of republicanism. At least, that is how contemporary critics read it: in the American discussion that followed, masonry was blamed for "illuminist" and anti-Christian tendencies.¹⁷

If the political profiles of Irish lodges covered the whole spectrum of political opinions, so did those of individual masons. An oft-quoted example of this is Major Sirr, the man who arrested Lord Edward Fitzgerald. He was the son of an officer of the Irish grand lodge and a freemason himself, although not a particularly active one.¹⁸ Furthermore, the conservative Ulster magnates of the 1790s, the 2nd Marquis of Downshire and 1st Earl of Annesley, were freemasons: both had even been grand masters of Ireland in the 1780s, though under their courtesy titles while still heirs to their fathers' peerages - which may explain the fact that this aspect of their lives has been overlooked by historians.¹⁹

Given their different political opinions, it was not unusual for freemasons to be fighting on opposite sides in an election, a fact that has puzzled some researchers. For instance, A. T. Q. Stewart, writing on the radical Presbyterian minister Thomas Ledlie Birch, was surprised to discover that Birch "actively supported Robert Stewart against the interest of the Hill family (though they too were Masons) in the County Down election of 1783".²⁰ Mapping the correlation between freemasonry and political activity at individual level - membership of the parliament, for instance - would be a massive undertaking and require detailed genealogical knowledge. Many Ulster MPs have first and surnames that are too common to enable positive identification. However, some of those listed in the 1791 report on the members of the Irish House of Commons (prepared for the 1st Marquis of Abercorn), can be identified as masons with a reasonable degree of certainty

¹⁶ In the 1896 collected works of Paine (ed. by Moncure Daniel Conway) the title of the essay is simply "Origin of free-masonry".

¹⁷ Stemper 1991, pp. 202-203 and p. 204 fn. 31. Stemper has not been able to date the Paine pamphlet (he has used a 1826 London edition). However, he thinks that the views expressed in it are consistent with those held by Paine around the time when he wrote the *Age of Reason*, published in 1794-95. The first recorded attack on the pamphlet was a sermon preached in Boston by a Rev. Jedidiah Morse in 1798.

¹⁸ Sirr 1906, pp. 39-41. Sirr's father, Joseph, was junior grand warden in 1773 and senior grand warden in 1774.

¹⁹ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 218, 220-221.

²⁰ Stewart 1995 pp. 180-181.

and their different political allegiances should be a further proof to show that membership did indeed transcend such divides. For instance, John (later Lord) O'Neill, MP for Co. Antrim voted for the opposition.²¹ On the government side, we find the Hon. Richard Annesley, MP for Newtownards, brother of the former grand master and later heir to his earldom.²²

It is not at all implausible to assume that a masonic lodge could act as a political bond in an age when party affiliations were loose and depended more on personal connections and local interests than on a shared national policy. However, it can be argued that so could any club or assembly. If a fraternity could be used by radicals to further their aims, the same could be done by conservatives as the emergence of the Orange Order shows. The irrelevance of simplistic equations of masonry with any one political cause is further underlined by the fast-changing nature of divisions in Irish politics: a radical (mason or otherwise) in 1782 could be a liberal in 1792 and a loyalist by 1798. The core of the problem is, of course, the lack of research on Irish freemasonry - in its absence historians have had to resort to imported definitions and impressions which may or may not be accurate in the Irish context.

7.1. The origins of masonic politicisation

The first documented event of freemasons as a body getting involved in politics seems to have taken place in the 1670s. At the time, there was unrest in south-western Scotland over the government persecution of the "Conventiclers", or Presbyterian dissidents. The only supporter that the Conventiclers had in parliament was the Earl of Cassillis. In 1672, the earl was elected deacon of the Kilwinning lodge; a move interpreted by Stevenson as an act of showing support to a courageous if controversial local politician.²³ The lodge at Dunblane in the 1690s included a group of landowners with Jacobite sympathies, but there is no evidence of the lodge itself being used for any political end.²⁴ Possible Jacobite sympathies of early eighteenth-century English lodges have also been a topic for much speculation.²⁵ However, by the time Frederick Lewis,

²¹ Johnston 1957, p. 16. Register, 1st series, lodge 257 (2 February 1784).

²² Johnston 1957, pp. 26-27. Register, 2nd series, Grand Master's Lodge (24 June 1786).

²³ Stevenson 1989, pp. 69-70.

²⁴ Stevenson 1989, p. 108.

²⁵ There was a prominent ex-Jacobite also among the Irish grand masters: James King, 4th Lord Kingston (grand master in 1731-32, 1735-36 and 1745-47). King had been a member of James II's privy council and followed him into exile, but later returned and was pardoned. Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 146-147.

Prince of Wales, was initiated in 1737, English freemasonry was well on its way to becoming a respectable social institution. This was not always the case on the Continent and, perhaps more importantly for Ireland, in America. This chapter and the following one (chapters 7 and 8) are an attempt to demonstrate how domestic political grievances combined with influences from abroad to produce a politicised freemasonry which, for a while, played a prominent role in Irish history.

7.1.1. Irish politics from the 1720s to the 1770s

The accession of George III and the ensuing parliamentary election of 1761 have been regarded as landmarks in Irish eighteenth-century politics. The election was the first one held for thirty-four years. There were features that indicated that a novel popular mobilisation and politicisation process was starting. For instance, newspapers played a prominent role in an election for the first time and a new cynicism towards the powerful families was evident. Some candidates pledged to support a septennial bill (a measure to ensure that in the future, elections would be held every seven years). The "patriot" party, led by Charles Lucas and Henry Flood, also had its origins in the 1761 election.²⁶ The next election and the passing of an octennial act (1768) were further boosts to popular politics.

What was the role of freemasonry - if any - in Irish politics before and during this new wave of political activity? Until the mid-1770s, the available evidence is very slim. As the Grand Lodge of Ireland emerged at the time of the 1724 "Wood's halfpence" crisis or soon after it, Lepper and Crossle suggest that the early Dublin freemasons may have been involved in the popular campaign against Wood's patent to mint brass coins for Ireland. However, their evidence must be regarded as insufficient and the conclusion, intriguing as it is, as speculation.²⁷ Lepper and Crossle also suggest that there may have been tension between Jacobites and Hanoverians among the freemasons in the late 1720s, although they admit that the evidence is far from conclusive.²⁸ Seán Murphy has argued that the succession in the early 1730s of grand masters (Lord Kingston, Viscount Netterville and Viscount Barnewall) who were either Catholics or recent converts, constitutes a "Catholic-Jacobite element in the upper echelons of Irish freemasonry".²⁹ However, it is doubtful whether the Jacobite leanings of noblemen who fought on the side

²⁶ Dickson 1987, pp. 128-129.

²⁷ A protest against the halfpence in October 1724 was signed by two future grand masters and "the grandfather of a third". Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 46-47.

²⁸ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 70-72

of James II constitute reliable evidence of the political opinions of their sons and grandsons forty years later.

Given that many prominent freemasons came from the landed class, it was inevitable that many of them were also involved in politics. For instance, William Ponsonby, the 2nd Earl of Bessborough (1704-1793) was a Whig politician who held many high offices in both Britain and Ireland. However, his brief tenure as senior grand warden of the Irish grand lodge had occurred long before, when he still only a 27-year-old MP for Co. Kilkenny.³⁰ Charles Daly, MP for Co. Galway, was appointed provincial deputy grand master of Connaught in 1757. His counterpart for Munster was Thomas Mathew of Annfield, Co. Tipperary.³¹ Mathew, who was associated with the surviving Catholic members of the Ormond family, was to be the "convert interest" candidate in the Tipperary election of 1761.³² Although Mathew's fiercely contested election is thus an early case of a prominent freemason in Irish politics, there is no evidence that Mathew's masonic activities played any role in the election contest.

Until 1771, disputed parliamentary elections were resolved by a vote in the House of Commons. As this procedure was open to abuse, a reform bill was passed, giving the powers of decision to a parliamentary select committee instead. Larry Conlon has suggested that the campaign to achieve this reform - or the 1761 Mullingar election dispute that led to the reform - was the starting point for masonic involvement in Irish politics. The defeated candidate in Mullingar was one John Nugent, who was trying to challenge the dominant Forbes (Earls of Granard) interest. According to Conlon, Nugent was "descended from a powerful masonic family".³³ Conlon's view that "the freemasons played no small part in bringing this reform about"³⁴ would require evidence to support it, however.

7.1.2. The 1776 general election

The first three undisputed cases of involvement in Irish politics by organised groups of freemasons took place during or soon after the 1776 general election, all of

²⁹ Murphy 1994, p. 80.

³⁰ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 146-148.

³¹ *Dublin Gazette* 16 July 1757.

³² Mathew was elected but unseated following an election petition. Dickson 1987, pp. 131-132. He went on to become grand master of the English (Antients) grand lodge, 1766-70.

³³ The 6th Earl of Westmeath (grand master in 1763-64) and Robert Nugent (junior grand warden in 1732). Conlon 1997b, p. 151, fn. 24.

them in Ulster. According to Aiken McClelland, the main issue that inflamed the voters in Co. Fermanagh was a recent bill aiming to relax some economic aspects of the penal laws. A sitting MP, Sir Arthur Brooke, had supported the bill and another candidate, William Irvine, set out to defeat him on an anti-papist platform. Brooke claimed that many of his supporters had not been able to vote because of a mob of two to three hundred freemasons, armed with cudgels and whips, who favoured his rival, roamed the streets of Enniskillen. Despite the alleged interference, Brooke won by three votes and Irvine's defeat led to more rioting by the masons. A war of petitions and counter-petitions between Brooke and Irvine followed.³⁵

The same general election in County Antrim also produced an interesting narrative of masonic involvement. A reception in Ballymena in honour of a victorious candidate, James Wilson, included a procession of

*ten thousand men with blue cockades...next to these 400 freemasons, attired in their jewels, armed with carbines for the purpose of saluting, and preceded by a large band of music, and colours made for the occasion, descriptive of their different lodges, and embroidered with various emblematical figures; to these succeeded 500 young women, habited in white, ornamented with blue ribbons...The masons lined the street from the entrance into the town, to the tavern, where dinner was served.*³⁶

In Antrim, the most important issue at stake was the role of the Presbyterians in the Irish polity. Attempts to circumscribe Presbyterian political influence through measures such as the Vestry Act of 1774 led to the fielding of independent candidates. Although the Vestry Act was repealed before the election, Wilson stood nevertheless and was elected.³⁷ Wilson had taken a test prescribed by his constituents: he was to refuse any place or pension offered by the government, to obey the instructions of his constituents and to work for a reform of the Irish parliament and for the repeal of Poyning's Law.³⁸

According to Conlon, the incidents involving Irvine and Wilson prove that the general election was contested by "masonic candidates who set up in opposition to the

³⁴ Conlon 1997b, p. 134.

³⁵ *The Journals of the House of Commons*, vol. IX, pp. 298, 313, 354, 377, 381. McClelland 1962, pp. 17-18. The bill that roused the ire of Irvine and his supporters may have been one of several such bills introduced in the early 1770s, such as the 1774 bills "to permit Papists to take lots of ground on building leases" and "for granting liberty to the Papists to lend money upon mortgages". Brady 1965, pp. 155-161, 164-165.

³⁶ McClelland 1962, p. 17. Also quoted in Stewart 1993 p. 53.

³⁷ Tesch 1993, pp. 42-43.

sitting members from the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy".³⁹ It is true that Irvine, the Fermanagh candidate, was a prominent freemason: he was appointed provincial deputy grand master of Ulster in the election year of 1776.⁴⁰ What Wilson's masonic affiliation - if any - was at the time is not clear. He was not registered for the only warranted lodge in Ballymena at the time⁴¹ which of course does not rule out the possibility that he was a member of a lodge elsewhere (or did not bother to have his membership registered in Dublin). He later joined the "Orange Lodge" of Belfast.⁴² The label "masonic candidate" is not particularly informative and may obscure the fact that there was a real political contest over a real political issue taking place in both constituencies.

The argument that these events constituted a challenge to the "Anglo-Irish Ascendancy" also seems exaggerated. A member of one of the most prominent landed families of Fermanagh, William Irvine of Castle Irvine was definitely a member of the "Ascendancy", howsoever defined.⁴³ Captain Wilson's challenge, if such it was, proved to be short-lived. Wilson had resigned his captain's commission in the army when he devoted himself to politics. The grandiose gesture may have helped him to win the election, but it also deprived him of what little income he had. As the expected annuity from his constituents was not paid as regularly as he would have wished, Wilson turned for help to the very government that he had set out to oppose. In return for his support in parliament, he was made captain of a revenue cutter.⁴⁴

Despite the brevity of Wilson's personal involvement in the challenge to the powers-that-were, his campaign may well have been a watershed in Ulster politics. However, the key character was not Wilson himself, but his chief canvasser and publicist, the journalist Hugh Boyd (1746 - 1794). The grandson and namesake of the landlord of

³⁸ Stewart 1993 p. 52.

³⁹ Conlon 1997b, pp. 135, 151 fn. 29.

⁴⁰ Patent appointing William Irvine provincial deputy grand master of Ulster, 1 August 1776. GLI. Irvine had probably been a mason since before 1774 at least: in that year he served as the first master of a lodge constituted in Irvinestown. Register, 1st series, lodge 513 (5 May 1774).

⁴¹ Register, 1st series, lodge 317.

⁴² Register, 1st series, lodge 257 (4 May 1781). At the time, Wilson was famous (or notorious) for having in 1772 fought a duel with Viscount Dunluce. See the short biography of Wilson in McClelland 1968, p. 83. Dunluce, later the 6th Earl and 1st Marquis of Antrim, was grand master of Irish masons in 1772-74 and 1778-82. Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 208.

⁴³ Irvine may have been previously MP for Ratoath, Co. Meath, a borough owned by his in-laws, the Lowther family. Belmore 1885, p. 47.

⁴⁴ Stowe MSS 73, miscellaneous books, vol. 1, Co. Antrim. Reprinted in Sayles 1954, p. 233 and fn. 2. According to the Dublin Castle official who wrote the manuscript, Wilson had been disinherited by his father, which (if correct and not hostile gossip) obviously made him even more vulnerable to the offers of the highest bidder, the government. The defection obviously did not endear Wilson to the Co. Antrim voters: he was not re-elected at the next election.

Ballycastle, Boyd had returned to Ireland from London "for the express purpose of attending the general election, as well as of giving his vote...to his friend Mr. Wilson, and of managing the canvass on his side". His most visible contribution to Wilson's campaign was the publication of his pamphlet *The Freeholder...addressed to the electors of the county of Antrim*.⁴⁵

Boyd's *Freeholder* expressed many ideas which were to be repeated again and again by later reformers. The Volunteers of the 1780s would continue his constitutional struggle to uphold the classical mixed constitution of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, derived from the Greek philosopher Polybios: "[Ireland] will exert her duty to resist the violations of her constitution, whether attempted by monarchy on the throne, or aristocracy around it". The parliamentary reformers and even more extreme radicals of the 1790s would subscribe to Boyd's assertion that "servile subjection to superiours [sic], as they are called but who are really superiour in nothing but the accidents of rank and title".⁴⁶

In addition to his literary contribution, Hugh Boyd is interesting also because his excursus into Antrim politics has left us a third narrative of masonic involvement in the public sphere in addition to the events in Enniskillen and Ballymena. The reception given to Wilson in Ballymena resembles the one given to Boyd in Ballycastle in the following year (1777) on his return "from England...amidst the congratulations of the gentlemen of the neighbourhood, and of a numerous and respectable tenantry. Lodge No. 432 [a predominantly Presbyterian lodge] escorted Mr. Boyd into town, dressed in their uniform".⁴⁷ Boyd himself was probably a freemason and there was a close connection between his family and freemasonry in Ballycastle.⁴⁸

What then is the character and significance of this early masonic involvement in politics? An anti-corruption and pro-Dissenter candidate in Antrim and an anti-Catholic rights candidate in Fermanagh, one a prominent freemason, both supported by some at least of their local freemasons - it is not much of a pattern to base conclusions on.

⁴⁵ Lawrence Dundas Campbell's introduction to *The miscellaneous works of Hugh Boyd...Vol. I*, pp. 5, 206-207.

⁴⁶ Boyd, Hugh: *The freeholder. A series of letters, addressed to the electors of the county of Antrim*, pp. 10-11 (reprinted in *The miscellaneous works of Hugh Boyd...Vol. I*).

⁴⁷ BNL 1 July 1777. For a discussion of the significance of the reception given to Boyd in the context of class and religious divisions among Ballycastle freemasons, chapter 5.1.1.

⁴⁸ A Hugh Boyd was registered a member of a Ballycastle lodge in 1766, when the future journalist was twenty years old. Register, 1st series, lodge 431 (24 June 1766). Several other Boyds (presumably related) were among the early members of the lodge.

However, there are other sources that combined with what we know of the two election contests may suggest even more intriguing possibilities. The significant peak of 1776 - 1777 in the curve of membership registrations in the grand lodge books (see chapter 3) may indicate that the incidents at Enniskillen, Ballymena and Ballycastle were just the tip of the iceberg and that more substantive processes of mobilisation were taking place beneath the surface. Perhaps the influx of new members into the masonic lodges of Ulster in 1776 - 1777 was the first wave of the popular politicisation and mobilisation that later took the form of Volunteer units. To rephrase Conlon's argument somewhat, it could be argued that a challenge to the political ascendancy (or at least to the government of the day) was emerging and that it was taking - in some cases and localities - the form of freemasonry. It may not be implausible to suggest that in Co. Antrim at least, freemasonry in 1776 was associated with reform.

7.1.3. The impact of the American war

Steven C. Bullock has argued that the "Antient" lodges of New England, drawing their membership from lower down the social scale than their opponents, the "Moderns", were closely linked to the 1770s politicisation in the colonies. According to Bullock, "Ancient lodges were most popular among groups that claimed increased political participation" and "republican ideas had particular resonance" for them. Having expanded the social boundaries of freemasonry, the Antients detached it from other "élite practices and pretensions" discredited by the American revolution and made masonry part of the common imagery of American republicanism.⁴⁹

As regards Ireland, the seemingly sudden emergence of a fully-fledged link between Volunteer corps and masonic lodges in the 1780s makes more sense if we look beyond the Irish shores for similar developments that might have given the impetus for it. The trend to link "patriotic" armed associations and masonic membership was not unique to Ireland and did not originate there: it started in the American colonies, where developments within freemasonry appear to have paved the way for a more substantial political mobilisation. Although the evidence is not conclusive, it seems likely that these developments in a region so closely linked with Ireland (particularly with Ulster)⁵⁰ and finally, the war between the colonists and the Crown, were among the factors that

⁴⁹ Bullock 1990, pp. 367-368. However, when the American war broke out, the division between rebels and loyalists did not coincide with the Antient-Modern division. Cerza 1976, p. 171.

⁵⁰ Emigration from Ulster to America had been unusually intense in the years immediately before the war. Dickson 1987, pp. 143-144.

contributed to the sudden rise in the popularity of freemasonry that culminated in the Volunteer period of the early 1780s.

As the war in America went on, freemasonry there became increasingly associated with the cause of the colonists and consequently, the cause of freedom from perceived oppression in general. It is unclear to what extent this popular association of freemasonry with the republican virtues, developing in America, was known in Ireland at the time. Unfortunately, there has been no systematic study of newspapers or private correspondence between Ireland and America that would throw light on this topic. At the very least, the developments in America and Ireland must be seen as linked parallel processes, cross-fertilised by some interaction and exchange of ideas but developing individually from somewhat similar sets of perceived grievances. However, it can also be argued that the parallels with Ireland are too obvious to be accidental. Given the close links between the colonies and Ulster in particular, it is very likely that the American events inspired some at least among Irish freemasons to follow suit.

As early as in June 1775, the members of a Pennsylvanian lodge were taking part in military exercises; their St. John's Day celebrations of 1776 and 1777 included thirteen toasts in tribute to the thirteen united colonies.⁵¹ The similarity to the later Irish Volunteers is obvious, and suggests that the masons of Ballymena in 1776 (see above) may have been "*armed with carbines*" for other reasons besides "*saluting*". A further indication of probable American influence is the way in which the custom of masonic funerals evolved. Commemorations such as the burial in March 1776 of the revolutionary general Joseph Warren, grand master of the Antients of Massachusetts,⁵² were probably precedents for the Irish Volunteer funerals with "masonic and military honours".

Also among the features that originated in America but were eagerly adopted in Ireland, was the habit of masonic lodges issuing political resolutions. A 1777 resolution of a Pennsylvanian lodge referred to "the unnatural and cruel war, in which this continent is now engaged, with the despotic king of England, who is endeavoring to deprive the inhabitants of this land of their inestimable and just rights and privileges". However, the one event which possibly had the greatest influence in wedding the American cause and the ideals of freemasonry together, was the celebration of St. John's Day in Philadelphia on 28 December 1778. Attended by almost 300 freemasons, including George

⁵¹ Huss 1986, p. 39.

Washington, it was the largest public gathering of American masons ever held and the first in which Washington was actively involved. The events were reported in Pennsylvanian newspapers.⁵³ As it happens, these events took place exactly when the political crisis in Ireland was deepening: the news would have travelled across the Atlantic just at the time when the Volunteers movement was about to enter the stage of mass mobilisation in the spring of 1779.

In Ireland, joining a movement known to include American leaders such as Washington and Franklin⁵⁴ may have become a way of registering one's protest against the war and certainly a fashionable thing to do.⁵⁵ In the light of the membership statistics quoted above, it could be argued that such a process may have started during the early stages of the American war, first manifested itself during the 1776 general election and then developed gradually over the next few years. However, as will be shown in the next chapter, the link between freemasonry and Volunteering in the late 1770s was not clear or automatic. A slump in masonic registrations followed in 1778 - 1780, exactly when the Volunteers were increasing in number and influence. Yet a link of some kind there was: one indication of this is the career of William Irvine, the unsuccessful Fermanagh parliamentary candidate of 1776. The provincial deputy grand master of Ulster, Irvine was technically the highest-ranking freemason of the whole province. An empty *honoris causa* title, it might be argued, as unlike his counterpart in Munster, he did not run an organised provincial grand lodge. Nevertheless, six years later, it was Irvine who - of all the otherwise not too significant Ulster gentlemen who had once run unsuccessfully for parliament - was to be the chairman of the Volunteer convention at Dungannon.

⁵² Bullock 1996, pp. 110-111. Warren had been killed at the battle of Bunker Hill in June 1776, but his body was only recovered by the Americans the following year.

⁵³ Huss 1986, pp. 39-41. The celebration was postponed by one day, as 27 December fell on a Sunday.

⁵⁴ A. T. Q. Stewart mentions an incident in which Benjamin Franklin was, during his visit to Ireland in 1771, treated kindly by the Earl of Hillsborough and his son Lord Kilwarlin (i.e. the future first and second marquess of Downshire) and ascribes this to masonic sense of fraternity existing even between political opponents. Stewart 1993, pp. 174-175. However, no evidence has been produced to date to show that the Hills were masons before 1784, the year when they were registered as members of the then most fashionable Belfast lodge (although it was not unusual to be a member long before the formal grand lodge registration). Register, 1st series, lodge 257 (2 February 1784).

⁵⁵ Contemporaries acknowledged the "fashion" aspect: "*'tis now not only honourable but fashionable to be a free-mason*". Dedication, *Ahiman Rezon* (Belfast 1782 edition), p. viii.

7.2. The Volunteers

The Volunteer period is when freemasonry burst forcefully onto the Irish political scene and was to remain there for twenty years. The relationship between the Volunteers of the 1780s and freemasonry is a complicated issue that, however, is usually taken for granted and explained away by vague references to the Enlightenment. That relationship is, although not in doubt, more complex than it may seem at first glance.

It is difficult to point out exactly when or where the Volunteer movement began. Volunteer units of some sort had been recruited in Ulster during all the major crises since the rebellion of 1641. This had happened several times within living memory and "the matrix of local military action was already in place" when the American war broke out.¹ David Dickson stresses that the Volunteers ("local paramilitary groups" as he calls them) sprang from two sources. The first source were the armed companies formed in the south-east and south midlands of Ireland to counter agrarian disturbances, consisting of Protestant gentry and tenants. The other source were the corps based on the example of the first Belfast units set up in 1778: democratic bodies that elected their own officers and were determined to remain outside government control. The distinct origins of the corps were blurred in the mass mobilisation of 1779.²

The political leanings of corps of the first type were often, although not always, conservative; later Orangemen regarded them as part of their own pedigree. In fact, the mysterious eighteenth-century Boyne Society or societies that crop up in every history of the Orange Order as an earlier model for their organisation were apparently not fraternal organisations in the Orange or masonic sense at all. Instead, they may simply have been gentry-led Volunteer corps set up in Cork and elsewhere in the south of Ireland in 1776 - 1778. Ogle R. Gowan, writing in 1825, gives a list of such "societies" and a description that perfectly fits a Volunteer corps but hardly a lodge of any sort: *"the above named associations received no pay, found their own clothing and appointments, but were armed shortly after their formations by government"*.³ There is no evidence of any specifically "masonic" involvement in the formation of this type of companies, unless we regard as such a corps set up in 1777 by the 2nd Earl of Belvedere, a Co. Westmeath magnate,

¹ Stewart 1993, pp. 6-7, 15-16, 19. The latest such incidents were the Jacobite rising of 1745, the Belfast food riots of 1756 and the French raid on Carrickfergus in 1760.

² Dickson 1987, pp. 148-149.

who had been grand master of Ireland in 1774 - 1775. Lepper and Crossle credit him with being "the first reviewing general of a Volunteer force consisting of 1000 infantry and 600 cavalry".⁴

The link between Irish freemasonry and Volunteering was for long completely ignored by historians largely because later Irish Catholicism and consequently, nationalism, did not approve of masonry. For instance, Thomas MacNevin's 1845 history of the Volunteers, nationalist and dedicated to the pro-Repeal politician William Smith O'Brien as it was, did not mention freemasonry at all.⁵ The connection was first seriously discussed only in the 1930s by the Rev. Patrick Rogers, who noted that "there were a few corps raised exclusively from members of Masonic lodges, and there must have been a considerable Masonic element in many others". Rogers correctly noted the tendency of masonic historians to look upon links between the two movements as undesirable. However, he asserted that "we cannot afford to neglect the Masonic influence, for the Volunteer leaders who were most disposed for alliance with the Catholics, were Masons" and that many Catholics hoped to achieve "recognition by the Volunteers through the good graces of the Masonic members".⁶

Modern scholars differ as to whether freemasons became Volunteers (as argued by Rogers) or the other way round. "Once the fact of Masonic involvement in the Volunteer movement is realised, its extent becomes staggering", writes A. T. Q. Stewart, quoting the many cases of closely linked volunteer corps and masonic lodges.⁷ On the other hand, Jim Smyth suggests that the revival of interest in freemasonry in the early 1780s "appears to have been stimulated by the other fashion which animated Irish public life in this period: Volunteering".⁸ It can be argued that "unprecedented interest" might be a better term than "revival" to describe what was happening in Irish freemasonry at the time. Nevertheless, for Smyth Volunteering comes first, its enthusiasm influencing and stimulating masonic lodges. Rogers and Stewart, on the other hand, reverse the relationship. However, should the American influence (as suggested above) prove to have been decisive as more research is carried out, the whole argument could be found

³ Gowan, Ogle R: *Annals and defence of the Loyal Orange Institution of Ireland*, p. 41. For a closer analysis of the Boyne Society, see chapter 10.2.2.

⁴ Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 211.

⁵ MacNevin turned the Volunteer leaders into idealised portraits of Irish patriots. For instance, "Colonel Irwin [Irvine], a gentleman of rank, a man firm and cautious, of undoubted courage but great prudence, presided as chairman" at the Dungannon Volunteer convention. His masonic role (see chapter 7.1.2) at the time was not mentioned. MacNevin 1845, p. 156.

⁶ Rogers 1934, pp. 61-62.

⁷ Stewart 1993, p. 174.

superfluous. The link between freemasonry and patriotic armed associations may have been (and probably was) imported wholesale from the American colonies.

7.2.1. The early phase, 1778 - 1780

Early in 1778, France joined the war on the American side, triggering in Ireland a wave of enthusiasm to form Volunteer corps to defend the country, perceived to be defenceless in the absence of most regular troops. Although not enthusiastic about the creation of an independent armed force of dubious loyalty, the viceroy decided to release arms from government depots to the Volunteers in May 1779. In a matter of weeks, the total strength of the Volunteers rose from 16 000 to 40 000, half of them in Ulster.⁹ Next November, the Volunteers manifested their new-found strength by turning the Dublin birthday celebrations of William III into a demonstration for "free trade", or unrestricted trade with the British colonies.

If the Volunteers were in many ways a continuation of older Irish Protestant military formations, they also had more recent model: the militias and armies of the American rebels. The American example of a link between military life and freemasonry was constantly present throughout the heyday of the Irish Volunteers. For instance, St. John's Day in June 1779 was celebrated at West Point by over a hundred masons, all Continental Army officers and again including Washington. A great increase in enthusiasm for masonry among American officers followed; at least 42% of generals commissioned by the Continental Congress were or later became freemasons.¹⁰ Next winter, at yet another St. John's Day celebration on 27 December 1779, a number of officers proposed the formation of a United States grand lodge with Washington as its grand master.¹¹

However, the massive increase in Volunteer strength did not translate into an equally massive influx into masonic lodges. The admittedly incomplete data of grand lodge registrations shows decreasing interest in freemasonry in Ulster during these early years of the Volunteer movement. After the peak of 1776 (219 registrations) and 1777 (210 registrations), which may have been partly due to a popular protest against the

⁸ Smith 1993, p. 170.

⁹ Bardon 1992, pp. 211-212.

¹⁰ Bullock 1996 pp. 121-122

¹¹ Bullock 1996, p. 116. The attempt to form a single grand lodge for all the United States eventually failed.

American war, there are three much more quiet years: only 71 registrations in 1778, 155 in 1779 and 175 in 1780. Coincidentally or not, these are the years when the Volunteer organisation was built up in earnest. Thus there is little evidence of a close link between freemasonry and Volunteers on the basis of these figures. One is left with the impression that in the Volunteering enthusiasm, freemasonry was left behind. Possibly its role as a vehicle of pro-American protest was over, now that the Americans were allied with France and pro-American sentiments could be interpreted as disloyal and pro-French? Or perhaps joining the masons was simply not the trendy thing to do anymore - the apron lost out to Volunteer uniform?¹²

That Irish freemasonry as a whole was not a political movement even at the height of the Volunteer movement, can be easily established by a quick look at its highest echelons. Although there were some politically active grand masters, there is no consistent pattern of such people filling the chair in the grand lodge of the 1770s or early 1780s, rather the opposite. Political direction or involvement was notably lacking during the first years the Volunteer movement; only a couple of the grand masters seem to have had any links with the emerging Volunteer movement. William Robert Fitzgerald first served as grand master in 1770 - 1772 but there is no record of any political involvement; he was twenty-one years old when first elected and only just returned from a grand tour on the continent.¹³ The next grand master was Randal William MacDonnell, Viscount Dunluce, who was characterised as "a social rather than a political figure".¹⁴ He was succeeded in 1774 by an apparently slightly more political figure, the 2nd Earl of Belvedere, who was in office at the time when the American war started. In 1776 he left his office as grand master; he was later credited with the formation of one of the first Volunteer corps in 1777.¹⁵ The next nobleman to preside in the grand lodge was the 1st

¹² In the summer of 1778, a correspondent of the *Dublin Evening Post* (who happened to be none other than Amyas Griffith, the soon-to-be reorganiser of Belfast freemasonry, writing from Bridgetown, Co. Wexford) mocked the then prevalent Volunteering fashion: "*The ladies are ruined by this unlucky spirit's prevailing, for...it may now happen...[that a] Miss may be engaged in small chat with a good military cob[b]ler in regimentals, whom the dear innocent had taken for a major, and whom she would not so much as look at, were he not en garbe militaire from head to foot*". Brady 1965, p. 190 (quoting *Dublin Evening Post* 4 August 1778).

¹³ William Robert Fitzgerald, Marquess of Kildare, from 1773 the 2nd Duke of Leinster (1748/49 - 1804), grand master in 1770 - 1772 and 1777 - 1778. Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 202-206.

¹⁴ Georgian Society publications, vol. iv. Quoted in Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 208. Randal William MacDonnell, Viscount Dunluce, from 1775 the 6th Earl of Antrim, from 1789 the 1st Marquess (1749 - 1791). Grand master in 1772 - 1774 and 1778 - 1782. Grand master of England (Antients), 1783 - 1791. Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 208-209.

¹⁵ George August Rochfort, 2nd Earl of Belvedere (1738 - 1814, also known as Viscount Belfield long after he succeeded to the earldom as he did not take his seat in the Lords), grand master 1774 - 1776. Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 211.

Earl of Mornington, whose main interest was music rather than politics; he was grand master only for one year.¹⁶

In 1777, at the time when masonic recruitment in Ulster was reaching a peak, Fitzgerald (now the 2nd Duke of Leinster) returned to the chair. By far the most active politically of the grand masters, he was already a prominent opposition leader despite his young age; his second term as grand master lasted only for a year. Later, Fitzgerald was active in securing parliamentary support for the Volunteers, organising in 1779 votes of thanks to the Volunteers in the Irish parliament. More radical plans for parliamentary independence did not get his support,¹⁷ however, and he later reverted to supporting the government.

The "social rather than political" Macdonnell, now the 6th Earl of Antrim, returned to office in 1778, taking over from Fitzgerald just as the Volunteer movement was just starting in earnest, and remained in office until 1782. In the summer of that year, in the immediate aftermath of the Dungannon Volunteer convention and the second Catholic Relief Act and only a couple of days after the repeal of the Declaratory Act of 1720, one might expect a more exciting figure to emerge to lead the Irish freemasons. However, Macdonnell was succeeded by a twenty-two-year old nonentity, the 2nd Earl of Mornington, whose main claim to fame at the time (although he went on to become governor-general of India and brother of the famous 1st Duke of Wellington) was that his late father, the music enthusiast, had been grand master six years before.¹⁸

7.2.2. "Not only honourable but fashionable to be a freemason": 1781 - 1783

If there had been an apparent lull in the affairs of Ulster freemasonry, it came to an abrupt end in the early 1780s. A series of interlinked local and national events brought Ulster masonry into the limelight. As with the new-style Volunteer companies of 1778, the powerhouse of this change was the town of Belfast. The impressive revival of interest in freemasonry in Belfast in the 1780s was traditionally ascribed to the influence of Amyas Griffith. He had risen in the excise service to be inspector-general for Munster, but fell from that post because of a scandal involving himself and a clergyman's wife. Griffith was

¹⁶ Garret Wellesley, the 1st Earl of Mornington (d. 1781, aged 45), grand master 1776 -1777. Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 212-213.

¹⁷ Dickson 1987, pp. 146, 149, 152.

¹⁸ Richard Colley Wellesley, 2nd Earl of Mornington (1760 - 1842), grand master 1782 - 1783. Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 215-216.

appointed to a much less prestigious post in Belfast in 1780 and being an active freemason, set out to revive the Belfast lodges.

However central Griffith's role was, it is unlikely that it was the only or the decisive influence given the unique character among Irish towns of Belfast itself. Renewal of leases by the 5th Earl of Donegall in the late 1760s had contributed towards revitalisation of the economic life of the town in the following decades. The new-found confidence of the Belfast middle classes was shown in the construction of many new private and public buildings and the economic activity was further stimulated by the building of the Lagan Canal. However, political power remained exclusively in the hands of the sole landlords of the town, the Donegalls. They alone nominated the sovereign (mayor) and burgesses of Belfast and consequently, the two members of parliament for the town. It has been suggested that this combination of economic success and political deprivation led to radicalism: demands for parliamentary reform found support in Belfast, as did United Irish republicanism soon after.¹⁹

Two masonic lodges had been warranted for Belfast in 1748 and two more in 1755-56. The oldest two lost all contact with the grand lodge by 1760 and probably ceased meeting sometime after that as contact was not re-established later. By 1782, the surviving members of one of them were referred to as "*the gentlemen who formerly composed the Old Blue Lodge*".²⁰ Of the next two lodges, one (no. 257) maintained contact with Dublin until 1763. It was to be revived and to become the famous "Belfast Orange Lodge" of the Volunteering era. The other one (no. 272) provided a steady trickle of entries into the grand lodge books throughout the 1760s and 1770s.²¹

Amyas Griffith arrived on the Belfast scene in 1780, during the American war and the Volunteer enthusiasm. He remained a prominent freemason and an active participant in other civic activities until he was again dismissed from the excise service in 1785 (after a disastrous involvement in the 1783 Carrickfergus by-election) and moved to Dublin soon after. According to A. T. Q. Stewart, Griffith "single-handedly created a revival of

¹⁹ Crawford 1993, pp. 62-63.

²⁰ Register, 1st series, entry for lodge 182 shows last registration in 1757. The other lodge, 183, was not even included in the register compiled c. 1760. IMR mentions a revival of 182 in 1782 (actually 1784 - see grand lodge minutes, 11 March 1784), but there is no evidence to indicate that it was successful. No post-1782 registrations of members took place. The former members of 182 are referred to in BNL 29 June 1781 and 28 June 1782.

²¹ Register, 1st series (lodges 257 and 272). GLI.

freemasonry", his outstanding contribution to it being the revitalisation of lodge 257,²² soon to be the most fashionable one in Belfast. However, Griffith did not have to start from scratch: the continuing registrations by lodge 272 and the survival of several members of the old lodge 182 (see above) show that there was a continuous presence of freemasonry in Belfast throughout the 1760s and 1770s. A 1782 list of Belfast lodges gave their numbers as follows:

Orange Lodge 257: c. 120 members
New Blues: c. 30 members
[no name] 491: upwards of 40 members
Rodney's Lodge [no. 587]: upwards of 30 members
*Also a Military Lodge 354.*²³

The population of Belfast in 1791 was estimated at 18 320, of which 8 932 were males.²⁴ How does the membership of Belfast lodges compare with the latter figure? If we only include the members registered - for the sake of argument - during fifteen years prior to 1791, the number of registered masons in Belfast would have been 482.²⁵ This is just over five per cent of the male population. As we have seen, the real figure would be much higher than the registered membership (see chapter 3.3.1.), but it is difficult to establish how much higher exactly. The upper-class lodge 257 probably had a higher percentage of its members registered at the grand lodge than some of the newer and less exclusive ones.

The first great step in the transformation of freemasonry to a political force was the approach adopted by lodge 257 to their St. John's Day parade in June 1781. Although the Irish freemasons had not been particularly secretive, they had neither actively sought publicity nor put it to a political use. Lodge 257 changed all that by publishing notices of the parade both beforehand and afterwards, thanking the minister who preached the St. John's Day sermon.²⁶ From then onwards, St. John's Day parades were turned into important civic events for which maximum publicity was sought. This transformation rather than simple "revival" of masonry in Belfast is where we can probably detect the hand of Amyas Griffith, energetically managing the public relations of freemasonry in a new and

²² Stewart 1993, pp. 57, 166.

²³ *Ahiman Rezon* (Belfast ed. 1782).

²⁴ BNL 28 October 1791.

²⁵ The number of members registered in 1776 - 1791 for Belfast lodges (given in parentheses after lodge number) is as follows: Lodge no. 257 (175 members), no. 272 (74), no. 491 (96), no. 587(48), no. 621 (46), no. 636 (14), no. 684 (12), no. 687 (17). Register, 1st series. GLI.

²⁶ BNL 15 June, 26 June, 29 June 1781.

innovative way. Newspaper notices of St. John's Day events - although not a new idea²⁷ - were an important tool in this process. Until then, masonic items in the northern papers had mostly been either news about major masonic events, appointments of a new grand master for instance; or notices of events open to non-masonic participants, such as theatre performances organised by masonic lodges.

Lodge 257 assumed an undisputed position of leadership among the Belfast lodges. It managed to recruit practically everyone that mattered in and near Belfast: peers, gentry, merchants and ministers, all brought together by the organisational skill and showmanship of Griffith.²⁸ Although other lodges took part in the 1781 parade, they were referred to as "*the masters, wardens and brethren of...subordinate lodges*".²⁹ Other lodges soon followed the example of the media campaign by lodge 257 by inserting advertisements of their own in increasing numbers.

The first Volunteer convention in Dungannon on 15 February 1782 was attended by the representatives of 143 Ulster corps. The delegates passed a series of resolutions attacking perceived grievances relating to the way Ireland was governed, among them the claim of the British government to have the right to legislate for Ireland as enshrined in Poyning's Law of 1494 and the Declaratory Act of 1720. They also expressed their satisfaction at the recent relaxation of the penal laws against Catholics.

As we have seen, William Irvine, the chairman chosen for the convention of 15 February, was not only an ordinary delegate of his corps, the "Lowtherstown Masonick Volunteers" but also a prominent freemason. Although contemporary accounts of the February convention do not mention Irvine's masonic role, it was apparently known to his contemporaries. After a second convention in June, a masonic lodge publicly declared that they were "*convinced of his sincerity as a freemason and a lover of his country*" (see below).³⁰ This it seems unlikely that Irvine would have become the chairman of the convention solely on the merits of being a Fermanagh landlord and a sometime unsuccessful parliamentary candidate; there were many others who would have qualified if those were the criteria. One is inclined to think that he must have been chosen because of prominence in some other walk of life. In Irvine's case, the one source of such

²⁷ See e.g. the notice by lodge no. 362 of Derry in *Londonderry Journal*, 16 June 1778.

²⁸ For Griffith's eccentric career, masonic and otherwise, see Stewart 1993, pp. 166-169.

²⁹ BNL 29 June 1781.

³⁰ BNL 28 June 1782.

prominence was his position as the provincial grand master of Ulster and as such, the honorary head of all the freemasons of Ulster.

In May 1782, couple of months after the first convention, an editor in Belfast (probably Amyas Griffith) finished an edition of *Ahiman Rezon*, Laurence Dermott's classic book of masonic constitutions. The dedication to lodge 257 shows that freemasonry of the "enlightened" type had definitely arrived in Ulster. Volunteer politics had left their mark on Ulster freemasonry, reflecting the Convention's demand for concessions to Catholics if not more:

*You pay no particular attention to country, religion, or to station, but are happy in diffusing bliss indiscriminately to all the honest and worthy of every denomination, of every country, of every persuasion, and of every rank. And you have not only established one of the most respectable and numerous lodges in the world, in BELFAST, but you have been the glorious means of reviving the Royal Craft all over this province; and lodges which have long lain dormant and neglected, are now forming and reconstituting with redoubled ardour; indeed 'tis now not only honourable but fashionable to be a free-mason. Go on and prosper, and may your endeavours to illumine the hitherto unenlightened part of mankind meet with that success the generous undertaking deserves.*³¹

The accession of a Whig government in Britain had helped the Volunteers to achieve their demands in the spring of 1782, despite an initial defeat in the Irish parliament. Some of the Volunteers were not satisfied, however. On 21 June 1782, a second convention met at Dungannon to call for a definite renunciation of the right of the British parliament to legislate for Ireland, for a reform of the parliament and for a more equal representation of the people.³² Once more, Colonel Irvine had a pivotal role: for his services as the "*President of the Dungannon Glorious Congress*", he was thanked by "*Lodge No. 483 consisting of volunteers...for his polite conduct respecting the emancipation of Ireland: they being convinced of his sincerity as a free mason and lover of his country*".³³

On St. John's Day just three days later, the members of masonic lodge 547 in Newtown Stewart, Co. Tyrone, met and passed resolutions that were to be yet another

³¹ Dedication to lodge 257 in *Ahiman Rezon* (Belfast edition, 1782), p. viii.

³² The demand for the "Renunciation" was the first major split in the Volunteer movement. The measure was advocated especially by Henry Flood, the former leader of the Patriot party, as he tried to regain his former influence. Another party led by Grattan declared itself satisfied with the recent repeal of the 1720 Declaratory Act. Flood's party had it their way in 1783 when the British parliament passed a Renunciation Act. Stewart 1993, pp. 40-43.

³³ BNL 28 June 1782.

turning point in the history of freemasonry and Volunteering. The members of the lodge decided to form themselves into a Volunteer corps called "*the First Free Mason Corps of the Kingdom of Ireland*", adopted a uniform of "*light blue cloth faced with orange*" and appointed officers.³⁴ On the same day, the role of freemasonry as a component of the ideology behind these events was summarised by the Rev. James Bryson in his St. John's Day sermon in Belfast. For Bryson, freemasonry was a model for the society at large:

*Our lodges and fraternities, when the principles of the craft are piously observed, are little moddels [sic] of what would render the world superior to the influence of folly, free from the dominion of vice, the holy residence of ancient faith, subject to the sense of God, and the hallowed retreats of friendship, arising out of love and trust; the abodes of charity, directed by wisdom and liberality.*³⁵

If the reorganisation of the Orange Lodge 257, the role of William Irvine and the publication of the Belfast *Ahiman Rezon* were the high points so far of masonic involvement in "patriot" politics, the setting up of the Newtown Stewart corps was an even more dramatic step in the same direction. It is the first documented instance (with the possible exception of Irvine's Lowtherstown corps) of freemasons, openly and as such, declaring that masonry and Volunteering were just the two sides of a coin: the Newtown Stewart masonic lodge and the new Volunteer corps now actually consisted of the same people. Perhaps significantly, the lodge had been set up in 1777, at the height of masonic recruitment but prior to the large-scale mobilisation and arming of Volunteer troops. This may indicate that the local lodge had been a focus for political disquiet for some time and that this dissension was now taking new forms.

The example of Newtown Stewart was followed by other lodges and corps. In some cases, the links between the corps and the lodge could be very close indeed. In Lifford, Co. Donegal, the two were practically indistinguishable: the members' subscriptions for guns were recorded in the lodge minute books - "*1 gun*" or "*2 guns*" marked against the names of the members. A Rev. Daniel Faloon was elected chaplain "*to our lodge & company*" and resolutions were passed in the lodge about the coats and hats to be worn with Volunteer uniform.³⁶

³⁴ *Londonderry Journal*, 2 July 1782. The resolutions were also reported in Dublin papers: *Dublin Evening Post* 29 June 1782 (quoted in Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 247).

³⁵ Bryson, James: *The duties of masonry briefly stated. A sermon delivered before the Orange Lodge of Belfast, no. 257, 24th June, 1782*, p. 26.

It may be significant that this close connection between soldiering and masonry was formed not before, but after the attainment of the Volunteers' primary aim of parliamentary independence in 1782. Thus the men who established the connection came from the ranks of the more radical Volunteers who went on to pressurise Britain to grant the "Renunciation" and explicitly surrender the right to legislate for Ireland. The American parallel again springs to mind: the ideal of the citizen, who was also a soldier and a freemason had definitely taken root in Ireland by 1782. The "Yankee Club of Stewartstown" which sent a congratulatory address to George Washington in 1783, may or may not have been a masonic lodge as A. T. Q. Stewart suggests.³⁷ However, the address is of interest in other respects: it provides an example of the close personal and family links between Ulster and America. It was the Rev. Thomas Ledlie Birch, who forwarded the address and Washington's reply to the radical *Belfast Mercury* newspaper, and it had been Campbell Dick, his brother-in-law in Philadelphia, who had transmitted the messages from the club to Washington and vice versa. In the address itself, signed by chairman Alexander Davidson, the radical reformers praised the revolutionary general not only for his feats in America, but also for the political changes in Ireland:

*your exertions have not only vindicated the freedom of your country but have also shed their benign influence over the distressed kingdom of Ireland. To you, sir...do we acknowledge ourselves indebted for our late happy deliverance from as baneful a system of policy as ever disgraced the rights of mankind.*³⁸

As the Volunteer movement was beginning to weaken and split, the link between masonry and the radical wing of the Volunteers, masonry and reform politics, was growing ever closer. It reached its apex in September 1783 when a new lodge, the "First Volunteer Lodge" (no. 620) was set up in Dublin in the aftermath of the general election in August. Consisting of Volunteer officers, the lodge decided unanimously to elect Grattan as a member only four days before the meeting of the Volunteers' ill-fated National Convention on 10 November.³⁹

However, Grattan was never initiated in lodge 620. His membership was blocked by the grand lodge, which had the power to veto the election of members to Dublin

³⁶ Lodge 569 minutes (4 September 1782). GLI (available in transcript in Hobbs 1921). Faloon (Faloon) was also chaplain of lodge 346 at Raphoe. Lodge 346 minutes (27 December 1792). GLI.

³⁷ Stewart 1995, p. 180.

³⁸ *Belfast Mercury* 5 October 1784. Birch praises his brother-in-law as "a strenuous advocate for Independence" without specifying whether it is American or Irish independence that he has in mind.

³⁹ Lodge 620 minutes (6 November 1783). GLI.

lodges.⁴⁰ In the summer of 1783, Lord Mornington had been replaced as grand master by Robert Tilson, 1st Lord Muskerry. Muskerry was a government supporter, who had only been elevated to the peerage two years previously and played a prominent ceremonial part at the institution of the Order of St. Patrick in March 1783.⁴¹ According to Lepper and Crossle, he was actively involved in grand lodge affairs unlike so many previous grand masters. If this was the case, there would remain little doubt that the snub to Grattan was sanctioned by Muskerry himself. The refusal to sanction the membership of a political figure as prominent as Grattan probably had a political reason behind it: either political animosity to Grattan or a desire to distance freemasonry from Volunteer politics. However, according to the grand lodge minutes, Muskerry was abroad for much of his first year in office and was only installed as grand master in December 1783 (having been elected in June) and the installation ceremony was the only time he was recorded as having been present at a grand lodge meeting.⁴² Thus Muskerry's precise role remains unknown.

The Grand National Convention of November 1783 and the ensuing defeat of the radical Volunteers seems to have been the last appearance of Colonel Irvine on the stage of national politics. He aligned himself with the Bishop of Derry on the issue of an amendment to a proposed resolution, suggesting that the Protestant suffrage should be extended in the elections for county members also and not only for those sitting for cities, towns, boroughs or manors. Opposed by a large majority including the commander-in-chief, Lord Charlemont, the amendment was defeated, only twenty-six delegates voting for it.⁴³ Irvine was elected to represent Fermanagh on the sub-committee that consisted of one representative per county.⁴⁴

As in 1776, some masonic lodges may have participated in the general election campaign of 1783. A correspondent of the *Londonderry Journal* complained in 1785 that

⁴⁰ Geoghegan 1921, p. 16. *Regulations of 1768*, rule XIII.

⁴¹ Robert Tilson (formerly Deane, 1747 - 1818), 6th Baronet, 1770; MP for Co. Cork, 1776-81; 1st Lord Muskerry, 1781. Grand master, 1783-85. Served also as the governor of Co. Limerick and as privy councillor. Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 217.

⁴² Grand lodge minutes (June 1783 - June 1785). GLI.

⁴³ *Grand National Convention in General Committee*. Stewart of Killymoon papers, D/3167/2/44. PRONI. Irvine's masonic career continued: he was present at a grand lodge meeting in the following year. Grand lodge minutes (4 March 1784). GLI.

⁴⁴ *The history of the proceedings and debates of the Volunteer delegates of Ireland...*p. 26.

masonry had been “brought into disrepute by a prostitution of their principles in a contested election”.⁴⁵

7.2.3. Masonic volunteers or volunteer freemasons?

As we have seen, at the height of the Volunteering enthusiasm it was in some cases difficult to distinguish a Volunteer corps from the local lodge. In some places most freemasons were Volunteers, or most Volunteers were freemasons: one is left with a doubt as to which was their primary identity. Possibly neither - being in arms for a patriotic cause and being the initiated member of an exclusive brotherhood may have been just two sides of the same coin, the ideal of the citizen-soldier. But did this ideal originate with masonry as many people assume? The origins of this mixture of civic, masonic and martial values have not been studied in great detail.

It is worth bearing in mind that freemasonry was originally far from an Enlightenment phenomenon. David Stevenson has argued that as it originated in the late Renaissance period, it belongs in some respects in the same category as other fashionable phenomena of that period such as alchemy and magic. Thus assuming an automatic relationship between freemasonry and the virtues of the Enlightenment can be problematic; it also fails to account for the fact that we have no evidence of any political involvement by Irish masonic lodges before the 1770s. The contacts between the Irish radical masonry and France, the standard-bearer of the Enlightenment, may in fact have been superficial and indirect. Tom Dunne suggests that as in the popular ballads of the 1790s there are few references to the events of the French Revolution but many to Tom Paine and the *Rights of Man*, “in so far as they were absorbed at all, the ideas of the French Revolution were absorbed through the writings of English radicals”.⁴⁶ Likewise, the main inspiration for Irish masonic radicalism may have been British⁴⁷ or, as has been argued in this chapter, American rather than Continental.

⁴⁵ *Londonderry Journal* 30 August 1785. This may be a reference to the incident in Enniskillen in 1776 (see chapter 7.1.2). Although the writer complains in his later letter of “a bad use” having been made of freemasonry in Derry, it is not certain that the comment on the “contested election” refers to Derry or even to the 1783 election. *Londonderry Journal* 4 October 1785.

⁴⁶ Dunne 1990, pp. 144-145.

⁴⁷ British freemasonry was apparently not totally immune to radical tendencies either as a Rev. Richard Munkhouse felt the need to warn the brethren of a Yorkshire lodge against following the example of their ‘illuminated continental brethren’ in 1799. De Montluzin 1988, p. 125.

There were undoubtedly "enlightened" freemasons in Ireland: one such was William Galt (c.1752 - 1812), a mason for forty years, who founded two book societies and a Sunday school in his home town of Doagh, Co. Antrim.⁴⁸ Freemasonry acquired an "enlightenment dimension" at some point but when did it happen in Ireland and to what extent is open to question. One wonders whether literature and newspapers reflecting the political circumstances and arguments of the time of the American war of independence would be a more fruitful starting point in the search for an Irish Enlightenment than freemasonry. The assumption that all that *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité* was somehow inbuilt in the very fabric of freemasonry from the very beginning would need more evidence to support it. At present, it sounds like a more modern and academic version of the conspiracy theories in which freemasonry was some kind of *deus ex machina*, a force with a single mind and purpose that moved things often from behind the scenes and was thus a sufficient explanation for complex historical events. Rather than assume that freemasonry itself triggered revolutions, it could be argued that it may have been only one factor, if a highly visible and popular one, in the tide of civic humanism and its concept of citizenship as derived from the Scottish Enlightenment and the American example.

Whether all this can be taken to mean that the Volunteer movement was "masonic" in character as A. T. Q. Stewart thinks depends on definition. Comments such as Stewart's: "it seems likely that the raising of the [Belfast First Volunteer] company was in part a Masonic initiative"⁴⁹ are hard to substantiate without extensive local and biographical research. That the initial church parade of the Belfast First Company of Volunteers took place on St. John's Day, 1778 (three years before Griffith's lodge turned the masonic St. John's Day parade into a media spectacle) may indicate a masonic link. Yet it need not mean more than that it was convenient to organise such an event on a day that had been traditionally celebrated in that fashion, and thus was "earmarked" in the public mind for parades and other celebrations.

It is hardly possible to present any reliable estimate of the extent of overlap in masonic and Volunteer membership, given the modest amount of local research on both movements. However, cases such as Lifford, where the corps and the lodge were just two facets of the same group of people, seem to have been an exception rather than the rule. For instance, few of the officers of the Armagh First Company, whose captain was Lord

⁴⁸ BNL 10 January 1812. Galt was registered as member of a lodge at Parkgate near Doagh in 1786. Register, 1st series, lodge 294 (19 January 1786).

⁴⁹ Stewart 1993 p. 166.

Charlemont himself, seem to have been freemasons.⁵⁰ The earl was also the captain of the Charlemont Volunteers; none of the officers of that corps appear among the registered members of the lodges that met in the borough of Charlemont.⁵¹ The rank and file seems to have been more interested: 300 freemasons from twenty-three lodges were reported to have attended the funeral in 1784 of William Dodds, a member of the Armagh First Company.⁵² The muster roll of the First Armagh dating from 1785-86 gives only surnames for most of the sixty-four Volunteers below officer rank. However, as in some cases two more members shared a surname, eighteen are identified by both surname and first name. Of the eighteen, six may have been (or later become) freemasons, although in some cases the late registration date suggests that the mason may be a son or other namesake of the Volunteer. One of the six was Thomas Greer, later a prominent freemason as president of the Armagh county committee.⁵³

The lack of interest among the officers and most of the men of "his" corps suggests that Lord Charlemont himself was not a freemason, or at least not an active one. Charlemont's lack of interest is further demonstrated by an account of his funeral in 1799, which (in contrast to Dodds's) lacked any masonic element.⁵⁴ However, it seems that at some stage in the early 1780s Charlemont or someone near him was toying with the idea of a secret patriotic brotherhood. A document among Charlemont's papers details the rules for an "Order of St. Patrick", which closely resembled the freemasons. Charlemont himself would have been the grand master, with the power to grant warrants (or "patents") to hold lodges (called "unions"). There would have been a ballot for membership "one black bean in seven to exclude" and a very thorough oath of secrecy:

⁵⁰ Of the officers listed in Paterson 1942, pp. 31-39, only the "active and able" adjutant, Andrew Boyd (Register, 1st series, lodge 409, 6 February 1783) and the third lieutenant, Lee McKinstry (Register, 1st series, lodge 409, 10 October 1800) were registered for any of the Armagh lodges (nos. 104, 409, 623). McKinstry transferred to another company (Armagh Second) in 1780 but resigned from it in 1782 because of a dispute over the second Dungannon meeting. Paterson 1942, pp. 31, 45-46. He was a mason by December 1799. Lodge 623 minutes (27 December 1799). PGL Armagh.

⁵¹ Register, 1st series, lodges 232 and 395.

⁵² In accordance with the customs of the "masonic and military" funerals of the time (see chapter 6.2.2.), the deceased was "*dressed in scarlet with scarfs and freemason uniforms*". *Belfast Mercury*, 19 October 1784 (quoted in Paterson 1942, p. 38). Dodds may be identical with the "Wm Dobbs", registered as a member of an Armagh lodge. Register, 1st series, lodge 409 (21 February 1774).

⁵³ Register, 1st series: John Campbell (lodge 409, 1 December 1763), Thomas Campbell (409, 13 April 1776), Thomas Greer (695, 8 January 1790; 104 and 409, 3 November 1791), William Oliver (623, 25 October 1799), Robert Palmer (623, 22 December 1787), Robert Palmer (623, 22 December 1787).

⁵⁴ *Dublin Evening Post* 13 August 1799 (quoted in Paterson 1942, p. 39). However, when the yeomanry was set up in 1796, Charlemont was accused of partiality in his selection of officers, on the grounds of "*a freemason business*". William Richardson to NN (26 September [1796]). Reb. 620/25/118. See also chapter 8.3.1.

after swearing, "*the secretary shall tell him that he is not to reveal that he has taken an oath, and that this declaration be also a secret*". The document is undated but the proposed name suggests that it was drawn up before the government appropriated the name "Order of St. Patrick" for the order of knighthood set up in 1783. The promise to support "*the constitution of Ireland, consisting of the king, lords and commons thereof*" and to oppose "*any attempt to bind Ireland by any other legislature on earth*" also suggest a date in the 1780s, during the struggle to free the Irish parliament from restrictions imposed by Westminster. The Volunteering link is also demonstrated by the secret signs to be used by the members to distinguish one another: "*putting his right hand on his left breast under his waistcoat, denoting fidelity to his country, and immediately raising it to his left shoulder, as an emblem that he has a musquet to support the rights of Ireland*".⁵⁵

In the case of Armagh, there is a documented rank-and-file interest in freemasonry combined with apparent relative lack of interest among officers. In other cases, leading Volunteers were masons - for instance, William Trotter, commander of the Downpatrick corps, "The Fusileers", and seneschal of the town. However, as none of the other Volunteer leaders in Downpatrick can be identified as freemasons, the link would not appear to have been very close.⁵⁶ The historian of Larne freemasonry has not detected an overlap between the memberships of the local lodge and the local Volunteer corps, although both were under the patronage of the Earl of Antrim.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Public principles of the Order of St. Patrick. *The manuscripts and correspondence of James, first Earl of Charlemont*, vol. II, undated letters and papers no. 50, pp. 404-405.

⁵⁶ For the Downpatrick Volunteers, see Wilson 1995, p. 140-142. For Trotter, see Register, 1st series, lodge 343 (7 October 1784). GLI. None of the other leaders (Henry West, Matthew Forde Jr, the Hon. Edward Ward, John Auchinleck, the Rev. William Nevin, the Rev. Dr Kennedy) can be identified in the register entries for the two Downpatrick lodges, 343 and 367.

⁵⁷ McCutcheon 1993, pp. 229-230.

7.3. Reform and reaction in the early 1790s

Like other Irishmen, Irish freemasons split into reformers and conservatives in the early 1790s and later, in the mid-1790s, into revolutionaries and loyalists. It is important to keep this distinction in mind. Knowing with hindsight that the cataclysm of the rebellion of 1798 awaits the people whom he is studying, the historian of the 1780s and 1790s may be tempted to study the decades as a story of the development of Irish "radicalism". The problem inherent in this approach is that radicalism in 1782 does not equal radicalism in 1792, much less radicalism in 1798.

To illustrate the complexity of appending "radical" or any other such labels on eighteenth-century individuals, let us take just one example. Lord Donoughmore, the grand master of Irish freemasons, was a "radical" in 1792-93 in the sense that he supported Catholic Emancipation; he was what presumably must be called a "loyalist" in 1798, commanding a yeomanry corps; an ardent "unionist" in 1800; yet he remained a supporter of Catholic rights throughout. Thus one cannot assume that a reformer in 1792-93 automatically became a revolutionary in 1798, or that a loyalist of 1798 was necessarily opposed to concessions to Catholics. As this chapter deals with a period when the two greatest political issues in Ireland were parliamentary reform and Catholic emancipation, terms such as "radical", "reformer" and "conservative" must refer to the position adopted by the individual or lodge in relation to these issues. In 1792-93, the United Irishmen were still a mixed group of people embracing a wide spectrum of reformist opinions; there was no militant separatism and consequently, no militant loyalism. What militancy there was, related to the above-mentioned two great political issues at hand. Thus the terms "revolutionary" and "loyalist" are best reserved to the following chapter 8, which deals with the developments from mid-1790s onwards.

The most important sources for the study of Ulster freemasonry in the early 1790s are the numerous resolutions published by masonic lodges in newspapers. This chapter is mostly based on resolutions published in the *Belfast Newsletter*, together with some items from the *Northern Star*, the United Irish newspaper founded in January 1792.¹ Due to the large number of such resolutions, those discussed in this chapter are by no means an exhaustive selection. Neither has it been possible to study all regions of Ulster in equal

¹ In the preparation of this chapter, I have been helped considerably by access to Commander Keith Cochrane's computerised compilation of the newspaper items of masonic interest in the Crossle collection, GLI.

detail. The main emphasis will be on the counties of Armagh and Tyrone. The reasons why these two were selected was firstly, that they were the only counties where the idea of masonic county committees (see chapter 4.3.) took root. Secondly, as Armagh and Tyrone were the two counties where freemasonry was organised more efficiently than anywhere else in Ireland, they were also the obvious targets for take-over by political factions. This is indeed what happened in 1792-93. However, as will be shown below, the two county committees developed in different directions. Armagh was to be dominated by conservatives, Tyrone by radicals.

7.3.1. The revival of masonic radicalism, 1789 - 1791

After the defeat of the Volunteers in 1783, freemasonry disappeared from the Irish political scene for a while. However, some parliamentary candidates seem to have continued taking advantage of their local masonic lodges while canvassing in much the same mode as during the first documented cases in 1776. The masonic historian W. J. Chetwode Crawley thinks that Arthur Wellesley's (later the 1st Duke of Wellington) decision to join lodge 494 at Trim, Co. Meath in 1790 was done simply in order to ingratiate himself with some of his potential voters for the borough seat. He was accordingly elected and remained MP until 1795; he also paid his membership fees until that year, when his army career took him overseas.²

However, the connection between some masonic lodges and the radical wing of the Volunteer movement was not forgotten. In the excitement caused by the French Revolution, the link between "patriot" politics and the fraternity was revived. Lodge no. 668 at Donaghrisk near Cookstown was an early example of the new awakening of patriot masonry. Only a couple of months after the fall of the Bastille, the brethren of the lodge decided to meet on the next St. John's Day in Winter (27 December) wearing "*the following uniform: blue coats with yellow buttons, scarlet waistcoats... & cocked hats with orange cockades*". Members not dressed as agreed were to be fined the sum of 5s 5d.³ Although there is no record of arms having been carried, the emphasis on "uniform" (rather than on the traditional masonic regalia) clearly demonstrates the Volunteer links or aspirations of the lodge.

² Crawley 1902, pp. 118-122.

³ Lodge 668 minutes (26 November 1789). GLI.

Lodge 668 is worth studying at some length because it was to be one of the most important nuclei of the masonic radicalism that swept Ulster in 1792-93. It was also the lodge of Dr James Reynolds, the future United Irishman. The lodge had originally been formed in 1787. After meeting for four years at Donaghrisk, its place of meeting was moved to nearby Cookstown in 1791.⁴ As Reynolds was master of the lodge at the time,⁵ he was probably instrumental in making the decision to move. The lodge had a wide range of contacts beyond its immediate neighbourhood. For instance, its list of visitors for 1790 included masons not only from most Ulster counties, but also several Scots and even an American.⁶ The members were active in promoting freemasonry: the lodge sponsored applications to set up new lodges.⁷

The idea of religious toleration, which carried with it the implication of equal political rights for Catholics, was not forgotten either. When the Rev. Thomas Ledlie Birch, minister of the dissenting congregation of Saintfield, preached the St. John's Day sermon to five assembled masonic lodges in June 1791, his topic was *"the ancient institution of masonry pointing out its progress in the world, and the friendship that should subsist among mankind"*. This by itself would not have been radical. However, the correspondent of the *Belfast Newsletter* specifically told his readers that Birch's sermon *"was universally applauded by a large and crowded audience of different sects of people"*.⁸

From 1790 onwards, important organisational changes started to take place within Ulster freemasonry. In some counties, informal ad hoc meetings of several lodges gave way to county committees, composed of the masters of all the lodges in the county (see chapters 4.2 - 4.3.) The formation of county committees seems originally to have been a measure to combat decline in social class and respectability; there is no evidence of pursuit of any political aims. The first committee was formed in Co. Armagh in August 1790.⁹ Soon after, political tempers began to rise with the publication of Burke's

⁴ Lodge 668 minutes (17 March 1791). GLI. IMR gives the date of moving as "about 1792". An anonymous critic of freemasonry, writing in Derry in 1785, noted that *"much pains have been lately taken in a neighbouring county [probably Tyrone] to establish free mason clubs in almost every village"*. He did not name the *"man who has been particularly active in propagating the craft"* (Reynolds?) whom he blamed for endangering the industry and sobriety of the community as lower-class men were spending more than they could afford on masonic convivial meetings. *Londonderry Journal* 30 August 1785.

⁵ BNL 18 March 1791.

⁶ Lodge 668 minutes ("Visitors Names in 1790"). GLI.

⁷ Three masons *"rec:d a certificate to the Grand [Lodge] petitioning for a warrant to hold a lodge in Sandholes"*. Lodge 668 minutes (26 June 1790). The warrant was granted on 4 March 1790. IMR.

⁸ BNL 22 July 1791.

⁹ Five lodges invited representatives of all Co. Armagh lodges to a meeting on 7 August 1790. BNL 20 July 1790.

Reflections on the revolution in France in November 1790 and the first part of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* in March 1791.¹⁰ Thus the formation of the next two county committees, Down in November 1790¹¹ and Tyrone in April 1791, coincided almost exactly with the publication of Burke's and Paine's books.

The initiative to organise the freemasons of Tyrone was taken by James Reynolds, master of lodge 668, or "Lodge of Unity" as it was known by then, and Alexander Stewart, esquire, master of the "Glorious Memory Orange Lodge" no. 689 of Dungannon. Together they called a meeting of all Tyrone lodges "*to take under consideration some matters of particular importance to the interest and honour of the Craft*".¹²

Whether or not calling a meeting of the lodges in Dungannon was intended to bring to mind the Volunteer conventions of 1782 and 1783, it was not greeted with unanimous enthusiasm by the freemasons of Tyrone. The proposed meeting was denounced as "unnecessary" by eleven lodges.¹³ Due to the opposition, the reorganisation progressed slowly. It took a year before even a "barony committee" consisting of fourteen lodges that met in the barony of Dungannon was formed¹⁴ and only in September 1792 did the grand lodge authorise the formation of a county committee similar to that of Armagh.¹⁵ It is interesting to note that for most of 1792, Thomas Russell was employed in Dungannon as seneschal of the manor court.¹⁶ Russell would no doubt have sought contact with local radicals, but there is no evidence of him having directly influenced Tyrone freemasonry, or indeed of him having been a freemason. It is also doubtful whether the encouragement that he gave to local linen weavers in their dispute with their employers¹⁷ made him particularly popular with the Tyrone masons, some of whom were linen drapers (see chapter 7.3.3.).

Despite the circumstantial evidence of Volunteer and later United Irish links, it is by no means certain that national politics were the only factor that determined the

¹⁰ McDowell 1979, pp. 352-353.

¹¹ The first meeting of "County of Down Association" was called for 16 November 1790. BNL 12 November 1790.

¹² A general meeting of delegates of Tyrone lodges was called for 18 April 1791. BNL 18 March 1791.

¹³ The resolutions to this effect were passed at a meeting in Stewartstown on 31 March 1791. BNL 15 April 1791.

¹⁴ BNL 23 March 1792

¹⁵ Grand lodge minutes (6 September 1792). GLI.

¹⁶ Woods 1990, pp. 86-87.

¹⁷ Quinn 1998, p. 196.

different reactions of the Tyrone lodges. Apparently political motives were suspected as Reynolds and Stewart reissued their summons with a postscript regretting that "*some are misled with gross misrepresentations (which have been very sedulously propagated) regarding the purpose of the...meeting*".¹⁸ A masonic pamphlet, dedicated to Lord Donoughmore and dated 28 July 1792, may contain a hint that the political activity of the county committee soon began to worry some masons. While emphasising that "*at such [masonic] meetings no revolution either in church or state ever had its origin*" the writer went on to express dissatisfaction with a county committee or committees:

*I cannot conclude, without expressing the high sense I entertain of the diligence, zeal, and perseverance, of the Dublin Committee; would I were able to give a similar account of many other committees; then, indeed, would the masonic order rise to a degree of eminence hitherto unattained....*¹⁹

Unfortunately, we know little about the political opinions of the "Unity" and "Glorious Memory Orange" lodges in 1791. Wearing orange cockades in 1789 and on another occasion in 1791²⁰ would not in itself tell much about the political attitudes prevalent in Reynolds's lodge, as the orange colour had not been monopolised by ultra-Protestants and loyalists yet. Although Reynolds came to be known as a leading United Irishman, it must be kept in mind that the joint initiative of his and Stewart's lodges took place six months before the first United Irish society was formed. In 1791, Reynolds himself was still only an unknown medical doctor and master of a masonic lodge. That a member of his lodge was accused of "*collecting a mob*" to fight "*papists*" at a fair²¹ might be taken to indicate extreme Protestant leanings. However, the fact that the alleged offender was by the lodge suggests that such behaviour, if proven, would not have been tolerated by the members (in the event, he was acquitted).

It is admittedly dangerous to hazard a guess about the political opinions of the members of a lodge in 1791, based on their opinions in 1792-93. On its own, Reynolds's United membership does not prove that everybody in his lodge was a United Irishman: in any case, the early United Irish societies did not actively seek to expand their membership, concentrating on distributing propaganda to any like-minded societies (including masonic lodges).²² In fact, several of the lodges opposed to Reynolds's and Stewart's summons were to be in opposition to the radical stance taken by the county

¹⁸ BNL 15 April 1791.

¹⁹ Mullalla, James: *An essay on the origin of masonry*, pp. 11-12, 16.

²⁰ Lodge 668 minutes (26 November 1789 and 8 December 1791). GLI.

²¹ Lodge 668 minutes (22 December 1791). GLI.

committee later (see chapter 7.3.2 below). However, the fact that also soon-to-be reformist lodges were among them, would seem to indicate that in 1791, Tyrone masons were not divided solely along political lines. The opposition included three lodges²³ that were to be signatories to the resolutions of the January 1793 meeting of radical lodges in Dungannon, chaired by Reynolds. Although political pressures may have contributed to the disagreement, it is more likely that local and personal rivalries combined with the traditional resentment against grand lodge interference (see chapter 4.1.2) were even more important. Furthermore, a new committee on the Armagh model would have meant new fees and expenses for the local lodges.

7.3.2. The conservative resolutions, 1792

*The freemasons appear splitting and if they die, change or reform, what but Christianity will remain unshaken.*²⁴

The winter of 1792-93 was a politically tense period in Ireland. Sectarian clashes continued in southern Ulster and northern Leinster. The relations between Britain and France (now a republic) were in a crisis, which eventually culminated in war in February 1793. Dissatisfied with the partial Catholic Relief Act of 1792, the leaders of the Catholics decided to demand total emancipation from the remaining penal laws. There was a resurgence of Volunteer corps, among them those with close links with their local lodges. At a Volunteer review in Dromore on 19 September 1792,

*the appearance of the 'Dromore Union' which is entirely composed of freemasons (lodge 507), had a pleasing effect, some of the most striking emblems of that ancient and honourable order were displayed in their colours and uniform. What an accession of strength would be made to the cause of liberty, if their example should be followed, and the character of Mason and Volunteer be universally blended.*²⁵

Thus was the American ideal of the citizen-soldier-freemason (see chapter 7.2.1) resurrected and its continued political relevance reasserted. In Dromore, the lodge and corps were totally merged. Later resolutions even referred to “a meeting of the Dromore Union Company...at their lodge-room”.²⁶

²² Curtin 1993, p. 210.

²³ 396 Fintona, 480 Cloghog and 698 Stewartstown.

²⁴ Martha McTier to Drennan (postscript in a letter by Samuel McTier), 27 January 1793. Reprinted in Chart, D. A (ed): *The Drennan letters*, p. 122.

²⁵ *Northern Star* 26 September 1792.

²⁶ *Northern Star* 29 December 1792.

The twin issues of Catholic emancipation and parliamentary reform proved to be decisive in bringing freemasonry back onto the political stage. In December 1792, the delegates elected to what became known as the Catholic Convention, met in Dublin. The stakes were raised towards the middle of the month by the proposal to hold a provincial reform convention in Dungannon in imitation of the 1782 Volunteer gathering. The two questions of whether Catholics should be admitted to the Irish polity as equals, and whether armed assemblies could dictate to the parliament, were back with a vengeance. Freemasons were not immune to the polarisation into reformers and conservatives that took place. An unprecedented newspaper war began between lodges and groups of lodges. A new step in the politicisation of freemasonry had been taken: until then, the typical newspaper item with masonic interest was an announcement of a forthcoming St. John's Day parade and divine service, or a notice thanking the minister afterwards.

The reformist position shared by many masons was well summarised in the anonymous reflections on the French Revolution published in the *Sentimental and Masonic Magazine* in November 1792. If the revolution would be successful, a wave of extreme republicanism would sweep across Europe. If it would fail, extreme toryism would dominate and Europe would be ruled by a council of despotic princes. The only remedy against both extremes was "to invigorate the democratic part of the constitution; it is to render the house of commons so honestly and substantially representative of the people, that republicans may no longer have topics of invective, nor ministers the means of corruption".²⁷ The reformers subscribing to this view were not revolutionaries: the "democratic part of the constitution" referred to the ideal of the mixed constitution of monarchical, aristocratic and democratic elements balancing each other (see chapter 7.1.2.). This balance was presumed to have been achieved in the constitutional settlement of 1688, hence the reformist slogans "the principles of the constitution" and "the constitution in its original purity" were to recur also in the resolutions passed by masonic lodges in the winter of 1792-93.

Political tensions emanating from general politics begin to show in masonic newspaper advertisements towards the end of 1792: "Died, at Larne, on the 19th inst., Mr. James Burns, in the 48th year of his age: he was a member of the "Royal Larne Lodge, No. 615, and a sergeant in the Royal Larne Company of Volunteers... The captain of the company and the senior warden of lodge No. 615...request to know if it was the

²⁷ *Sentimental and Masonic Magazine* (November 1792), pp. 408-410.

word Royal, or what other cause, prevented the editors of 'The Northern Star' from publishing, at full length, the news sent them respecting the death of [Burns]".²⁸

Perhaps ironically, it was the conservatives who triggered the conflict on the pages of northern newspapers only a couple of days after the end of the Catholic Convention, approximately at the time when the idea of the Dungannon reform convention began to circulate in the north of Ireland. The floodgates were opened by the publication of resolutions from four conservative lodges in Co. Londonderry. Setting the tone for other such resolutions from conservative-minded lodges, lodge 650 (Bellaghy) declared its *"invariable attachment to His Majesty's government and the succession of his family to the crown"*. Apparently attacking the idea of an extraparliamentary reform convention, they argued that *"a loyal and peaceable representation...to the legislature"* was the best and only legal way to address grievances. The Bellaghy masons further accused *"the enemies of the constitution"* of using methods *"subversive of the principles of good government, and highly injurious to the peace, and industry of the community"*, asserted that the reformers were trying to create *"anarchy and confusion"* and finally declared that they were *"determined to resist all innovators & collectively as well as individually, support the civil power in the execution of the laws as at present established"*.²⁹ The three other lodges published a much shorter (and less extreme) joint resolution which did not include the controversial reference to *"the laws as at present established"* (that is, including the remaining penal laws and the unreformed parliament). Instead, they simply declared their loyalty to the king and obedience to his orders *"pursuant to the oath of fidelity"*.³⁰

In Co. Armagh, political, ethnic and sectarian tensions made their mark upon freemasonry, which was supposed to be immune to all three. A fresh cycle of localised violence between Catholics and Protestants had broken out in 1791. By 1792, Protestant fears were rising: there were rumours of gun-running by Catholics, who were perceived as having lost their former deference and become insolent towards Protestants. Parish committees supervising elections of delegates to the Catholic Convention sprung up: the politicisation and organisation of Catholics added to the worry of Protestants, who could not distinguish between the Catholic Committee and the rural bands of militant Catholics,

²⁸ BNL 6 November 1792.

²⁹ Resolutions of 650 Bellaghy (passed on 3 December 1792). BNL 11 December 1792. Surprisingly, A. T. Q. Stewart has interpreted the Bellaghy resolutions as *"calling for reform and virtually advocating passive resistance to government"*. Stewart 1993, p. 184.

³⁰ Resolutions of 387 Castledawson, 532 Curran (see below) and 691 Castledawson (passed on 3 December 1792) BNL 11 December 1792. The secretary of lodge 532 denied that his lodge had

called Defenders. Under such circumstances, reviving Volunteer corps was often a measure to control Catholics rather than an attempt to strike a blow for any legislative reform, as it had been in the 1780s.³¹

Against such a background it is perhaps not surprising that freemasonry in Armagh had become politicised. When the political crisis over the proposed reform convention hit the county and the first conservative resolutions by masonic lodges appeared in the press in December 1792, the Armagh county committee was mobilised by its conservative Protestant leadership. Soon it became clear that the committee, headed by its president, Thomas Greer, as well as the majority of lodges were in the hands of conservatives. By 15 December at the latest, the county committee had written to the lodges and requested them to participate in drawing up and passing loyal resolutions.³²

At a meeting held on 17 December, the twenty-six lodges represented on the Armagh committee declared their loyalty to the king and government "*at a time when the attachment of many to the constitution appears doubtful*". On the question of reform, the Armagh masons let it be known that "*whatever defects may exist in it [=the constitution], we are averse to see the rude hand of innovation attempt to correct what it can only by the endeavour deform...we are forward to condemn, and will resist to the utmost of our power, such measures as may in any degree, tend to disorder the present system of government*". The lodges vowed that they would "*support the civil power, in the execution of the laws of the land, as at present established, collectively as well as individually, without respect to persons, regardless of religious distinctions, uninfluenced by any spirit of party, and purely from a wish to maintain inviolate, the inestimable blessings of our constitution*".³³ Although the county committee had originated as a body concerned with social status and respectability, they had become a political lobby group. The coordinated nature of the publication of the Armagh resolutions seems to support L. M. Cullen's view that they should be seen in the context of a close government interest in the

subscribed to the resolutions: "*passive obedience and non-resistance is not the motto of my brethren. We are freemasons and we hope to die free*". BNL 28 December 1792.

³¹ Bartlett 1992, pp. 180-182.

³² A lodge in Armagh met on 15 December "*called by a letter from the president of the County Armagh Committee to take into consideration a loyal address or resolutions [of] attachment to his present Majesty's person, crown and dignity*". Lodge 409 minute book, 15 December 1792. PGL Armagh.

³³ The resolutions were supported by lodges 104, 134, 232, 266, 328, 361, 393, 395, 409, 459, 463, 516, 527, 540, 582, 592, 603, 665, 678, 680, 695, 696, 743, 747, 757 and 766. BNL 21 December 1792; *Gordon's Newry Chronicle*, 20 December 1792. Lodge 393 later disassociated itself from the resolutions. Lodge 393 minute transcripts (27 December 1793). GLI.

affairs of the county and an attempt to build up a strong pro-government faction led by Lord Gosford.³⁴

As there were about 35 or 36 functioning lodges in Co. Armagh at this time and the county committee declaration was supported by 26,³⁵ there is no doubt that opinions contained in it certainly represented the majority view (even though one of the twenty-six later complained that they had not agreed to the resolutions and blamed them for their "*abject and slavish spirit*").³⁶ Of the lodges that were absent, one declared its support for the county committee later.³⁷ Thus at least three fourths of the Armagh lodges were in the hands of conservatives. Only three lodges published reformist resolutions, including the one which disassociated itself from the county committee resolutions after their publication.³⁸ Six lodges were absent because they refused to recognise the authority of the county committee and had been suspended by it in November 1792.³⁹ One of these published separate loyal resolutions⁴⁰ but the others remained silent.⁴¹ At least one of them (618 Tullyherron, see chapter 5.2.1) seems to have had a predominantly Catholic membership. Another (623 Armagh) seems also to have had at least partly Catholic and probably less than "respectable" membership by the standards of the county committee. Only five months previously, the lodge had refused to join the committee, claiming that "*under the sanction of our warrant and the authority therein given we are not bound or compelled to adhere to any rules or resolutions save that [sic] of the Grand Lodge of Ireland*". Lodge 623 had also ignored a fine imposed on it for charging less than the prescribed fee of £2 11s 10d for initiating candidates.⁴² However, that its absence (and that of some at least of the other lodges) was not simply due to stubbornness is shown by an entry in its minutes: "*it was agreed that the sev[era]l lodges dissenting in this county shou'd be convened on Wednesday next for the purpose of writing to the grand lodge for*

³⁴ Cullen 1996, p. 21.

³⁵ In one case it is not known with certainty whether a lodge met in Armagh or Tyrone in 1792. According to IMR, lodge 681 moved from Caledon, Co. Tyrone to Killylea, Co. Armagh (a distance of only some 5 kilometres or 3 miles) in 1792. However, it was still passing joint (radical) resolutions with the Tyrone lodges 333 Caledon and 711 Dyan (BNL 11 January, 25 January 1793).

³⁶ Resolutions of 393 (Hamiltonsbawm). *Northern Star* 9 January 1793.

³⁷ 437 Middletown. BNL 4 January, 8 January 1793.

³⁸ Resolutions of 264 and 601. BNL 11 January 1793 and fn. 35 above.

³⁹ Cochrane 1994, p. 66 lists 315, 349, 618, 623 and 671 as suspended by the county committee. According to IMR, lodge 612 had also been suspended.

⁴⁰ 315 Tandragee, one of the lodges with a rule against admitting Catholics (see chapter 5.2.2). BNL 21 December 1792.

⁴¹ 349 Killylea, 618 Tullyherron, 623 Armagh and 671 Killylea.

⁴² Lodge 623 minutes (29 June, 9 August 1792). PGL Armagh. There were some colourful characters in lodge, such as Winwright Proctor who called the county committee "*a set of perjured rascals and villains*". Johnston 1990, p. 83.

redress".⁴³ In addition to Armagh, the conservatives also remained strong in Co. Londonderry.

7.3.3. The radical reaction, 1792 - 1793

The hint in the Bellaghy resolutions of collective resistance to reform, although not explicitly said to be armed resistance, prompted a strong response from reformist freemasons. The first response came from lodge 534 at Maghera in the same county. It is perhaps worth quoting at some length as it summarised the reformist case that was to be repeated in numerous resolutions from other lodges. Declaring "*that we will not yield to any man or body of men in our loyalty to our beloved and rightful sovereign...and ardent attachment to our once unrivalled constitution, arising from a just knowledge of its original excellency*", the Maghera freemasons joined "*the enlightened virtuous and unbiased part of the nation in declaring that gross corruptions have stolen into the [political] system*". In line with the concept of the mixed constitution, perfect but now sadly out of balance, they claimed that they were determined "*not (as the advocates for despotism would insinuate) to level but restore - not to innovate but renovate*". If any anarchy was to follow, as claimed by the Bellaghy lodge, it was the fault of "*that tyrannical corruption...which first robbed the community of its natural rights - and still continues...to resist the will of the Nation*". There were echoes of Tom Paine in the reference of "*this blissful era when the rights of men are fully ascertained*" and of America in the complaint about "*taxation without representation*". However, it was the rallying final paragraph that took the challenge beyond patriot rhetoric by openly raising the sensitive Catholic question and linking reform politics to masonic ideology:

*Resolved - That we shall no longer suffer the tools of corruption, the mercenary slaves of power to extinguish in our breasts the fire of patriotism, the pure benevolence of brotherhood, but that by a happy union of power & sentiment with our virtuous brethren of every religious description, we shall do all that in us lies, in perfect consistence with liberty and loyalty to establish the rights of the Nation.*⁴⁴

If the Maghera resolutions were strong, more was to come. The members of a lodge at Killead, Co. Antrim, repeated much the same arguments, but added that they:

reprobate the doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance, so strongly circulated by the lodges of no. 387, 691, and 532; convinced that it has operated

⁴³ Lodge 623 minutes (8 January 1793). PGL Armagh.

⁴⁴ Resolutions of 534 Maghera (passed on 13 December 1792). BNL 18 December 1792, *Northern Star* 26 December 1792.

*most fatally to abridge the liberty of the subject, by sanctioning illegal attachments and patronizing a ruinous, a slavish system of penal and excise laws.*⁴⁵

An even more extreme notice was inserted in the *Northern Star* in the name of a lodge at Garvagh. Omitting any reference to the king, the writer demanded an end to tithes, pensions, sinecures and *“that oppressive tax”* of hearth money and proclaimed that *“fictitious titles, such as monarchy, royalty, serenity, excellency, &c. are ponderous and oppressive mountains in the great globe of despotism, under which poor Erin sinks and groans: a word in your ear, whereabouts is France at a loss for want of either?”*⁴⁶ Although the notice purported to be a genuine account of resolutions agreed on St. John’s Day, 27 December 1792, the master, senior warden and secretary of the lodge later denounced it as a fabrication containing *“doctrines...repugnant to our principles”*.⁴⁷ Whether the disavowal was a politic move by extremists who realised that they had gone too far, or a genuine expression of disapproval at a notice inserted by a too enthusiastic member (or by a provocateur) remains unknown. Nevertheless, the extreme republicanism contained in the resolutions was not repeated by any other lodge.

The shockwaves spread from lodge to lodge and from one county to another. Soon after the first resolutions, the Down county committee, or “Association of the County of Down” called a meeting of Down lodges in Dromore on 15 January (see chapter 11.1).⁴⁸ The lodges in Co. Cavan were summoned to meet on the same day *“for the purpose of preparing an address to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland signify[ng] our allegiance to his majesty and our steadfast intention to support the present constitution”*.⁴⁹ James Reynolds called a meeting of the Tyrone county committee. The published summons was preceded by an appeal to Reynolds by the masters of five lodges, according to whom *“insidious attempts are made to divide us - the union, dignity and interest of the order are in danger”*, a disparaging reference to the activities of the Armagh county committee and the other conservative lodges. Not surprisingly, Reynolds obliged and requested delegates from all the lodges in the county to meet in Dungannon on 7 January.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Resolutions of 627 Killead. *Northern Star* 26 December 1792.

⁴⁶ *Northern Star* 29 December 1792.

⁴⁷ BNL 11 January 1793. The denial was repeated in the *Northern Star* 6 July 1793. Samuel McSkimin, the conservative chronicler of the 1790s was not aware of these denials and regarded the Garvagh resolutions as a genuine case of *“republican declamation, with the fury of...Jacobin clubs”*. McSkimin, Samuel: *Annals of Ulster*, p. 15.

⁴⁸ BNL 21 December 1792, *Northern Star* 19 December 1792.

⁴⁹ Lodge 560 minutes, 27 December [1792]. GLI. Page 3 on which the entry appears, is out of sequence in the restored minute book and belongs between pages 6 and 7.

⁵⁰ BNL 28 December 1792, *Northern Star* 29 December 1792.

In the overall context of December 1792, the political implications of Reynolds's summons to the lodges of Tyrone were clear to everybody. Reynolds was not an obscure doctor from a remote provincial town anymore, but a well-known radical leader. Earlier in 1792, he had been jailed for refusing to give evidence to the secret committee of the House of Lords, and only one week before issuing the summons to the lodges he had chaired a meeting of the Dublin society of the United Irishmen.⁵¹

After issuing the summons, Reynolds and his fellow Cookstown radicals set about reorganising the local Volunteers. A lodge "*composed of Presbyterian and other clergymen, of linen-drapers, merchants &c*", most probably Reynolds's own "Lodge of Unity", no. 668 - took the lead in calling a meeting for the purpose of re-establishing a Volunteer corps, or "*an armed association...for the protection of property, keeping in order the sedition and procuring their own constitutional rights*". The level of radical enthusiasm gripping the lodge shows in the decision not to wait for the return from Dublin of James Stewart of Killymoon, the local MP, commander of the old Volunteers in the region and a friend of the Presbyterian cause. The Cookstown masons decided that consulting Stewart was unnecessary, for "*they were not to beg permission to think; that they would deem such a step not a mark of respect but of vassalage*". Reynolds tried to soothe Stewart's hurt feelings by suggesting that the very act of "*asking your permission to meet must hurt your feelings and the whole affair appear to the world an indelicate piece of flattery*".⁵² The meeting on New Year's Day of "*the Friends of Liberty and good order, inhabitants of Cookstown and the adjacent country*", after passing the customary assurances of loyalty, went on to demand "*the speedy abolition of all civil and political distinctions an acc[oun]t of religious opinions*" and "*a radical compleat reform in the Commons house of parliament*".⁵³ Although chaired by Reynolds, this was a general reform meeting and not a masonic one.

⁵¹ McClelland 1962, p. 21, fn. 1.

⁵² J[ames] Reynolds (Cookstown) to James Stewart (n.d. "Saturday night"). Stewart of Killymoon papers D/3167/2/84. PRONI. Thomas Bartlett has dated the document as having been written after 31 December 1792. Bartlett 1983, p. 45, fn. 19. However, internal evidence and comparison with the resolutions (PRONI D/3167/2/85) of a meeting on 1 January 1793 (referred to by Reynolds, but not yet held at the time of writing), suggest an earlier date. According to Reynolds, Stewart had left for Dublin and the Cookstown masons had met on "*14th inst.*" indicating that he was writing in the same month (December). Stewart was to have returned in eight days time, which could suggest Saturday 22 December as the time of writing. However, Reynolds quotes a handbill, announcing an imminent meeting "*on [next?] Tuesday*". Presuming this to be the Tuesday 1 January 1793 meeting, Reynolds would have been writing on Saturday 29 December 1792.

⁵³ Resolutions (copy) of "*the Friends of Liberty and good order, inhabitants of Cookstown and the adjacent country*" (1 January 1793). Stewart of Killymoon papers, D/3167/2/85. PRONI. Bartlett has interpreted the meeting as a formation of a loyalist association, suggesting that the freemasons took

By the end of December, it was clear that Ulster freemasonry had split into two factions. In Co. Londonderry, there was an attempt to find a common middle ground between the two extremes. There was a significant conservative faction: according to a correspondent of the Marquis of Abercorn, writing from Derry on 26 December, “*great numbers of freemason lodges are every day publishing declarations of supporting the king, constitution & civil magistrate*”.⁵⁴ However, on New Year’s Eve, nineteen lodges met in Castledawson to pass resolutions that can best be described as a compromise. Among the nineteen were the three lodges whose loyal declarations had started the avalanche (387 and 691 Castledawson, 650 Bellaghy).⁵⁵ Seven radical lodges from the neighbourhood of Garvagh, Maghera and Draperstown in the east of the county were also represented: one of them was busy forming a Volunteer corps with the grandiose title of “*First Masonic Union of Ulster*”.⁵⁶ The seven lodges had met only two days previously at Maghera to demand the restoration of “*every rank, without religious distinction, to their just rights*”. The list of twelve toasts drunk at Maghera is instructive of the extent of their radicalism at this time:

Freemasonry, uncorrupted, all the world over.
Our rightful sovereign, George the III, and his family.
The Irish Volunteers, and the fast friends of reform.
The constitution in its original purity.
Mr. Fox, and the virtuous minority in the British House of Commons, who reprobated the speech of the Minister.
The Glorious Memory as renovating the constitution.
Burgoyne’s fate to the allied generals of despotism
Religion, without the influence of pension or priest-craft.
A general bankruptcy to all those, who deal in slaves, black or white.
The 15th of February ‘82, and may the same auspicious day on ‘93, by another Provincial Convention, make hirelings tremble.
Harmony and attachment between freemason bodies and Volunteer corps.
*Roman Catholic emancipation in happy conjunction with Protestant liberty.*⁵⁷

The intended compromise resolutions of the Castledawson meeting commenced with a declaration of loyalty to the king and constitution and intention to “*strenuously*

a lead in forming such associations in north Ulster. Bartlett 1983, p. 45, fn. 19. However, given the participants, the reference to procuring constitutional rights and the general lack of deference throughout the document, it is obvious that this was a radical meeting.

⁵⁴ Alexander Young to Lord Abercorn (26 December 1792). Abercorn Papers D/623/A/153/47. PRONI.

⁵⁵ BNL 11 December 1792.

⁵⁶ Resolutions of lodge 594 (Tobermore). *Northern Star* 5 January 1793. The lodge thanked ten members of lodge 460 (Ballinascreen) who had also enrolled as Volunteers.

⁵⁷ Resolutions of 460, 532, 534, 573, 594, 728 and 730 (passed 29 December 1792). *Northern Star* 2 January 1793 (does not include the list of toasts), BNL 11 January 1793.

oppose any innovation that may endanger the safety of either". Without mentioning the Catholic issue, the next resolution declared that *"a more equal representation of the people in parliament"* was required. Peaceful means were advocated; however, in an ambiguous phrase the lodges agreed that *"violence and opposition to the laws should be the last efforts of a loyal people"*. Although the compromise resolutions were published in the name of all the participating lodges, as having been *"agreed by a large majority"*,⁵⁸ in reality unanimity was not reached. Six lodges and some of the officers of three others denied that they had agreed to the compromise. Instead, they published resolutions that they had proposed but which had been rejected as *"too violent"* by the others. Although these rejected *"revolution as unnecessary and ineligible for the kingdom of Ireland"*, they also demanded that members of the House of Commons should be *"frequently chosen by the people"* and offered to support *"upright magistrates"* against offenders. In addition, the dissenting lodges published satirical "resolutions" of a meeting held *"at the Lodge Room of Despots: the following upright disinterested members present, viz. Curate Blankhead, two merciful tythe farmers, a tythe proctor to a pluralist [a clergyman of the established Anglican church who held several benefices], a half-pay officer..."*⁵⁹

The Grand Lodge of Ireland was alarmed by the flood of political resolutions emanating from supposedly non-political lodges. On 3 January 1793, the grand lodge *"ordered that a lett[er] be prepared & sent to the different lodges in this kingdom, informing them that their interference in religious or political matters is contrary to the constitutions of masonry"*.⁶⁰ This "admonition" as it came to be called, stressed that the masons had *"sufficient opportunities of expressing their religious and political opinions in other societies and other capacities, and should under any pretence whatsoever, suffer such topics to invade the sacred retirement of a lodge"*.⁶¹ However, the grand lodge chose the same day to discipline seven lodges *"for disobedience"* towards the Armagh county committee.⁶² Although the lodges censured were of different political leanings, the timing of such a show of support for the openly partisan, conservative county committee showed little understanding of the political escalation that was in progress among Ulster freemasons.

⁵⁸ BNL 11 January 1793, *Northern Star* 23 January 1793.

⁵⁹ Resolutions of 470, 531, 532, 534, 573 and 701 with two wardens of 613, one warden of 728, and master and warden of 745 (passed 31 December 1792). BNL 15 January 1793.

⁶⁰ Grand lodge minutes (3 January 1793). GLI.

⁶¹ *Northern Star* 23 January 1793. "Masonic admonition" in *The Sentimental and Masonic Magazine* (March 1793), p. 200.

⁶² The lodges disciplined were 264 Middletown (radical), 315 Tandragee (conservative), 349 Killylea, 601 Tynan (radical), 618 Tullyherron, 623 Armagh, 671 Killylea. Grand lodge minutes (3 January 1793). GLI.

The meeting of the masters or delegates of thirty Tyrone lodges on 7 January 1793 was the undoubted climax of the attempt to fuse the ideals of the (radical) citizen, the (re-embodied) Volunteer, and the freemason. The delegates quickly dispensed with masonic ceremonies and then *"resolved themselves into an assembly of masonic citizens"*, thus circumventing the grand lodge order not to discuss politics at lodge meetings. Their resolutions praised the Volunteers and condemned *"the mendicant patriotism of the timid and interested"*. Revolution was condemned, but only conditionally: *"it should never be had recourse to, 'till all other means of escaping slavery have been tried in vain"*. The resolutions proper were followed by an even longer appeal for unity among the freemasons of Ireland, condemning the conservatives' *"insidious attempts...to introduce discord...and make brother draw the murderous sword against brother"*. The Dungannon resolutions and the annexed appeal to freemasons are one of the most radical and definitely the most thorough declaration of the principles of Irish radical freemasonry of the early 1790s.

While the Tyrone masons acknowledged their debt to France and America and recorded their support for a long list of grievances, the main theme that ran through every line of their appeal was bitterness towards their Armagh brethren and other masons who had sided with the government. There was incomprehension and anger at the news that their fellow masons had not seen the light of freemasonry in quite the same way as the men of Tyrone: they were not only in the danger of betraying their country, but also the principles of masonry. *"Could any of you generous brethren, behold these and innumerable other grievances [corrupt government and oppression of Catholics], and declare yourselves enemies to those who will attempt to reform the system of iniquity which occasions them!"*. The fusion of political and masonic philosophy inherent in the resolutions was summarised in the oft-quoted slogan *"Let every lodge in the land become a company of citizen soldiers. Let every Volunteer company become a lodge of masons"*. An exhortation to *"countrymen of all denominations"* to join masonic lodges concludes the appeal. However, even these last few lines are marred by recrimination and hint of betrayal: *"Among the apostles there was one Judas - the slaves among us are few - join our lodges"*.⁶³

⁶³ *Northern Star* 16 January 1793, *BNL* 22 January 1793, *Londonderry Journal* 29 January 1793.

How representative was the Dungannon meeting? Of the 56 Co. Tyrone lodges⁶⁴ that can with reasonable certainty have said been active at the time, thirty, or just over half, sent delegates. At least some of the lodges had close links with Volunteer corps; in addition to Reynolds's own lodge (see above), the lodges represented included 547 Newtown Stewart, which had formed the first "masonic" volunteer corps in 1782, and 483 Aughnacloy which had in the same year "*consisted of volunteers*" (see chapter 7.2.2.). The "Glorious Memory Orange Lodge", one of the two lodges that originally started the county meetings, was absent - either because the radicals had hijacked the agenda or because the lodge had ceased to meet.⁶⁵

Of the lodges not represented at the Dungannon meeting, four passed resolutions that can be described as equally radical to those agreed in Dungannon: demanding parliamentary reform and Catholic emancipation.⁶⁶ Only one Tyrone lodge, the "Royal Blue" of Ballygawley (no. 727) had declared openly its opposition to "*all innovators*", warning of "*anarchy and confusion*" in language borrowed from the Bellaghy resolutions.⁶⁷ However, the lodge may have split upon the issue as its master was present in Dungannon. In the region of Cookstown, Stewartstown and Coalisland in the east of the county, there was a group of nine (later seven) lodges that adopted a position between the two extremes. The resolutions agreed at their meeting in Stewartstown five days before Dungannon did not make any specific political demands. After the customary professions of loyalty, the lodges declared that "*loud as the call for reform is, we think that the only method of having our grievances redressed is by dispassionate representation of them to the legislature*".⁶⁸ These lodges obviously represented a more cautious or even conservative element in the county: they had been among the eleven lodges that were opposed to the establishment to the county committee in 1791.⁶⁹ It may be significant that at least six of the original nine lodges represented at the Stewartstown meeting in January 1793 (including the two that soon went over to the radicals) were to pass loyalist

⁶⁴ For the criteria used for this estimate, see chapter 3.5.2.

⁶⁵ The lodge had not registered any new members after 1788, the year of its formation. Register, 1st series, lodge 689.

⁶⁶ 333 and 681 Caledon and 711 Dyan. BNL 11 January 1793. 470 Coagh (in conjunction with several Co. Londonderry lodges). BNL 15 January 1793.

⁶⁷ Resolutions of 727 (passed on 28 December 1792). BNL 11 January 1793.

⁶⁸ Resolutions passed by nine lodges at Stewartstown on 2 January 1793. BNL 8 January 1793. Two of the lodges (396 Stewartstown and 470 Coagh) soon joined the radicals.

⁶⁹ BNL 8 April 1791.

resolutions in 1796-97.⁷⁰ Finally, there were at least fourteen lodges whose political leanings in 1792-93 are unknown.⁷¹

Altogether, only approximately 60 % of the Tyrone lodges supported radical reform. This percentage is significantly lower than that in the neighbouring county of Fermanagh, where fourteen lodges out of an estimated total of seventeen (over 80%) were on the side of reform.⁷² Although the evidence for the political leanings of Fermanagh masons is much less substantial than for Tyrone, somewhat surprisingly the masons of Fermanagh appear as the most uniformly pro-reform group of masons in Ulster.

Although the Dungannon resolutions of 7 January were an important exposition of radical thinking in the winter of 1792-93, historians may have overestimated their significance. A. T. Q. Stewart calls the meeting "a clear indication of masonic determination to stage-manage the [February 1793 Dungannon reform] Convention, which was to meet a month later". However, Stewart omits to mention the local (county) character of the masonic meeting. Stewart, apparently drawing on secondary sources, claims that "no fewer than forty lodges" were represented,⁷³ while the actual figure was, as we have seen, thirty out of fifty-six.

No doubt Reynolds and his associates were preparing for the provincial reform convention. However, "*United Irish* determination to stage-manage the convention" might seem more accurate, presuming Nancy Curtin is correct in her view that the northern United Irishmen "were apparently content to let sympathetic cover organisations and the *Northern Star* itself, convey the will of the northern people, a process culminating in the Dungannon convention in February 1793".⁷⁴ Following this point to its logical conclusion - if the United Irishmen (such as Reynolds) were the secret movers behind the scenes, the "cover organisations" would include masonic lodges and the Tyrone masons' county committee itself.

⁷⁰ The other four were 479, 554, 710 (BNL 30 May, 3 June 1796; 18 August 1797); lodge 724 (BNL 18 August 1797)

⁷¹ Three of these were later suspected of United Irish activity (369, 476, 720). General Knox to Cooke 7 May 1798, Reb. 620/37/3) and one (471) is known to have passed loyalist resolutions. BNL 18 August 1797.

⁷² *Northern Star* 6 February 1793.

⁷³ Stewart 1993 p. 185.

⁷⁴ Curtin 1994, p. 98.

Thus A. T. Q. Stewart sees the reform convention as a masonic project, Nancy Curtin as a United Irish one. For Stewart, radicalism originates in freemasonry and takes the form of (or advantage of) the United Irishmen - for Curtin, vice versa. It is by no means certain that either explanation is sufficient - the reality may have been much more complex. For instance, James Reynolds was a freemason before he was a United Irishman, but he may have been a Volunteer before he was a freemason. Other reformers joined some or all of the three organisations in a different order. Without detailed biographical information, it is risky for a historian to suppose that membership of one organisation (freemasonry) was somehow intrinsically so dominant that it would somehow subjugate the other two. Given that masonic ideology could just as well be used to justify conservatism as radicalism, concepts such as Stewart's "masonic determination" have little substance: was there "masonic determination" to advance reform in Tyrone but block it in Armagh?

As we have seen, dividing the resolutions (and lodges) of 1792-93 into the two categories of radical and conservative masks significant variations within those categories. Some of the ostensibly reformist lodges used much more moderate language than others and called for the exclusive use of legal means in the fight for reform. According to lodge no. 598 (Ballyutoag, Co. Antrim), "*loud as the laws call for a repeal...the only method of having our grievances redressed, is by a dispassionate representation of them to the legislature*".⁷⁵ The nine lodges meeting in Stewartstown (see above) repeated this declaration almost verbatim.⁷⁶ Lodge no. 586 (Bellaghy, Co. Londonderry) declared its support for "*the civil magistrate in the execution of laws as now established [i.e. including the remaining penal laws and unreformed parliament]*". However, unlike the other Bellaghy lodge (no. 650, see chapter 7.3.2.) which started the whole battle of resolutions, the members of 586 also declared that they would "*be happy in co-operating with our fellow subjects in requesting from the legislature a redress of such grievances as may have crept into our general system*".⁷⁷

It is a matter of semantics whether resolutions such as these should be called "moderate reformist" or "moderate conservative"; clearly they fall somewhere between the extremes and probably mask divisions within the lodges themselves. In the case of Bellaghy such splits within the local lodges are actually well documented: a St. John's Day sermon preached in Castledawson on the topic of obedience was addressed not only

⁷⁵ BNL 1 January 1793.

⁷⁶ BNL 8 January 1793.

to the local conservative lodges (nos. 387 and 691) “*who first published their determination, active allegiance, and in a part of the country where a few knew no bounds to their phrenzy of political reform*”, but also to “*part of Bellaghy lodges*”.⁷⁸

Interpreting the 1792-93 resolutions is further complicated by the fact that some lodges were ostensibly moderate but a closer dissection of their language shows that they actually hinted at the use of other means if the constitutional ones would not be found sufficient: “*We are firmly attached to his majesty’s crown and person, and to the principles of the constitution...at the same time, we wish for a fair and equal representation of ALL the people in parliament, ...and which we hope to obtain by legal and constitutional means* [my emphasis]”. Reading between the lines of these resolutions, allegiance to the “principles” of the constitution implied that the constitution was not being applied in a correct way and required reform;⁷⁹ “all the people” was meant to include Catholics and finally, “hoping” to achieve reform by constitutional means implied that this was by no means certain and that one had to be prepared to use other methods. In this particular case, the potential threat is further underlined in the final resolution, “*That we form ourselves into a Volunteer corps...*”.⁸⁰

After Dungannon, the political situation changed rapidly. The government agreed in principle to Catholic relief when the parliament met on 10 January. However, the publication of resolutions by masonic lodges continued. For instance, in Co. Antrim group of nine reformist lodges near Lisburn “*resolved, that we lament the quixotic phrensy [sic] of our brethren of Armagh, and of other lodges...who have alarmed his Majesty with visionary dangers*”⁸¹ while four Ballymoney lodges joined to declare their “*familiar attachment to the present constitution*”.⁸² On 21 January, Louis XVI was executed, making radical extremism even more suspect than before. At the beginning of February war broke out between France and Britain and the Catholic relief bill was presented to the parliament.

The provincial reform convention met in Dungannon on 15-16 February and approved resolutions demanding parliamentary reform and Catholic emancipation and at

⁷⁷ BNL 1 January, 4 January, 8 January 1793.

⁷⁸ BNL 8 January 1793.

⁷⁹ A related reformist slogan, which had been in use since the time of the first Volunteer convention of 1782, was “restoring the constitution to its original purity”. McDowell 1979, p. 280.

⁸⁰ Resolutions of 258 (Rasharkin, Co. Antrim). BNL 8 January 1793.

⁸¹ Resolutions of 112, 314, 403, 426, 428, 499, 602, 682 and 749 (passed on 10 January 1793). *Northern Star* 12 January 1793, BNL 25 January 1793.

the same time, praising the mixed constitution and condemning republicanism. Two prominent Tyrone masons among the delegates, Dr James Reynolds and Dr James Caldwell (master of lodge 698 Stewartstown) wanted the convention to demand biannual parliaments and the use of the ballot in place of *viva voce* voting. The proposal was defeated, as was their demand that the convention should condemn the war against France.⁸³ If the Tyrone masons had attempted to "stage-manage" the convention, as suggested by A. T. Q. Stewart (see above), they were not successful.

Was Hereward Senior correct in his assertion that "Irish masons were found in all political factions but were, in general, inclined to be critical of the penal code imposed on Catholics and were not enthusiastic Orange patriots"?⁸⁴ As we have seen, Irish masons were indeed found in all political factions. However, the strength of conservatism within Ulster freemasonry was considerable, as evidenced by the case of the Armagh county committee. Much more local research is needed before the relative strengths of reformers and conservatives in each county or the whole province are known, but it seems clear that in addition to most of the lodges in Armagh, the conservatives controlled at least a significant percentage of lodges in Antrim, Cavan, Londonderry, Monaghan and Down (but not in Fermanagh). To these must be added the cautious opposition to radicalism of a number of Tyrone lodges (those present at the Stewartstown meeting).

The meetings of 1792-93 were to be the first and last public show of force of such magnitude by Ulster freemasons. When the Catholic relief act was passed by parliament in April 1793, many moderate masons were no doubt satisfied and saw no reason for further activity. Moreover, the Convention Act of August 1793 prohibited representative assemblies, thus effectively making Dungannon-style masonic meetings impossible.

As Reynolds and Caldwell found out to their dismay, their condemnation of the war against France was not shared by all. The response of the grand master of Irish freemasons, Lord Donoughmore, was to raise an army regiment, and later a second one. The recruitment posters for the "Masonic, or Royal Irish Volunteer" regiment sought to recall the glories of the Volunteer days: the regiment was not called such, but a "corps" and Donoughmore himself was titled "the real friend to Irish liberty". The freemasons of the Liberties of Dublin were reported to have responded enthusiastically. For his pains, Donoughmore received the reward of a poem by a lady, praising his martial virtues:

⁸² Resolutions of 135, 240, 655 and 703 (passed on 14 January 1793). BNL 25 January 1793

⁸³ McDowell 1979, pp. 428-429. For Caldwell's masonic role, see BNL 22 January 1793.

*See Donoughmore, our Master Grand,
in war's array appears,
With pride leads forth his mystic band
Masonic Volunteers!*⁸⁵

If the most prominent freemason in Ulster in the early 1780s had without a shadow of doubt been Amyas Griffith, for the early 1790s the honour must be shared between Dr James Reynolds of Tyrone and Thomas Greer of Armagh. They both organised and rallied behind a political cause a majority of the lodges in their respective counties: nothing of the sort had ever been attempted before in the annals of Irish freemasonry. Greer's Armagh committee may have been born out of social snobbery, but he managed to develop it into an effective political lobby. The Tyrone county committee did not achieve the same level of support within its county, but its call to arms (both figuratively and literally) remains an important milestone in the development of radical ideology in Ireland.

Although the radicals' attempt to use freemasonry as a building block of a new society was wrecked by schism within the brotherhood, the ideal was not yet completely lost. How could it possibly be - after all, in the opinion of many radicals such a society was not a Utopian dream, but had been realised in America, where freemasonry played an important role in the symbolism of the new republic. For instance, in September 1793, President George Washington dedicated the new United States Capitol in a masonic ceremony, only one of many such ceremonies to take place over the next generation.⁸⁶ Unfortunately for Dr Reynolds, he was obliged to acquaint himself in the workings of the American ideal more closely than he might actually have cared to do: in 1793 he was jailed and in the next year, emigrated to America.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Senior 1966, p. 3.

⁸⁵ Recruitment poster in possession of lodge 620, Dublin; *Dublin Evening Post*, 15 April 1794; both quoted in Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 424-425. The "Masonic Volunteers" was published in the *Sentimental and Masonic Magazine* (April 1794), p. 358. Although the author no doubt meant well for the war effort, another verse of the poem can hardly have encouraged enlistment: "*In glory's field did ne'er appear/ soldiers more firm and brave/ They laugh at death, they scorn base fear/ nor dread a Gallic grave*".

⁸⁶ Bullock 1996, p. 137.

⁸⁷ In 1801, Reynolds published in America a Utopian description of a classless, priestless society called "Lithconia", thereby pushing "the deist, rationalist and fraternal elements in masonic thought to their outer limits". Smyth 1993, p. 172.

8 FREEMASONRY AND POLITICS AFTER 1794

The aim of this chapter is to study the links between freemasonry and political movements in the changed circumstances that prevailed after 1793. The constitutional changes, the French war, the suppression and re-emergence of militant radicalism shuffled the political deck, creating new allegiances and alliances. Despite the masonic membership of many United Irish leaders, the relative influence of revolutionaries in Ulster freemasonry may have been more limited than has been suggested previously. On the other hand, the masonic links of both the Defenders and loyalists (including Orangemen) seem to have been more substantial than most historians have assumed.

8.1. The United Irishmen and freemasonry, 1794 - 1798

I should much desire that a society were instituted in this city [Dublin] having much of the secrecy and somewhat of the ceremonial of freemasonry, so much secrecy as might communicate curiosity, uncertainty, expectation to the minds of surrounding men, so much impressive and affecting ceremony in its internal economy as without impeding real business might strike the soul through the senses. A benevolent conspiracy - a plot for the people....¹

The radical political society of the United Irishmen was founded in October 1791. Its politics differed from those of the earlier reformist Volunteer demonstrations as the United Irish espoused the cause of Catholic emancipation. In the climate of intensifying ideological warfare between Britain and revolutionary France, the Irish government tightened its grip: legislation was passed in 1793 for raising militia regiments, for controlling the sale and transport of arms and munitions and for banning assemblies claiming representative status (the Convention Act). The government also put pressure on the most prominent group of political radicals: the Dublin society of United Irishmen. Several of its leaders were tried on various charges and some went into exile. In May 1794, the society was raided and its papers seized.

Historians differ on whether 1794 marked a break between "old" United Irishmen, a political discussion society, and a "new" society which soon developed into a revolutionary army.² According to Nancy J. Curtin, the militant element was represented within the United movement from the very beginning, particularly in Ulster. The conversion

¹ Drennan to Samuel McTier (21 May 1791). Reprinted in Chart, D. A. (ed): *The Drennan letters*, p. 54. Drennan published his ideas on the establishment of such a society in the pamphlet *Idem sentire, dicere, agere* in June 1791. Reb. 620/19/24.

from a reform society into a revolutionary conspiracy was thus a gradual process rather than a sudden event.³ L. M. Cullen suggests that a secret coterie of extremists operated outside the established structures of the Dublin society from 1792 onwards.⁴ In any case, 1794 marks the time when the leadership of the radical cause passed to the United Irishmen of Ulster, who organised the movement as an underground network of revolutionary committees. Local societies were to form baronial, county, and provincial committees, the pyramid culminating in a national directory.

William Drennan's vision of a secret revolutionary brotherhood was just a fantasy when it was first written in 1791, but only a couple of years later it had become reality. How close was the link between freemasonry and the United Irishmen? As Drennan so explicitly "implicated" freemasonry in the radical project, it is not surprising that later historians have expressed interest in the issue. In fact, what little research of academic standard there is on Irish freemasonry, has concentrated almost solely on the links with political radicalism (see chapter 2.3). However, once again, the near-total lack of local research making use of both masonic and general sources hampers the formation of a definitive opinion. In its absence, unproved legends abound. For instance, it has been claimed that the Wexford United leaders Keogh, Harvey and Colclough were the master and two wardens of lodge no. 596 in Wexford.⁵

The conclusion reached by most historians is that the connection between masonry and radicalism was close. Brendan McEvoy argues that many lodges in Tyrone became a cover for United Irish activity.⁶ Aiken McClelland asserts that although "we know little of the political views of lodges [after 1793] as the country drifted towards the rebellion of 1798...there can be no doubt that many lodges were little more than meeting-places for the now banned United Irish societies".⁷ Quoting McClelland as his source, A. T. Q. Stewart is even more emphatic: "there is a great deal of evidence that many lodges became little more than meeting-places for United Irish societies after the association was banned in 1794, and this pattern continued right up to the outbreak of the rising in 1798".⁸ One problem with this kind of conclusions is that they have been reached without any

² McDowell 1979, pp. 436-444, 471-475.

³ Curtin 1985, pp. 469-470.

⁴ Cullen 1993, pp. 188-189.

⁵ Cogan 1988, pp. 85-86. None of the three were registered members of the lodge. Register, 1st series, lodge 596. However, according to Fagan 1998, p. 142, Harvey was member of the "Barristers' Lodge" in Dublin.

⁶ McEvoy 1969, pp. 64-65.

⁷ McClelland 1962, p. 22.

⁸ Stewart 1993, p. 185.

recourse to masonic sources. An even more weighty reason for criticism is that even if such assertions are correct, they fail to assess either the relative significance of the United Irish element within Irish freemasonry or the relative importance of freemasonry in the United Irish scheme of things.

Unfortunately, even the best attempts so far at a closer analysis of the issue have been hampered by misinterpretation of sources. For instance, Patrick Fagan's conclusions regarding the role of Dublin masonic lodges as a United Irish front need to be regarded with some caution as they are partly based on an incorrect interpretation of the grand lodge register.⁹ In a case even more instructive of the pitfalls of the masonic records, Jim Smyth has suggested that "a number of key agents, McCracken, Bartholomew Teeling and Samuel Kennedy...joined their local masonic lodges" in the spring of 1795.¹⁰ Such a strategy no doubt seems consistent with other information on the United Irish activities at that time. However, its existence (or its application to masonic lodges) cannot be proven by masonic sources alone. Smyth has assumed that the dates in the grand lodge register are those of admission to a lodge. As we have seen (see chapter 3.3.), they only indicate the date when the member's name was inserted in the grand lodge books on the receipt of the registration fee. For instance, Henry Joy McCracken was registered in February 1796; the previous batch of members' names from his lodge had been received by the grand lodge in May 1795.¹¹ This might seem to indicate a time of admission between the two dates, but in practice names were often omitted and only included in later returns when and if the members requested a grand lodge certificate. Thus McCracken's admission could have taken place at any time between the foundation of his lodge in May 1792 and February 1796.

As regards the other individual United Irishmen mentioned by Smyth, his inclusion of Samuel Kennedy, the printer of the *Northern Star*, among the "key agents" joining the freemasons in 1795 is even harder to sustain. Kennedy's is the first name to appear on the list of members of another Belfast lodge founded in 1792,¹² three years before the alleged mass infiltration. This would suggest that he was the first master of the lodge. Consequently, to qualify as such he would probably have been a mason (a member of

⁹ Fagan 1998, pp. 142-143.

¹⁰ Smyth 1992, p. 159.

¹¹ Register, 1st series, lodge 763 (6 May 1795, 5 February 1796). Smyth gives the lodge number correctly in his 1992 book but as 783 in Smyth 1993, p. 175. No trace of McCracken can be found in the register entry for lodge 783.

another lodge) even before 1792. The third of the presumed key infiltrators, Bartholomew Teeling, was registered in February 1795. However, on the same day seven other members of the same lodge were registered.¹³ This alone shows that the date is not likely to be that of the actual admission. It is highly unlikely that eight men could have gone through the lengthy initiation ceremonies during one night: such cases have not been recorded in the minutes of individual lodges. Teeling may have joined at any time after the previous registrations by his lodge, in September 1794, or as we have seen, indeed long before that but only requested a grand lodge certificate in 1795.

However, Smyth's observations may be correct in substance if not in detail. Although his evidence does not support his suggestion of a concerted campaign of infiltration, the fact that United Irish leaders underwent the bother and expense of grand lodge registration may support other proof on their "missionary" activities in the revolutionary cause. Possibly they found it easier to gain admission to strange lodges during their travels armed with a proper grand lodge certificate and not just one signed by the officers of their own lodges.

The enthusiasm for freemasonry in the bicentenary decade of the 1990s may have led to other kinds of unwary assumptions. For instance, Brendan Clifford, the editor of a selection of masonic items from the *Northern Star*, subscribes to some sweeping generalisations such as that "Freemasonry...was a confidential society...whose purpose was to promulgate the philosophy of John Locke" or that Mozart, had he lived in Ulster, "would, as a freemason, also have been a United Irishman".¹⁴ However, Clifford also puts forward a proposal that should not be ignored without some inquiry: a distinction between a "caste" freemasonry, directed by the grand lodge, that "seems to have made itself the guardian of the Constitution of 1782, as the perfect form of the Glorious Revolution in Ireland", and a "popular" northern variant, which contributed to the reform politics and the formation of the United Irishmen.¹⁵

Larry Conlon asserts that "the majority of the general membership of both the United Irishmen and Defenders, including their leadership, would appear to have been

¹² Register, 1st series, lodge 762 (5 April 1792). Smyth gives Kennedy's lodge as 763 (i.e. McCracken's lodge) in Smyth 1992, p. 221 fn. 13. The lodge number is corrected in Smyth 1993, p. 174 but the contradiction as to Kennedy's date of admission remains.

¹³ Register, 1st series, lodge 193 (13 February 1795).

¹⁴ Clifford 1992, pp. 10-11.

active freemasons".¹⁶ This is highly unlikely, as many more people were involved in the United Irishmen and the Defenders than in freemasonry. The Ulster radicals alone claimed a membership of 118 000 in 1797.¹⁷ Although the figure is probably exaggerated, comparison with the estimated number of Ulster freemasons (c. 12 000 in 1792, c. 20 000 in 1800, see chapter 3) does not support Conlon's argument. The membership fees alone would have disqualified many potential United Irishmen and even more so, Defenders, from being members of the "regular" masonic lodges. The Defenders, like the early Orangemen (see chapters 8.2 and 8.3.2) may have considered themselves masons - in their own way - but this is probably not what Conlon had in mind.

8.1.1. Overlap in membership

Establishing the full extent of the links between the post-1794 United Irishmen and freemasonry is a complicated task. Much more detailed local and biographical research is needed before anything approaching a comprehensive view can be reached. However, Jim Smyth's investigations are (despite the above criticism) a valuable starting point. Smyth has identified thirty-three United Irishmen who were freemasons: of these, seventeen came from Ulster.¹⁸

The United Irish leaders in Belfast lodges included at least Henry Haslett, William McCleary and William Tennant (lodge 257),¹⁹ Samuel Kennedy (762),²⁰ Thomas McCabe (587)²¹ and Henry Joy McCracken (763).²² For some of the Belfast radicals, the evidence is inconclusive. *"Last night I visited some public houses, where were assembled meetings of freemasons, and arrested Mr. Cuthbert the tailor, and am going to commit him to*

¹⁵ Clifford 1992, pp. 8-9, 16. The selection edited by Clifford, although entitled "Freemasonry and the United Irishmen", only includes items from 1792-93: it is by no means certain that all or even most reformers in masonic lodges at that time were United Irishmen (see chapter 7.3).

¹⁶ Conlon 1997b, p. 146.

¹⁷ Dickson 1987, p. 186.

¹⁸ Smyth 1993, pp. 174-175. Most of the people mentioned in this chapter are among those listed by Smyth. Actually, Smyth lists eighteen Ulster freemasons. However, his identification of a member of the Lisburn lodge called George Tandy with the brother of the Dublin radical, James Napper Tandy, seems doubtful as the Lisburn mason was registered in 1771. Register, 1st series, lodge 193 (26 June 1771).

¹⁹ Register, 1st series, lodge 257 (Haslett: 27 January 1781; "McCleary" and "Tenent": 6 October 1783).

²⁰ Register, 1st series, lodge 762 (5 April 1792). Smyth 1992 p. 221 gives his lodge as 763 but this has been corrected in Smyth 1993, p. 174.

²¹ Register, 1st series, lodge 587 (14 November 1789). Smyth 1993 p. 174 gives McCabe's lodge as 684 (another Belfast lodge). However, McCabe does not appear in the Register under 684.

²² Register, 1st series, lodge 763 (5 February 1796). Smyth 1993 p. 175 gives McCracken's lodge as 783 (another Belfast lodge). However, McCracken does not appear in the Register under 783.

gaol",²³ wrote Lord Carhampton in 1796. Was Joseph Cuthbert, Presbyterian tailor and a United Irishman, also a freemason? The only Cuthbert registered for a Belfast lodge is a James Cuthbert,²⁴ he may be a relative or the entry may contain a clerical error. Daniel Shannon, or Shanaghan, was a Catholic Belfast solicitor, who with Cuthbert reputedly drove from Belfast to Blaris camp in a coach and four to distribute money to soldiers.²⁵ Shannon who, according to the informer Bird, was "*avaricious in the extreme, yet a hard drinker*", may also have been a mason: the grand lodge register mentions a Daniel "Shanahan" among the members of a Belfast lodge.²⁶ Namesakes can be found in the records also for John Campbell²⁷ as well as for William Magee the printer and bookseller²⁸ and John Boyle the merchant,²⁹ both of whom were among the founders of the *Northern Star*. William Orr, the United Irish martyr hanged at Carrickfergus in October 1797, has also been reputed to be a mason. However, Orr's name cannot be found in the register entries for any of the nearby lodges.³⁰

It may be worth noting that at least Haslett, McCabe, McCleary and Tennant were freemasons before they were United Irishmen, as was their Dublin colleague, Archibald Hamilton Rowan.³¹ However, they all joined a masonic lodge at a time of political upheaval - it may be impossible or even irrelevant to try and establish whether they were freemasons or Volunteers first at a time when many politically active citizens tended to be both. Portraying the United Irish society as a masonic plot makes little sense as not all masons, even those caught up in the Volunteering enthusiasm in the 1780s, were radicals by the standards of the late 1790s. To quote just a couple of examples, John Brown, master of the "Orange Lodge" of Belfast (no. 257) and reputedly the wealthiest man in that town, was later "a pillar of the conservative faction and four times sovereign of the town".³² The Rev. George Macartney, "a noted pluralist and an active magistrate", issued

²³ Lord Carhampton to [Pelham] 15 November 1796. Pelham transcripts, T 755/3 p. 194. PRONI.

²⁴ Register, 1st series, lodge 587 (8 July 1795). The register entry shows that "James Cuthbert" affiliated from another Belfast lodge, 491. The register entry for that lodge mentions a "Joseph Culbert". Register, 1st series, lodge 491 (26 April 1784).

²⁵ Curtin 1994, p. 171.

²⁶ Register, 1st series, lodge 621 (5 March 1785).

²⁷ Register, 1st series, lodge 687 (23 March 1796).

²⁸ Register, 1st series, lodge 257 (20 March 1782).

²⁹ Register, 1st series, lodge 687 (23 March 1796).

³⁰ 313 Antrim, 529 Antrim, 551 Templepatrick. The 1790s registrations of 805 Antrim cannot be ascertained with certainty as the last volume of the first series of the grand lodge register (which included 805) has been lost. Interestingly, two prominent freemasons of different political leanings, William Bristow and Lord O'Neill, were among those who asked for clemency for Orr. For their pleas for clemency, see Curtin 1994, p. 85.

³¹ Rowan was a mason from 1789. He belonged to two Dublin lodges, one of them the First Volunteer Lodge, an exclusive lodge founded by Volunteer officers. Geoghegan 1921, pp. 21-22.

³² Stewart 1993, p. 165.

the warrant for the arrest of William Orr. His nephew Arthur Chichester Macartney was one of the prosecuting counsel at Orr's trial. Like Tennant and McCleary, both Macartneys were members of lodge 257.³³

Another group of radicals, closely linked to Belfast, was clustered around lodge 193 in Lisburn. The members of the lodge included Henry Munro and Bartholomew Teeling.³⁴ Samuel Neilson, the editor of the *Northern Star*, also appears to have been a member of the Lisburn lodge.³⁵ According to Jim Smyth, Neilson's links with the Teeling family were crucial in the context of United Irish - Defender co-operation.³⁶

Co. Tyrone masonic radicals of the late 1790s include Archibald Borland (350 Cappagh), James Boyle (lodge unknown, Coagh),³⁷ Alexander Campbell (599 Aughnacloy), the exiled Dr James Reynolds (768 Cookstown) and William Richardson (205 Moy). John Alexander, the printer of *Strabane Journal*, who may have done printing for the United Irishmen, may have been a member of a lodge in Raphoe in the neighbouring Co. Donegal.³⁸

In Derry city, the presence of United Irish leaders Andrew and Lawrence McShane in lodge 640³⁹ may indicate that the members of that lodge were, on the average, more inclined to radicalism than those of lodge 132, the oldest in the city. The membership roll of lodge 132 included Henry Alexander and George Hill, the two MPs for the city.⁴⁰ In Magherafelt, the most prominent radical and mason was Dr James Caldwell. An apothecary told a magistrate in 1798 how he had procured a United Irish constitution for the swearing in of two visitors at Caldwell's house. As he did not have a copy himself, he went to see a fellow conspirator called David Wilson, got a copy from him and then returned to Caldwell's house.⁴¹ A David Wilson was the first registered member (the first master) of a Magherafelt lodge in set up in 1776, but the name is too common to allow

³³ For short biographies of members of 257, see McClelland 1968, pp. 80-84.

³⁴ For Munro, see Register, 1st series, lodge 193 (4 January 1794). For Teeling, see fn. 13 above.

³⁵ Register, 1st series, lodge 193 (16 June 1796).

³⁶ Smyth 1992, pp. 118-119. Although familiar with the register entry for lodge 193 (having used it to establish Teeling's and Munro's membership, Smyth does not identify Neilson as a freemason. A. T. Q. Stewart (correctly, as it turns out) assumes that he was a mason. Stewart 1993, p. 184.

³⁷ Andrew Newton (Coagh) to NN (9 February 1798). Reb. 620/35/130.

³⁸ Register, 1st series, lodge 346 (8 November 1784). For the allegations concerning printing, see General Knox to Edward Cooke (3 May 1798). Reb. 620/37/3.

³⁹ Register, 1st series, lodge 640 (29 September 1785 for Andrew McShane, 26 April 1792 for Lawrence). A printed list of lodge 640 members appended to the register page indicates that Lawrence McShane was already a member on 5 April 1792. I am grateful to Dr Breandán Mac Suibhne for drawing my attention to the Derry radicals.

⁴⁰ Register, 1st series, lodge 132 (21 May 1790 for Alexander, 23 December 1797 for Hill)

positive identification.⁴² A Co. Monaghan lodge expelled a Pat McQuaide "for non-attendance and being a United Irishman".⁴³ According to Larry Conlon, several Co. Cavan United leaders may have been masons.⁴⁴ On the other hand, a government agent in Downpatrick listed eight United Irishmen suspects in May 1796, claiming that they met under the guise of a literary society. None were freemasons, at least according to the grand lodge register.⁴⁵

For other parts of Ulster, the local research is even more incomplete, further underlining the need for many more detailed local studies before anything meaningful can be said about the extent of the overlap in the whole of the province, not to mention the whole of Ireland. From outside Ulster, the name of Oliver Bond should be added: he was a member of a fashionable Dublin lodge, the membership of which included people like two scions of the LaTouche banking dynasty, several grand lodge officers and at least one peer.⁴⁶ However, in assessing the significance of these facts, one should also remember the names missing from the list, such as Theobald Wolfe Tone, Arthur O'Connor, Thomas Russell, John Napper Tandy and Lord Edward Fitzgerald. No evidence has surfaced to date to prove that any of them were freemasons, passive or active - even Fitzgerald, who was a brother of the 2nd Duke of Leinster, grand master the Irish masons in the 1770s.

Presbyterian ministers, the group often regarded as the ideological backbone of the revolutionary movement, do not seem to have particularly well represented in masonry. William McMillan has listed thirty-one ministers or probationers who were implicated in the rebellion, twenty-seven of them adherents of the New Light wing of Presbyterianism.⁴⁷ However, only a couple of the thirty-one appear to have preached at masonic services: Futt Marshall, who was reputedly present with the rebels on Donegore Hill, was a mason himself.⁴⁸ Thomas Ledlie Birch and James Porter were not addressed

⁴¹ Information of John Grahams, 10 July 1798. Reb. 620/40/35 (enclosure).

⁴² Register, 1st series, lodge 525 (6 July 1776). Neither Caldwell or the apothecary, John Grahams, can be found in the register under any of the nearby lodges (423,525,536,613,777).

⁴³ Lodge 794 minutes, 17 May 1796, quoted in Hayes 1938, p. 28. The lodge (at Newbliss, Co. Monaghan) also made several others members to clear themselves of involvement in the United Irish society.

⁴⁴ Conlon 1997a, pp. 804-805.

⁴⁵ For the suspects, see Wilson 1995, p. 142. There is no mention of Thomas Nevin, Joseph Haughton, James Wallace, James Sweeny, Edward and John Fitzsimons or James and Joseph Nelson in Register, 1st series, under the Downpatrick lodges 343 and 367. GLI.

⁴⁶ Register, 1st series, lodge 198 (27 December 1785).

⁴⁷ McMillan 1997, pp. 85-86, 88-113.

⁴⁸ McMillan 1997, pp. 95-96. BNL 29 June and 2 July 1790, 3 July 1792. *Northern Star* 27 June 1792.

as "brothers" in the St. John's Day newspaper reports: thus their masonic membership remains in doubt.⁴⁹ James Bryson, the most prominent mason among radical Presbyterian ministers, died in 1796.

All the available information suggests that the intensity of the radical-masonic link varied considerably from county to county, from town to town and even from one lodge to the next. In assessing the significance of radical masons, one should keep in mind that many lodges and individual masons, especially but not solely in Co. Armagh, were strongly loyalist: it is by no means proven that radicalism had a stronger hold of masonry in Ulster than loyalism (see chapter 8.3). Many more were moderates, whose interpretation of the principles of masonry did not encompass violent revolution.

If rebels could be freemasons, so could informers. One such anonymous informer reported on the activities of a suspected United Irish emissary: "*There is now in town a young man from Belfast of the name of Gordon...and am sure he has come out for the purpose of planting societies in different parts. He is a mason, so am I, & goes under the pretext of selling muslins...Search all his papers*".⁵⁰ The Belfast United Irishmen, John Hughes and James McGuckin later became government informers. Both were members of lodge 257.⁵¹

Knowing that an individual United Irishman - no matter how prominent - was a mason, tells us little of the real substance of the connection between masonry and political radicalism. It is time to move beyond biography and look at the substance of the link: the ideological grounds on which it was based, the ways in which it operated and how it changed over time.

8.1.2. Masonic ideology and United Irish radicalism

The Belfast United Irish newspaper first published in 1792, the *Northern Star*, adopted a positive attitude towards freemasonry from the very beginning. Masonry was portrayed as a model for a non-sectarian society, thus strengthening the United Irish

⁴⁹ For Birch, see BNL 29 June 1787, 22 July 1791 and *Northern Star* 29 June 1795 According to A. T. Q. Stewart, Birch was "a prominent freemason". Stewart 1995, p. 180. However, he was not a registered member of the only masonic lodge in Saintfield. Register, 1st series, lodge 425. For Porter, see 1 July 1796.

⁵⁰ Anon. to "Mr. Armstrong" (Thomas Knox MP of Dungannon?) n.d. (c. October 1796). Reb. 620/25/187, enclosure. According to the informer, Gordon was a nephew of Samuel Neilson.

⁵¹ McClelland 1968, pp. 81-82.

argument for the abolition of denominational distinctions as regards political rights. For example, the burial in London of two masons *"in one grave, although one was a Roman Catholic, and the other Protestant"* was interpreted as evidence of *"masonic philanthropy, which, rising superior to religious prejudices, has ever united in social benevolence the members of this distinguished fraternity"*.⁵²

When the lodges in Bellaghy and Castledawson published the first conservative resolutions in December 1792, (see chapter 7.3.2) the *Northern Star* expressed the disappointment felt by radical masons by publishing a long protest in the form of a letter signed "A freemason and an Irish Protestant". The writer defined the purpose of masonry as *"to meet together as brethren, for the promulgation of knowledge, the advancement of morality, the exploding of bigotry...and drawing as it were the whole universal family of mankind into a holy bond of union, peace and concord"*. Support for conservatism was portrayed as contrary to these principles and as something likely to cause freemasons to be viewed as *"the bond-men of royalty, the minions of party, the very lowest and most pliant groundlings of administration"*. The Bellaghy and Castledawson resolutions were regarded as the first manifestation of a plot by the government desperate to create a division among the restless nation: *"how shall it be kept up? Religious animosities are now at an end; the light of reason hath entered men's hearts; they see they are enslaved... Yet something must be effected - we must not give up our places, our pensions, our sinecures, our patronage and our profits, without a struggle. The freemasons, yes, let's try what we can do there - they are a numerous, an affectionate, and a loyal body; we must exert all our cunning to bring over some of their societies...."*. There was also a hint of what the writer considered was the task of the proposed provincial reform convention: to appoint *"deputies to represent the Nation"* in the house of Commons.⁵³

Although in the mid-1790s it was clearer than ever that not all masons were radicals and freemasonry as a body would not support revolution or even reform, it was not difficult to find traces of radicalism in masonic contexts like contemporary masonic poetry:

*Our noble order e'er shall brave
Oppression's scourge, and envy's sting
Shall feed the hungry, free the slave,*

⁵² *Northern Star* 4 January 1792.

⁵³ *Northern Star* 19 December 1792.

*And make the widow's heart to sing:
To no persuasion e'er confined,
It deals its blessings to mankind.*⁵⁴

The United Irishmen also used masonic symbolism and imagery in their propaganda. Dáire Keogh argues that a masonic funeral in Dungannon in 1796 was a precursor of the transformation of "religious processions and funerals... into United Irish rallies and displays".⁵⁵ The "all-seeing eye" as a symbol for God appears in the satirical poem, *An elegy, sacred to the memory of the Orange Pig* which describes the fury of the Armagh Orangemen when a pig decorated with Orange insignia was let loose among them. After a mock-tragic lament for "your orphaned litter and your widowed sow" the poet ends his rhymes on a more serious note:

*And such the state of tyrant usurpation
Till Erin's sons liberate this fettered nation:
And the all-seeing Eye with just unerring hand
Restore and waft from pole to pole the injured rights of man.*⁵⁶

Such sentiments were echoed in some St. John's Day sermons, such as that preached in 1795 by the Rev. Thomas Ledlie Birch "from 1 Peter, 2. chap. middle clause of the 17th verse", or "Honour all men, love the brotherhood, fear God, honour the king". Thus however one defines the "middle clause", honouring the king was not part of Birch's sermon. In his concluding address, Birch castigated "*fomenters of quarrels amongst mankind, [who] practise their hellish arts of dividing the people into parties, and leading on the brother to meet his brother in blood, under a religious pretence, and afterwards rob all parties!*".⁵⁷

Given the intense political involvement of so many masonic lodges in 1792-93 (see chapter 7.3), it was inevitable that many of the actors in the subsequent events would be masons. However, the different political circumstances of 1792-93 and 1798 must be constantly kept in mind. Due to the wide divergence of political opinion within freemasonry, it was by no means predetermined in which camp a freemason would end up. The historian must be careful not read evidence of reformist leanings in 1792-93 as evidence of United sympathies in 1798. Many Ulster masons (notably the majority of them

⁵⁴ "A masonic song, by a member of no. 13, Limerick" in *Sentimental and Masonic Magazine* (January 1794), p. 68.

⁵⁵ Keogh 1997, p. 14.

⁵⁶ Printed handbill, Reb. 620/35/119 (enclosure). Reprinted in McEvoy 1969, p. 46.

in Co. Armagh) were conservatives even when reforms were proposed in 1792-93, not to mention when a complete overthrow of the Irish political system threatened. By the time Birch preached his sermon in 1795, it was becoming more and more likely that a brother - in the masonic sense of the word - would indeed soon meet his brother "in blood". Several masonic lodges and individual masons - particularly in Co. Armagh - were busy organising armed loyalist associations. The lower-class loyalism later known as Orangeism that was emerging was not without masonic connections and features of its own (see chapter 8.3).

In addition to the loyalist element, many masons were moderates, who were either satisfied with the extension of the political rights of the Catholics in 1793 or did not regard the time as ripe for more advanced reforms. Thus there is no contradiction between a mason or lodge demanding a reform of the constitution in 1792-93 and defending the constitution (as reformed in 1793) against rebels in 1798.

8.1.3 United Irish infiltration of masonic lodges?

The received wisdom on the links between freemasonry and the United Irishmen is that "there is little reason to doubt that freemasonry was used by the United Irishmen as an organisational tool when the 'cell' structure was being actively promoted in 1795 and 1796".⁵⁸ However, one must be careful not to push the meaning of "an organisational tool" too far. If it is taken to mean similarity of organisation, the comparison is not particularly fruitful. Unlike masonic lodges, new-style United Irish groups did not parade in public; unlike the eighteenth-century masons, they sought to keep their membership secret. Unlike the masons, they had a hierarchical structure of military command which bore little resemblance to the simple and often inefficient masonic organisation which the establishment of county committees had so flagrantly failed to make more effective in all but two counties.

Although the evidence on local level is still far too incomplete for a definitive picture of the radical-masonic links to be presented, it seems that the "front" aspect of masonic lodges may have been much exaggerated. After all, not a single lodge is known to have been suppressed by the government before or after 1798, although individual

⁵⁷ *Northern Star* 29 June 1795. The service was attended by lodges 343 Crossgar, 425 Saintfield and 659 Lisnod. For a short biography of Birch (which does not mention his masonic links), see McClelland 1963.

⁵⁸ Whelan 1996, p. 86.

lodges disciplined members implicated in the rebellion (see chapter 8.4). Not a single lodge seems to have had its warrant cancelled or even suspended because of political involvement. The role played by, and links between, political clubs and some masonic lodges on the continent of Europe (particularly in France)⁵⁹ may have misled researchers. It is often assumed that the relationship between Irish freemasonry and the United Irishmen, the pre-eminent Irish manifestation of the late eighteenth-century political club, must have been equally symbiotic. However, although by 1795 freemasons had to defend their society against the claims of masonic involvement in the French Revolution,⁶⁰ there is no evidence of direct links between French and Irish freemasonry. Moreover, the already quoted Irish masonic ideology, as presented in the *Ahiman Rezon*, obliged a freemason to be "a lover of quiet...always subject to the civil powers...". Even though some Irish masons chose to stress the condition attached to deference: "...provided they [the civil powers] do not infringe upon the limited bounds of religion and reason",⁶¹ most masons seem to have reached the limits of disobedience that they could justify in 1792-93.

Although the fact that different lodges had different political profiles is not in doubt, identifying lodges with definite United Irish links is difficult. Having had prominent radical members in the past (even the very recent past) was no proof of radical leanings in the late 1790s. For example, both Samuel Kennedy's lodge (no. 762) and Henry Joy McCracken's (no. 763) passed decidedly loyal resolutions in 1797.⁶² Neither is the foundation date of a lodge a firm indication of political attitudes. According to Kevin Whelan, "in 1796 alone, thirty-three new lodges were created and twelve old ones revived".⁶³ As Whelan gives these figures in the context of describing how the United Irishmen organised their "cell" structure in 1795 - 1796, he seems to assume that creating new masonic lodges was something the United Irishmen could do at will. Needless to say, such an assertion completely ignores the supervising role of the grand lodge. The fact that a lodge was founded in 1796 does not automatically mean that it was founded by radicals: some of the thirty-three lodges were set up in militia regiments (this on its own does not preclude radical involvement, of course, but grand lodge vetting of the applicants for a warrant makes it unlikely). If any further evidence is required, one of the 1796 lodges was formed in the Essex Fencibles - an unlikely place for a United Irish cell

⁵⁹ Mazauric 1993, p. 21.

⁶⁰ See e.g. "Freemasonry, proved to be a honourable institution" in *Sentimental and Masonic Magazine* (June 1795), pp. 483-487.

⁶¹ *Ahiman Rezon* (Belfast 1782 ed.), p. 12.

⁶² BNL 7 July 1797.

⁶³ Whelan 1996, p. 86.

to exist.⁶⁴ Furthermore, many of the lodges formed in the 1790s expressed strong loyalist opinions in their 1797 resolutions.⁶⁵

Not all Irish masonic lodges had names in addition to numbers, but it may be tempting to judge the political attitudes of those that did by looking at their names. However, neither names such as "Orange" (see chapter 8.4) nor apparently radical-sounding names are definitive evidence of where the lodge stood as regards politics. Lodge 845 Belfast was called "Lodge of love and liberty", which has led Kevin Whelan to think that it was a "front" for the United Irishmen. As the lodge warrant (granted in principle in 1796) was not paid for and consequently, not handed to the lodge until 1799, it is doubtful whether this particular lodge was very active in the revolutionary or any other cause. The lodge may of course have functioned without a warrant, though apparently there is no evidence of this activity.⁶⁶

By 1796 the radicals were accused of operating under the cover of masonry. James Paterson of Magherafelt reported that St. John's Day in Winter, 1796, was to be the cover for radical meetings. "*The delinquents*" were to organise "*three meetings...by delegates, in this county on St. John's Day, supposed to be under the masque of masonry, to report the strength of their different districts...*".⁶⁷ That St. John's Day, an alleged informer denied the accusations both upon oath before magistrates and "*also at a full meeting of...lodge no. 701 held in...Moneymore being St. John's Day where I acquit[t]ed myself of said charges to the full satisfaction of the members belonging thereto*".⁶⁸

Although the government correspondence contains several references to masonic lodges suspected of radical activity, the historian has to be careful not to regard allegations as facts without examination. Suspicion fell particularly hard on the lodges in Tyrone, the county which in 1792-93 had been the most radical (although not unanimously so). In a series of letters to Dublin Castle, General Knox accused the Tyrone masons of covering up "*United Irish treason, under the mask of freemasonry. County*

⁶⁴ IMR pp. 141-144.

⁶⁵ These include 785 Knocknagin, Co. L'derry (BNL 1 July 1796), 805 Antrim (BNL 27 January 1797), 826 Littlebridge, Co. L'derry (BNL 18 August 1797), 836 Pomeroy, Co. Tyrone (BNL 7 July 1797), all formed in or after 1793.

⁶⁶ Whelan 1996, p. 86. The name "Lodge of love and liberty" is recorded in IMR. Only three members were registered before the turn of the century. In the years 1802-1837 the lodge registered further 197 members, many with names possibly identifying them as Catholics.

⁶⁷ James Paterson to [General Knox?] (25 December 1796). Reb. 620/28/14b.

committees. Sub-committees. Correspondence. Fines &c are foreign to masonry, of late establishment and evidently part of the United Irish system". Some of the lodges in Tyrone and also in Fermanagh "were disloyal and doing mischief"; one consisted of "the greatest rascals in the North", another was "composed of a notorious gang of United Irishmen": Knox believed that "treason is kept alive thro' every county in the North thro' the medium of free mason lodges".⁶⁹

Knox's preoccupation with the danger posed by masonry convinced him of the need for more drastic action. In June 1798, he sent William Richardson of Moy, the prominent Co. Tyrone freemason and an associate of Reynolds in 1793, to Dublin Castle with a letter to Under-Secretary Cooke. Richardson was to explain his conduct "in consequence of the disloyalty manifested by some lodges of free masonry in the County of Tyrone, over which lodges he has a superintending controul [sic] - a certain suspicion rested upon him, which it behoved him to clear up". Richardson was to deliver the letter to Cooke, but unknown to him, Knox had also written another letter in which he urged Cooke to seize Richardson and "keep him in Dublin - in suspence [sic] - without giving him any hint of the nature of the charge against him...I believe him a dangerous fellow here, but hope shortly to discover him completely...".⁷⁰

General Knox's analysis of the activities of the Tyrone masons, based on captured masonic documents, had one significant defect: it was utterly wrong. He did not realise that the Tyrone county committee was a body authorised by the grand lodge in Dublin and actually predated the United Irishmen (see chapter 7.3.1). The actual evidence that Knox had, consisted of a letter from one Tyrone mason to another, which mentioned the county committee and a sub-committee. As Knox was not aware of the existence of such committees in freemasonry, he automatically assumed that these terms referred to the subversive United Irish organisation. He only became aware of the facts after he had sent Richardson to Dublin. Nevertheless, Knox stubbornly insisted that the government should destroy such a "dangerous system grafted on freemasonry...the grand master, in authorising such a system, has been duped".⁷¹ One is left with the impression that the

⁶⁸ Mandy Diffin to the editor of the *Northern Star* (25 January 1797). Reb. 620/28/144. No. 701 had been a radical lodge in 1792-93. BNL 15 January 1793.

⁶⁹ Gen. Knox (Enniskillen) to Cooke (3 May, 5 May, 7 May 1798). Reb. 620/37/7.

⁷⁰ Two letters by General Knox (Dungannon) to Cooke (6 June 1798) Reb. 620/38/61. Richardson was a founder-member and apparently the first master of 205 Moy as his name appears first on the list of members. Register, 1st series, lodge 205 (3 August 1790). The low number of the warrant is explained by the fact that warrant 205 was a "revived" one; it had previously been held in several army regiments. IMR.

⁷¹ Gen. Knox to Cooke (13 June 1798). Reb. 620/38/141.

masons suspected by Knox may actually have been more moderate reformers rather than United Irishmen. In one case, Knox almost admits as much, by declaring that the master of a lodge was "*an acknowledged United Irish man - but apparently a moderate one*".

Several of the other references to masonry also admit of an interpretation less dramatic than that put on them by nervous magistrates and ill-informed generals. For instance, a suspect was reported "*to visit a freemason society &c at Ballinascreen [Draperstown]*".⁷² However, such a clue does not automatically prove that the whole lodge was but a facade for a United Irish committee. In this particular case, far from it. The Ballinascreen lodge (no. 460) had indeed been radical by the standards of 1792-93, with close links to the Volunteers. Nevertheless, it had had passed loyal resolutions in the summer of 1796.⁷³

In September 1796, the Rev. Isaac Ashe requested that soldiers should be based in Coagh, "*the noted rendezvous of all illegal meetings*". In a postscript, Ashe added that "*the grand master of the freemasons if he exerted himself could be of much service as the majority of United Irishmen effect to be of that society, & assemble under that pretext*".⁷⁴ Again, a careful reading shows that Ashe did not allege that all masons were revolutionaries, or that any lodge that he knew was a front for the United Irishmen. The United Irishmen could well "effect to be" masons and hold meetings disguised as lodge meetings, but this does not prove that all such meetings were actually held under the aegis of "regular" masonic lodges. For instance, a group of soldiers claimed that they were tricked into joining a society of the United Irishmen "*some by curiosity & some from thinking it a freemasons society & they all were told nothing was included against the king*".⁷⁵ In one case in 1797, the United Irishmen were actually specifically placed in the category of "irregular" masons: "*every hedgemason in this neighbourhood are United Irishmen*".⁷⁶

Some of the "evidence" of the United Irish infiltration is even more dubious. The parish priest of Carrickfergus and government informer, James McCary, claimed that "*many under the sanction of holding war[r]anted freemason lodges assemble to hold societys of unitted irish mens [sic] machinations - these gent[leme]n in admitting a brother*

⁷² George G. Gordon (Limavady) to Sir George Hill Bart. (8 February 1797). Reb. 620/28/240.

⁷³ BNL 11 January 1793, 1 July 1796. See also McClelland 1962, p. 20.

⁷⁴ Rev. Isaac Ashe (Money more) to NN (25 September 1796). Reb. 620/25/111.

⁷⁵ W. Bentinck (Armagh) to Pelham (28 December 1796). Reb. 620/18/6.

⁷⁶ James Hamilton Jr to the Marquis of Abercorn 7 May 1797. Abercorn Papers, D/623/A/89/25. PRONI.

omit now in these days their usual oath of al[l]egiance - and unless watched well may ere long become dangerous to the state".⁷⁷ How much McCary actually knew about freemasonry in his district, is not known: as he does not name any masons or lodges, it seems that his information was pure hearsay. The Antrim magistrate, George Macartney, sent to Dublin Castle a medal confiscated from a house belonging to a man whose three sons were suspected of being United Irishmen. On one side of the medal there are engraved masonic symbols and on the other, a harp without a crown. The harp, which is engraved much more crudely than the "masonic" side of the medal, is surrounded by an inscription: "*Irishmen unite - tear off[f] your chains and be free - Jo. M'Bride 1790*".⁷⁸ Macartney apparently suspected that the medal (although it predated the United Irishmen) may have been used as a badge of recognition by the radicals. However, as George Macartney was himself a mason (see chapter 8.1.1), the incident can hardly be construed as an expression of suspicion of masonry as such.

If most of the allegations were vague, there were some that were more specific and pointed at particular lodges. Andrew Newton of Coagh, a liberal magistrate who had some Catholics in his yeomanry corps and sought to prevent provocative Orange displays by Protestants, complained in May 1797 of two masonic lodges in his neighbourhood where "*every bad & disloyal measure is adopted*". He suggested that measures should be taken to prevent lodges meeting at night, "*as I hear (for I am no mason) that their business can be as well done in the day*".⁷⁹ However, assessing the significance of such claims is complicated by the fact that most of the allegations originate with either General Knox (who knew remarkably little about freemasonry in his district) or with Newton who eagerly believed all conspiracy theories that came his way (see chapter 8.3.4). Lodges specifically implicated by these two crusaders were 350 Cappagh,⁸⁰ 369 Fintona, 476 Dromore, 599 Aughnacloy, allegedly a lodge "*composed of the greatest rascals in the North*" and "*in fact a [United Irish] county committee*" and 720 Fivemiletown, which Knox claimed was "*composed of a notorious gang of United Irishmen*". In addition, there was an "*infamous*" if unidentified lodge in Armagh.⁸¹ Also in Cookstown, masons were regarded with suspicion: an army colonel threatened in 1798 to close a public house frequented both by his soldiers and freemasons.⁸² Of these lodges, only 350, 599, and

⁷⁷ James MacCary to William Williams (15 July 1797). Reb. 620/31/236a.

⁷⁸ George Macartney to Cooke (25 February 1797). The medal is deposited in the National Archives with the Rebellion Papers.

⁷⁹ Andrew Newton (Coagh) to [Pelham] (3 May 1797). Reb. 620/30/11.

⁸⁰ Andrew Newton to NN (9 February 1798). Reb. 620/35/130.

⁸¹ General Knox to Cooke (3 May, 5 May and 7 May 1798). Reb. 620/37/3

⁸² Bartlett 1990, p. 195.

two of the lodges in Cookstown are known to have been radical even by the standards of 1792-93.

To sum up, most of what little information the government had on subversive activity in masonic lodges, was either vague or dubious. Few if any lodges can be shown to have been United Irish "fronts" with any level of certainty, suggesting that the United Irish infiltration of masonry - if they in fact ever committed themselves to such a strategy - was singularly unsuccessful. Most lodges - unless they were actually involved in loyalist mobilisation (see chapter 8.3.1) preferred to stay aloof of political or sectarian trouble. It seems likely that in most cases, a lodge ended on the list of suspects due to personal or political prejudice rather than through proven subversive activity. Probably some of the correspondents of the government did not bother distinguishing between United Irishmen and more moderate reformers.

Nevertheless, many individual masons were United Irishmen, and for some of them the dual membership led to a conflict of loyalties. The predicament of Richard Gally is an example of the conflicting obligations that faced some masons in the late 1790s. Bob White, a cousin of Gally's, had concealed stolen gunpowder and told Gally about it "*under the secrecy of masonry*". Gally told a magistrate, Thomas E. Higginson, about the gunpowder, although "*his principal scruple in giving the information against his cousin was, his being bound to secrecy as a mason*". Higginson, who was also a freemason, told Gally that "*no secrecy of masonry obliged me to conceal anything which as a Christian I should divulge, and the concealing of which might prove so injurious to so many of my fellow creatures*".⁸³

What significance freemasonry had in the United Irish scheme of things seems to have been largely restricted to individuals: emissaries travelling from town to town, or even further afield. Although the information comes from the nervous Newton, it suggests that masonry may have had a role in facilitating contacts with Scottish radicals:

*There is a young man from this place [Coagh] now at Glasgow College, who, as I am inform'd, went with a collected purse for the purpose of making United Scotchmen - his name is James Boyle - When here he was master of a mason lodge - in which every member was deeply United - & into which no new members were admitted but of that class, at their admission, allegiance to the king was entirely omitted & a disloyal test substituted.*⁸⁴

⁸³ Thos. E. Higginson (Woodbrook) to Lord NN (15 February 1797). Reb. 620/28/275.

⁸⁴ Andrew Newton (Coagh) to NN (9 February 1798). Reb. 620/35/130.

Shared masonic membership may also have had a role as a facilitator of contacts between some of the leading United Irishmen and the Defenders (see chapter 8.2). However, the discovery of even one lodge that could be said to have been a United Irish front with any certainty, must await the completion of local studies on individual towns and lodges.

8.1.4. The struggle for freemasonry, 1796 - 1798

If radical leanings by the standards of 1792-93 are no proof of radicalism in 1794-96, neither is it by any means certain that the political position of a lodge remained unchanged. Not only could there be disagreements among members: there were also attempts to influence the lodges from the outside, particularly by the grand lodge. Little is known of the grand lodge reaction to political activity within the lodges apart from the "admonition" issued soon after the December 1792 mobilisation of the Tyrone "masonic citizens".⁸⁵ A circular was sent to the local lodges to remind them of this policy. Lepper and Crossle say nothing further of grand lodge activity in this regard, moving straight to the post-1798 argument on whether rebel masons should be expelled.⁸⁶

However, some evidence of the grand lodge's efforts during that gap of five years survives. Most of the eighteenth-century grand lodge correspondence has been lost, but one intriguing document is extant. A letter from lodge 613 (Desertlyn, Co. Londonderry) in July 1796 refers to efforts by the writer, Samuel Brown, to discover whether any lodges in his neighbourhood had been infiltrated by the United Irishmen:

Your two letters of the 14th May & the 21st June came to hand & I observe their contents - I would have answered the first or this but has [sic] been end[e]avouring to find if any free mason lodge in this neighbourhood acted under the appell[ation] of united Irishmen - I assure you as a b[rothe]r: I have not been inform'd nor can I find out any lodge of freemasons that has acted under such a character⁸⁷

The writer goes on to admit that suspected United Irishmen from the Maghera region had been sent to Derry gaol and that no doubt there were masons among them "for almost every one are freemasons now". Although the recipient is not named, the letter was definitely sent to a grand lodge officer as it is not only addressed to "Sir and

⁸⁵ Grand lodge minutes (3 January 1793). GLI.

⁸⁶ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 296-299.

Brother", but also includes details of financial transactions (lodge dues and registration of members) that would only have been discussed between a lodge officer (most likely the secretary) and the deputy grand secretary, who was in charge of such matters (at the time of writing, Thomas Corker). Thus it proves that in the May and June of 1796 at least, the grand lodge was actively gathering information of United Irish activities within the masonic organisation, although in this case, little information of any significance was obtained.

In November 1796 the informer, Francis Higgins, warned the government that the United Irishmen were becoming concerned with the number of loyal resolutions passed by masonic lodges in different counties. By this time, many masonic lodges in Armagh and elsewhere had a prominent role in raising armed loyalist associations, although these were soon to be superseded by the yeomanry (see chapter 8.3). Higgins claimed that a plan was being hatched by the Dublin United Irishmen to pack the next meeting of the grand lodge and

to forbid every masonic lodge...from publishing any declaration of, or concerning any kind of party politics, or prosecutions, under penalty of having their warrants superseded. - This resolution if carried, will entirely prevent a great & numerous body of men from shewing their loyalty and their detestation of incendiary's [sic].

Higgins suggested that Lord Donoughmore, if informed of the plan, would be able to foil it.⁸⁸ However, no such resolution had been proposed in the grand lodge by the time of the rebellion⁸⁹ and the publication of loyal resolutions continued.⁹⁰ It is unknown whether Higgins was misinformed or whether Donoughmore's vigilance foiled the plot. Although intelligence obtained from an agent inside a secretive revolutionary organisation must be regarded as highly suspect - given the inherent limitations of the murky world of espionage - Higgins's information suggests that some at least among the United Irishmen were worried about the strength, even dominance, of loyalism within freemasonry.

By the summer of 1797, a struggle for the control of some lodges seems to have been underway. The Co. Armagh committee, *"having been informed by the very best authority that government entertains very strong doubts of the loyalty of the masons of*

⁸⁷ Samuel Brown to NN [Thomas Corker?], 6 July 1796. Deputy grand secretary's correspondence files, lodge 613, folder 1. GLI.

⁸⁸ F[rancis] Higgins to Cooke (19 November 1796). Reb. 620/36/226/1.

⁸⁹ Grand lodge minutes (November 1796 - May 1798). GLI.

⁹⁰ In BNL loyal resolutions by masonic lodges were published in 1797 at least on 2 and 26 January; 26 and 30 June; 3, 7, 14 and 24 July; 18 and 28 August; 20 October.

this kingdom and that had it not been for the interference of some respectable masons we would have long since been stop[pe]d from meeting", proposed passing loyal resolutions in order to *"wipe away from masonry a stigma which should never rest upon it"* and to secure government sanction for continued lodge activity. Some refused to participate, as the grand lodge had banned all such public expressions of opinion, loyal or otherwise.⁹¹ However, the committee managed to mobilise thirty-four lodges to publicly declare their abhorrence of rebellion.⁹² In Belfast too, moderates or loyalists seem to have secured the control of most lodges. In June 1797, the "Orange Lodge" (no. 257) declared their loyalty⁹³ and in July, eight other Belfast lodges followed suit, disclaiming

*all connection with any traitorous society, or rebellious association whatever...neither promises nor threats shall ever induce us to join any body of men whose principles may be inimical to the just prerogatives of our beloved sovereign, or tend in the smallest degree to endanger the peace and prosperity of this kingdom.*⁹⁴

Despite the ostensibly loyalist language, the declarations of Belfast lodges were actually moderate in the sense that although they supported George III and his "illustrious house" they did not refer to a "glorious constitution" or use any such expressions of extreme loyalism found in other contemporary declarations. Among the lodges were several that had had radical members, such as the one of which Samuel Kennedy was a founder-member and probably the first master (no. 762). Another lodge had only in the previous year registered Henry Joy McCracken as member.

If the resolutions of the majority of Belfast lodges were moderate, possibly the result of a compromise, other lodges exhibited signs of more extreme politics. In separate and very brief resolutions, another Belfast lodge (no. 587) declared its support not to "the constitution" but to the *"principles of the constitution"*, a formulation which had been used in 1792-93 to express desire for reform of the constitution (see chapter 7.3.2).⁹⁵ At the other extreme was the "Noah's Blue Lodge" of the Falls (no. 636), which declared its support to *"our happy constitution"* in openly loyalist terms.⁹⁶ Two Belfast lodges were

⁹¹ Thomas Greer to lodge 409 (15 June 1797). John Jackson (secretary of 409) to Greer (21 June 1797) Copies of both letters are in lodge 409 minute book, 1791 - 1807. PGL Armagh.

⁹² BNL 3 July 1797. As Roger Wells has not been aware of the earlier history and conservative character of the Armagh county committee (see chapter 7.3.2) he misinterprets the Armagh lodges as advertising their "desertion" from the United Irishmen "after the 1797 campaign of repression in Ulster". Wells 1986 p. 119.

⁹³ Resolutions of lodge 257. BNL 30 June 1797.

⁹⁴ Resolutions of lodges 272, 491, 550, 621, 687, 761, 762 and 763. BNL 7 July 1797.

⁹⁵ Resolutions of lodge 587. BNL 7 July 1797.

⁹⁶ Resolutions of lodge 636. BNL 7 July 1797.

absent from these proceedings and their politics are not known: no. 684, a very active lodge which registered twenty-five new members in 1797 alone, and no. 793, which apparently was not very active at the time.⁹⁷

Similar divisions can be detected in other places besides Belfast. The Co. Down town of Rathfriland also witnessed a struggle between radicals and others. In 1795, the two lodges (654 and 710) in the town took part in a Presbyterian service by the Rev. Samuel Barber, an event reported in the *Northern Star*.⁹⁸ However, by 1797 loyalists seem to have prevailed. Resolutions passed by the lodges suggest that a purge of radicals was underway or had already taken place. Lodge 710 declared that "*it is not our intention or duty to discuss political subjects; but all persons whom we may know acting inimical to the laws of the land, shall be obliged to withdraw from our lodge*".⁹⁹ Soon after, lodge 654 disclaimed "*all connection with any seditious association whatever; to which we have the greatest abhorrence: and that we will expel from our lodge, all such persons we may hereafter find to be concerned in any such detestable business*".¹⁰⁰ Apart from excluding individual radicals, the struggle may have been between extreme loyalists, and a moderate-Whig element (rather than radicals) over the tone of proposed resolutions.

The role of the government in the counteroffensive against radical masons is not clear and may not have been particularly significant: probably the masons were expected to put their own house in order. Although the activities of suspect lodges were reported on by magistrates and army officers (see chapter 8.1.3), the total amount of information on freemasons in government correspondence is not very large. Possibly there was some level of surveillance as a copy of the rule-book of a Dublin lodge found its way into the government intelligence files.¹⁰¹ The Armagh county committee resolutions passed of 21 June 1797 referred to suspicions that the government had concerning the loyalty of some masons (see chapter 8.3.3)¹⁰² However, there is no evidence of formal contact between the government and the Grand Lodge of Ireland before October 1797, when Chief

⁹⁷ John Graham (master of 793) to Mr Thomas [Corker?] (1 July 1799): Graham refers to the lodge as having been "nearly dormant" for a long time. Register, 1st series, lodge 793 (appendix).

⁹⁸ *Northern Star*, 8 January 1795.

⁹⁹ BNL 18 July 1797.

¹⁰⁰ BNL 28 August 1797.

¹⁰¹ *The rules and regulations of lodge no. 190/15*. Dublin 1792: printed by Robert Rhames. Reb. 620/19/135. In the title of the leaflet, 190 is the number of the lodge's warrant from the Grand Lodge of Ireland, 15 a "local" number indicating seniority among Dublin lodges. Jenkinson 1931 (also reprinted in IMR, pp. 7-14).

¹⁰² Declaration and resolutions of the "General Committee of all the free and accepted masons of the County of Armagh" (21 June 1797). Reb. 620/31/155 (enclosure).

Secretary Pelham wrote to Lord Donoughmore to request his assistance in combating radicalism within masonry:

*I take the liberty of troubling your lordship with the enclosed from a perfect conviction of your desire to use any influence you may possess in this country for the preservation of its constitution. Not being a freemason I cannot tell in what way your lordship can check the designs of those who wish to make freemasonry a political engine but I am perfectly satisfied that whatever steps you may think proper to take will be better than any I can suggest.*¹⁰³

It is not known what the enclosed evidence was, but the brevity of the letter suggests either that Pelham was not expecting a cordial reply and did not bother putting too much energy into trying to convince Donoughmore - or that the real reason for writing the letter had little to do with masonry (see below). After all, the grand master's politics had in the past not exactly coincided with those of the government, particularly on the issue of Catholic relief. Moreover, the letter was written after a part of the Whigs had withdrawn from the parliament and only ten days after the hanging of William Orr under the repressive emergency legislation.

In response, Donoughmore decided to implement a plan proposed to him by the port surveyor of Strangford, Charles McCarthy. McCarthy had suggested sending a grand lodge officer to tour the northern lodges in order to prevent "*any unfortunate practices that the lower order of the people may put into execution by being initiated into the mysteries of masonry*". Donoughmore suggested that Dr. Walter Wade, his deputy grand master and a "*zealous supporter of government*" was the right man for the task and his mission appears to have received the blessing of Dublin Castle.¹⁰⁴

What influence Wade's tour had is not known. As the Magherafelt letter shows (see above), the grand lodge had been gathering information on radical masons in 1796 and there is no reason to believe that this activity had ceased. In many key areas such as Belfast, loyalists and moderates had already secured control of most lodges. Thus the timing of Pelham's letter in October 1797 is surprising: by then, the government seems to have had little to fear from freemasons. The letter may in fact have had more to do with the high politics of the realm than with the all-but-defeated United Irish attempts at infiltrating masonry. After all, Donoughmore was a politician and a landed magnate first

¹⁰³ Pelham to Donoughmore (24 October 1797). Reb. 620/32/184.

¹⁰⁴ Donoughmore to Pelham (31 October 1797), quoted in Berry 1913, p. 199.

and foremost. As it happens, he was made a viscount less than a month after his contact with Pelham.

In February 1798, the government hit upon the novel propaganda weapon of distributing copies of John Robison's *Proofs of a conspiracy* to magistrates. Reading Robison's book appears to have deepened the anti-United Irish paranoia of some magistrates, making the United Irishmen seem as just the Irish manifestation of the alleged global *Illuminati* conspiracy (see chapter 2.1). For Andrew Newton of Coagh, who had long been suspicious of freemasonry, *Proofs of a conspiracy* deepened his suspicion further:

*I shall as you desire, let it be read by all who wish it - this publication confirms me in the opinion I had long formed on good grounds relative to free mason societies - you know sir that two years ago, I wrote to Doctor O'Connor to apply to Lord Donaghmore [sic] on that very subject - I well knew that there was the worst of purposes carried on through freemasonry among the lower classes, long before United Irishmen were known....*¹⁰⁵

Another magistrate, Joseph Pollock, used Robison's book successfully to frighten a suspect masonic lodge in Newry. Pleased with his achievement, Pollock suggested to Pelham that copies of the book should be distributed to masonic and Orange lodges, both of which he regarded as "*capable of much ill*".¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Andrew Newton to NN (9 February 1798). Reb. 620/35/133. Newton's correspondent is not Pelham as he mentions having sent another letter (see Reb. 620/35/130) to Pelham on the same day.

¹⁰⁶ Joseph Pollock to Pelham (23 February, 25 February 1798). Reb. 620/35/152 and 156. See also chapter 11.1.

8.2. The Defenders

As less is known about the politics, structures and membership of the Defenders¹ than about those of the United Irishmen or the Orangemen, tracing their possible masonic links is also bound to be more difficult. The best-known individual freemason in the Defender ranks was Lawrence O'Connor, the Meath schoolmaster who had masonic certificates in his possession when arrested.²

Several historians have argued that the Defenders bore a close resemblance to freemasonry. Hereward Senior suggests that Defenders and Orangemen alike sought to "imitate the masonic system of organisation"³ while L. M. Cullen has attributed to masonic influence specific individual features of the Defenders: their adoption of the term lodge, the numbering of lodges and a ritual "directly imitative" of masonry.⁴ Likewise, Jim Smyth argues that "the masonic complexion of Defenderism is undeniable. The passwords and secret hand signals, the biblical language and deliberate mystification of the tests, oaths and catechisms, the use of the terms 'lodge' and 'brother' and, in at least one case, 'Grand Master' all suggest the Defenders' debt to masonry".⁵

According to Smyth, "Defenderism...did not, at first, evolve any formal hierarchy or central leadership. Rather it developed a loosely federated 'horizontal' structure. Lodges were numbered in sequence as they were established and co-ordinated in a low-level way by masonic techniques". What these techniques were, apart from intervisitation and perhaps free dinner and drink for the visiting emissary, Smyth does not say. Smyth's assertion that "the federated, cellular structure was an effective form of clandestine organisation insofar as it proved more spy-resistant...than the United Irishmen's centrally-led pyramidal one".⁶ Smyth is probably correct in his analysis of the effects on internal security of "cellular" organisation as opposed to "pyramidal", although it is difficult to imagine a "cellular" organisation numbering its cells, or at least it being able to do so consistently.

¹ For specialist studies of the Defenders, see Garvin 1982 (continuity between the Defenders and nineteenth-century Ribbonmen); Miller 1983 (the "Armagh troubles" of the 1780s and 1790s); Bartlett 1985 (contemporary documents on Defenderism with an introduction); Cullen 1990 (political structures); Bartlett 1992, pp. 178-186, 210-223 (political overview); Elliott 1993 (leadership and co-operation with the United Irishmen).

² Brady 1937, p. 184.

³ Senior 1966, p. 14.

⁴ Cullen 1990, p. 124.

⁵ Smyth 1992, p. 46.

⁶ Smyth 1992, p. 114.

While the similarities between aspects of freemasonry and Defenderism are undeniable, there is need for some caution. For instance, it is anachronistic to suggest that there was anything particularly masonic about the use of biblical language: Jacqueline Hill has shown that biblical language was a central medium of political discourse in eighteenth-century Ireland.⁷ Nor is it by any means certain that the “lodge system” attributed by historians to the Defenders, was similar to that of the freemasons (see chapter 10.1). There is also the twofold problem of interpreting the “masonic” terminology as used by the Defenders. Firstly, we cannot be sure that they gave the terms exactly the same meaning as the freemasons did. Secondly, in some cases we cannot be sure if they used them at all, although their contemporaries did use masonic terminology in describing secretive organisations. For instance, the viceroy, Lord Camden, reported that the Defenders were organised into a system of affiliated lodges.⁸

Much of what we know or assume about the Defenders is based on a document (or group of documents) published by Sir Richard Musgrave in his *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland*. Purportedly “found in the year 1789, by a magistrate of the county of Armagh”, the documents consist of an oath, the rules of a “body of defenders” (the word “lodge” is used only by Musgrave in a footnote) and a certificate given to a member certifying that he had “gone through the rules and obligations of a brother defender”. In Musgrave’s tendentious interpretation, these documents “clearly proved that the defenders were systematically organized, and that their uncommon eagerness to procure arms and ammunition, arose not from defensive, but offensive designs”.

The documents bear no obvious signs of forgery. They resemble similar documents produced by masonic lodges, except that the oath declares only conditional loyalty to George III and the rules refer to the acquisition of weapons and prohibit members from going “to a challenge”, or taking part in a faction-fight, “without leave of three of the committee at least”. There are no exaggerated references to wading in Protestant blood like in the alleged “extermination oaths” (see chapter 10.3) that contributed to sectarian tension later.

⁷ Hill 1997a.

⁸ Camden to Portland (25 July 1795). Reb. 620/22/19. According to information supplied to Camden, “their [the Defenders’] meeting is called a lodge, and sometimes a committee”. July 1795 information digest, reprinted in Bartlett 1985, p. 381.

Nevertheless, historians should be careful not to rely too much on Musgrave's purported Defender documents unless other supporting evidence is available. After all, Musgrave was a high-ranking Orangeman and thus had an obvious axe to grind in relation to the Defenders, as no doubt had many of his informants, such as the anonymous Armagh magistrate. The documents were supposedly found in the possession of a Defender leader called Sharky. The arrest of Sharky is mentioned in the *Impartial account of the late disturbances* by "J. Byrne", who may have been Fr Quigley, the United Irishman. However, there is no mention of any documents and according to "Byrne", Sharky was examined in Dublin but released.⁹

Thus we have only Musgrave's word for rather too many things: that the document was genuine, that it was really found in 1789 (thus conveniently proving that the Defenders had been preparing for battle for years) and even that the Defenders he described "*were exclusively of the Roman Catholic religion*". On the last point, the fact that Musgrave decided to emphasise it to his readers, suggests that not everybody regarded it as a self-evident truth.¹⁰ Ironically, if the documents were genuine, they do not support Musgrave on this count: there are rules against drunkenness, swearing and indiscipline, but nothing against the admission of Protestants.

There seems to be even less evidence to support Musgrave's claim that the Defenders "*had a grand master in each county, who was elected at a general annual meeting*". Musgrave assumed that the mere mention of the words "grand master" is enough to prove the existence of elaborate organisation at county level. However, nothing in the supposed Defender set of rules that he reproduced in his book, unambiguously rules out the possibility that the "grand master" was simply a grandiose title for the chairman of a local society.

If the provenance of the Musgrave document is by no means certain, the other known reference to a Defender "grand master" is even more dubious. It occurs in a government intelligence report concerning John Magennis, a Defender leader from Co. Down. The information was provided to Under-Secretary Cooke by a government spy, Friar Philips. According to Cooke, Magennis had boasted to the friar that he was the

⁹ Byrne, J [pseudonym?]: *Impartial account of the late disturbances in the county of Armagh*. Reprinted in Miller, David W (ed): *Peep O'Day Boys and Defenders*, p. 78. On the authorship of the pamphlet, see Miller 1996, pp. 3-10 and Cullen 1996, p. 18.

¹⁰ Nancy J. Curtin has pointed out that in Dublin at least, there was a number of Protestant Defenders. Curtin 1985, pp. 481-482.

grand master of the Defenders.¹¹ However, one should not read too much into the use of the words "grand master". Firstly, it may have been just a pompous title for a local leader. Secondly, the information itself is third-hand hearsay - what Magennis said was transmitted by Philips and perhaps others to Cooke, who first wrote it down in a letter to his superior. Thus it is not clear whether "the grand master" were the actual words used by Magennis or whether Philips or Cooke used the words for the sake of brevity or emphasis - using a familiar term to convey Magennis's claim to be a high-ranking leader of the Defenders.¹²

Fortunately, we do not have to rely on Musgrave or Philips in order to draw a sketch of the links between masonry and Defenderism. Given the prevalence of freemasonry (both "regular" and "irregular") in Co. Armagh and the involvement of many Catholics in it, it would be surprising if masonic ideology and symbolism had not influenced predominantly Catholic societies much like it influenced the early Orange Order. L. M. Cullen has put forward the idea that James Quigley of Armagh could have "given impetus to the spread of lodge-type organisation" among the Defenders.¹³ However, the prevalence of freemasonry in the popular culture of Ulster makes Quigley superfluous as an explanation. The Defenders' familiarity with the idea of an oathbound fraternity can be more plausibly explained by hedgemasonry and the extension of membership in "regular" lodges to more and more Catholics in the 1780s.

In fact, there is some evidence to suggest that the Defenders may have thought of themselves as freemasons - in their own peculiar way, of course. Some of the extant Defender catechisms refer to the society as a "*holy order of St. John*" - another expression for freemasonry. Moreover, the language they used had obviously been influenced by the masonic obligations and ritual penalties: "*I solemnly and sincerely swear to always heal [sic] and conceal and never to reveal any point, part or letter of what I have got from this secret lodge to any person with whom it is not concerned until the ashes of my body is [sic] cast on the seashore*".¹⁴ The government, for its part, complemented the Defenders for "*having established a brotherhood almost as sacredly kept as freemasonry*".¹⁵

¹¹ Cooke to Pelham (4 December 1795). PRONI T /755/2, pp. 253-255.

¹² Musgrave, Sir Richard: *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland*, pp. 48-49, 605-606.

¹³ Cullen 1990a, p. 126. For a critical examination of the term "lodge-type organisation", see chapter 10.1.

¹⁴ Quoted in Bartlett 1985, p. 388. "Heal" is a variant of the archaic word "hele" (used by freemasons as another synonym for "conceal").

¹⁵ September 1795 digest of intelligence, reprinted in Bartlett 1985, p. 392.

The chief constable at Duleek, County Meath, wrote to Dublin Castle in March 1798 with an interesting bit of news: "*I am informed there is a new soci[e]ty sw[e]aring under the name of freemeasons [sic] but the[y] are not freemeasons [sic] only give [?] that name...*".¹⁶ Jim Smyth has presumed that this is a case of a United Irish "front".¹⁷ However, similar information from County Armagh suggests that this was not an isolated incident and that a "Defender front" might be a more accurate description. According to Musgrave, already "*in the year 1795, the Romanists, who assumed the name of masons, used frequently to assemble in the neighbourhood of Loughgall, Charlemont, Richhill, Portadown, Lurgan, the Ban-foot and Black-water-foot, and robbed Protestants of their arms*".¹⁸

Local masonic records from Co. Armagh suggest that there may be some truth in Musgrave's assertion. Interestingly, they also show that the Defenders were not only bands of "hedgemasons", but that there were at least some members of lodges affiliated to the Grand Lodge of Ireland among them. A Michael Hampton of lodge 328 in Richhill, Co. Armagh was cautioned (but expressly not censured) by his lodge in 1794 for "*walking at the head of a party of people generally called deffenders [sic] and carrieing [sic] a garland*".¹⁹ Another mason called McCan, a member of lodge 266 in Maghery, was "*suspended for six months for carrying arms in company with the Defenders*" in 1795.²⁰ As late as in 1813, candidates joining a Co. Monaghan branch of the Catholic secret society of Ribbonmen, promised not to join any other society except the freemasons (!), trade societies or the armed forces.²¹

In places where the local lodge was in the hands of the loyalists, the Defenders probably came very close to the "irregular" or "hedgemasons" discussed in chapter 5.4. Interestingly, an alleged Defender oath contains the phrase "*I do swear that I will attend*

¹⁶ William Taylor to Pelham (17 March 1798). Reb. 620/36/17.

¹⁷ Smyth 1993, pp. 173, 341 fn. 29.

¹⁸ Musgrave, Sir Richard: *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland*, p. 58.

¹⁹ Lodge 328 minutes (12 May 1794). Quoted in Jenkinson 1946b, p. 90. The complaint about Hampton was made by Robert Winter of lodge 603 Loughgall.

²⁰ Lodge 623 minutes (19 November 1795). PGL Armagh. In 1837, Maghery consisted of 16 thatched, single-storey houses close to the shore of Lough Neagh, 11 km (7 miles) north of Loughgall, in the predominantly Catholic parish of Tartaraghan. *Fair sheets for memoir by Thomas McIlroy*, printed in Ordnance Survey memoirs, vol. 1, pp. 117-118.

²¹ Garvin 1982, p. 145. The rule approving of masonic membership was reported by the novelist William Carleton, who was persuaded by locals to join the Ribbon society.

all places that my capt[ain] orders me to subdue all Orange Men & Regular Masons who believe in damn[e]d Luther & Calvin".²²

In June 1796, William Sprol, a Co. Down freemason, encountered two men, both Catholics, whom he could recognise as masons by the secret signs they gave. The men, apparently United Irish or more likely, Defender agents, swore Sprol to secrecy and told him that they wanted *"to pull down the tythes [sic] and clergy", "an Irish parliament of their own, unconnected with the English" and "no English clergy in Ireland"*. They told him that almost all the Catholics and a great number of Presbyterians and Protestants (i.e. Anglicans) were *"united"* and that *"when the Night of Trouble would come, he [Sprol] would be safe, but not to go out of his own house at his peril on that night, that they intended to mas[s]acre all Protestants and orangdemmen [sic] that were not united"*.²³ Obviously, the two agents' understanding of the lofty United Irish and masonic philosophies was rather limited, as their plan for a massacre of Protestants shows. Thus it is perhaps plausible to regard them as another case of Defenders who were also masons and who may have taken the United Irish oath but put their own sectarian interpretation on it.

In the light of the above evidence, it is also possible that freemasonry may have had a role in facilitating the contacts between the United Irishmen and the Defenders. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that almost all of the United Irishmen credited by Nancy J. Curtin with establishing links with the Defenders - such as Henry Joy McCracken, James McGuckin, Joseph Cuthbert and Daniel Shanaghan,²⁴ as well as Samuel Neilson - were either definitely or probably masons (see chapter 8.1.1).

The image of Defenderism which emerges from a new reading of both government and masonic sources is that of a network of local associations which combined ideas taken from freemasonry with a military structure imitating the Volunteers. There is little evidence of an elaborate chain of command: even Musgrave does not claim that the Defenders had a national leadership, and his claim of county organisation rests on a single document of uncertain provenance. At least some of the Defenders were masons recognised by the Grand Lodge of Ireland in Dublin. Others probably regarded themselves as masons, no doubt as equal in that regard to the "regular" masons. Once

²² Thomas Wallis to NN (21 November 1797). Reb. 620/33/78.

²³ [Captain] Robert Waddell to Cooke (9 August 1796) and enclosures. Reb. 620/24/100.

²⁴ Curtin 1985, pp. 482-483. In addition, although Charles Teeling is not known to have been a mason himself, he had a masonic connection in the person of his brother, Bartholomew.

the majority of the "regular" masons of Co. Armagh were openly committed to the conservative and loyalist causes and helped start armed Protestant associations in 1795-96 (see chapter 8.3), the Defenders probably considered themselves as the only true upholders of the ideals of masonry as they saw it.

The Defenders' view of the Orange Order was not as simple as it might seem. In the early 1800s, the Orange Order was a conservative and loyalist organization, but it was also a fraternal organization. The Defenders, who were a more radical and revolutionary group, saw the Orange Order as a threat to their own ideals. They believed that the Orange Order was a tool of the British government to control the Irish people. This view was shared by many other radical groups of the time, such as the United Irishmen and the Society of United Friends of the Rights of Man. The Defenders' opposition to the Orange Order was based on their belief that the Order was a tool of oppression and that it was a threat to the rights of the Irish people.

The Defenders' opposition to the Orange Order was not just a matter of ideology. It was also a matter of practicality. The Orange Order was a powerful and well-organized organization, and it had a long history of violence. The Defenders, who were a more radical and revolutionary group, saw the Orange Order as a threat to their own ideals. They believed that the Orange Order was a tool of the British government to control the Irish people. This view was shared by many other radical groups of the time, such as the United Irishmen and the Society of United Friends of the Rights of Man. The Defenders' opposition to the Orange Order was based on their belief that the Order was a tool of oppression and that it was a threat to the rights of the Irish people.

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8.3. Loyalism

The study of the links between freemasonry and the political loyalism of the 1790s has seldom gone beyond unsubstantiated political statements. As radicalism in general has attracted so much more scholarly interest than loyalism, the lack of attention to such a topic, perceived to be peripheral to the political events of the period, is perhaps not surprising. Few historians have even noted, not to mention explored in depth such links. Historians of radicalism, such as Nancy J. Curtin, have understandably only noted them in passing: "although freemasonry contributed greatly to growth and development of the United Irishmen, it also provided recruits for conservative and loyalist forces".¹ However, even the historian of the early Orange Order, Hereward Senior, suggests that the on the average, Irish freemasons were not "enthusiastic Orange patriots" while noting in passing a series of conservative resolutions passed by a group of Co. Armagh masonic lodges in 1797.²

The presumed close link between masonry and radicalism may have led historians to assume that there was nothing of interest to be discovered on the other side of the political divide. What research there is on the issue of fraternal societies on the loyalist side has concentrated on the origins and later influence of the Orange Order. However, as a conservative faction dominated Co. Armagh freemasonry from the early 1790s onwards and conservatives were not altogether without influence in other parts of Ulster (see chapter 7.3.2), it is by no means easy to establish whether radicalism or loyalism had more adherents within freemasonry.

Not only masonic records, but also the widely-used Rebellion Papers and other political correspondence from the 1790s contain numerous references to freemasonry. These have been hitherto practically ignored by historians, no doubt owing to the lack of research on masonry to provide a background against which to study individual narratives. In particular, there seems to be more than enough evidence to warrant further investigation of two related issues: the involvement of conservative masonic lodges (especially in Co. Armagh) in the loyalist mobilisation of 1795-96 and the nature of links between the emerging Orange Order and freemasonry. The first two sections of this chapter will seek to present a new interpretation of both these issues. The third section deals with the developments after the establishment of the yeomanry in 1796, which

¹ Curtin 1985, pp. 464-465, fn. 4.

² Senior 1966, pp. 3, 77.

appear to have largely eliminated the need for any militant loyalist role for "regular" masonic lodges. The specifically masonic influences on various aspects of the Orange Order will be discussed thematically and in greater detail in chapter 10.

No interpretation of the origins of Irish loyalism can avoid the "troubles" that swept Co. Armagh in the 1780s and 1790s. The background to this series of violent incidents - whether primarily socio-economic or political - has been much debated by historians, particularly David W. Miller and L. M. Cullen.³ The limited scope of this chapter does not allow a detailed reassessment of either the social, economic or political affairs of the county outside the intended aim of establishing the role of freemasonry in the birth of loyalism in the 1790s. However, some of the ideas that have surfaced in the debate are highly relevant to the topic under discussion.

David W. Miller has suggested that the cash economy promoted by the linen industry created an independent and at times unruly group of young men, who had money to spare.⁴ The presence of a group such as the Armagh weavers may well have contributed to the popularity of freemasonry in the county. After all, eighteenth-century masonry appears to have been popular with young men who could afford both the lodge fees and the odd drop of punch in the company of their brethren. The weavers' position in the local society was ambiguous: they did not have the social status accorded to those engaged either in farming, or in more established and more urban trades. Consequently, one would expect at least some of the weavers to seek admission into a society with a strong emphasis on both respectability and conviviality (not to mention the fascinating ceremonies). In some cases such aspirations would no doubt have been met with rejection. Such a hypothesis could at least partly explain why Armagh was the first county where a county committee was deemed necessary in order to stop the admission of "*very improper persons...into some of the lodges in said county*" (see chapter 4.3).

Another suggestion not without merit in this context is that put forward by L. M. Cullen: that Armagh freemasonry played a role in the construction of a government party in the county.⁵ No unambiguously political motive can be detected behind the formation of the Armagh county committee in 1790, apart from a general conservative tendency to

³ For the latest contributions to this debate, see Miller 1996 and Cullen 1996. For a review of earlier research, see Miller 1983, pp. 162-165.

⁴ Miller 1983, pp. 168-169. For a more recent analysis of the social status of the farmer-weavers of Co. Armagh, see Crawford 1997, pp. 48-51.

⁵ Cullen 1996, p. 21.

keep out people not deemed respectable enough to join masonic lodges. However, the role played by the county committee of Armagh freemasons in opposing Catholic emancipation and parliamentary reform in 1792-93 (discussed in chapter 7.3.2) is well compatible with Cullen's thesis.

8.3.1. Origins of masonic loyalism, 1793 - 1795

As the Armagh county committee organised the passing and publication of loyal resolutions and played a role in trying to check the activities of radicals in 1792-93 (see chapter 7.3.1), it can be regarded as a precursor of masonic loyalism. However, the linkages between freemasonry, conservatism and the emerging militant loyalism were complex and the county committee (and the "regular" lodges under it) were not the only expression of such masonic loyalism. The social divisions originally intended to be upheld by the committee were blurred but did not disappear when most Protestants rallied behind the government. From 1793 and increasingly from 1795 onwards, the sources suggest that lower-class Protestant elements were rallying around their own "hedgemason"⁶ lodges, allied with but distinct from the loyalist majority of the "regular" lodges. In many cases, it is not possible to tell whether the references to "freemasons" refer to warranted or unwarranted lodges.

In the intensified loyalist mobilisation of 1795-96,⁷ freemasonry came to play a role which has so far escaped the attention of historians. Although historians have traditionally focused on Armagh, the same political and sectarian divisions extended into the neighbouring parts of Tyrone. In that region, the perceived threat posed by the Catholic Convention, the Defenders and the Dungannon reform convention in the winter of 1792-93 led to the creation of the first known Protestant group or society that may have their origins in "unwarranted" hedgemasonry. In February 1793, the "Orange Boys" of Dyan, declared that they were ready *"to rouse from our lethargy, like bold Hibernians, in defence of our sovereign"*.⁸ Given the contemporary political context, the Orange Boys seem to be a response by local inhabitants who were not "regular" masons, to the radical resolutions in favour of parliamentary reform and Catholic emancipation by three lodges in their

⁶ For a discussion of the concept of "unwarranted", "irregular" or "hedgemasonry", see chapter 5.4.

⁷ For the causes of the Protestant mobilisation of 1795-96, see e.g. Bartlett 1992, pp. 202-227.

⁸ BNL 1 February 1793.

neighbourhood (nos. 333 and 681 Caledon, 711 Dyan).⁹ As it happens, the lodge no. 1 in the post-1795 Orange Order was located in Dyan.¹⁰

It was not unknown for canvassing politicians to suddenly develop an interest in masonic affairs at election times.¹¹ William Brownlow Jr, the government candidate in the January 1795 by-election, appears to have had such a sudden awakening: on St. John's Day in Winter (27 December 1794) he visited at least two Armagh lodges, in which he had apparently never set foot before. However, as Robert Camden Cope, the opposition candidate, was also a mason, one should not automatically assume a correlation between freemasonry and support for Brownlow.¹² It is important to remember the diversity of political opinion within Irish freemasonry that had been so clearly demonstrated in 1792-93. In the mid-1790s, some masons were planning a revolution, others still hoped that political reforms would restore tranquillity, while others were preparing to crush any rebellion. All these groups were convinced that their particular course of action was the correct and logical one for a member of the fraternity.

Possibly escalated by the closely-fought by-election,¹³ popular Protestant mobilisation gathered pace. Not all such activity was controlled by the government interest and some sources suggest that there may have been two factions working broadly for the same aim: one a "respectable" conservative faction, which included the lodges of the Armagh county committee; the other a lower-class element that found expression in what the contemporaries would have called "hedgemasonry" - possibly consisting in part of the *"very improper persons"* not deemed respectable enough to join "regular" lodges. It is significant that this second echelon of loyalism adopted the form of a fraternal society months before the traditional foundation date of the Orange Order.

The loyalists who petitioned the Armagh magistrates for permission to parade on 12 July 1795 were the first instance (possibly with the exception of the Orange Boys of 1793) of such lower-class loyalist masonry, which could just as well - albeit with hindsight - be called early Orangeism. The *"Protestant associations forming the Loyal Union of Orange"* denied any links with the Peep O'Day Boy faction which had repeatedly clashed with the Defenders since the early 1790s. On the contrary, and significantly, they claimed

⁹ BNL 11 January 1793.

¹⁰ Senior 1966, p. 20.

¹¹ E.g. the future Duke of Wellington - see chapter 7.3.1.

¹² Minute books of lodge 409 and 623 (27 December 1794). PGL Armagh. See also chapter 5.1.1.

¹³ Cullen 1996, pp. 21-22.

that their "*principles is [sic] as sacret [sacred] and as distinct as that venerable body of brotherhood called free-masons*".¹⁴

The radicals soon became aware of the fact that a new loyalist force was being organised. According to a government intelligence report of July 1795, "*the United Irishmen being prevented from meeting publickly, have established clandestine societies...some calling themselves book-clubs, literary societies & reading societies; others saying their only view is to defend themselves against the freemasons*". A footnote adds that "*Mr Richardson in a letter to the Hon[ourable] Thos. Knox; dated near Dungannon, writes that these societies are all free-mason's work, and that they keep clear of religion & politics*".¹⁵ Depending on interpretation, the Richardson referred to in the footnote could be William Richardson of Moy, the president of the Tyrone masons' county committee, denying that the literary and other societies are United fronts; or the Rev. Richardson of "Dungannon plan" fame, asserting that loyalist "freemasons" are not a threat to the government. Although the latter interpretation seems more plausible, either way it is clear that by the summer of 1795 freemasonry had, in Co. Armagh at least, become synonymous with loyalism and that the United Irishmen were concerned about their activities.¹⁶

In August 1795, the loyalist freemasonry came out into the open in Aughnacloy in south Tyrone, on the border of Co. Monaghan. This is where a highly unusual meeting was held on 1 August between one of the "regular" masonic lodges of the town (no. 483) and a body of men called "*clandestine or unwarranted masons*". Both groups joined together in order to suppress the "*parcel of fanatics, who call themselves Defenders*" who, they claimed, had lately spread to the neighbourhood. The events in Aughnacloy show that a masonic lodge could act as a rallying-point for a loyalist association just as well as for a United Irish cell. The local implications of this plan will be studied in greater detail in chapter 11.2.

As such, there was nothing new in mixing masonry and military organisation: the links between masonic lodges and Volunteer corps in the 1780s and early 1790s are sufficient proof of that. However, the alliance concluded in Aughnacloy is significant

¹⁴ *The humble petition of the protestant associations forming the loyal union of Orange*. Pelham transcripts, T 755/2, p. 148. PRONI. Bartlett (1992, p. 216) has interpreted the word "sacret" as "secret".

¹⁵ "Extracts from [letter]s in the office of the chief sec[reta]ry, relative to the Defenders...fair copy sent to the Duke of Portland 25th July [17]95". Reb. 620/22/19.

because the two groups so obviously drew their membership from different social strata of Protestants, a phenomenon that is often assumed to have started only with the formation of the Orange Order. Lodge no. 483 declared to have *"in friendship joined with that body of men, generally known by the name of clandestine or unwarranted masons"*. The clandestine masons were obviously a body of lower-class Protestants, as the deferential language of their resolutions shows:

And we the clandestine or unwarranted masons, to the amount of one hundred and upwards, this day assembled, under the sanction of lodge no. 483, do hereby most solemnly swear and sincerely declare, that we will bear true allegiance to his present Majesty George the Third, and to his lawful successors, that we will aid and support the warranted lodges of free masons, as far as in us lies, in their aiding the Magistrate [=the authorities], in order to suppress all tumults...

The regular masons of no. 483 responded with a gracious gesture as befitted respectable people, addressing their social inferiors:

Resolved, that the unwarranted masons who have entered into the resolutions of this day, under the protection of lodge no. 483, or shall at any time hereafter subscribe to the same, be entitled to wear a blue ribbon.

The meeting concluded with a decision to publish the resolutions in the *Belfast Newsletter* *"in order to show the loyalty of us unwarranted masons, and they hope that the rest of their brethren, throughout this kingdom will join in the same manner"*.¹⁷ As these events predate the "Battle of the Diamond" by nearly two months, they show that the birth of what became known as Orangeism was not a sudden event in September but the culmination of a gradual process which had lasted throughout the summer of 1795 and perhaps longer. Given the large number of lodges in the region, the organisational substructure of masonry - both in its regular and "hedge" forms - was in place for political factions to use.

More evidence of the role of masonic lodges in the emergence of armed Protestant associations came to light in the autumn of 1795. Writing to his patron, the Marquis of Abercorn, George Knox of Dungannon claimed that *"Defenderism has spread completely through the north...the Protestants who call themselves freemasons - go in lodges & [are] armed & are abetted, at least connived at by the gentlemen [and] are doing all they can to goad the Catholics to outrage & will no doubt succeed - for the latter will*

¹⁶ Bartlett 1992, p. 216.

¹⁷ BNL 14 August 1795.

have the plea of self defense".¹⁸ Abercorn, replying to Knox's letter a few days after the "Battle of the Diamond" took place near Loughgall, commented that "*I have long been aware (as I think you remember) that masonry is the rock of the North of Ireland. If real care be not taken, the country will split upon it & of care being taken, there is little chance*".¹⁹

On its own, Abercorn's comment may seem cryptic. It is obvious that he saw freemasonry as a danger (figuratively, as a rock is a danger to a ship) and was pessimistic about the chances of avoiding the peril. Whether the danger originated from the radical or loyalist quarter, is not clear without reference to Knox's letter which triggered the remark. However, in the context of Knox's specific criticism of "*Protestants who call themselves freemasons*" provoking a conflict, it seems that both men were concerned about lower-class loyalists taking advantage of freemasonry to their own unruly ends, either sectarian terror or Volunteer-type armed pressure on the government. Also the timing of the two letters supports the theory that the two men were concerned about a Protestant mobilisation which they might not be able to control: Knox wrote his letter just as trouble was brewing in the Loughgall region, Abercorn replied in the immediate aftermath of the "Battle of the Diamond" on 21 September.

The conservative interest in freemasonry in 1795-96 is best documented in Co. Armagh. However, it was not confined to there. For instance, that Lord Downshire, a former grand master of Ireland, still showed interest in freemasonry can be gauged from the fact that a lodge (no 212) was formed in the newly-formed Downshire militia in 1795.²⁰ It was the first such lodge in a militia regiment and was followed by many others (see chapter 5.3.2). A development of "two-tier loyalism" comparable to that in Armagh can also be observed in Co. Monaghan, where the distribution of Orange lodges had little to do with that of the post-1796 yeomanry corps.²¹ It may not be a coincidence that the most prominent loyalist critic of Orangeism in the county, Lord Blayney, joined a masonic lodge (or chose to have his membership of it registered) in Monaghan in 1796.²²

¹⁸ George Knox to Lord Abercorn (18 September 1795). Abercorn Papers, D/623/A/137/45. PRONI.

¹⁹ Lord Abercorn to George Knox (27 September 1795). Abercorn Papers, D/623/A/79/124. PRONI.

²⁰ IMR. Richard E. Parkinson asserts that the revival took place despite grand lodge opposition. The warrant had been previously held at Kinsale, Co. Cork. The link between Kinsale and Co. Down may be that the same landowner [lord de Clifford] had an interest both in Downpatrick and Kinsale. Parkinson 1946, p. 14.

²¹ Ó Snodaigh 1977, pp. 164-166.

²² Ó Snodaigh 1977, p. 163. For Blayney's masonic membership, see Register, 1st series, lodge 564 (1796).

8.3.2. The birth of the Orange Order

21 September 1795 is the traditional birth-date of Orangeism. On that day, a series of violent incidents between Defenders and Protestants in Co. Armagh culminated in a clash at cross-roads called the Diamond, near Loughgall. About thirty Defenders (according to one estimate) were killed in an assault on an inn owned by a Dan Winter after an attempt at reconciliation by local priests and magistrates had failed.²³ By the local faction-fighting standards, the incident was so bloody that it later acquired the grandiose title of the "Battle of the Diamond".

Interpreting the role of freemasonry in the birth of Orangeism is a hazardous task. For writers possessing both nationalist inclinations and the benefit of hindsight, labelling freemasonry as Orange or Orangeism as masonic has been a easy way to disparage both (see chapter 2.3). In this respect, the waters have been muddied by Orangemen like R. M. Sibbett, who tend to obscure the militant side of Orangeism and (with hindsight) emphasise the rituals and degrees as if they were an end in themselves. However, the attitudes of the Orangemen themselves towards any masonic origins of their movement, have changed over time. Although early nineteenth-century Orangemen tried to play down any masonic links (see chapter 8.3.4), their later brethren had no such inhibitions as by the end of the nineteenth century, Irish freemasonry had regained its social respectability and become predominantly Protestant in membership.

As the relationship between freemasons and Orangemen has not always been cordial, members of both orders have tended to obfuscate it as dictated by the political circumstances of the day. The freemasons have felt a need to protect their separateness by emphasising a total lack of any historical links. Typically, any discussion of Orangeism has been preceded by reservations and apologies such as that of the masonic historian, Berry: "Being well aware of their [Orangemen's] exclusion from our proceedings, I need hardly say that this paper is not intended to trench on politics or polemics...".²⁴ De Vere White emphasised that "the purposes of the two institutions were wholly different. Masons existed for the sake of Masonry; the Orange Order was specifically directed towards the suppression of Catholics and the maintenance of Protestant ascendancy".²⁵

²³ Senior 1966, pp. 16-18.

²⁴ Berry 1913, p. 196.

²⁵ De Vere White 1973, p. 52.

That outsiders have often confused the two orders has been a further source of embarrassment to freemasons. On one occasion at least, the need to prove that there is no link whatsoever has led to an omission bordering on forgery. In the original minute book of a Dublin lodge, there is a record of a 1785 visit by a member of an "Orange Lodge Belfast" (i.e. masonic lodge 257). In a later transcript, the list of visitors attending the lodge meeting on that day have been copied - except for this one name and lodge. Either the transcriber wanted to make sure nobody saw the entry in case they would misunderstand it, or he misunderstood it himself - not knowing that the "Orange" was a masonic lodge despite its name. If the latter assumption is correct, the transcriber was seeking to hide his embarrassing (if mistaken) discovery of an Orangeman attending a meeting of his beloved lodge.²⁶

In the light of the findings of the previous chapter, it seems clear that there was an important masonic contribution to the loyalist mobilisation of 1795-96. Although the "battle of the Diamond" may have provided impetus and added cohesion to a loose network of armed Protestant lodges or societies, the essential ingredients had been in place by the summer of 1795. At least some if not most of them, such as the "*clandestine or unwarranted masons*" of Aughnacloy, regarded themselves as freemasons: they practised masonic rituals without being affiliated to the Grand Lodge of Ireland. In addition, recent research suggests that early Orangeism resembled freemasonry much more than its present-day variant does: the masonic-style rituals that were a feature of original Orangeism, were later excised by the command of the new national leadership in Dublin (see chapter 10.2.1). Moreover, some of the "regular" masons were prepared to overlook class distinctions and provide an organisational backbone to their "unwarranted" brethren.

Such analysis comes very close to the conclusions of the "official" historian of early twentieth-century Orangeism, R. M. Sibbett. Sibbett claims that when the Orange Order was organised at the Diamond, "among those present were members of the Masonic body, some of them unwarranted according to technical phraseology, and it is easy to imagine the suggestions they were likely to tender",²⁷ apparently a reference to secrecy and the mode of organisation. Thus it may be argued that in the eyes of their neighbours and contemporaries, the early Orangemen (like the Defenders, see chapter

²⁶ Lodge 620 minute book and transcript (6 January 1785). GLI.

²⁷ Sibbett [1939], p. 285. Aiken McClelland has suggested that the Royal Black Institution (although not the other manifestations of Orangeism) derives its origin from hedgemasons. In the light of the above, such distinctions may not be relevant. McClelland 1968, p. 191.

8.2) were to all intents and purposes freemasons - albeit without the "regular" warrants from Dublin that their socially more respectable brethren had. No doubt they held their version of masonry to be the correct one, or at least as correct as that of the "regular" ones. Excluding Catholics was, as we have seen, not without precedents: there were several "regular" lodges that had not deemed it incompatible with the principles of masonry (see chapter 5.2.2). To what extent the "fraternal" trappings were just a facade for what were effectively paramilitary bodies along the lines of the disbanded Volunteer corps, is debatable and may have varied from lodge to lodge.

It should be hardly necessary to comment on Fr Coyle's conspiracy theory about the Orangemen as a front for all-pervasive, anti-Catholic freemasonry. Nothing could have been further from the minds of Lord Donoughmore, a prominent champion of Catholic emancipation, or his appointees and protégés, the leaders of the Grand Lodge of Ireland. Why, then, did popular loyalism take - outwardly at least - such a "masonic" form with lodges, rituals and parades? The factors which helped promote freemasonry itself, such as conviviality, respectability, a degree of social security and a fascination with mysteries, no doubt played a part. However, the primary aim of the first Orangemen was to form a militant and political organisation to contain the perceived threat of their immediate opponents, the Defenders, and their potential (at the time) opponents, the United Irishmen. Thus it is in the realm of the political and the military rather than the social and the esoteric that we must look for the answer.

The two most important reasons why the Orange Order took the shape it did may well be the time when and the place where it was first organised: near Loughgall in 1795. Significantly, its formation took place in the interim between the disbanding of the Volunteers in 1793 and the raising of the yeomanry in 1796. As the local combinations of the Co. Armagh loyalists were denied the most effective form of organisation - the military or paramilitary one - by the government, they turned to the second best, the semi-secret fraternal society. As the Aughnacloy incident (see chapters 8.3.1 and 11.2) shows, masonic lodges with "loyal" membership could become foci for loyalist mobilisation. Feeling the need to create an organisation to match that of their rivals, the loyalists turned to the only mass organisation available to them at the time. In this sense, it can be argued that freemasonry was (or rather, some masons and some masonic lodges were) among the progenitors of the Orange Order. In the words of the Rev. Holt Waring, son of the prominent freemason, the Orangemen organised themselves in they way they did because of *"the fondness of the people for associating together, their attachment for*

freemasonry, and all those private associations, gave a particular zest to this mode of keeping them true to their allegiance".²⁸

Even after the yeomanry was formed, government precautions ensured that access to it remained limited. For instance, Colonel William Blacker had to choose one hundred yeomen from among the thousand recruits that he had offered to the government.²⁹ Thus for the bulk of the politicised loyalists in 1796-98 - the years during which many of the defining characteristics of Orangeism were defined and consolidated - the masonic-type brotherhood remained the only available avenue of mobilisation even after the raising of the yeomanry. This would have been so particularly in the case of those whose circumstances were deemed less than "respectable". For that very reason, they probably had not been involved in the old Volunteers - and neither would they have been the first choice of a local magnate about to raise an yeomanry corps. By the time the government turned to the Orangemen for support, their new movement had acquired an *esprit de corps* of its own and remained a separate organisation outside government control despite supporting and supplementing the official embodiments of loyalism, the army and the yeomanry, from time to time.

The other crucial clue to why the Orange Order became a "brotherhood" consisting of "lodges" is the location. Loughgall was the centre of the Cope estate, a small Protestant market town surrounded on three sides by parishes with a Catholic majority.³⁰ However, that alone does not make it any more likely cradle of a fraternal society than any other similarly situated town. What made Loughgall unusual was the unusually dense concentration of masonic lodges in the surrounding barony of Oneilland West. Almost one third of the lodges of Co. Armagh were located there: several little towns and even townlands having a lodge or lodges of their own.³¹ One of these was the lodge that disciplined a member for taking part in a party of Defenders (see chapter 8.2 above). The region also had a tradition of "hedgemasonry": in the 1760s, whole "unwarranted" lodges from Loughgall had applied to a regular lodge in Richhill for recommendations to the grand lodge.³²

²⁸ MSS history of Orangeism, vol. I, p. 141. Wallace papers, D 1889/6/4/1. PRONI.

²⁹ Blackstock 1998, pp. 62, 92.

³⁰ Crawford 1997, p. 45.

³¹ See the table below. Source: IMR.

³² Lodge 328 minutes (several entries). Quoted in Jenkinson 1946b, p. 88. Interestingly, the Oakboy disturbances of 1763 had originated in the same barony. Magennis 1998, p. 167.

TABLE 8 REGULAR MASONIC LODGES IN ONEILLAND WEST IN THE 1790s

number	founded	location	supported the county committee in 1792-93
266	(1787) ³³	Maghery	yes
328	1759	Richhill	yes
462	1768	Loughgall	no
527	1775	Ballintaggart	yes
582	1781	Levalleglish	yes
603	1782	Cranagill	yes
612	1783	Baltylum	no
665	1787	Magaraty	yes
680	1788	Richmount	yes
743	1791	Clonmain	yes
757	1792	Richhill	yes

With only two exceptions, the lodges in the barony adopted a conservative stance in 1792 (see chapter 7.3.2) and there is no evidence to suggest that they changed their mind later. Of the two that were absent, lodge 612 in Baltylum, in the parish of Drumcree, registered 28 members between 1783 and 1800. Judging by their names, many of them were probably Catholics,³⁴ which would account for their less than unanimous enthusiasm for “*the inestimable blessings of our constitution*” as advocated by the county committee. The other lodge, no. 462 in Loughgall, only registered eight members during its entire history and none after 1770: some may have been Catholics, but based on only eight names any opinion on the denominational breakdown is bound to be inconclusive. However, the political hostility of the landlords of Loughgall, the Copes, to the government interest in the county may be a sufficient explanation. Although the landlord of Loughgall, Robert Camden Cope, was a mason (see chapter 5.1.1), his links with the local lodge - if any - are unknown. The lodge severed its connection with the grand lodge some time prior to 1801 but kept on meeting “clandestinely”, or without grand lodge recognition.³⁵

Although there is no record of whole “regular” masonic lodges having joined the new institution, many individual freemasons did become Orangemen. Of the first Orange leaders, a namesake can be found in masonic records for James Sloan (or Sloane),³⁶ in

³³ Lodge 266 was founded in Lurgan in 1756 and moved to Maghery in 1787. IMR.

³⁴ The registered members included Edward Donnelly, Pat Duffy, Edward Kelly, Thomas Collins, Pat O’Hara and John Murphy. Register, 1st series, lodge 612.

³⁵ A note in the grand lodge register: “*now at work clandestinely, Ap[ril] 1801*”. Register, 2nd series, lodge 462. GLI.

³⁶ Register, 1st series, lodge 582 (22 October 1783). The lodge met at Levalleglish near Loughgall.

whose house (or inn) in Loughgall the Orange organisation of 1795 was set up. According to Nancy Curtin, James Wilson whose band of "Orange Boys" preceded the order by two years, was "a substantial Presbyterian farmer and freemason in County Tyrone".³⁷ Among the first members of the gentry to join the Orangemen, some were freemasons. One was the vicar of Drumcree, the Reverend George Maunsell, whom L. M. Cullen calls "one of the catalysts of support for the Orange Order".³⁸ Maunsell had been a founder-member of a masonic lodge in Portadown less than two years previously.³⁹ As senior warden of his lodge, he was involved in the county committee of the Armagh freemasons.⁴⁰

Armagh was not unique in having freemasons among the members of the Anglican élite who supported the Orangemen. Mark Kerr O'Neill, the district master of the Orangemen of Coleraine in 1799 was also a mason.⁴¹ However, of the fifteen other members of the district Orange lodge, only three can be tentatively identified in masonic records.⁴² Being a freemason was definitely not a prerequisite for Orange membership. For instance, William Atkinson, high constable of Belfast, grand master and "captain commandant of the armed Orangemen of the county of Antrim"⁴³ in 1798 is not listed under any of the Belfast lodges in the grand lodge register.⁴⁴

The most prominent Orangeman as regards his masonic career was Major Holt Waring (1722-1805) a veteran of Dettingen, Fontenoy and Culloden, who had been an officer of the Grand Lodge of Ireland for 29 years and retired to Waringstown, Co. Down (4 km south-east of Lurgan) in the early 1790s.⁴⁵ The move may have been simply due to Waring's advancing age; however, it coincides with Lord Donoughmore's appointment as

³⁷ Curtin 1994, p. 155.

³⁸ Cullen 1997, p. 281.

³⁹ Register, 1st series, lodge 789 (7 November 1793). Maunsell was vicar of Drumcree in 1781-1804 and later become Dean of Leighlin. Blacker, William: *The battle of the Diamond*. Printed in Kilpatrick, Cecil (ed.): *The formation of the Orange Order, 1795-1836*, p. 18.

⁴⁰ *Sentimental and Masonic Magazine*, July 1794, p. 96. Maunsell's name is given as "Mansel".

⁴¹ For the district Orange lodge, see Mullin 1977, p. 118. A Mark Kerr O'Neill was registered in 1750 for a Coleraine lodge. Register, 1st series, lodge 123. GLI. He (or perhaps a son of the same name) joined another Coleraine lodge in 1799. Lodge 754 minute book (Entered Apprentice degree, 15 February 1799) and Register, 1st series, lodge 754 (11 March 1799). GLI.

⁴² William Hamill: lodge 754 minute book (Royal Arch degree, 14 July 1796) and Register, 1st series, lodge 754 (14 October 1796). Richard Heyland: Register, 1st series, lodge 123 (1750). John Rice: lodge 754 minute book (24 December 1798). GLI.

⁴³ Rev. Edward Hudson to Lord Charlemont (27 October 1798). Printed in *The manuscripts and correspondence of James, first Earl of Charlemont*, vol. II 1784 - 1799, no. 351.

⁴⁴ Register, 1st series. GLI.

⁴⁵ Junior grand warden, 1761; senior grand warden, 1762; grand treasurer, 1762-90 and deputy grand master in 1765-66. Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 189.

grand master and the take-over by the grand lodge by his appointees. It has also been suggested that Waring's successor took over "the finances of the grand lodge in a most disorganised condition".⁴⁶ In 1769, Waring had appointed Thomas Corker, the deputy grand secretary, to act also as his deputy in receiving lodge dues.⁴⁷ As this was the main financial activity on the credit side of the grand lodge accounts, one would have thought that Corker would have got some of the blame for any neglect or wrongdoing. However, and perhaps significantly, Corker was in fact the only one of the important grand lodge officers to survive Donoughmore's accession in 1789 by more than two years.⁴⁸ One is left with the impression that perhaps Waring's leave-taking from the grand lodge was not on the best of terms.

As the twelfth of July 1796 was approaching, Waring reassured Dublin Castle that there would be no trouble in his district: the Orangemen would not bring arms or spirits. Despite having received these assurances, Waring pretended not to know the local Orange leaders: "*With every enquiry I have been able to make, I cannot learn who are the principal people concerned...or I should have given them advice on the occasion, as to their conduct*".⁴⁹ After the parade was over, Waring praised the sober and disciplined conduct of the local Orangemen and claimed "*that a distinction must be made between these Orangemen, & those of the Co. of Armagh, under that denomination, who have wreckt [sic] & made such horrid waste & depradations [sic] for some time past*".⁵⁰

Another magistrate living nearby, a Captain Waddell, was more critical of Orange activities and found it "*very odd if Major Waring cannot quell*" Orange activity "*in his own town [and] among his own tenants*".⁵¹ Waddell also suggested that Waring did not want to put too much pressure on fellow freemasons even if they possessed valuable information. Waddell recounts how a man had told Waring that he had been asked to join the United Irishmen but refused. According to Waddell, the man who refused to join "*knows who tendered him the oath whose house it was in and who were present, this man and the others I mentioned should be brought forward and made declare what they know about*

⁴⁶ Crawley 1904, pp. 140-141.

⁴⁷ Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 272.

⁴⁸ See succession table of grand lodge officers, Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 471. Corker remained in office until his death in 1801. Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 198.

⁴⁹ Holt Waring (Waringstown) to Cooke (4 July 1796). Reb. 620/24/11.

⁵⁰ Holt Waring (Waringstown) to Cooke (23 July 1796). Reb. 620/24/46.

⁵¹ [Captain] Robert Waddell to Colonel [Ross?] (31 July 1796). Reb. 620/24/71. Waddell's plan to recruit people in the neighbourhood of Blackskull as constables was opposed by loyalists, who distributed notices threatening death to those obeying "*Papist Capt: Waddell*". Waddell to Col. Ross (28 July 1796). Reb. 620/24/64.

the matter if exertions are not made on these occasions those [thugs?] will not be found out untill [sic] too late". Apparently Waring, despite his undoubted loyalist sympathies, had neglected to do so. "*This man is I hear a freemason*", observed Waddell in a clear reference to Waring's well-known masonic career, "*but I think in a business of this sort there should not be any delicacy observed*",⁵² suggesting that Waring had shown undue consideration to a fellow mason in not requiring him to give evidence - probably in order not to expose him to the revenge of the United Irishmen.

The existence of whole masonic lodges with loyalist leanings was not confined to Armagh. The Rev. Clotworthy Soden of Maghera reported in May 1796 that "*the thumping matches between masons & those United fellows will do no harm, lately at a sitting of a lodge on their way home, they met a party of those nocturnal gentry, when a boxing bout ensued & half a dozen cut faces & blackened eyes appear'd before me*". Although the freemasons described by Soden were opposed to the United Irishmen, it is not known whether their lodge was linked with other like-minded masons in any way as there was no body comparable to the Armagh county committee in the politically more divided Co. Londonderry. Although not a mason himself, Soden was on friendly terms with his local masons: he claimed to have "*got into their good graces*" and that he had "*been paid...some flattering complim[en]ts at some of their lodges*".⁵³

The adoption of masonic customs and traditions by the Orangemen and the overlap in membership produced some strange side-effects. It is interesting to note that many originally masonic ballads have been preserved by Orangemen and are now regarded as Orange songs. One such has a refrain "*And keep the Orange flag flying o'er the hills of Tandragee*" - a reference not to Orangeism, but to the masonic lodge no. 315 which was one of the lodges called "Orange" long before the Orange Order existed.⁵⁴

8.3.3. Yeomanry, masonry and Orangeism, 1796 - 1798

Allan Blackstock, in his study of the origins of the Irish yeomanry, has demonstrated that a distinction should be drawn between the Orange Order and the gentry-led loyalist associations. An important phase in the latter form of loyalist

⁵² [Captain] Waddell to Col. Ross (28 July 1796). Reb. 620/24/64.

⁵³ Clotworthy Soden (Maghera) to NN (25 May [17]96). Reb. 620/23/124.

⁵⁴ McClelland 1986, pp. 53-54. McClelland claims that the majority of the members of 315 were Catholics. However, this is very unlikely as 315 was one of the lodges which had a bye-law

mobilisation was the "Dungannon plan" initiated in the summer of 1796 by Thomas Knox, the MP for Co. Tyrone and the Rev. William Richardson of Dungannon. The plan was not adopted as such by the government. However, it helped the recruitment from among loyalists to the new local defence force known as yeomanry which was raised in the autumn of 1796.

Although the Dungannon plan (which was eventually never realised) had novel features, its roots lay in the long-established tradition of local, voluntary "law and order" associations of magistrates and gentlemen. Such associations could publish resolutions, reward informers and raise a *posse comitatus* to chase lawbreakers. The formation of such an association in south Londonderry in May 1796⁵⁵ coincides with the publication (between 30 May and 1 July) of loyal resolutions by at least thirteen masonic lodges in the district and adjoining parts of eastern Tyrone. Interestingly, almost all of the lodges in question are known to have been pro-reform in 1792-93 and about half of them could be considered radical by the standards of the day (see chapter 7.3.3).⁵⁶ Such a shift in political opinion no doubt reflects the hardening of political and sectarian divisions that was taking place all over Ulster.

The attempt to create an organisation effective enough to match that of the Defenders and the United Irishmen obsessed the minds of local organisers of loyalist societies. In some cases, the model that was chosen was clearly an imitation of the United Irishmen rather than that of freemasonry. An association called "Derriaghy Loyalists" was formed in August 1796 in imitation of the Dungannon association. It was decided that the society was to consist of separate cells, United Irish -style, or "*distinct societies of young, able & spirited men - who are willing to stand forward, and take an active part, at this important crisis*". Each unit was to consist of a maximum of 25 men who "*live in the same neighbourhood and have a confidence in each other*". Although these societies were to be numbered, this on its own does not prove masonic influence as by this time, the United Irishmen were also numbering their committees. There is no indication that there was any kind of ritual aspect to the Derriaghy association, which was probably soon subsumed either in yeomanry or the Orange Order.⁵⁷

specifically banning the admission of Catholics (see chapter 5.2.2.). Lodge 315 minute book (by-law 14). GLI. For the lyrics of "The hills of Tandragee", see McClelland 1986, pp. 90-91.

⁵⁵ Blackstock 1998, p. 59.

⁵⁶ BNL 30 May, 3 June, 1 July 1796.

Before deciding to raise the yeomanry, the government explored several options for a loyal local defence force. In late August and September 1796, a “fencible county cavalry” plan was circularised to county magnates. Both leading conservatives and Whigs were approached: Charlemont was asked to ascertain the views of the gentry in both Armagh and Tyrone.⁵⁸ Thus William Richardson, whose own base was deep inside Tyrone, got involved in the minutiae of raising Armagh corps. In September, Richardson reported that a schism had arisen in Co. Armagh between what he called “*the old Royalists*” or “*old Loyalists*” on one hand and on the other, “*the Republican Reformists now disposed to Loyalty, among these were mostly Lord C[harlemont]’s old Volunteers*”. Casting himself in the role of a peacemaker, Richardson shuttled between the two parties. The loyalists were offended by Charlemont’s reliance on his old Volunteer comrades to officer the local yeomanry as they preferred Macan, the sovereign (mayor) of Armagh to be their captain. In this context, Richardson made a cryptic remark: “*I made some inquiries among the Republicans [i.e. Whigs] who told me it was a freemason business, I then went to visit Lord C[harlemont] and mentioned I had done so in Dublin...*”.⁵⁹

On the surface, Richardson’s remark seems to mean that Charlemont’s preference for his old Volunteer officers was a consequence of their shared masonic membership. However, it seems most unlikely that the “republicans” would reveal to Richardson their masonic plot if they had one. On the contrary, they could with some justification complain that the rival plan to set up a loyalist corps commanded by Macan was “freemason business”. While there is no evidence that Charlemont was a mason (see chapter 7.2.3), Macan seems to have been one.⁶⁰ Moreover, the overwhelmingly loyalist attitudes of the Co. Armagh masons point strongly towards the conclusion that freemasonry was at this juncture in Armagh a by-word for loyalism.

On 19 September the raising of the yeomanry was formally announced and in October, the commissions were issued to the officers. The yeomanry eventually absorbed the Dungannon and similar associations.⁶¹ Richardson’s letter thus belongs to the period of intense negotiation and intrigue between those two events in the process of raising of

⁵⁷ Resolutions of a general meeting of the inhabitants of the parish of Derriaghy (18 August 1796). Reb. 620/24/130.

⁵⁸ Blackstock 1998, pp. 67-68.

⁵⁹ William Richardson to Arthur [Wolfe] (25 September [1796]). Reb. 620/25/118.

⁶⁰ An Arthur J. Macan was registered a member of an Armagh lodge only a couple of months before these events. Register, 1st series, lodge 695 (3 June 1796). G.L.I. A. J. Macan was one of the Co. Armagh magistrates who met on 28 December 1795. Resolutions of the Armagh magistrates, Reb. 620/24/48 (enclosure).

the force. Once established, the yeomanry may have taken over the paramilitary functions of masonic lodges: most yeomen were probably recruited from the same stratum of people (mostly Protestants) from which masonic lodges drew their membership. There were definitely links between some lodges and the yeomanry: the records of a Ballycastle lodge include a *"List for the Cary Yeomanry"* dated 26 January 1797 which contains forty-two names. Another list follows with nine names of *"Persons who refused to serve"* and six marked "absent", indicating that the majority of the members joined the yeomanry.⁶² The phenomenon was not confined to Ulster: a Cork lodge suspended its meetings in 1798 as its members *"had individually joined different yeomanry corps a duty which from the necessity of the case superseded the usual assembling of the brethren of this lodge"*.⁶³

Although the attempted French landing at Bantry Bay in December 1796 failed, it gave a boost to the morale of the United Irishmen and frightened their opponents. Three masonic lodges in Ballymoney, Co. Antrim, hurried to declare their loyalty.⁶⁴ However, an anonymous Protestant from Drumcree, Co. Armagh, was worried: in March 1797 he complained that the *"United work is drawing verry [sic] near us which is compos'd of Scotch and Irish...I hear there is [sic] whole bodys of Orrange [sic] men turned over to the United men"*. He suggested that *"the Orrange Institution is much improv'd and wise men of propperty [sic] at the helm of it and I think [it] would be useful to Government if they would get fair play"*.⁶⁵ Another correspondent worried at the rumours that former loyalists were defecting to the United Irishmen, H. Clements, made a distinction between Orangemen and freemasons. He first described the political scene as he saw it:

the sentiments of the people of this country are within these past ten days totally changed from what they were, it was at that time a loyal and spirited people, determined to support their king and constitution and were bound each other by the oath of Orangemen.

Now these loyal people were demoralised, continued Clements: *"both they and freemasons, who are very numerous in this country, joined the United Irishmen"*.⁶⁶ Although both societies were associated with loyalism, they were regarded as two separate bodies. This distinction recalls the 1795 division between the regular lodge no.

⁶¹ Blackstock 1998, pp. 70-71.

⁶² Lodge 432 records, vol. 1. PGL Antrim.

⁶³ Lodge 27 minutes (6 December 1798). GLI.

⁶⁴ BNL 2 January 1797.

⁶⁵ Anon. (Drumcree) to NN (21 March 1797). Reb. 620/29/205.

⁶⁶ H. Clements to Mrs Clements (10 April 1797). Reb. 620/29/206.

483 in Aughnacloy and their allies, the “unwarranted” masons. Of the two outlets for loyalism, freemasonry was obviously the more respectable one. The Orange Order was apparently regarded (even by other loyalists) as an unruly mob desperately in need of “wise men of property” trying to “improve”, in other words, control and restrain them. It is significant that early Orange apologists did not deny the link between Peep O’Day Boys and early Orangemen.⁶⁷

The formation of the yeomanry removed the need to organise masonic lodges into armed loyalist associations. Significantly, the first president of the Armagh county committee, Thomas Greer, had a typical conservative military “career” in the sense that from a Volunteer officer of the 1780s he became a yeoman officer of the 1790s.⁶⁸ However, the habit of publishing masonic loyal resolutions was kept up throughout the year 1797.⁶⁹ The Armagh county committee resolutions passed on 21 June 1797 referred to the suspicions that the government had concerning the loyalty of some masons. “*At a period when a spirit of disaffection and sedition may have alienated from their duty and allegiance many misguided people*”, the members of the county committee declared their reverence of the constitution and disclaimed “*all connection with any traitorous society or rebellious association whatsoever*”. The duty of masons, as defined by the Armagh committee, was:

*to be good subjects and to be amenable to the government under which we live - it is therefore with the deepest regret we learn from high authority, that government have several strong reasons for doubting the loyalty of some of the masonic lodges of this kingdom.*⁷⁰

However, one should not assume that all loyalists of the late 1790s were ultra-Protestant bigots. It is doubtful how much enthusiasm either for Protestant supremacy or the landed oligarchy can be read into the loyal resolutions of 1796-97. After all, the undiluted Protestant Ascendancy ceased to exist before the term came into use. The “constitution” of loyalist rhetoric, as it existed in the late 1790s, was not the constitution of Williamite conquest any more. The relief acts of 1778, 1782, 1792 and particularly that of 1793 had not made Catholics equal to Protestants, but had dramatically altered their position. The parliament was yet unreformed, but enough had changed to allow many

⁶⁷ e.g. *To the Protestant inhabitants of Great Britain and Ireland* (an anonymous manuscript). Reb. 620/39/10. See also chapter 8.3.4.

⁶⁸ *The Irishman* 7 November 1823.

⁶⁹ See chapter 8.1.4.

⁷⁰ Declaration and resolutions of the “General Committee of all the free and accepted masons of the County of Armagh” (21 June 1797). Reb. 620/31/155 (enclosure).

moderates to declare their support for the "constitution" as it then stood (in addition to those scared into opposing further changes by the rising tide of radicalism). For instance, five lodges in and near Magherafelt declared "*our present constitution to be perfectly steady in forming laws for the benefit of the kingdom at large*". Of the five lodges, only one (691 Castledawson) had taken a conservative stance in 1792-93; three had adopted a moderate reformist position and one (573 Termoneeny) had been among the radical dissidents of the Castledawson meeting on 1 January 1793 (see chapter 7.3.1.).⁷¹

A similar transformation of reformers to loyalists took place in Stewartstown, Co. Tyrone, and its vicinity. Seven of the eight lodges had existed in 1792-93: they had all been reformist and three of them had even supported the radical resolutions of the Dungannon meeting. Now they praised "*our happy constitution, and the succession to the throne in his majesty's illustrious house*" and promised to help "*suppress all riot and disorder*".⁷² However, there were several shades of loyalism just as there had been shades of reformism in the early 1790s. It is instructive to note that even in 1797, a title such as "Whitehouse Orange Lodge No. 651" did not necessarily indicate extreme Protestant leanings and definitely not any connection with the nascent Orange Order. In fact, the resolutions passed by lodge no. 651 were moderate as loyal resolutions went at the time, recommending "*brotherly love*" to their brethren rather than, as other lodges were doing at the time, declaring their undying love of the "*glorious constitution*".⁷³

To sum up, freemasonry was in 1795-96 an important avenue of loyalist mobilisation, particularly so in Armagh where there was an efficient, conservative-controlled county committee. The extent of actual militancy may have varied from place to place: some masons were no doubt content to pass resolutions while others, such as those in Aughnacloy, actively sought an armed federation with lower-class Protestant "hedgemasons", soon to be called Orangemen. With the formation of the yeomanry, the need for masonic lodges as loyalist paramilitary corps ceased: individual loyalists could better achieve the security they desired in their capacity of yeomen. By 1798, many of the Volunteers and freemasons of the 1780s and early 1790s were firmly in the loyalist camp. For instance, several members of the famous Belfast Orange Lodge no. 257 signed on 29

⁷¹ BNL 18 August 1797. The moderate reformist lodges in 1792-93 were 525 Magherafelt, 567 Ballyronan and 613 Magherafelt.

⁷² Resolutions of the Stewartstown lodges, BNL 18 August 1797. Resolutions of 257 Belfast, BNL 30 June 1797.

⁷³ BNL 24 July 1797.

May 1798 a public appeal to hand over to the army the artillery pieces of the Belfast Volunteers, hidden since the disbandment of the corps.⁷⁴

Although difficult to quantify precisely, the links between loyalism and freemasonry in the Ulster of the late 1790s appear to be no less significant than those between masonry and radicalism; perhaps even more so. By 1797 at the latest, loyalists or moderates controlled the majority of lodges in many key areas including Belfast (see chapter 8.1.2). Although the militant loyalist phase of “regular” freemasonry did not last long, the dichotomy between the two classes of loyalists did not disappear. The Orangemen, whose roots lay in the hedgemasonry which predated the “battle of the Diamond”, were not subsumed into or replaced by the yeomanry. They had already acquired an *esprit de corps* of their own and although they could be recruited as supplementary yeomen, many of them were not regarded as “respectable” enough to qualify for the membership of either “regular” freemasonry or the yeomanry.

8.3.4 The separation of freemasonry and Orangeism, 1798 - 1799

The Orange Order was more successful than the Defenders in developing a national organisation resembling that of the freemasons. At first, the Loughgall innkeeper James Sloan acted as a co-ordinator and secretary for the Orange societies. In July 1797, Orangemen from five counties formed a grand lodge in Portadown. William Blacker was grand master of Armagh and William Atkinson of Antrim; Thomas Verner claimed jurisdiction over Tyrone, Londonderry and Fermanagh. Finally, a national grand lodge was set up in Dublin in March 1798.⁷⁵

The main argument put forward for the decision to move to Dublin was that it would help control the sectarian fanaticism evident among northern Orangemen - although their opponents no doubt saw it only as an attempt to make that fanaticism more efficient and co-ordinated. An anonymous Orangeman, writing in 1799, suggested that the difference, if any, between the early Orangemen and Peep O'Day Boys was marginal and certainly the connection between them was not as remote as later Orange historians would like to believe:

⁷⁴ The original appeal in Getty Papers D/3695 (PRONI) was reprinted in Chambers 1994, pp. 14-16.

⁷⁵ Wallace, R. H: *History of the Orange Order*. Printed in Kilpatrick, Cecil (ed): *The formation of the Orange Order*, pp. 102, 114-118. Senior 1966, pp. 19-20, 91-92.

*... a plan was formed and executed, of transporting the Orange association to the metropolis, and by regulating and improving the system, and placing at its head men of higher rank and talent, to convert to the support of the throne and the constitution; an institution, which, from the nature of its origin and formation, might have degenerated into a ferocious spirit of persecution.*⁷⁶

Although the attitude of the first Orangemen towards freemasonry was positive, this sentiment was not shared by the founders of the Grand Orange Lodge. Freemasonry, as it manifested itself in the "hedgemasonic" activity of the early Orangemen, was apparently regarded by them as a primitive and embarrassing feature. Distancing Orangeism from freemasonry was part of a general drive to distance it from whatever plebeian, hedgemasonic, perhaps Peep O'Day Boy origins it might have had. For instance, the first Orange grand master, Thomas Verner, denounced "*interference or innovation from other societies*". Verner and his deputy grand secretary also declared themselves hurt by "*comparisons... between the proper conduct of the Grand [Orange] Lodge of Ireland and the improper exactions that have been the injury of other institutions with which we hold ourselves totally unconnected*".⁷⁷ It seems certain that Verner had the freemasons in mind as payment of dues (definitely regarded as "improper exactions" by many masons) to the masonic grand lodge was a source of considerable friction between it and the local lodges. Further evidence can be found in the case of "innovation" which attracted the censure of the Grand Orange Lodge in December 1799. An Orange lodge was reprimanded for having - like a masonic lodge would - a senior and a junior warden among its officers. The lodge was told that "*by the rules of the grand lodge there is no such office of warden*".⁷⁸

As a part the same strategy, leading Orangemen could belittle the significance of the Battle of the Diamond as the founding moment of the Orange Order - when it suited them to do so. William Swan, deputy grand secretary of the Order, was requested to produce the minutes of the Grand Orange Lodge to the parliamentary select committee investigating the activities of the Orangemen in 1835. He showed the committee a book and emphasised that it was "*the original book of the proceedings, from the first Orange*

⁷⁶ *Orange vindicated, in a reply to Theobald M'Kenna*, p. 8.

⁷⁷ Thomas Verner (grand master) and Richard Carpenter Smith (deputy grand secretary) to Wolsey Atkinson (15 January 1799). Quoted in Kilpatrick 1993, pp. 52-53. The lodge was reprimanded also for having conferred on its members "Scarlet" and "Royal Marksman" degrees in addition to the recognised "Orange" and "Purple".

⁷⁸ Kilpatrick 1993, pp. 54-55.

Lodge that was established in the city of Dublin on the 8th of March 1798". He also denied that such books existed for the years 1795 - 1798.⁷⁹

It must be emphasised that the "separation" discussed here does not imply that "regular" masonry and Orangeism were ever part of the same organisation. Although most "regular" freemasons in Armagh and many of them elsewhere had rallied to the loyalist cause, their rejection of and social snobbery towards loyalist "hedgemasons" (see chapter 11.2) may have contributed to the decision to set up a separate Orange organisation in Ulster. It is not surprising that the post-1798 Grand Orange Lodge should regard the freemasons as rivals. After all, freemasonry at the national level was headed by Lord Donoughmore and others not fully "sound" on the grand issue of upholding the idea of "Protestant Ascendancy" as advocated by the Orangemen. The great (and apparently growing) number of Catholic freemasons, the perceived masonic involvement in the rebellion and the lenient treatment meted out to masons suspected of radicalism (see chapter 8.4) all put pressure on the Orangemen to dissociate themselves from their earlier role-models. It may be more than a coincidence that the Orangemen began to show their disapproval of masonry approximately at the same time, in the winter of 1798-99, when the masons collectively decided to forget their differences over the rebellion.

What the separation (a term not used in the contemporary sources) from masonry meant in practice was that Orangemen were encouraged to cease to think of themselves as freemasons of any sort and to develop a new, exclusively "Orange" identity. The Orange leadership sought to make the break with masonry as complete as possible without offending those of their "brethren" who liked being addressed as such and meeting in "lodges". This policy was further pursued through attempts to abolish the masonic initiation rituals adopted by the early Orangemen (see chapter 10.2.1).

After the break with masonry, the Orangemen solved the problem of establishing respectable antecedents in different ways. One was the invented genealogy of the Boyne Society (see chapter 10.2.2), possibly a conscious move by Gowan and other Orange writers to further distance Orangeism from freemasonry. Simply ignoring the masons was another. Writing in the 1830s, Colonel Blacker mentioned that James Sloan, the secretary of the first Orange meeting, issued "'numbers', a kind of rude warrant for holding lodges".

⁷⁹ Information of William Swan, Esq. (2 June 1835). *[1st] report from the select committee appointed to inquire into... the Orange lodges*, p. 87. The book shown by Swan was apparently the grand lodge minute book 1798 - 1818 (GOLI/A/M/98) now in the archives of the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland in Belfast.

Blacker took the existence of "lodges" and "warrants" for granted and did not mention masonry or any other society by name, not even the Orange Boys of Dyan, one of the precursors of the Orange Order founded in 1793 (see chapter 8.3.1).⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Blacker, William: *The battle of the Diamond*. Printed in Kilpatrick, Cecil (ed.): *The formation of the Orange Order, 1795-1836*, p. 16. Kilpatrick suggests that the absence of the Orange Boys in Blacker's account is consistent with the tendency of the gentlemen Orange leaders to play down the role of such suspected Peep O'Day elements. See Kilpatrick's introduction, p. 12.

8.4. Freemasonry and politics after 1798

As the politics of the various masonic lodges and individual freemasons had been different throughout the 1790s, so were their reactions to the events of 1798. According to Lepper and Crossle, two parties emerged in the grand lodge, one of which "wished to expel all freemasons who had been connected with the defeated political movement, the other quoted the rules of the fraternity in support of the theorem that a grand lodge should take no cognizance of a mason's political actions".¹ Indeed, a passage in the Old Charges, the fundamental rules of masonry, set out the requirement of loyalty to the state in a way which, arguably, made it possible for a mason to rebel while still remaining a bona fide freemason. According to the Old Charges, "*A mason must be a peaceful subject, never to be concerned in plots against the state*". However, to this was added the significant qualification that "*though a brother is not to be countenanced in his rebellion against the state, yet, if convicted of no other crime, his relation to the lodge remains indefeasible*".²

The latter qualification was deemed to have led some people to believe that rebelling was perhaps not exactly consistent with the principles of freemasonry, but nevertheless an activity that would be tolerated by their brethren. It may have occurred to some that had the rebellion succeeded like in America, the radicals would then have been on the side of the legitimate authority and the same clause could have been used to protect defeated loyalists. Nevertheless, the solution of the grand lodge was to delete the offending passage "*least [sic] the unwary may hereafter be misled*".³ However, the Ulster masons were slow to adapt to the new rules. An 1803 edition of *Ahiman Rezon*, published in Belfast, still carried the paragraph unamended while a Dublin edition of 1804 obeyed the grand lodge ruling.⁴

It seems that the grand lodge was far from unanimous in its decisions as to how to deal with the issue of the rebellion. Patrick Fagan has suggested that a disagreement between the deputy grand master, Dr Walter Wade, and other members of the grand lodge, may have been due to what Fagan has described as Wade's radical sympathies rather than over a matter of masonic protocol as suggested by Lepper and Crossle.⁵

¹ Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 298.

² Old Charges, paragraph II in *Ahiman Rezon* (c. 1790 Dublin edition).

³ Grand lodge minutes (14 February 1799). GLI.

⁴ Old Charges, paragraph II in *Ahiman Rezon* (Belfast edition 1803 and Dublin edition 1804).

⁵ Fagan 1998, p. 147 and fn. 64. Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 310-313.

Whatever Wade's sympathies were, the accusations levelled at him by Daniel O'Connell and other prominent masons definitely seem political in character: Wade was blamed for "*unceasing recurrence to past transactions which your Lordship [Donoughmore, the grand master] as well as the Grand Lodge by their act of amnesty...wished to consign to oblivion*" and his conduct was said to "*involve the Craft in difficulties and disorders which, if not prevented, must lead to destruction*".⁶ Wade had apparently incurred the wrath of a part of the grand lodge in December 1798 by closing one of their first meetings after the rebellion before those present could finish their "*debate materially involving the interests of masonry*". After Wade had left the chair, another chairman took over. The reopened meeting passed resolutions calling for Wade's dismissal and declaring that "*any discussion of political, religious or controversial subjects is utterly subversive of and abhorred from the fundamental principles of masonry*".⁷ However, the events are open to another interpretation. Walter Wade was the very man sent by Lord Donoughmore to combat subversion in the northern lodges in 1797 due to his record of being "*a zealous supporter of government*" (see chapter 8.1).⁸ Thus it seems more likely that Wade represented the ultra-loyalist wing of the grand lodge, while O'Connell and others of a more conciliatory opinion resented his continuing demands for a purge of radical members.

Despite the grand lodge policy of condemning revolution without condemning the revolutionaries, some local lodges tried members implicated in the rebellion. A lodge in Ballymoney, a town which had been burned by the army in retaliation for rebel activity, held an extraordinary meeting "*to try some members of said lodge (no. 240) whom we allege turned rebels + joined the insurgents the 8th day of June last*" (the day after the burning when the rising began in earnest in north Antrim). A William Caulfield was excluded "*for ever never to be suffered to be balloted for again*" and seven others until they would be found deserving of mercy.⁹

Trials of suspected rebels were not peculiar to the Ulster lodges but took place in other parts of Ireland also. In Charleville, Co. Cork, several members of the local lodge were under suspicion: "*Willm. Lillis being under suspension for some time is now expelled*

⁶ Daniel O'Connell to Donoughmore [dated by Fagan at mid-June 1800]. Reprinted in Fagan 1998, pp. 154-155.

⁷ Grand lodge minutes (6 December 1798). GLI.

⁸ Donoughmore to Pelham (31 October 1797). Quoted in Berry 1913, p. 199.

⁹ Transcript of lodge 240 records. Family papers and records of Derrykeighan, T/1177/19/5-15. PRONI. None of the United Irishmen of Ballymoney listed by Stewart were among the charged freemasons, which suggests that the radicals had not infiltrated the lodge. Stewart 1995, p. 141.

this lodge, likewise Willm. Maum[e?]& Edwd. Sanders Senr. are expelled this lodge for their improper conduct in breaking their obligation & the true rules of masonry [sic] Edwd. Sanders Jun. is under suspension till it appears to this lodge that he has not being [sic] guilty of breaking his obligation & being guilty of improper conduct to the present constitution...".¹⁰ As late as two years after the rebellion, the lodge passed a resolution "not to admit any person, to be made a mason in this lodge that had anything to do with the united business".¹¹

Two Dublin lodges took a less extreme course: one of them only noted "*an order from grand lodge committee to enquire into the conduct of our members during the rebellion, & found all our members to have conducted themselves with propriety*".¹² The First Volunteer Lodge completely circumvented the order by asserting that "*as masonry was suspended immediately after the commencement of the late rebellion we have not had an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the masonic conduct of the members of our lodge and as masons we are not authorized to make any other inquiry*".¹³ Something of the spirit of solidarity towards brethren, whether rebels or not, implicit in the unrevised Old Charges, survived after all.

Among the political exiles, the association between radicalism and freemasonry seems to have survived beyond Irish shores. This was the case among at least some of the United Irish exiles in America, one of whom was the leading Tyrone mason and radical, Dr Reynolds.¹⁴ Even in Ireland, some at least of the former United Irishmen were fully rehabilitated. The Dublin Volunteer and United Irishman Archibald Hamilton Rowan had been tried for treason but escaped abroad. In 1802, the government permitted him to return home. He reaffiliated with the First Volunteer Lodge and remained a member until 1820 when he resigned due to ill health.¹⁵

Reynolds's successor as the president of the Tyrone county committee, William Richardson, had been sent to Dublin by General Knox, who instructed the authorities there to detain him as a "*dangerous fellow*", or suspected revolutionary (see chapter

¹⁰ Lodge 49 minute book (4 June 1798). GLI. Edward Sanders Jr was cleared of the charge and reinstated at the next meeting of the lodge on 24 June 1800.

¹¹ Lodge 49 minutes (7 July 1800). The next two candidates to join were "*admitted provided they comply with the above resolution*" together with a sergeant of the Suffolk Fencibles.

¹² Lodge 207 minutes (26 November 1798). GLI.

¹³ Lodge 620 minutes (12 November and 26 November 1798). GLI.

¹⁴ Wilson 1998, pp. 1, 44.

¹⁵ Geoghegan 1921, p. 22.

8.1.2). Richardson survived his ordeal, however - and made an impressive comeback. In July 1799 he was unanimously re-elected as president of the Tyrone committee. In a printed handbill, the Tyrone masons set out the organisation of the county committee and its subdivision into nine subcommittees. However, the document may represent wishful thinking rather than reality. Nowhere in the document is it actually claimed that all the sixty-four lodges listed were represented at the meeting. The names of the masters of all the lodges are listed under the subcommittee headings; each one clearly marked "master". If this reflected the actual attendance, it would be surprising that not one of the 64 masters was absent and the lodge represented instead by a "delegate", a common enough occurrence at the 1793 Dungannon meeting.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the survival and resurgence of Richardson raises the question, did he manage to assure the government of his loyalty or was he released due to lack of evidence? Was his post-1798 county committee just the Tyrone United Irish organisation in disguise? There was no rising in Tyrone: thus any United organisation there could only quietly disband or bide its time and wait for another chance. On the other hand, maybe General Knox was wrong and Richardson was a radical of the 1793 reformist rather than the 1798 revolutionary variety.

The rebellion was soon followed by the Act of Union controversy. Lord Donoughmore, the grand master, was an active supporter of the proposed union, lobbying for it already in January 1799 when the proposal was first put to the Irish parliament. In his native county of Tipperary, Donoughmore allied himself in the unionist cause with most of the leading Catholic families of the county. Donoughmore's brother, Major-General John Hely-Hutchinson, as the high sheriff of the county, summoned a county meeting which passed strongly unionist resolutions. At the time, Hely-Hutchinson was also the senior grand warden of the Grand Lodge of Ireland.¹⁷

This public association of two high-ranking freemasons with the cause of the legislative union may have created the perception that Donoughmore's personal, pro-Catholic politics were representative of the Irish freemasons at large. Even though Donoughmore did not strive to use freemasonry for his political ends (indeed he could hardly have done so, given his efforts to prevent others from using it for theirs throughout

¹⁶ *County Tyrone General Masonic Committee...July 1st, 1799.* (handbill) GLI.

¹⁷ Bolton 1966, pp. 93, 149. John Hely-Hutchinson (1757-1832). MP for Lanesborough (1776-83), for Taghmon (1789-90) and for Cork City (1790-1801); lieutenant-general, 1803. Baron Hutchinson of Alexandria, 1801; succeeded his brother as the 2nd Earl of Donoughmore, 1825. Joint provincial grand master of Munster, 1791. Senior grand warden, 1791-1823. Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 290-291, 429-431.

the 1790s), freemasons in the anti-unionist camp can hardly have been pleased with the political prominence of their pro-union grand master.

The period of the Union dispute was marked by the emergence of orders or lodges calling themselves "black". Traditionally the colour of the Knights Templar degree, at this juncture the colour seems to have been associated with anti-Union feeling. James Hamilton Junior, the Irish agent of the absentee 1st Marquis of Abercorn, frequently reported on anti-Union sentiments. On 16 January 1800, an anti-union amendment had been rejected in the House of Commons. Led by Downshire, the 2nd Earl of Charlemont (the son and successor of the Volunteer commander-in-chief) and W. B. Ponsonby, the disappointed opponents of the union mobilised with the aim of putting pressure on the parliament through a flood of petitions from all over the country.¹⁸ Just six days after the vote in the Commons, the alarmed Hamilton wrote that the Strabane garrison had been called to arms and marched to Ballymoney, Co. Antrim where *"it is reported 12.000 rebels are in arms and have assumed the name of Knights of the Black Garter from which I guess they are some of the lower orders of freemasonry"*.¹⁹

The first reports turned out to be exaggerated as only a couple of weeks later Hamilton began *"to agree with your Lordship [Abercorn] in thinking that there is little to be feared from the Society of Black Garters; above 15 of their leaders have been taken up and securely flogged"*.²⁰ Although Hamilton does not actually allege that this revolt was a burst of anti-Union sentiment, this interpretation is not implausible given the timing and his constant stream of information to Abercorn regarding local opposition to the union - both before and after this incident. However, it is not clear whether these "black" brethren were freemasons or Orangemen. There was another case, possibly unrelated, of "black" unrest. In June 1803, the inspector of yeomanry in Tyrone and Donegal reported that

*both counties are in a perfect state of loyalty and industry - except the town of Dromore & neighbourhood in the County Tyrone & borders of Fermanagh which is kept in a state of disturbance by a body of people styling themselves Black Masons to the great annoyance of the loyalists of that part of the county - On the first of May last they attacked and wounded many in a fair held at Dromore without any provocation on the part of the well known loyal people of that country this is the only occurrence that has come to my knowledge.*²¹

¹⁸ Bolton 1966, p. 187.

¹⁹ James Hamilton Jr to Lord Abercorn (22 January 1800). Abercorn Papers, D/623/A/92/4. PRONI.

²⁰ James Hamilton Jr to Lord Abercorn (9 February 1800). Abercorn Papers, D/623/A/92/7. PRONI.

²¹ H. Archdall (Dungannon) to Sir E. Littlehales Bart. (11 June 1803). Reb. 620/65/182.

After the momentous events of the rebellion and the union with Britain, the Dublin masonic establishment returned to its normal activities, though the politically influential now spent less of their time in Dublin than hitherto. Freemasonry was still respectable, despite the involvement of some masons and lodges in the insurrection. The 3rd Earl of Hardwicke, who succeeded Cornwallis as lord lieutenant, is on record for laying "*the first stone of a house of recovery in Cork-street...his excellency put on the masonic apron and was presented with a...trowel...having the Hardwicke arms on one side and a suitable inscription on the other*".²²

In Ulster, the picture was somewhat different. A semblance of normality was soon restored; a report on St. John's Day (27 December 1798) sermon and dinner in Belfast and the customary advertisements thanking the minister appeared in the Belfast Newsletter.²³ However, there was no reference to a procession. Apparently the authorities were not prepared to allow public demonstrations of any sort even though the loyalty of one at least of the lodges concerned should have been beyond suspicion - the lodge in the Monaghan Militia regiment. On the next two St. John's Days, in June and December 1799, Belfast lodges expressly thanked local military commanders for their permission to parade - in June even for the "*liberty to spend the evening*".²⁴ However, several lodges were absent. Some may simply have preferred different arrangements for their celebrations but there may have been political tensions also: several of the absent lodges (nos. 257, 587, 684, 793) had also declined to sign the loyal resolutions passed by most Belfast lodges in July 1797.²⁵

In the polarised political climate, many lodges retained their radical or loyalist political affiliations. Before the mid-1790s, lodge names incorporating adjectives such as "Orange" or "Loyal" had not necessarily indicated strongly conservative or loyalist political leanings: the "Orange Lodge" of Grange, Co. Antrim (no. 543) had called for parliamentary reform in 1793.²⁶ However, in the post-1798 atmosphere such titles carried a different message. The newspaper report of a St. John's Day service in Coleraine in 1801 was attended by the "Loyal Blue Lodge" (754 Coleraine) and the "Loyal Orange & Blue Lodge" (888 Armagh Militia). The officiating minister was the Rev. Robert Hezlett

²² *Literary and Masonic Magazine* April 1802, p. 135.

²³ BNL 28 December 1798, 1 January 1799.

²⁴ BNL 30 June, 24 December 1799.

²⁵ BNL 7 July 1797, 30 June 1799. The absence of 793 may also be explained by the fact that it was, according to the master of the lodge, "*nearly dormant*" at the time. John Graham to Thomas [Corker] (1 July 1799). Appendix to Register, 1st series, lodge 793. GLI.

²⁶ *Northern Star* 2 January 1793.

(Haslet), a prominent loyalist.²⁷ Where loyalism and freemasonry were linked, the link remained strong: in 1808, eleven Co. Antrim lodges are on record for offering the services of 461 volunteer soldiers under Capt. Ezekiel Boyd of Ballycastle, a member of the landlord family that figures prominently in the masonic membership lists of that town.²⁸

However, other lodges had other ideas. Activity that can best be described as "United Irish" or "Defender", or both, seems to have been carried on under the guise of masonry well beyond 1798. Radical freemasonry, as well as the co-operation between Catholics and Protestant radicals, seems to have survived particularly well in western Ulster where there was no rebellion and where the counterrevolutionary repression presumably did not hit the radicals equally hard. Sir George Hill of Derry suggested in 1802 that *"the Catholics have directed their friends to associate themselves as much as possible in freemasons lodges and to keep together"*.²⁹

On the borders of Antrim and Londonderry, a series of fights took place in 1802 between Orangemen and yeomen on one hand and a party of *"Roman Catholics and masons"* on the other. A fight at Garvagh fair on 24 May was followed two days later by another fight at Kilrea clothmarket. Both sides gathered their forces and an even more violent fight ensued in Kilrea on 7 June, the fair day of the town. The "Catholics and masons" apparently started the fight, first marching *"up & down the street whooping & shouting"*, armed with *"quarter poles, staffs, a few swords, & other offensive weapons"* but apparently not with firearms. They ignored the advice of some *"respectable men"* to desist and marched off, crying *"has any man any thing to say against a mason"* or, according to another witness, *"where are your Protestants now who dare say against a mason"*. Finally, they knocked down a member of the other party who had *"made some observation about William's cause & George's laws or words to that effect"*. The loyalists were outnumbered and took refuge in a house from where they fired first blank and then live shots. Two men were reported killed and sixteen wounded, some of them innocent bystanders. It was afterwards suggested that the Orange party may have stored their guns in the building in advance. The investigating magistrate claimed that *"a set of Roman Catholick masons of the lowest class & character, with whom some profligate Protestants have mixed"*, had organised not only in the neighbourhood of Kilrea but

²⁷ BNL 13 July 1801. For Hezlett's loyalist credentials, see his Orange certificate (1799) and other Orange documents in Hezlett papers, D/668/O. PRONI.

²⁸ Bashford n.d., p. 7.

²⁹ Sir G. F. Hill (Derry) to Marsden (23 September 1802). Reb. 620/62/80.

elsewhere in the neighbouring counties.³⁰ One of the allegedly "very active persons in said mob" was John Hanna, the master of a masonic lodge in Vow, Co. Antrim.³¹

As there were Protestants on both sides, the origins of the conflict seem to have been more political than sectarian. This was also the opinion of the Rev. William Richardson, a namesake of the "dangerous fellow", rector of Clonfeacle near Moy and a magistrate. With Thomas Knox MP, he had been the founding father of the 1796 "Dungannon plan" of setting up loyalist associations to maintain order and supplement the army if need be.³² In the years after 1798, he anxiously kept an eye on the local freemasons:

*Catholics and Protestants over the North are in profound peace with each other; the tail of the United Irish has rallied in freemason lodges. With these, Orange lodges, when they meet at fairs, do and will come to blows, and the question between them is political and not religious. I have pressed your lordship before on the subject of these freemason lodges, every day growing more numerous, and more suspicious by their guard against everything Orange.*³³

Another report from Co. Tyrone in 1803 suggested that the situation was as bad as it had been in Co. Armagh in the 1790s and recommended swift action to end the "wars" between the two factions of Orangemen and freemasons,

that is real[l]y the loyalists and the United Irish, for it is so fully understood in that country...In the first battle at...Dromore... the freemasons prevailed [a reference to the fight on 1 May 1803 between the "Black Masons" and Orangemen, see above], in the second battle at Fintona (not far removed) Orange had the better...Now a short continuance of these wars will enable that party [the radicals] to increase and unite the Catholics together with them and make it a Catholic question which is their grand object.

The correspondent supported a recent memorial by "respectable" Protestants for army protection and suggested that troops be sent to Dromore, Fintona and Trillick, not because the loyalists were not able to protect themselves but to show the government's support for them and to frighten the "United Irish freemasons". Moreover, the proposed show of force would reassure "the peaceable unoffending Catholics (probably the great

³⁰ James Paterson (Kilrea) to General [Hart?]. (12 June 1802); S. Moore to George Bristow (12 June 1802); information of Charles Stewart (copy, 13 June 1802); information of William Kent (13 June 1802). Reb. 620/62/12. Most of the numerous witnesses described the "mob" as consisting of "masons and Roman Catholics", implying that the two were not synonymous.

³¹ Information of Daniel Livingston (copy, 10 June 1802). Reb. 620/62/41. The lodge was probably no. 571, the only lodge in Vow listed in IMR.

³² Blackstock 1997, p. 394.

majority)" who would "feel themselves protected and with the more difficulty will be brought to look for safety in Association [i.e. the United Irish camp]".³⁴ In 1808, "Northern Defenders" were still reportedly meeting as masons in "numerous and respectable" lodges.³⁵

In the aftermath of 1798, tensions seem to have arisen between Catholics and Protestants also within freemasonry. The Derry magistrate, Sir G. F. Hill, wrote in 1803 that "*the Catholics...are now prevented from frequenting freemason lodges where Protestants associate with them, and the Catholics who are publicans have been oblig'd to erase from their sign boards all freemason insignia*".³⁶ It is not clear who prevented the Catholics from attending, or obliged the publicans to erase the signs - whether the civil or ecclesiastical authorities, or both. Perhaps Hill himself - he was a freemason, although he had ceased to attend in 1798. The reasons are not clear, but his specific mention of having not "*attended any freemason lodge since 1798*" suggest that the events of that year made him to stop attending, possibly because he did not feel comfortable in the company of radicals.³⁷

The habit of publishing political resolutions by masonic lodges - not surprisingly, all of them loyal in tone - was briefly revived on the pages of the Belfast Newsletter in the wake of the 1803 rebellion. Some lodges simply let it be known that they would assist the authorities against any disturber of the peace, foreign or domestic.³⁸ Another lodge used a decidedly loyalist formula in declaring their firm determination to support King George, "*and to maintain our most glorious constitution*".³⁹ But the war-weary mood of the people, freemasons included, was possibly best summarised by lodge 526 (Hall's Mill, Co. Down). They specifically emphasised that they were, or had been, adherents of different religions:

when this lodge was first instituted...its first master and wardens were then of different sentiments in point of religious tenets, though undivided in point of love for each other, and perfectly agreed in sentiments of Light...every candidate for masonry, who offered himself to us (if his moral conduct was unblameable) we received him into our fraternity, let his mode of worship be what it would if he feared God...

³³ William Richardson to Lord NN (2 May 1803). Quoted in McClelland 1962, p. 24.

³⁴ "GP" (G. Porterfield) to Viscount Kilwarden (23 May [1803]). Reb. 620/66/181.

³⁵ William Fleming to Dr. Harding (6 February 1808), quoted in Berry 1913, p. 200.

³⁶ Sir G. F. Hill (Derry) to A. Marsden (13 March 1803). Reb. 620/65/73.

³⁷ Sir G. F. Hill to the Grand Lodge of Ireland (17 October 1811). Quoted in Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 392.

³⁸ BNL 23 August 1803 (552 Currain and 581 Shanmullagh, both near Magherafelt).

³⁹ BNL 7 October 1803 (917 Glenarm).

Nevertheless, there was no trace of United Irish sympathies as the members declared that they *"shall ever be found amongst the most zealous of His Majesty's most faithful subjects, in firmly opposing the daring spirit of insurrection, and disorder, which if not subdued, would once more involve our country in all the horrors of confusion and distress"*.⁴⁰ The three traditionally mixed lodges in Keady, Co. Armagh soon publicly adopted the same resolutions.⁴¹ After 1803, the public expression of political sentiments in masonic contexts became less and less frequent.

Just like the reactions of the various masonic lodges were different to the political controversies of 1792-93 and 1798, it is not possible to generalise about their reaction to the situation after 1798. Some lodges sought to remain neutral. A Downpatrick lodge (no. 367) resolved in 1801 *"that no b[rothe]r can report a man [i.e. propose him for membership] knowin[g] him to be concerned in any other society"*.⁴² As the lodge was known for its moderate reformist pronouncements in the 1790s, rejecting both radical and loyalist extremism (see chapter 5.2.2), it is likely that the ban on parallel membership was aimed at the Orangemen, the United Irishmen and the Defenders alike. The disapproval of *"party existence"* in a 1804 sermon by the Anglican Rev. James Forde in Ballynahinch⁴³ may also be read as general condemnation of radical and loyalist factions alike. Ten years later, a lodge in Cushendall on the Antrim coast stressed that they:

*shall not initiate any candidate bearing a party name of whatsoever denomination unless he seriously engages to decline all associations of that nature. Our lodge also duly examined every member thereof, and are happy to say, all answered negatively to the question - 'Are you an Orangeman, Defender, or Ribbonman?'*⁴⁴

Other lodges were more specific about societies they deemed incompatible with masonry. A Lurgan lodge decided in 1814 that *"every member that is in this lodge or comes into it as a member must take the same obligation that we have done that he is not nor never will be a Ribanman [sic] nor any other unlawful society against his Majestie [sic]"*.⁴⁵ On the other hand, the Presbyterian Rev. William Charleton of Markethill, who

⁴⁰ BNL 28 August 1803.

⁴¹ BNL 16 September (463, 540 and 766 Keady). The emphasis on religious tolerance was probably welcome in Keady as only three months previously, Catholics and Orangemen had fought each other at the Keady fair. General Ross to NN (16 June 1803). Reb. 620/66/240.

⁴² Resolution (3 June 1801) in Lodge 367 Records, vol. 1794 - 1806. Downpatrick Masonic Hall.

⁴³ BNL 10 January 1804.

⁴⁴ *Ulster Recorder* 9 December 1814.

⁴⁵ Transcript of lodge 134 (Lurgan, Co. Armagh) minute book. GLI. The resolution is not dated but it was signed by John Mahaffy who is mentioned elsewhere in the minutes as the master of the lodge in 1814-15. The preceding entry was written in 1814.

was himself a freemason, chose in 1805 to quote scripture in order to "*display the superiority of our ancient institution, over the Modern structures raised by our illegitimate offspring, on the sandy foundation of prejudice, superstition & ignorance*", a not too subtle attack on the Orange Order given that at least one of the lodges present had had radical sympathies in the 1790s.⁴⁶

With hindsight, it may be possible to argue (as Kevin Whelan has done) that "the Orange Order was pivotal to the policy of deradicalising Freemasonry. As Orange Lodges (themselves clearly modelled on a Masonic prototype) spread, Freemasonry could no longer transcend sectarian divides, and a fissile tendency developed. In the late 1790s that split occurred, neutralising an ideologically congenial vector of revolutionary thought. Radical Freemasonry shuddered to a sectarian-induced halt".⁴⁷

However, Whelan's argument is far too simplistic on several counts. First of all, elements of masonic ideology could be used to justify conservatism and loyalism just as well as reformism and radicalism. Thus Irish freemasonry, as a body, was never radical even by the standards of 1792-93 and definitely not by the utterly different standards of 1798. Some sections were, but that radical freemasonry did not disappear overnight when Orangeism was born. Moreover, Irish freemasonry as a whole (if not all lodges in all regions) did transcend sectarian divides until the Catholics started leaving in large numbers - not because of Orange pressure in the 1790s, but because of the hostility of Catholic clergy from the 1810s onwards (see chapter 5.2.1). Arguably, the increasing revolutionary extremism of the United Irishmen after 1794 may have alienated more freemasons from their cause than the spread and excesses of Orangeism.

In fact, the conflict between freemasonry and Orangeism was a significant factor in the decline of Irish masonry in the nineteenth century. In 1814 there were reported to be still "*many lodges*" in Belfast, but "*the jealousy which subsists between the Orangemen and that society [the freemasons] has reduced the lodges to a very low ebb*".⁴⁸ As late as in 1818, a minister at a masonic sermon in Bangor was thanked for having proven "*their [the masons'] superiority to other societies of a more recent date*".⁴⁹

⁴⁶ BNL 22 January 1805. For lodge 393 (Hamiltonsbawm), see McClelland 1962, p. 22. The other two lodges had been supporters of the conservative county committee in 1792-93 but their later political associations are unknown.

⁴⁷ Whelan 1996, p. 120.

⁴⁸ Col. A. D. O'Kelly (Belfast) to the Duke of Sussex (9 October 1814). McPeake papers, T/3048/A/31. PRONI.

⁴⁹ BNL 30 June 1818.

9 THE 1806 GRAND LODGE SPLIT: A CRISIS IN IRISH FREEMASONRY

In 1806, the Grand Lodge of Ireland split into two warring factions. For two years, the rival bodies met in Dublin, both claiming to be the legitimate grand lodge. After a temporary reconciliation in 1808, one of the factions withdrew and with the support of over 300 Ulster lodges, set up a rival grand lodge in Dungannon. The Grand Lodge of Ulster¹ survived for five years, although in the end, most lodges deserted it and reaffiliated themselves with the Dublin grand lodge. Like most of masonic history, this episode has escaped the attention of all but masonic historians.

The first attempt to study the split in detail was made in 1892 by Francis C. Crossle. Crossle set the tone for most masonic historians by attributing most of the blame to Alexander Seton, deputy grand secretary of the Grand Lodge of Ireland. As Crossle quotes extensively from the legal documents of a case in which Seton was the defendant, he tends to demonise Seton as the only actor - and a villain at that - in the drama. According to Crossle, the “ostensible” causes were the “faulty and extravagant” system of grand lodge finances and the interference with the higher degrees. Crossle concludes that the main culprits were Seton and his superior the grand secretary, Major Gorges D’Arcy Irvine: the “real” cause was their “determined feeling of resentful opposition to the properly constituted authorities of the order”.²

Replying to Crossle in the following year, Henry Sadler set out to complement his Dublin-centred article “with the Ulster version of the episode”. Making fun of Crossle’s naive legalism which favours the winner, Sadler commented that “we all know what an atrocious crime rebellion against constituted authority is, unless it succeeds” and claimed that the split led to the development of Irish freemasonry “from being the worst organised masonic system then in existence” to a respectable position at the end of the nineteenth century.³

Most masonic historians have tended to follow Crossle rather than Sadler in placing the blame squarely on Alexander Seton. W. J. Chetwode Crawley goes even

¹ The Grand Lodge of Ulster was sometimes known as the Grand East of Ulster, on the model of the French grand lodge, the *Grand Orient*.

² Crossle 1892, pp. 18-19. The court case, *Leech v Seton*, was heard in the High Court of Chancery in Ireland. An abstract by Daniel O’Connell and Abraham G. Hill (respectively barrister and solicitor for the plaintiff) is reproduced in Crossle 1892, pp. 4-7.

³ Sadler 1893, pp. 4, 24.

further by omitting to mention the quarrels between the grand lodge and hundreds of local lodges previous to the open split. In Crawley's account, all that happened was that Seton was dismissed from his post in 1806 and expelled from masonry in 1807; he then details the ensuing court cases (other than that discussed by Crossle) in which Seton sued a member of the rival faction for libel.⁴

The most detailed account of the split is that by John Heron Lepper and Philip Crossle. Not surprisingly, they tend to follow the path laid out by Philip Crossle's father: the entire chapter is entitled "The Seton secession". Lepper and Crossle's account of the events is riddled with hindsight and teleological legalism: for instance, they refer to the rising tensions as "preparations of war" by Seton. One faction is referred to throughout as "the grand lodge" or "the constitutional party", while their challengers are called "the rebels", "the seceders" or "the opposition body".⁵

Following earlier masonic authors, Terence de Vere White explains away the split as "internal feuds, not political in their nature".⁶ Masonic writers, Lepper and Crossle at their head, have generally attempted to be as oblique as possible about any political causes related to the dispute and any political links that the two factions might have had. Did the Ulster party consist of unreconstructed United Irishmen, extreme loyalists, disgruntled opponents of the Act of Union, or simply people critical of the abuses of the Donoughmore favourites? Before attempting to answer the question, it is necessary to outline the birth and activities of the two parties.

9.1. The "country" lodges dissatisfied, 1801 - 1806

The post of the grand secretary of the Grand Lodge of Ireland had been filled since 1796 by Major Gorges D'Arcy Irvine (1760 - 1847), son of William Irvine, the provincial grand master of Volunteer fame.⁷ The running of grand lodge correspondence, records, finances and other such day-to-day affairs had customarily been left to the deputy grand secretary, the only salaried rather than honorary officer of the grand lodge. Thomas Corker, whose circuits of Ulster to collect unpaid dues have been discussed

⁴ Crawley 1901, p. 137. The case, *Seton v Graham*, was heard at Co. Tyrone assizes and appealed to the Court of Common Pleas in Dublin in 1808.

⁵ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 321-405.

⁶ De Vere White 1973, p. 51.

⁷ Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 436. Major Irvine's military rank derived from the local corps, of which his father was the colonel. The corps had apparently begun its life as a Volunteer one, then resurrected as yeomanry in 1796, yet kept its original title "Lowtherstown Masonick Volunteers".

before, had filled this post for over thirty years. By the turn of the century, however, the increasingly infirm Corker was not up to the task any more.

Even outsiders knew that all was not well in Irish freemasonry. Leading Orangemen, seeking to distance their movement from masonry (see chapter 8.3.4), could utilise in that argument "*comparisons...made between the proper conduct of the Grand [Orange] Lodge of Ireland and the improper exactions that have been the injury of other institutions with which we hold ourselves totally unconnected*".⁸ After Corker died in 1801, the affairs of the grand lodge were left in confused state. The new deputy appointed by Irvine was a northern protégé of his, the barrister Alexander Seton. The deputy grand secretary had traditionally acted as deputy to both the grand secretary and the grand treasurer. However, in July 1801, a new post of deputy grand treasurer was created. There were now two salaried officers, neither the superior or subordinate of the other, dealing with much the same kind of work.

The new deputy grand treasurer, William Semple, was to receive an annual salary of 50 guineas plus 10 per cent of all the arrears owed to the grand lodge that he managed to collect. Apparently Semple was reasonably successful and became the target of an anonymous pamphlet, attacking Semple's appointment as an extravagant expenditure: "*Semple will get £100 a year, which would relieve twenty paupers annually or keep six children in the Orphan School*". The grand treasurer and Dublin barrister, John Boardman, was accused of "*putting the surplus funds into government stock*" when, argued the pamphleteer, they should have been used to build a masonic hall in Dublin.⁹

The "exactions" hit the lodges even harder after the grand lodge decided in August 1802 to raise the lodge dues. Although the increase was earmarked for charity purposes, protests reached Dublin from many lodges, particularly but not only from those outside the capital. A Dublin lodge complained that the salary attached to the controversial post of deputy grand treasurer alone would have been enough to support nine orphans. Another protest from Dromore summarised the position of the country lodges: the increases seemed "*calculated for private emolument*" and the proposed improvements would be of no advantage to "*the body in distant parts of the kingdom*". Finally, in March 1803, the grand lodge gave in to pressure and cancelled most of the increases. In the same year

⁸ Thomas Verner (grand master of Ireland) to Wolsey Atkinson (grand secretary of Armagh, 15 January 1799). Quoted in Kilpatrick 1993, pp. 52-53.

⁹ "A Brother": *An address to the right honourable and right worshipful the worthy fraternity of free and accepted masons in Ireland, on the state of their fund, its application and use.*

the deputy grand treasurer, Semple, resigned - but the damage to the credibility of the grand lodge had been done.¹⁰

Not all Ulster lodges initially rejected the increases. For instance, lodge 409 in Armagh first supported the grand lodge. However, in January 1803 the lodge was invited to a meeting to discuss the issue with other lodges. Soon after, the lodge changed its policy completely and decided that the grand lodge demand was "*unprecedented*" and that the sum could be put to better use locally.¹¹ In 1804, two more anonymous pamphlets appeared. By now, it was clear that the grand lodge had split into two factions, centred around grand secretary Irvine and grand treasurer Boardman, who was supported by the deputy grand master and Dublin merchant, Alexander Jaffray.¹²

Three moves made by the Boardman-Jaffray faction in 1805 seem to have been instrumental in uniting all those not satisfied with the direction Irish masonry was taking. Firstly, Major Irvine was removed from the post of grand secretary. Although elected to the post of junior grand warden instead, Irvine understood all too well that he was being removed from the position where he could exercise patronage over the salaried office of deputy grand secretary and have a significant indirect influence over the administration of the whole order. Irvine refused the technically higher sinecure and Alexander Seton was left without the support of his patron.

Secondly, in September 1805 the grand lodge declared that it was taking over the administration of the previously independent "higher degrees" of Royal Arch and Knights Templar. And finally, in December 1805, the grand lodge decided to hunt down the publisher or publishers of the anonymous pamphlets. A "secret committee" was set up, with 50 guineas at its disposal, to reward whomever could bring evidence leading to the prosecution of the authors of "*PUBLICATIONS, grossly reflecting on the conduct of the Grand Lodge of Ireland and its officers...the productions of anonymous and despicable libellers - false in statement - unfounded in inference, and malignant in intent - they endeavour to deceive, pervert and revile*".¹³

¹⁰ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 330-332, 409-410.

¹¹ Lodge 409 minutes (4 November 1802 and 15 January 1803) including copy of a notice sent by John Jackson, secretary of 328 Richhill to lodge 409.

¹² Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 332-334.

¹³ *Grand Lodge of Ireland, Thursday, the 12th December, 1805* [a grand lodge circular]. GLI.

9.2. Two rival grand lodges in Dublin, 1806 - 1808

Many of the "country" lodges, especially in Ulster, apparently interpreted the 1805 debacle - removing Irvine and trying to find and discipline the anonymous pamphleteers - as a move to get rid of the few men who were not corrupt or out of touch with the sentiment among the rank and file. A series of protest meetings was held in Ulster between January and April 1806. The recorded meetings were held in Belfast (62 lodges, 20 January), Cavan (20 lodges, 4 March), Enniskillen (39 lodges, 21 March), Dungannon (72 lodges, 24 March), Armagh (33 lodges, 24 March), Castledawson (36 lodges, 31 March), Carnfenton, Co. Antrim (11 lodges, 11 April), and Ballymoney (25 lodges, 14 April). All the meetings were united in their condemnation of the "*innovations lately proposed to be placed on the higher masonic orders*", the "*new, chimerical, and complex systems of finance*" and "*dissensions and contests about places of power and emolument*" in the grand lodge.¹⁴

The grand lodge leadership did not respond to the protests. Instead, on 6 May, Seton was dismissed from the post of deputy grand secretary. This final insult triggered a new wave of local meetings "*concerning the in[n]ovations lately proposed by the grand [lodge]*"¹⁵ but the patience of many lodges was now at its end: the aim of the May 1806 meetings was not to petition the grand lodge but to prepare for taking it over. The discontent finally burst into the open at a grand lodge meeting held in the Tailors' Hall, Dublin, on 5 June 1806. The Ulster lodges had sent dozens of delegates (the plan was to send seventy-three, representing 451 lodges) who were to use their significant voting strength to re-elect Irvine, get rid of grand treasurer Boardman, abolish the post of his deputy "*and rescind all the late transactions, which infringe upon our ancient rights and masonic privileges*". The opposition was highly organised: a committee had been set up to correspond with the delegates sent to Dublin and with Seton, who had already acquired a reputation as the champion of the ordinary member. Should the attempt to change the course of Irish masonry fail, and another cabal adopt "*any novel mode...to extort money from the country [i.e. the local lodges]*", the Ulster lodges were prepared to "*establish a grand lodge for themselves where the funds of the order would be better employed in general charity, than to individual emolument*".¹⁶

¹⁴ Crossle 1892, pp. 9-10; Sadler 1893, pp. 8-9. Crossle gives the year of the Belfast meeting mistakenly as 1805.

¹⁵ Lodge 418 minutes (31 May 1806). PGL Antrim.

¹⁶ Circular, 24 May 1806, quoted in Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 353-354.

The horde of Ulster masons crowding into Tailors' Hall caused consternation among the grand officers and representatives of Dublin lodges who were usually the only people who bothered to attend grand lodge meetings. Checking the credentials of the "country representatives" took a long time and some delegates were rejected. Nevertheless, the opposition managed to repeal some grand lodge resolutions that had offended them. For Alexander Jaffray, the deputy grand master chairing the meeting, a prominent Dublin merchant and a governor of the Bank of Ireland, it must have been traumatic to watch the provincial crowd negating one by one measures adopted by him and his associates. It was already half past one in the morning - the meeting had lasted for six and a half hours - and the Ulster masons were passing more and more resolutions. When they were about to rescind the elections of Boardman and the new grand secretary who had replaced Irvine, and to abolish the office of deputy grand treasurer, Jaffray decided that enough was enough. He declared that the meeting was over and left with most of the Dublin delegates. As the Ulster masons and others remaining at Tailors' Hall saw it, the deputy grand master had exceeded his powers. They carried on with the meeting, passing the controversial resolutions and moreover, reinstating Irvine as grand secretary, appointing a former junior grand warden Peter Digges LaTouche to replace Boardman and recommending that Seton be continued as Irvine's deputy.¹⁷

At the next meeting of the grand lodge a month later, on 3 July 1806, Jaffray arrived to chair the meeting but went home again, as he did not like the composition of the crowd present. After he had left, those present carried on with the business despite his absence. Seton placed the grand lodge records, seal and copperplates for printing warrants and certificates at the disposal of the opposition. Boardman kept the charity funds. From then on, there were two rival "Grand Lodges of Ireland" in Dublin. Both of them recognised Lord Donoughmore - who was ill and absent from all these proceedings - as their grand master but disagreed on everything else. The situation was a stalemate: neither party could get the grand master to exert himself on their behalf. The opposition contemplated replacing Donoughmore with Somerset Lowry-Corry, the 2nd Earl of Belmore, but did not carry out the threat. Both sides passed resolutions expelling the leaders of the opposing side. Although the initiative to take on the grand lodge establishment had come from Ulster, even Lepper and Crossle admit that "it would be a mistake to imagine that at this stage of the struggle it was the Northern masons against the rest of Ireland. Seton's party had quite a respectable following, in every sense, in Dublin itself and some of the oldest metropolitan lodges were divided in their allegiance".

¹⁷ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 354-355.

The Jaffray-Boardman faction managed to secure the support of the English grand lodge of the Antients, thus excluding from the charity of Antient lodges all Irish masons holding certificates from the rival grand lodge. They also took Seton to court, demanding that he should hand over to them the grand lodge property in his possession.¹⁸

Lord Donoughmore's twenty months of indisposition or indecision finally came to an end in the spring of 1808. At a specially convened reconciliation meeting in April, the earl tried to work out a compromise, replacing Jaffray with his own brother Abraham Hely-Hutchinson and having Seton's expulsion revoked. However, the peace was short-lived. Northern lodges were again lobbied to attend the following meeting on 5 May 1808 *en masse*. A circular instructed the delegates to have the proper jewels, aprons and certificates and to be prepared to pay any arrears owed to the grand lodge - as non-compliance with any of these technicalities could be used to exclude them.¹⁹

Despite these precautions, a dispute arose over the re-election of Boardman as grand treasurer. The votes of lodges whose dues were in arrears were refused and this led to a walkout by the opposition delegates. The representatives of the northern lodges retired to a tavern and issued a resolution addressed to William Irvine, the provincial deputy grand master of Ulster (addressed as grand master of Ulster in the resolutions). Irvine was requested to call a grand lodge meeting at Dungannon, thus following the time-honoured Volunteer custom of calling an Ulster assembly to meet in that town. Three days later, Irvine - openly assuming the style of grand master of Ulster - issued the requested summons. On 6 June 1808, the representatives of 311 lodges (as claimed by the organisers) met and decided "*that a grand lodge be formed for the province of Ulster, not to be governed by the grand lodge in Dublin*". In addition to Irvine senior and junior as grand master and secretary, several prominent members of Ulster gentry were elected also to the other positions in the grand lodge. The Hon. John Bruce O'Neill (later the 3rd Viscount O'Neill) was to be the senior grand warden, Archibald Acheson, the 2nd Earl of Gosford the junior grand warden and William Brownlow the grand treasurer.²⁰

¹⁸ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 355-360, 364.

¹⁹ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 362-371.

²⁰ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 372-373, 378-380.

9.3. The Grand Lodge of Ulster, 1808 - 1813

The formation of an independent grand lodge for Ulster, if such was the aim of the dissidents, was not without recent precedents. The formation of grand lodges to govern freemasonry in the breakaway North American states in 1778 - 1790 was probably the model that the Ulster faction would have thought of.²¹ It could be argued that the jurisdiction of a grand lodge need not coincide with the political nation. For example, attempts to form a single grand lodge for the United States in 1779-80 had failed, with the last of the thirteen former colonies (Delaware) having formed a grand lodge of its own as recently as in June 1806.²² The success of the American masonry in seceding from their mother grand lodge was also a precedent in other sense: it could be argued that separation did not have to mean the loss of masonic legitimacy and the severing of fraternal ties.

The use of terms such as "*Ancient Grand Lodge of Ireland*"²³ to describe the Ulster grand lodge, echoed the Antient-Modern split in English freemasonry. By the use of such terms, the Ulster faction sought to underline their implicit claim that the Dublin leadership had embarked on a course of unacceptable innovation. According to this line of thought, such violation of the central tenets of masonry made secession not only justified but also virtuous. Unfortunately for them, the Antients and Moderns of England were very close to reconciliation (eventually reached in 1813) and neither faction was interested in losing the goodwill of the established Irish grand lodge.

However, there is no evidence that a permanent separation was ever intended. The delegates who constituted the new grand lodge did not deny the existence or legitimacy of the other grand lodge: "*if the grand lodge in Dublin at any future time makes such concessions to us as shall meet our demands, we shall be happy to meet our Dublin brethren again*". Jurisdiction was claimed only over Ulster. Consequently, no masonic communication was to take place with Ulster lodges that refused to join the new body. The objective of an all-Ireland reform of masonry was not entirely given up: all Irish lodges not represented at Dungannon were "*invited to assist in accomplishing our objects*".²⁴

²¹ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 403-405. For the gradual separation of the American lodges from the English grand lodges, see Bullock 1996, pp. 114-121.

²² Cerza 1976, pp. 174-175.

²³ BNL 4 July 1809.

²⁴ Resolutions of the 6 June 1808 Dungannon meeting, quoted in Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 379-380.

Despite the aggressive rhetoric, the ties between the two parties were never completely severed. For instance, Lepper and Crossle are unable to explain the curious double career of the 2nd Earl of Belmore, who held high office in both grand lodges simultaneously. Belmore was first elected junior grand warden of the Grand Lodge of Ireland in 1805. Major Irvine, who had first been elected to the post, refused to take it up (see chapter 9.1) and Belmore was elected in his stead "by a very small majority".²⁵ During the 1806 - 1808 phase of the split, there were plans to replace Donoughmore with Belmore and at the reconciliation meeting of 1808, he retained his position as junior grand warden. Indeed, Belmore remained in that post in the Dublin grand lodge throughout the split (until 1813) while at the same time he was also elected to succeed Irvine's father William as grand master of the Ulster grand lodge in 1809, 1810 and 1811.²⁶ In another "curious occurrence" that Lepper and Crossle fail to explain, Belmore failed to get re-elected by the grand lodge in 1813 though recommended by the Grand Master's Lodge.²⁷

Belmore's retention in the office for eight years may have been due to personal friendship with Donoughmore: after 1808 he was the only one among the four top office-holders of the grand lodge who was not a Hely-Hutchinson. On the other hand, his repeated re-election may be interpreted as a standing offer of reconciliation directed at the Ulster faction. After 1813, his services were no longer required. From the Ulster point of view, Belmore's role in two camps may support the argument that the "rebellion" was meant to create something along the lines of the autonomous provincial grand lodge of Munster rather than a totally independent grand lodge. In fact, Seton himself referred to the establishment of "*a third grand lodge in Ireland*"²⁸ and to the Cork grand lodge as performing "*all the acts within the power of a grand lodge*", claiming that Ulster was entitled to the same privileges.

The Ulster grand lodge seems to have had allies in Munster as in December 1810 it thanked John Maginn, the provincial grand secretary of Munster "*for his attachment, and his zeal in promoting...the general advantage of free masonry*".²⁹ In fact, there seems to have been a "rebellion" in Munster as well. A grand lodge committee of inspection found in 1814 that a Miles Edwards, assuming the title of deputy grand secretary of the Grand Lodge of Munster had received dues from lodges in the county and city of Cork,

²⁵ Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 340.

²⁶ Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 357, 440.

²⁷ Lepper & Crossle, p. 411.

²⁸ *A memoire of certain transactions which occurred between the month of January, 1806, and June, 1808, in the Grand Lodge of Ireland.* Reprinted in Sadler 1893, p. 7.

assuring them that they “were exonerated from all demands of the national grand lodge”.³⁰

Although permanent separation may not have been the aim of the dissidents, the Dublin grand lodge would not permit dual allegiance of any sort. By the summer of 1809, the lodges were being told to choose one side or the other.³¹ One of the noblemen at the head of the Ulster grand lodge, Lord Blayney, at first saw no contradiction between chairing a meeting of one grand lodge and allegiance to the other. However, the Dublin grand lodge soon put him right: in March 1810, he claimed that he had thought that the Grand Lodge of Ireland had sanctioned the meeting in Dungannon which he chaired, “for the accommodation of the province of Ulster”. Despite his withdrawal from the affairs of the Ulster grand lodge, he was re-elected its senior grand warden in 1810, 1811 and 1812. Sir G. F. Hill of Derry was likewise elected junior grand warden in 1810 and 1811, but later denied that he had given his permission. The fact that the Ulster faction elected grand officers without their approval was a sign of its declining strength and “respectability”: their Dublin rivals seized eagerly upon it in their propaganda.³²

In 1810, thirty-seven Grand Lodge of Ireland lodges in Belfast and its neighbourhood held out an olive branch to their Grand Lodge of Ulster brethren, promising to “freely forgive past errors” of those who would “return to their proper allegiance”. However, they warned their own members again not to have any masonic communication with those who continued to adhere to what they called “the Dungannon Association...once seemingly powerful, but...now...dwindled almost to the state of nonentity”.³³ Six Grand Lodge of Ulster lodges responded, calling themselves defiantly “the REGULAR free and accepted masons of the town of Belfast” and thanked the delegates sent to a recent meeting “of our infant grand lodge”.³⁴

Comparing the situation in Belfast in 1810 with that in 1797 (see chapter 8.1.4) shows that the politics of the 1790s were not the cause of the division. Of the nine Belfast lodges which expressed their loyalty to the government in 1797 (albeit in moderate rather

²⁹ Crossle 1892, p. 15.

³⁰ *Committee of Inspection, to whom was referred the consideration of letters from certain lodges held in Munster, relative to grand lodge dues, and other matters connected therewith, on Thursday, 7th April, 1814.* GLI.

³¹ Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 386.

³² Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 391-392, 396, 398, 400.

³³ BNL 8 June, 25 June 1810. Many of the GLI lodges were new, formed after the split.

³⁴ BNL 28 June, 3 July 1810.

than extreme loyalist language), six supported the Grand Lodge of Ireland while three backed the Grand Lodge of Ulster.³⁵ The two lodges which had published separate resolutions in 1797, one exhibiting more radical (no. 587) and one more loyalist (no. 636) tendencies, were both among the pro-Dublin faction.

Although in Belfast the battle-lines were clearly drawn by 1810, this was not the case everywhere. In 1809, a new lodge (no. 443) was set up in Saintfield, Co. Down, warranted by the Grand Lodge of Ulster.³⁶ Despite the fact that the older lodge in town (no. 425) remained under the Grand Lodge of Ireland, both lodges attended St. John's Day services together for several years: in 1810, 1811 and 1812.³⁷ These celebrations took place both before and after a January 1811 meeting of nine Co. Down lodges at Comber of which the master of 425, Richard M'Coubrey, was the president. The meeting denounced the "*association held in Dungannon*" and resolved

*that any lodge, or member of a lodge, holding communication with the Dungannon Association, or any spurious combination, whereby the harmony of masonry may be injured, shall have no part or interest in the above lodges, until they return to their proper allegiance, to the antient establishment, the Grand Lodge of Ireland.*³⁸

Nevertheless, peaceful coexistence went on in Saintfield until 1813. In that year, the St. John's Day celebrations ended in a fracas between the two lodges. In the words of a local masonic historian, W. G. Simpson, "party and creed both figured in it",³⁹ suggesting that local political and religious disputes fused with the division which may have originated in purely masonic disputes.

By April 1811, the grand treasurer, Boardman, was confident that "*Seton's conspiracy*" would soon "*be overthrow[n] completely*". He also gloated over the fact that the Grand Lodge of Ulster had moved its place of meeting to Belfast: "*the complotters, not six in number, have shifted the scene of cabal to Belfast, & of Dungannon we shall hear no more!*".⁴⁰ However, in Belfast at least, only one of six Grand Lodge of Ulster

³⁵ The GLI lodges were nos. 257, 491, 550, 621, 761 and 763. The GLU ones were nos. 272, 687 and 762.

³⁶ *Grand Lodge. Dungannon, December 6, 1809.* [Grand Lodge of Ulster circular]. GLI.

³⁷ BNL 29 June 1810, 2 July 1811, 30 June 1812.

³⁸ BNL 11 January 1811.

³⁹ Simpson 1924, p. 36.

⁴⁰ John Boardman to A[braham] Hely-Hutchinson (9 April 1811). Donoughmore Papers D/41/25. TCD.

lodges (no. 272) had defected to Dublin by 1812.⁴¹ Three others (nos. 484, 762, 949) changed sides at some stage between the summer of 1813 and the summer of 1815 and the last one (no. 687) by 1816.⁴²

It is difficult to time the ending of the split precisely. In 1813, after years of legal wrangling, the *Leech v Seton* chancery suit was finally decided in favour of the plaintiff. The 1809 conditional decree was made absolute, directing Seton to hand over the disputed funds and documents. Seton was also restrained from registering masons and issuing warrants or certificates.⁴³ Nevertheless, he refused to comply with the decision and the legal battle went on. After Boardman died in 1814, Seton made overtures to end the litigation between him and the Grand Lodge of Ireland. However, the terms offered by the deputy grand master, Abraham Hely-Hutchinson, amounted to a demand for unconditional surrender. As regards the other northern leaders, Hely-Hutchinson dismissed Irvine with one sentence: "*With Major Irwin [sic] we have nothing to do*".⁴⁴ In the event, the lawsuit against Seton went on at least until 1823 and perhaps longer.⁴⁵

In June 1813, Lord Donoughmore gave up the post of grand master after twenty-four years in office. The resignation of the allegedly corrupt and inefficient grand master may have made it easier for the remaining dissidents to return to the fold without loss of face. The last recorded meeting of the Grand Lodge of Ulster took place in December 1813.⁴⁶ The last nail in the coffin of the Grand Lodge of Ulster was perhaps the "International Compact" concluded between the grand lodges of Ireland, England and Scotland in 1814. A letter from Seton to the assembled grand secretaries of the three grand lodges was dismissed contemptuously as "*a letter from a person of the name of 'A. Seton' describing himself as a D[eputy] G[rand] S[ecretary] of a society calling themselves the 'Ulster Grand Lodge'*". It was agreed that Irish masons were not to be admitted to lodges unless they had certificates from the Dublin grand lodge, thus denying

⁴¹ Estimating the relative strengths of the parties in Belfast is complicated by the fact that there seems to have been both a GLI and a GLU lodge numbered 88 as the number appears in the St. John's Day advertisements of both factions. BNL 30 June 1812.

⁴² BNL 28 June 1813, 27 June 1815, 28 June 1816.

⁴³ Crossle 1892, p. 9

⁴⁴ Abraham Hely-Hutchinson to Lord Donoughmore (4 July "1812"). The letter should be dated 1814 as it refers to Boardman's recent death, which occurred on 29 May 1814. Donoughmore Papers D/49/241. TCD.

⁴⁵ Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 377.

⁴⁶ Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 402.

the Grand Lodge of Ulster masons any recognition (including access to charity funds) in Britain.⁴⁷

What may be the last reference to *"the soi-disant Grand Lodge of Ulster"* is dated in 1815, although it is not clear whether it actually still existed at the time.⁴⁸ Individual lodges may have refused to submit to the Dublin grand lodge for a much longer period: as late as 1822, a group of Co. Down lodges thought it necessary to advertise the fact that they were *"under the constitution of the...Grand Lodge of Ireland"*.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Grand lodge minutes (1 December 1814). GLI. Parkinson 1957, p. 22.

⁴⁸ Abraham Hely-Hutchinson to the Duke of Leinster (14 August 1815). Donoughmore Papers D/51/8. TCD.

⁴⁹ BNL 28 June 1822.

9.4. "Fraud, innovation, and individual aggrandisement": the causes of the split

In 1809, the champion of the Ulster faction, Alexander Seton, listed four reasons for the discontent and the ensuing secession. The first was general dissatisfaction at the way in which the grand lodge was disposing of money collected from the order at large. Especially *"the appropriation of a considerable portion of the funds of charity to support a new and unnecessary" office of deputy grand treasurer* was objected to. The second, *"the removal of Major Irvine from the rank of grand secretary"* suggests that unlike the other grand officers, Irvine had had the trust of the Ulster freemasons. Thirdly, the grand lodge attempt to control the "higher degrees" was denigrated as *"the new fangled and absurd innovation of subjugating the superior, to the controul of the inferior, degrees of masonry"*. Finally, Seton objected to the reward offered by the grand lodge for the discovery of the writer of pamphlets critical of its activities. Suspected of having written the pamphlets himself, Seton denounced vehemently *"the establishment of an inquisitorial committee, endowed with a tenth of the funds [of the grand lodge], to be expended in a quixotic search for the author of some anonymous publications, whose reflections, whether true or false, were pointed at individuals, and not at the order"*.

To sum up Seton's argument: the grand lodge was a corrupt body, intent on providing jobs for favourites, expanding its own power and persecuting its opponents. The two grand officers identified by name as responsible were Alexander Jaffray, the deputy grand master and John Boardman, the grand treasurer. Lord Donoughmore is not spared either. His neglect of duty is cited as the reason why things were let to deteriorate to the point of no return. Seton also suggested that Donoughmore's twenty years in the chair had made him complacent and corrupt: *"Had the repeated attainment of this exalted situation blunted the grand master's feelings, and rendered him indifferent, until the moment in which he might conceive some advantage more substantial than the mere honour was to be obtained?"* Instead of piloting the ship of masonry past dangers, *"he awaits the wreck of the vessel - and his first exertion is to enrich some humble follower with the scattered remnant of her treasure"*.⁵⁰ Seton later even accused Donoughmore of treating Irish freemasonry merely as a recruiting ground for the army regiments that he raised (see chapter 7.3.3) and of favouring Cork, where he had political influence and interests, over Ulster. According to Seton, Donoughmore was:

⁵⁰ Seton, *Audi alteram partem*, pp. 5-7.

from 1789 to 1797...entirely occupied by two most important employments: raising regiments for the honour of masonry and establishing...a grand lodge in the city of Cork, for the accommodation of twelve or fourteen lodges...having no more regiments to raise, the order was no longer an object of attention to the grand master.⁵¹

Seton's list of grievances was echoed in resolutions published by seceding lodges. Ten lodges from Lisburn and its vicinity declared in 1810 that

they are determined to persevere in supporting the ancient and genuine principles of masonry as now established in their native province, being fully convinced that charity and every other masonic duty will be there maintained, and that fraud, innovation, and individual aggrandisement, which hath hitherto oppressed the Craft in Ireland, will be entirely annihilated amongst their Ulster brethren.⁵²

The evocation of "fraud" and "individual aggrandisement" echoes Seton's allegations of corruption, while "innovation" probably refers to both the "new and unnecessary" salaried officer and the attempt to control the higher degrees.

During the first stage of the split (1806 - 1808), the membership of the opposition grand lodge was so numerous and respectable that even Lepper and Crossle admit that "something more than mere turbulence of spirit was dividing the masons of Ireland *at this period of their dispute*" [their italics].⁵³ However, their implicit message is that from 1808, the Ulster secession was unjustified and due to the evil influence of Alexander Seton alone. No doubt Seton was personally affected by many of the controversial grand lodge decisions, such as the establishment of the post of deputy grand treasurer - as Lepper and Crossle repeatedly point out. However, one man with a grudge was not sufficient in bringing about a division like the Ulster split. The grievances of the Ulster lodges were real: the deputy grand treasurer's salary cost money and the increased efficiency in collecting arrears was not to the liking of many of the lodges either. Nor was the control of the higher degrees just a case of principle or stubbornness: it also had a significant financial aspect. Lodges in possession of such rituals could make money by initiating "*strangers*", or members of other lodges, to the higher degrees.⁵⁴ Before the grand lodge take-over, the lodges could spend the fees for those degrees as they pleased. There was no need to send any of the money to the grand lodge, as was the case with the fees for the "craft" degrees. One lodge even enshrined this right in a bye-law, passed in or after

⁵¹ Seton to NN (pamphlet in the form of a letter, June 1810) in *Grand lodge. Dungannon, June 6, 1810* [Grand Lodge of Ulster circular]. GLI.

⁵² BNL 3 July 1810.

⁵³ Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 358.

April 1804: *"That all sums of money received for all or any of those steps such as Royal Arch Superexcellent Mason Knight Templar or Knight of Malta shall go to the support of Warrant No. 888"*.⁵⁵ Thus the reform threatened to take away the only income available to the lodges that was not yet subject to grand lodge encroachment. At a protest meeting of Tyrone lodges in March 1806, the grand lodge proposals were objected to as an *"idea of raising money from the country lodges by any such new invented mode, as a taxation on the higher orders of masonry"*.⁵⁶

Can any political grounds for the split be identified? Most contemporary observers did not attach unambiguous party labels to either masonic faction. The postmaster of Belfast, Thomas Whinnery, wrote in 1808 a report to Dublin Castle on Charles Davis, a Belfast publican. A veteran of the 1798 rebellion, Davis had been to Dublin on masonic business. According to Whinnery, *"that body [=Irish freemasonry], it seems, has divided into two parties, with the least loyal of which Davis is actively connected"*.⁵⁷ Aiken McClelland does not venture a guess as to which faction, the Dublin or the Ulster one, was the "least loyal" one. Such assessment of the relative merits as regards loyalty of the two factions is rare and in this case, possibly based on personal prejudice. However, there is little evidence to support the argument that the politics of 1798 were the main cause of the schism. In 1809, a political disagreement caused a split in a Newry lodge. The new "Nelson" and "Union" lodges agreed to disagree on everything else, but both applied to the Dublin grand lodge for warrants.⁵⁸

At the height of the split, a group of lodges opposed to secession criticised the *"professions of loyalty"* issued by the Dungannon faction. They protested that they were also *"willing to come forward when duly called, with the most unfeigned expressions of loyalty to our beloved sovereign"*, thus seeking to create the impression that the Ulster grand lodge was assuming an ultra-loyalist posture and unfairly casting doubt on the loyalty of the Dublin party.⁵⁹ In fact, the declarations of loyalty issued by the leaders of the northern grand lodge do not provide unambiguous proof of their politics. In an 1810 address to the Duke of Richmond, the lord lieutenant, the Ulster faction assured him of its *"attachment to the principles of our happy constitution, to the support of which we are*

⁵⁴ Lodge 336 minute book (orders for the tyler, no. 3). MIC/249/3. PRONI.

⁵⁵ Lodge 888 minutes (bye-law 31). GLI.

⁵⁶ Resolutions of 72 Co. Tyrone lodges (24 March 1806). Reprinted in Sadler 1893, p. 9.

⁵⁷ McClelland 1962, p. 25.

⁵⁸ Crossle 1909, pp. 5-6.

⁵⁹ BNL 5 January 1811.

bound, not only...as subjects, but also...as masons".⁶⁰ The phrase "principles of the constitution" had been a reformist slogan in the early 1790s. However, in another memorial to the Prince of Wales in the same year, the Ulster grand lodge used a formulation which in the 1790s would probably have identified it as a group of conservatives: "*our sincere professions of attachment for that invaluable constitution, the blessings of which it is our happiness...to enjoy*".⁶¹ Writing as the Ulster masons were in the politically changed situation ten years after the Union, they probably were not aware of the difference between "the constitution" and "the principles of the constitution" that had been so significant in the 1790s.

A study of the leaders of the "rebellion" provides further evidence to support the view that the politics of 1798 were not the grand issue dividing the masons of 1806 or 1808. The opposition grand lodge that held sway in Dublin in 1806-08 included people such as the former deputy grand master, Dr Walter Wade, who may have lost his position due to his uncompromising loyalist views after 1798 (see chapter 8.4) and Smollett Holden, who had been the bandmaster of the Downshire militia regiment (see chapter 5.3.2).⁶² At the head of the Grand Lodge of Ulster were many figures with impeccable loyalist credentials such as the 2nd Earl of Gosford, Lord Blayney and the Irvines; even people like Brownlow who were also Orangemen. Although Lepper and Crossle belittle the significance of gentry figures at the head of the new grand lodge by pointing out that some of them were elected without their permission (see chapter 9.3), Gosford at least is known to have been active: he visited a lodge in Markethill in his capacity of junior grand warden of the Grand Lodge of Ulster.⁶³

However, the leaders of the Ulster faction were by no means a homogenous group of loyalists. They also included people like William Richardson, president of the Tyrone county committee, who had been imprisoned as a suspected United Irishman in the late 1790s (see chapters 8.1.2 and 8.4). There seems to have been a degree of continuity between the personnel of the Tyrone committee and the Grand Lodge of Ulster (which, after all, was first located in Dungannon). For instance, William Canning, who had been printer to the county committee in 1799, was appointed printer to the grand lodge.⁶⁴ Richardson's own lodge, no. 205 Moy, supported a prominent Dublin member of the

⁶⁰ *The humble address of the freemasons of Ulster* (GLU circular, 1 October 1810). GLI.

⁶¹ *The humble address of the freemasons of Ulster*, quoted in Sadler 1893, p. 4

⁶² Smollett Holden and others to Robert Leslie (21 November 1807). Reprinted in Sadler 1893, p. 21.

⁶³ Paterson 1946, p. 199.

opposition party, César Gautier, by electing him a member and deputing him to represent them at the Grand Lodge of Ireland in 1805.⁶⁵ Richardson himself remained active in the Grand Lodge of Ulster as late as 1811.⁶⁶ Moreover, the seceding lodges included some with strong radical links in the 1790s, such as no. 193 in Lisburn.⁶⁷ On the other hand, lodge 425 in Saintfield remained pro-Dublin: in the 1790s the lodge had boasted of being "*constituted of different religious persuasions*" and marched to hear a revolutionary sermon by the Rev. Thomas Ledlie Birch.⁶⁸

George Augustus Chichester, the 2nd Marquis of Donegall, had come to live in Belfast in 1802 after his family had been its absentee landlords for almost a hundred years. Donegall, reported to be a "staunch" Orangeman, was also a mason.⁶⁹ When the Ulster grand lodge was on its last legs in 1813, the 2nd Earl Annesley donated money and Donegall a plot for the planned orphan school.⁷⁰ Although Donegall was a freemason, there is no reason to believe that his membership was the decisive factor in his decision. The marquis also provided land for many beneficial non-masonic public institutions: the Academical Institution, the Fever Hospital, the Commercial Buildings and the Belfast gasworks.⁷¹

Should one wish to speculate on the links between the masonic split and contemporary political controversies, it seems that 1800 may be a more useful starting point than 1798. Many of the key players of the 1790s had left the scene: the 2nd Marquess of Downshire and the 1st Earl Annesley, two former grand masters, had died in 1801 and 1802 respectively. Armar Lowry-Corry, the 1st Earl of Belmore, one of the leaders of the anti-Union party, had also died in 1802. Perhaps significantly, Colonel Irvine was succeeded in 1809 as grand master by Belmore's son Somerset, the 2nd Earl.

⁶⁴ Crossle 1892 p. 14.

⁶⁵ Register, 1st series, lodge 205 (7 August 1805). Lepper & Crossle 1925, p. 343. Gautier seems to have been an eccentric even by masonic standards; Lepper and Crossle accuse him of having been a French spy, although they do not explain why Napoleon would have bothered to send an agent to participate in the internal squabbles of the Irish freemasons. Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 326-327.

⁶⁶ Lepper & Crossle 1925 pp. 349, 379, 382, 395.

⁶⁷ BNL 3 July 1810.

⁶⁸ *Northern Star* 29 June 1795.

⁶⁹ Col. A. D. O'Kelly (Belfast) to the Duke of Sussex (9 October 1814). According to O'Kelly, "*some years ago Lord Donegall and other gentlemen added themselves to the society of masons*". McPeake papers, T/3048/A/31. PRONI.

⁷⁰ BNL 25 May 1813, Lepper & Crossle 1925 p. 401.

⁷¹ Maguire 1983, p. 31. Donegall is referred to as "*our hono[u]red brother*" in the resolution of thanks by forty lodges on St. John's Day, 1814. As these were Grand Lodge of Ireland lodges,

It is not implausible that Lord Donoughmore's strong stance over the Union controversy (in 1800, he was rewarded with an earldom for his support for the government) and his advocacy of Catholic emancipation may have helped to accumulate anti-unionist ill will towards him and the Dublin grand lodge he headed.

The removal of Irvine junior and the take-over of the higher degrees both occurred in 1805, a year that had already seen the Catholic issues resurface: a Catholic petition had been presented to the parliament in March and rejected in May. In February 1806, a new government (the "ministry of all the talents") had taken over following the death of Pitt. Thus the first split of 1806 occurred at a time what the new government was trying to convince the Catholic leaders of their good intentions. This policy was pursued through appointments of pro-emancipation politicians to high offices of state and included offering the post of Postmaster-General to Donoughmore. The final split of 1808 coincided with the "veto" controversy, a debate on whether the king should have a veto on the appointment of Catholic bishops in return for concessions to Catholics.⁷² Donoughmore remained prominent in pro-Catholic politics throughout the split: for instance, he presented a Catholic petition in the House of Lords in 1810.⁷³

While the contemporary events on the political scene are not a sufficient explanation for the split on their own, they serve to show that the specifically masonic grievances of the "country" faction tended to become acute at times of political tension. Donoughmore's resignation from grand mastership in 1813 may not have been the triumphant exit of a victorious grand master who had healed the split, as Lepper and Crossle portray it.⁷⁴ Instead, it may have been an exercise in mutual face-saving. The weakening of the Ulster faction allowed Donoughmore to leave the position which had proved to be of more trouble than benefit to the Hely-Hutchinson family enterprise (although his two brothers retained their posts in the grand lodge for several years).⁷⁵ The exit of the earl may also have allowed the seceding lodges of Ulster to return without having to submit to the authority of Donoughmore, a controversial political figure accused by his opponents of negligence, nepotism and corruption.

Donegall was presumably not associated with the cause of the rival body any more. BNL 5 July 1814.

⁷² For the re-emergence of the Catholic question after the Union, see Connolly 1989a; Bartlett 1992, pp. 268-303.

⁷³ Connolly 1989a, p. 38.

⁷⁴ Lepper and Crossle 1925, pp. 419-421.

⁷⁵ John, Lord Hutchinson (senior grand warden until 1823) and Augustus Abraham Hely-Hutchinson (deputy grand master until 1819)

10 THE INFLUENCE OF MASONRY ON OTHER ORGANISATIONS

For scholars of eighteenth-century Ireland, especially for those studying the 1790s, the attraction of freemasonry has often been not masonry as such but modes and models of organisation and behaviour that freemasonry is supposed to have provided for societies deemed to have been more important in the political sense: the Defenders, the United Irishmen and the Orange Order. As the political context in which freemasonry came to influence these organisations has been analysed in chapter 8, the task remains to examine what precisely and how significant the legacy of masonry was. What also needs to be studied is to what extent features that we perceive as "masonic" today are actually features that any eighteenth-century organisation would have had.

Among historians, the term "masonic" has tended to become something of a convenient shorthand for anything involving secrecy.¹ For instance, Nancy Curtin has used the terms "polemical, masonic and paramilitary" to describe three models of organisation that the United Irishmen employed between 1791 and 1798. "Polemical" describes the activities of loose networks of affiliated clubs disseminating political education and radical ideas - along the lines of corresponding societies or Jacobin clubs. By "paramilitary", Curtin means the mass organisation of a citizen militia, following the example of the Volunteers. The third model, "masonic", emphasises "secrecy and ritual, both of which, while certainly represented in the reformist phase of the United Irishmen, were hardly prominent". In the post-1794 underground phase, Curtin argues that "the masonic and paramilitary models of organisation...combined to produce that secret but mass-based system which characterised the movement in the late 1790s".² Curtin's view on founding of the first Orange lodge also emphasises secrecy as a "masonic" feature: "the first lodge of the Orange Order was established, adopting the paraphernalia of secrecy used by the Defenders and originating with the freemasons".³

Philip Robinson has argued that Ulster fraternal societies were not simply quasi-masonic - that is, their basic inspiration was not derived from "contemporary Freemasonry or indeed any one ascendant society". Robinson's view is that "a core of vernacular

¹ For instance, David Dickson's definition of 1790s Defenderism as being "organised around masonic-style lodges". Dickson 1987, p. 173.

² Curtin 1994, pp. 90-91.

³ Curtin 1994, p. 156.

tradition existed, relating to the formalised behaviour of groups of men (including Freemasons)...Many of the customs are clearly more archaic than the organisation within which they are to be found, and in most societies conflict occurred whenever central control (Grand Lodge) emerged and attempted to alter or suppress rituals deemed to be assertive of vulgar local custom".⁴ However, Robinson fails to explain how that vernacular tradition was born. In the absence of an alternative explanation, freemasonry (whether in the form of "regular" masonry or hedgemasonry) remains the most plausible source of such ideas.

10.1. Organisation: the lodge system?

The masonic lodge was a versatile organisational model. Its merits have been best summarised by David Stevenson, according to whom freemasonry "diversified in the most bewildering way...It could provide an institutional framework for almost any religious or political belief...It is as if the lodge system, combined with secrecy, ideals of loyalty and secret modes of recognition, had created an ideal organisational framework, into which members could put their own values and which they could adapt for their own uses".⁵

Potentially militant fraternities with a structure and a ritual resembling freemasonry were not unique to Ireland. E. J. Hobsbawm has described the Calabrian Onorata Società as a popular self-defence organisation for the community from which it drew its membership, capable of operating a "parallel system of law" if need be.⁶ The obvious Irish parallels are the Defenders and Orangemen: Hereward Senior suggests that both movements sought to "imitate the masonic system of organisation".⁷

However, on occasion historians have pushed the similarities between masonry and the new militant fraternities further than evidence allows. In particular, the term "lodge system" has acquired a meaning very different from the sense in which it is used by historians of freemasonry. For instance, Tom Garvin uses the word to describe a 1820s Ribbon system of "lodges", each consisting of maximum of forty men divided into three sections of twelve, plus four officers.⁸ L. M. Cullen subscribes to the same definition when he suggests that "as the Defenders had a lodge system, they can even be seen as

⁴ Robinson 1986, p. 9.

⁵ Stevenson 1988, pp. 6-7.

⁶ Hobsbawm 1971, pp. 50-51.

⁷ Senior 1966, p. 14.

⁸ Garvin 1982, p. 146.

precursors of the later United Irishmen".⁹ However, the use of the word "lodge" in this context obscures the fact that no such organisation has been documented in freemasonry - a masonic lodge was simply the name for local clubs or societies of masons, without any military subdivisions. The structure described by Garvin and Cullen was obviously an imitation of a military unit, bearing more resemblance to the regular army or the Volunteers than to the freemasons. The hard substance of military structure could be wrapped in the soft trappings of masonic fraternity. The symbols and traditions could be strongly influenced by masonry while the organisation was decidedly (para)military. The only cases in which masonry could come under such a concept, were the lodges which doubled as Volunteer corps: their organisation was very similar to that of the Defender and Orange societies and may arguably have been the inspiration for these new paramilitary structures, if not for the elaborate nation-wide organisation of the United Irishmen.

To sum up, the concept of a "lodge system" as used in the writing of Irish history is something of a misnomer. As defined at present, it must, for the reasons outlined above, exclude most freemasons. A brotherhood such as the one suggested by William Drennan in 1791 could arguably be modelled on contemporary freemasonry. A secret militant organisation such as the United Irishmen in their later manifestations could not. The present term does not describe the masonic lodge system, but a mixture of masonic-style fraternity and Volunteer-type local armed body. As excluding the originators of the term "lodge" from the "lodge system" renders the latter meaningless, a new term should be found to describe the organisational form which encompasses in varying degrees the Defenders, early Orangemen, the later United Irishmen and the nineteenth-century Ribbonmen. As the Defenders predate the others, perhaps the term "Defender-type organisation" would do - unless we wish to call them "paramilitary fraternities".

The United Irish clubs, or at least the Dublin one, seem to have adopted some "masonic" features such as the admission of new members through a ballot, in which the old members cast a white or black bean or ball, indicating approval or rejection.¹⁰ The masonic custom of numbering the lodges was also imitated by the United Irishmen and the Orangemen. As regards the Defenders, the evidence is too limited to allow a definite opinion. Sir Richard Musgrave took at face value alleged Defender documents reputedly

⁹ Cullen 1993, p. 190.

¹⁰ Curtin 1994, p. 94.

found in 1789 (see chapter 8.2) and used them to bolster his argument that the Defenders had a complex organisation:

it must have taken up some time to bring this system to maturity, and they were probably numerous in the county of Armagh, as Sharky's lodge is number 18. There must have been an intercourse...between the lodges of different counties; for, in this plan, there appears a certificate, that Michael Moor was a brother defender, and he is recommended to the committee of Carrickarnan, number 1, in the county of Louth.¹¹

However, we only have Musgrave's word for this: there is little else to prove this feature was shared by all of those calling themselves Defenders and no proof at all for the existence of a central authority doing the numbering.¹² With as few sources as this, it is obviously not possible to even attempt a guess at how widespread numbering the local societies was. As little is known about what sort of higher committees - if any - may have emerged among the Defenders, it cannot be established whether the numbering was done consistently or whether the numbers were picked at random to create an impression of an elaborate organisation. The Orange Order was more successful than the Defenders in developing a national organisation resembling that of the freemasons. A national grand lodge was set up in Dublin in the spring of 1798 although for a while, a dual system of government existed of the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland in Dublin and a local grand lodge of Armagh, both receiving a share of the fees paid for new lodge warrants.¹³

¹¹ Musgrave, Sir Richard: *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland*, pp. 48-49. David W. Miller accepts Musgrave's view on numbering, based on the "1789" document. Miller 1983, p. 177.

¹² For other cases of numbering of Defender societies, see Bartlett 1985, p. 382.

¹³ "Rules and regulations...for the use of all Orange societies...November 20, 1798" in *[1st] report from the select committee appointed to inquire into...the Orange lodges*, appendix 3, p. 6.

10.2. Initiation and degrees

Freemasonry has long been famous for its elaborate initiation ceremonies. Its influence in this respect upon other organisations has become something of a truism in recent scholarship.¹⁴ However, it must be questioned whether masonry was the sole or even the most important source of such ideas. In eighteenth-century Irish and indeed European society, many changes in one's status involved some sort of formal initiation, usually involving the taking of an oath. Such transitions included becoming a freeman of a city, enlisting as a soldier, or becoming any kind of office-holder from the monarch downwards. In this respect, the masonic initiation, though more secret and more complex than most, is just one instance of a prevalent and widely-accepted way of regulating and codifying change in an individual's position within the society.

Had freemasonry not been invented, it is conceivable that societies with political aims would still have performed secret initiations of some sort. However, freemasonry did exist, and had a considerable presence in eighteenth-century Ulster. Bearing in mind the caveat that the need and inspiration for initiation ceremonies may have come from society at large, it nevertheless cannot be disputed that the outward forms of other organisations were definitely influenced by, or even based on, those practised in masonic lodges. As not enough is known about the degrees and ceremonies of the Defenders to permit comparison with masonry, this chapter will concentrate on the masonic influence on the early Orange Order.

10.2.1 Masonic and early Orange ritual

There has been very little serious study of symbols and rituals among the historians of Ireland. Some notable exceptions are Pauric Travers's article on nationalist and republican funerals,¹⁵ Nancy J. Curtin's analysis of the symbols and rituals of the United Irishmen¹⁶ and Anthony D. Buckley's study of Orange regalia and biblical texts used in Orange ceremonies.¹⁷ However, the aim of this chapter is not to study rituals for the sake of rituals: rather, it is argued that the study of early masonic and Orange rituals can provide further support for the re-examination of links between the two movements in the 1790s (see chapter 8.3.2).

¹⁴ e.g. Bartlett 1985, p. 389, fn. 22. O'Brien 1990, p. 49.

¹⁵ Travers 1990.

¹⁶ Curtin 1990.

¹⁷ Buckley 1986.

By the time covered in this study, the "trigradal" system of the three so-called "craft" degrees of entered apprentice, fellow craft and master mason had been long established in freemasonry, although in Ireland it was somewhat obscured by the fact that lodges often conferred two or even all three degrees on the candidate during the same lodge meeting. For those seriously interested, there were on offer various "higher degrees", several of which had become widespread in Ulster by the 1780s. In the freemasonry of the 1790s that influenced Defenders and the Orangemen, the "higher degrees" were particularly popular with less-than-respectable "regular" lodges (see chapter 6.4.). There is no reason to believe that the "hedgemasons" were in this respect any different from their regular brethren.

Outwardly, the Orange system of degrees corresponded closely to the masonic model. The nearest equivalents of the three "craft" degrees of the masonic lodge were the "Orange" and "Purple" degrees; the first of these being usually followed soon by the second, which conferred full membership of the Orange lodge. In the place of the masonic Royal Arch chapters and Knights Templar preceptories, the Orangemen invented Royal Arch Purple chapters and the Royal Black preceptories.¹⁸

"Brethren" with their various "degrees" organised in a hierarchy of "lodges", "chapters" and "preceptories": the similarity of nomenclature leaves no doubt that the masonic system was something that the early Orangemen admired and considered necessary for a fraternal organisation. Just like the masonic Grand Lodge of Ireland, the newly formed Grand Orange Lodge tried to combat the creativity of the local Orange lodges. In the first recorded condemnation (many more were to follow), they regretted *"that many persons having introduced various orders into the Orange Society which will very much tend to injure the regularity of the Institution, the grand lodge disavows any orders but the Orange and Purple"*.¹⁹

Aiken McClelland suggests that the Royal Black Institution derives its origin from hedgemasons, who "joined the Orange Order when it was founded on 21 September 1795, and grafted on to the simple Orange ritual an amazing number of degrees".²⁰ Likewise, the Orange historian Sibbett ascribes the addition of a higher degree in 1796 to

¹⁸ Buckley 1986, pp. 5-6.

¹⁹ Grand Orange Lodge minutes (13 December 1798). GOLI/A/M/98. For Orange higher degrees, see Kilpatrick 1996.

²⁰ McClelland 1986, p. 53.

the influence of John Templeton, "a Protestant and a freemason".²¹ It is true that from 1798 onwards, the newly-founded Grand Orange Lodge sought to ban "higher" degrees within Orangeism.²² However, there is no evidence of the existence of an original "simple Orange ritual" later corrupted by hedgemasons. On the contrary, recent scholarship (see below) suggests that the relationship between "simple" and "masonic" rituals is much more complex: the simple ritual was apparently imposed on the order by the Dublin-based leadership who founded the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland in 1798.

According to David Cargo, the early Orange rituals closely resembled those of freemasonry. However, they were not approved of by the founders of the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland and in 1800, a simplified ritual was introduced for the first or "Orange" degree. For a while, the second or "Purple" degree retained much of its "masonic" elaborateness. An Orangeman, writing in 1813, claimed that in many lodges the candidates were introduced "naked and hoodwinked" and had to "go through a long and tedious form". In 1820, this degree too was purged of its original content, possibly in order not to give offence to freemasons. However, much of the original masonic-style ritual of the Orange Order appears to have been condensed and preserved in the third degree, which has evolved into the present Royal Arch Purple degree. Likewise, other "old" degrees practised at Orange meetings found refuge in various "Black" lodges and associations. Cargo's argument is supported by the fact that the Royal Arch Purple retains most of the features commonly associated with masonic initiation ceremonies. For instance, the candidate enters the lodge in a state of symbolic poverty (and by extension, equality); he takes an oath or obligation, the breaking of which is supposed to incur gruesome penalties; he is then escorted around the lodge room and subjected to various challenges and trials.²³ Anthony D. Buckley has observed that "many Orangemen feel that the Royal Arch Purple degree (despite its obvious similarity to the Masonic Royal Arch) has a similar status in Orangeism as the third degree in Craft Masonry, at least in the sense that it is a consummation of the earlier Orange and Plain Purple degrees".²⁴

That the early Orange rituals were a form of vulgarised freemasonry is further supported by the Very Rev. Holt Waring, son and namesake of the prominent freemason. Waring took (in the words of the later Orange historian, Wallace) "a prominent part in

²¹ Sibbett [1939], p. 290.

²² Grand Orange Lodge minutes, pp. 55, 99, 109. GOLI/A/M/98.

²³ Cargo 1993, pp. 179-183, 190-193.

reducing the earlier system to order" and in his testimony to a House of Lords committee in 1825, "has enabled us to form some idea of the rudeness that characterised the earlier system, and of the confusion that prevailed among the Orange societies before being amalgamated in one Society". The original ritual was described as having been "*contrived by persons of the lowest description, just as a sort of freemasonry among themselves*".²⁵ Another early nineteenth-century Orange leader Stewart Blacker also referred to "*the old Orange system*" as something distinct from that of his own time, even referring to masonry in that context:

- *Do you know the origin of the Black Lodges [Orange higher degrees]?*
- *I have not the slightest idea, but imagine they arose from the desire of the lower orders to have something more exciting or alarming in the initiation of members; I think it may be a mixture of freemasonry with that of the old Orange system, a species of mummery innocent in itself, and originating in the strong desire that vulgar minds in general manifest for awful mysteries and ridiculous pageantry.*²⁶

10.2.2. The Boyne Society: a nineteenth-century myth?

David Cargo presumes that "between 1795 and 1800 three degrees were created all relating to the original theme which was received from two existing organisations, namely the Orange Boys [of Dyan] and the Loyal Orange Boyne Society". Cargo also argues that despite the close resemblance between masonic and early Orange rituals, this similarity "is in method only as the basis or theme is completely different". By "basis" or "theme", Cargo means the biblical story on which the ritual was based: the building of Solomon's Temple in the case of the freemasons, the Exodus in the Royal Arch Purple. Any similarity, he argues, would have come about through dual membership rather than any organisational or historical link.²⁷

Although Cargo's theory of original, masonic-style, Orange rituals is highly plausible, it may be anachronistic to place much emphasis on the presumed earlier Orange societies, whose antecedents cannot reliably be traced beyond the 1790s. If such societies existed in the Armagh countryside where the Orangemen had their origin, their

²⁴ Buckley 1986, pp. 6-7. Buckley also notes that the Royal Arch Purple initiation has been described as "the most elaborate and the most terrifying" of the degrees in the various Orange systems, a description which well fits many accounts of the masonic third degree ceremony.

²⁵ MSS history of Orangeism, vol. I, p. 137. Wallace Papers, D/1889/6/4/1. PRONI. Reprinted in Kilpatrick, Cecil (ed): *The formation of the Orange Order 1795 - 1798*.

²⁶ Evidence of Stewart Blacker (8 June 1835). [1st] report from the select committee appointed to inquire into the...Orange lodges, p. 122.

²⁷ Cargo 1993, p. 199-200.

contemporaries may have classified them simply as a variant of freemasonry, possibly as "hedgemasons". As we have seen (see chapter 5.2.2.) freemasonry could and did take on an exclusively Protestant character even in some warranted lodges and later, have a role in loyalist mobilisation as shown by the Aughnacloy resolutions (see chapters 8.3 and 11.2.).

The danger in explaining things by the influence of the Boyne Society is that the whole idea of a single "Boyne Society" appears to have little basis in original sources. Rather, it may turn out to be a construct of nineteenth-century writers.²⁸ The suggestion that a "Boyne Society" with several branches existed continuously throughout the eighteenth century seems to be an illusion created by lumping together disparate evidence of civilian or military assemblies bearing the epithet "Boyne", such as the Munster Volunteer corps of late 1770s. Actually even Ogle R. Gowan, one of the sources often quoted in support of the existence of a "Boyne Society", makes a distinction between these, armed "Boyne Societies" likely to have been Volunteer corps, and urban societies of the Apprentice Boys of Derry type; the latter apparently included an Enniskillen "Boyne Society".²⁹ Closer to Armagh, there was a "Boyne Volunteer Corps" in Monaghan in 1782. However, their call for "*respectable men of every religious denomination*" to be admitted into the Volunteers make them unlikely role-models for later Orangemen.³⁰

The strongest indication in original sources of the existence of something called "Boyne Society" remains the *Humble petition of the Protestant associations forming the Loyal Union of Orange* presented to the Armagh grand jury in 1796. These Orangemen declared that they adopted the title Orange "*in imitation of that venerable body the Boyne Society, on whose principles we act and adopt as own*". Disassociating themselves from the Defenders and Peep O'Day Boys, they claimed to uphold principles that were "*as sacred and as distinct as that venerable body of brotherhood called free masons*"; yet asked to be "*put on a similar footing with the Boyne Society*".³¹ It is obvious that in 1796

²⁸ The whole evidence for the existence before the 1790s of a distinct organisation called the "Boyne Society" seems to derive from nineteenth-century antiquarians such as Jonah Barrington (the source for Senior 1966, p.2), Ogle R. Gowan, William Banks and Sir John Gilbert (among the sources, along with Senior, used for Kilpatrick 1993, pp. 10-12). These writers also seem to have the sources used by R. M. Sibbett and Aiken McClelland (see McClelland n.d. p. 2).

²⁹ Gowan 1825, p. 37 (the Enniskillen society), p. 41 (the armed Munster corps).

³⁰ Resolutions of the Boyne Volunteer Corps (12 May 1782), printed in Wilson, C. H: *A compleat collection of the resolutions of the Volunteers...*, p. 260.

³¹ *The humble petition of the Protestant associations forming the Loyal Union of Orange*. Pelham Papers T/755/2 pp. 148-149. PRONI.

such a society - perhaps based in Dublin³² or possibly in Munster and reputedly descended from the volunteers of the 1770s - was held up as a model by the newly-organised Armagh loyalists. However, there is no evidence in the petition to suggest that any link between the two existed at the time. As with the reference to freemasons, the aspiration to the status of the Boyne Society suggests that the Armagh petitioners were of lower social standing than the members of the other two societies. The fact that a blessing of the grand jury was needed to "put" the Orangemen "on a similar footing" suggests that in the minds of the petitioners at least, the Boyne Society of 1796 was some sort of an institutionalised *posse comitatus*.

Given the nation-wide publicity given to the Armagh troubles, any references to a "Boyne Society" after 1796 cannot be reliably interpreted as referring to a single society of that name. For instance, the *Rules and regulations of the Boyne Society commonly called Orangemen of the County of Antrim* simply suggest that a "Boyne society" and an "Orange lodge" were interchangeable terms at the time when loyalist societies started to spring up.³³ This is confirmed by Holt Waring's description of the 1796 Orange parade in Waringstown - he called the marchers "*The Orange Men, stiling themselves, by the distinction of, The Boyne Club*".³⁴

Cecil Kilpatrick has analysed in great detail the symbols on a 1798 wall-chart of a "First Loyal Orange Boyne Society of Armagh". Kilpatrick notes that the chart contains "every emblem of the Royal Arch Purple Order" and many emblems of the later Black Preceptories; his interpretation is that the Orangemen derived these from, or through the Boyne Society.³⁵ However, since there is little evidence of the existence of a federated "Boyne" society, the comparison may just as well be taken as supporting the view that this "Boyne" society was in fact what we would now call an early Orange lodge - the emblems and rituals of which were derived from freemasonry and (as argued by David Cargo) later preserved in the Royal Arch Purple when the official Orangeism was purged of such features.

As noted above, the ritual of the first degree ("Orange") was revised to remove all traces of a masonic-style initiation ceremony in 1800; a simple catechism and address

³² McClelland n.d. p. 2 refers to a "Royal Boyne Society" of Dublin.

³³ Lecky took this to mean simply that the Orange Society at first called itself "The Boyne Society, commonly called Orangemen". Lecky 1892, vol. III, p. 427, fn. 1.

³⁴ Holt Waring (Waringstown) to Cooke (23 July 1796). Reb. 620/24/46.

³⁵ Kilpatrick 1993, pp. 17-21. The wall-chart is preserved in Armagh County Museum.

were substituted.³⁶ The persistence of masonic-style rituals among Orangemen led to more denunciations: by 1813 masonic-style rituals were condemned as "*heathenish and indecent*"; the Orange Order was said not to have any "*mystery or superstitious rites*" which were "*the very practices and ceremonies of the Illuminati*".³⁷ In the following year, the grand lodge was still complaining that some Orangemen had "*assumed*" (in fact, retained):

*in some degree, the rules and regalia of that very respectable order, the freemasons; which, however honourable in themselves, are totally distinct from Orangemen ...whoever continues in such practices cannot be received as a brother of our order.*³⁸

On the basis of what evidence is left after a critical reading of the nineteenth-century literature on the topic, the link between any eighteenth-century loyalist clubs and the Orange Order in Ulster seems tenuous to say the least. This also applies to the Dublin society sometimes mentioned in this context, the "Aldermen of Skinners' Alley". Admittedly, Sir Jonah Barrington suggested in his *Personal sketches of his own times* that "*the idea of 'Orange Societies' arose...from this association*". An overlap in the membership between any such societies and the first Orange lodges in Dublin would of course be a topic worth closer study. However, Barrington's suggestion must be seen in the overall context of the humoristic autobiography and chronicle of curious events that the *Personal sketches* is. Although Barrington had been an Orangeman in the 1790s, he was not an uncritical observer of Orangeism by the time he wrote his book, thirty years later. Given that in the same chapter, Barrington described the Aldermen's drunken revels in extremely colourful detail, ascribing such origins to the Orange Order was obviously meant to be neither a compliment nor a piece of serious historical argument.³⁹

³⁶ Kilpatrick 1993, pp. 55-56.

³⁷ Thomas K. Manning (secretary to the Grand Orange Lodge) to William McIntosh (27 January 1813). Quoted in Kilpatrick 1993, pp. 65-66.

³⁸ *Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland. Tuesday, June 21, 1814* (printed circular). GOLI.

³⁹ Barrington, Sir Jonah: *Personal sketches of his own times*, vol. I, pp. 243-253.

10.3. Oaths

Oaths of all forms, prices and denominations - great oaths and small oaths - simple oaths and compound oaths - noble oaths and common oaths - purgation oaths and electioneering oaths - bribing oaths and corruption oaths - loyal oaths and disloyal oaths - new oaths and old oaths - oaths for quieting disordered minds, allaying evil spirits, soothing bad consciences, procuring sleep and banishing remorse...oaths to prevent oaths, and oaths to promote oaths....¹

Swearing an oath is more or less an anachronism in most parts of present-day western society, associated only with courts of law, inauguration ceremonies of heads of state or other high state officials or perhaps initiation into old exclusive societies such as freemasonry. In the eighteenth century, the custom was much more widespread, but it has attracted surprisingly little attention from historians. The phenomenon has been generally ignored or taken for granted - few historians of the period even regard "Oaths" worth an index entry.

Oaths were a prominent part of Irish law and politics. For instance, in 1774 an act was passed to enable Catholics to prove their loyalty to the Hanoverian dynasty by swearing an oath in which they had to deny the pope's jurisdiction in civil matters. The nuances and rituals surrounding the taking, or refusing to take an oath were elaborate and could be used to convey subtle political messages. A Catholic peer, on succeeding to his title, would present himself at the House of Lords and take the oath of allegiance to the king, just like a Protestant peer would. However, when further "*asked to take the other oaths, and make and subscribe the Declaration*" the minutes would record that "*his Lordship was pleased to desire time to consider of it, and then withdrew*".² In practice, this formula amounted to a ritual within a ritual, a demonstration of loyalty combined with a refusal to comply with those parts of the ceremony that the peer deemed incompatible with or offensive to his religion.

Given that in eighteenth-century Ireland oath-taking was not a custom associated exclusively or even primarily with secret societies, a historian should be careful to avoid such an assumption. This caveat encompasses assertions such as that by Jim Smyth: that "oaths were pioneered by the Whiteboys in the 1760s, and this is one reason why

¹ *Billy Bluff and Squire Firebrand: or, a sample of the times, as it periodically appeared in the Northern Star*. Belfast 1797, pp. 25-26. The advertised oaths were available "at Humbug-office, Delusion-street". Reb. 620/34/57.

² E.g. Sir Valentine Browne after being created Baron of Castle Rosse and Viscount of Kenmare. *Journal of the House of Lords*, Vol. VIII (1 May 1798).

they provide a logical starting point (and a generic label) for any discussion of these movements [Irish secret societies]" and that "oaths binding members to secrecy was the defining characteristic of Whiteboyism". Smyth argues furthermore that the extreme penalties prescribed by law for administering and taking unlawful oaths "acknowledged the centrality of this practice for illegal organisations".³

Smyth is correct in emphasising that outside the prescribed and predictable world of oath-taking for constitutional political purposes lurked the "unlawful oath", an offence from the Whiteboy Act of 1765 onwards. However, it could be argued that the obsession with oaths in the draconian legislation against the secret societies (and in much of the correspondence of Dublin Castle in the 1790s) reveals more about the attitudes and fears of the authorities rather than about the actual situation within the illegal societies. After all, the polity rather than the Whiteboys defined Whiteboyism.

The paranoia about the unlawful oath suggests that it was seen as a revolution on a personal level, a coup d'état in miniature, something that destroyed the bond between the rulers and the ruled. The latter defined their loyalties anew: promising to be true to one another, the persecuted Catholic church, the French. The significance of oaths is demonstrated by the digest of intelligence on Defenders compiled for the Duke of Portland, the home secretary. Although the report contains accusations of robbery, pillage and murder, its compiler chose to commence the list of crimes by claiming that "*whenever Defenderism has prevailed, the administering of unlawful oaths, & the plundering of houses of arms have been universal; where it has raged most...various other acts of outrage have been committed...*".⁴ The order of things may be significant: the symbolic rebellion of the unlawful oath preceding and leading to actual acts of rebellion.

An oath not recognised by the establishment as legitimate was perceived as a serious danger. In the popular imagination of the ruling classes, it was coupled with another concept - that of the "combination".⁵ The essence of this threat was lower classes "combining" without (and thus possibly against) upper-class leadership. Such action was by definition incompatible with a society where people were divided into castes based on ancestry and property: even many United Irishmen were publicly opposed to

³ Smyth 1992, pp. 35, 43-44.

⁴ *Extracts from l[etter]s in the office of the chief sec[reta]ry, relative to the Defenders...25th July [17]95. Reb. 620/22/19.*

⁵ For eighteenth-century legislative measures against combinations, see McDowell 1979, pp. 23-24.

combinations among workers.⁶ Thus a magistrate reporting the taking of unlawful oaths in his neighbourhood was sending an extremely strong and urgent message of distress - the strongest possible short of actually reporting an outbreak of rebellion. Where such oaths were taken, there a combination was afoot and consequently, the very fabric of society was under threat.

The fear of the combination is illustrated by the 1795 pastoral of Archbishop Troy, in which he vehemently condemned the Defenders. He devoted a significant part of his pastoral to the single issue of their being "*combined together under the specious sanction of what they sacrilegiously denominate an oath, often compulsory and always tendered by unlawful authority*". He repeatedly condemned "*the oaths of association taken by these Defenders, instead of being in any matter binding, are only bonds of iniquity, and consequently unlawful, sinful, wicked and damnable*". Troy also forbade the sacraments to "*any person, even when in danger of dying, suspected of having abetted what is generally understood by Defenderism, and much less to any one, who shall have taken the oath of association, unless he shall previously express his detestation of the unchristian principles on which the combination is grounded*" [my emphasis]. And as if this invective was not sufficient, Troy went on to warn that

FINALLY, if after this solemn notification, any person calling himself a ROMAN CATHOLIC, who has taken, or shall hereafter take the Combination Oath of Defenders, and shall depart this life after refusing to make the above mentioned abjuration...is to be considered as having died impenitent and unworthy of the suffrages of the faithful, and by the very fact deprived of the usual funeral rites....⁷

Troy's thinking here is perfectly in line with that of his contemporaries in the fields of law and administration. It should be noted that his condemnation was not based on anything else the Defenders had actually done or left undone - forming a "combination" by the means of an oath was quite enough for a man to be damned in both this world and the next. Troy was not alone in regarding the taking of oaths as a serious business: a clerical pamphleteer of the 1780s suggested capital punishment for perjury.⁸

Several statutes against illegal oaths were passed in the 1780s and 1790s. It is perhaps worth noting the full title of the Whiteboy Act of 1787: "*The act to prevent tumultuous risings and assemblies and for the more effectual punishment of persons*

⁶ McDowell 1979, pp. 374-375. For the extent of social reformism in United Irish ideology, see Quinn 1998.

⁷ Archbishop Troy's pastoral (6 August 1795). Reb. 620/22/29 (enclosure).

guilty of outrage, riot, and illegal combination, and of administering and taking unlawful oaths". The latter two crimes were to be punished by seven years' transportation for taking such an oath, transportation for life for administering one.⁹ The Insurrection Act of 1796 prescribed even heavier sentences: transportation for life for taking an unlawful oath and death for administering it. A loophole was closed by criminalising the act of being present at a swearing or causing oaths to be taken though not present - the penalties were to be the same as if actually administering the oath.¹⁰ The target was to prevent subterfuges adopted by insurgents, such as placing a printed oath and a prayer-book in an empty room where the initiate could "find" them and swear himself a member, without anybody else incriminating himself in the capital crime of administering the oath.¹¹ An even more fantastic variant was to try and evade the spirit of the law by sticking to the letter: the disaffected called one of themselves by the name of George III, and swore loyalty to him (rather than to his namesake in London).¹²

In or around July 1796, two visitors to the house of Dr James Caldwell of Magherafelt wanted to join the United Irishmen. A local apothecary was summoned to swear them in. When he was later interrogated by the authorities, the apothecary insisted that *"on their requesting him this Depon[en]t to swear them in, he...declined doing it, to which they reply'd cant [sic] we do it ourselves, being answered in the affirmative...they got a book which this Depon[en]t believes to have been a prayer book...& of their own accord took the oath"*.¹³ The apothecary was - in declining to administer the oath in 1796 or in later denying to have done so, or both - obviously trying to protect himself from the capital charge (since March 1796) of administering an unlawful oath. Likewise, when about forty men joined an Orange lodge at Ma[ghe]ralin in 1796, *"a person produced an oath to them and laid it on the table after having read it to them which they took voluntar[il]ly"*,¹⁴ whereby it could be argued that no one administered the oath and thus no one was liable to be punished for doing so.

Masonic oaths were a borderline case between legal and illegal oaths: not expressly legal by statute, although tolerated by custom. As landing on the right side of the lawful-unlawful divide was essential for any society striving for respectability, an

⁸ Finch, Robert Pool: *Considerations upon the use and abuse of oaths...*, pp. 12-13.

⁹ *Statutes at large*, vol. XIV, 27 G3 c.15 (1787).

¹⁰ *Statutes at large*, vol. XVII, 36 G3 c.20 (1796).

¹¹ George Lambert to NN (18 April 1797). Reb. 620/29/276.

¹² W. Newenham (Roscommon) to Pelham (9 April 1797). Reb. 620/29/215.

¹³ Information of John Grahams (10 July 1798). Reb. 620/40/35 (enclosure).

¹⁴ [Captain] Waddell (Islandderry) to Col. Ross (28 July 1796). Reb. 620/24/64.

Orangeman argued in 1799 that the oaths taken by his brethren should not have been treated as subversive, like those of the United Irishmen. Rather, they should have been on par with those taken by freemasons and Friendly Brothers of St. Patrick, technically illegal but tolerated.¹⁵ However, their opponents lost no time in asserting that an Orange oath could and should be grounds for transportation.¹⁶

The United Irishmen used an oath or a test to set themselves apart as a select group of dedicated patriots even before the society became a secret one and the oath acquired a new functional significance.¹⁷ The oath was a serious matter and revealed a spectrum of theological opinion among the radicals. The Templepatrick United Irishman, James Hope, recollected in the 1840s that he, as a Presbyterian, was sworn on the Bible while Covenanters took the oath by lifting up the right hand and Catholics swore on their own prayer-book.¹⁸ Smyth has summed up the functions of oaths in illegal societies as follows: "Oaths, when obeyed, gave the perpetrators of 'outrages' security against detection and punishment, and offered the societies a sense of cohesion, solidarity and mystique".¹⁹

Although some among the United Irishmen were pessimistic and thought, like Hope, that "oaths would never bind rogues",²⁰ the trust that many of them placed on an oath was astonishing by modern standards. For instance, one of the informers working for Sergeant Lees, the government's intelligence agent in Carrickfergus, was caught by the local United Irishmen. Contrary to what one might expect, they spared his life and even promised him a reward if he could discover who else had been giving information on United activities in the neighbourhood. The informer had presumably taken the United oath of secrecy and broken it once already. But what precautions did his interrogators take to make sure that he would not betray them again? "*They swore him to the secrecy of them then present!*"²¹

The case of the Carrickfergus radicals was not an isolated instance of naive amateur revolutionaries behaving foolishly. Samuel Neilson was equally trusting in the "*very strong test*" that the United Irishmen required new members to swear. As Curtin has

¹⁵ "An Orangeman": *Orange vindicated, in a reply to Theobald M'Kenna, Esq.*, pp. 44, 45 fn.

¹⁶ Moore, George: *Observations on the Union*, p. 70.

¹⁷ Curtin 1990, pp. 72-73.

¹⁸ Madden n.d., p. 97.

¹⁹ Smyth 1992, p. 43-44.

²⁰ Madden n.d., p. 96.

²¹ Andrew Macnevin (Carrickfergus) to Cooke (4 August 1796). Reb. 620/24/80.

pointed out, it was ironic that the very person to whom he expressed such confidence in the test, happened to be the informer Smith.²² There is plenty of evidence to show that many people in all political camps still regarded an oath as a solemn commitment and could not comprehend that others might not. *"I did not think the oath of allegiance strong enough"* wrote a Co. Cavan magistrate:

*I have taken the liberty of making them swear the following words in addition...viz. That I will not unite with any man or set of men to endeavour to overturn the king or constitution of this kingdom as by law established, and that I will not conceal arms of any description, or know of any that are concealed without giving information thereof.*²³

Another magistrate wanted to ensure that in the wording *"care is taken to guard against future oaths being binding"*,²⁴ which is ironic in a sense that the poor magistrate could not possibly know whether the people taking the oath of allegiance were using this very device of having sworn in advance to ignore the oath administered by him.²⁵ A more realistic magistrate was pessimistic about the capability of the oath *"as to the oath [of allegiance] itself, the security is but slender, [the Catholics of Monaghan] being in constant expectation that a French invasion will dis[s]olve all these obligations"*. Taking an oath could thus require a considerable amount of double-think. Defenders renewing their obligations might promise that *"as in our former oath we are bound to his majesty king George III and his successors to the crown, so for the present year 1789, we promise faithfully the same obedience, and also while we live subject to the same government"*.²⁶ Others reportedly swore loyalty to George III *"till there should be an invasion"* from France.²⁷ A sacred commitment to violate sacred commitments, such an oath was a blow at the very foundations of the state. Ironically, a very similar "conditional" oath of loyalty was one of the most serious accusations against the Orangemen in the 1830s: *"That we bear true allegiance to his majesty king George the Third, and his successors, so long as he or they support the Protestant ascendancy"*.²⁸

²² Information of Bird/ Smith, Reb. 620/27/1. Curtin 1994, p. 104.

²³ Col. Thomas Nesbitt to NN (7 June 1797). Reb. 620/31/47. Another magistrate who devised his own version of the oath of allegiance was Lord Donoughmore, the grand master of Irish freemasons. Donoughmore to Cooke (24 December 1797). Reb. 620/33/174.

²⁴ John Ravell Walsh to Lord NN (6 June 1797) Reb. 620/31/45 (enclosure).

²⁵ Norman Steele (Carrickmacross) to Pelham (8 June 1797). Reb. 620/31/55.

²⁶ Musgrave, Sir Richard: *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland*, app. III, p. 605.

²⁷ Smyth 1992, p. 67.

²⁸ Secret article 1, "Rules and regulations...for the use of all Orange societies...November 20, 1798" in [1st] report from the select committee appointed to inquire into... the Orange lodges, appendix 3, p. 4.

If the Defenders (and Orangemen) could promise obedience while reserving the right to rebel, respectable subjects could also perform mental gymnastics as shown by the amusing oath not to keep previous or future oaths, sworn by the "principal inhabitants" of a Co. Kildare town:

*That any unlawful oath which has or shall hereafter be administered, by means of terror or otherwise, to any of us, we will not keep the same; but as soon as possible will give information thereof, and of the offenders to the magistrates.*²⁹

In some cases, however, oaths did actually work by catching the would-be swearer - if he was a man of honour - in a net of contradicting oaths and making him feel that he was forced to choose sides. A Lieutenant Hamill and ten yeomen of the Newbliss Cavalry resigned upon being asked by their commander to swear "*that I am not an [sic] United Irishman nor do I ever intend becoming one and I do swear that I will not aid or assist them in their proceedings, either by day or by night, by word or by deed, and that I will firmly adhere to the Newbliss Troop & the oath of allegiance which I have already taken*". Hamill confessed to being an United Irishman and believing that revolution was inevitable.³⁰

Oaths and rumours of oaths taken by others could be a powerful propaganda weapon. Prior to 1798, Ireland was full of rumours of "extermination oaths": adherents of one religion were rumoured to have sworn to wade knee-deep in the blood of the other side. The panic spread by the rumours suggests that such alleged oaths were not regarded as empty boasts but as serious commitments in a mystical or religious sense: if the threatening "other" was believed to have actually sworn to commit murder (as distinct from issuing ordinary threats), it could be relied upon to be prepared to do it. Allegations of "extermination oaths" sworn by the other side became the staple of political argument. Plowden, the Catholic historian, claimed in 1809 that the original Orangemen had sworn to "*use [their] utmost exertions to exterminate all the Catholics of the kingdom of Ireland*".³¹ The Orangeman, Lieutenant-Colonel Verner, quoted as late as in 1835 a mirror image of the alleged Orange oaths to prove that "*United Irishmen, Whitefeet and Ribbonmen, and other societies*" wanted to massacre the Orangemen.³²

²⁹ *Oath of the principal inhabitants of the town of Kilcock*. Reb. 620/22/18.

³⁰ Alexander Ker, Captain of Newbliss Cavalry (Newbliss) to [Pelham] (28 April 1797). Reb. 620/30/19.

³¹ Plowden, Francis: *The history of Ireland...*vol. II, p. 371.

Oaths could also involve financial considerations. Magistrates used to charge for administering the oaths that the crown required of its loyal subjects. Sixty men from the Montiaghs, Co. Armagh were reportedly prevented from taking an oath of allegiance "on account of...extraordinary fees".³³ In 1797, those implicated in treasonable activities were offered the chance to take an oath of allegiance and give up arms in return for an amnesty. Some magistrates saw this as a chance of profiting and even refused to recognise certificates issued by other magistrates, if the people concerned lived in what they regarded as their own territory.³⁴ The Anglican archbishop of Armagh offered to organise a subscription for the poor, who could not afford paying fees on top of losing their wages of a whole or half a day while travelling to a magistrate in order to take the oath. The reaction of Chief Secretary Pelham to such a counterproductive practice was that of surprise and indignation: "*I believe that a magistrate is legally entitled to a fee for administering an oath but I confess that I am very much surprised to hear that any magistrate should claim one on this occasion and I should hope that it could not be a general practice*".³⁵ In a more serious case of corruption, Lord Castlereagh, before committing himself to supporting the appointment of a port surveyor, wanted to know "*if the appointment could take place without the oath being required to be taken by the party going out as well as the person coming in, viz. that no valuable consideration was given or received*". There was no vacancy, but the incumbent was willing to resign and money was obviously changing hands contrary to the law.³⁶

³² Evidence of Lt.-Col. Verner, MP (7 April 1835). [1st] report from the select committee appointed to inquire into... the Orange lodges, p. 12.

³³ Byrne, J [pseudonym?]: *Impartial account of the late disturbances in the county of Armagh...* Reprinted in Miller, David W (ed): *Peep O'Day Boys and Defenders*, p. 83.

³⁴ Charles Hamilton (Portglenone) to Pelham (17 June, 30 June 1797). Reb. 620/31/113 and 620/31/175. See also evidence of Nathaniel Chestnut (23 June 1797). Reb. 620/31/165 (enclosure) and Thomas Whitney to Sir John Blaquiere (1 July 1797). Reb. 620/31/210.

³⁵ The Archbishop of Armagh to Pelham (15 June 1797, with a copy of Pelham's reply 16 June 1797). Reb. 620/31/99.

³⁶ Lord Castlereagh to Alexander Marsden (20 March [1802]). Reb. 620/18/7/19. See also Charles Tottenham's request to be allowed to dispense with the Revenue Oath. Calendar to the Rebellion Papers, 620/31/187 (the document is apparently missing).

10.4. Signs and passwords

However strongly freemasons themselves might have felt about the need to keep their secrets inviolate, their need for secret signs and passwords was in fact limited outside their ceremonial use at lodge meetings. As the connection with the building trade disappeared, the only practical uses for signs of recognition were firstly, keeping the curious out and secondly, preventing fraudsters from laying a claim to their charity funds. A few shillings of relief might fall into wrong hands, if impostors posing as impoverished masons were admitted, but no serious threat to the members themselves was involved. Nevertheless, outsiders could at times take umbrage at such secrecy and masons sometimes had to defend the use of such signs:

I cannot see what reason our enemies have to blame us for making use of particular signs and words, since they ever were the most distinctive marks of the best and civil societies, nay, amongst the wisest generals, are not watch words given to their soldiers, whereby the friend from foe may be distinguish'd?³⁷

The militant new organisations of the 1790s put the masonic baggage that they had inherited to new, more practical uses. A password used in the context of a mock-medieval ritual was one thing. A password which could mean the difference between a safe journey home and a beating, if not loss of life at the hands of a hostile political faction, was something much more serious. This is how the Rev. Cupples, rector of Lisburn and an Orangeman, justified the use of secret signs of recognition in his Twelfth of July sermon in 1799:

We have no secrets to conceal, except the marks and tokens by which we know one another. In times of turbulence and intestine commotion, it was necessary to have certain words and signs, to discriminate friends from enemies... They were necessary to inspire mutual trust and confidence, by indicating similarity of sentiment.³⁸

A similar argument concerning the need for signs "to enable our brethren to recognise each other in their laudable endeavours" was put forward by a Rev. Nixon, after the Orangemen of Northern England had helped suppress Luddite unrest in 1812.³⁹ These secret signs were a complex series of gestures and passwords, the memorisation

³⁷ D'Assigny, Fifield: *An impartial answer to the enemies of free-masonry*, p. 9.

³⁸ Cupples, S: *The principles of the Orange association*, p. 13. The Reverend Cupples may have had a masonic connection: the 1787 St. John's Day sermon in Carrickfergus was preached by a "Rev. S. Cupples". BNL 15 June 1787.

³⁹ The Rev. Nixon to the Earl of Yarmouth (13 November 1813). Quoted in Senior 1966, p. 157.

of which served only the purpose of identification. According to one informant, the "*sign of the Defender*" was:

to put the two hands behind the back of the head and pretend to yawn - drop the hands upon the table clinched - and the answer to that is to draw the right hand over the forehead and drop the palm of that hand upon the back of the left, - and in answer to that sign the left hand is to be drawn across the forehead and put upon the back of the right, and upon joining hands they press the thumb upon the second joint of the back of right hand, and mention the words "Eliphas Matas".⁴⁰

The capacity of such symbols to promote subversion was regarded to be almost as great as that of illegal oaths. Resolutions of two Co. Tyrone parish meetings in the autumn of 1795 warned all their countrymen against illegal oaths and "*to avoid all nightly and private meetings, and particularly where distinctive marks or signs are made use of, as being illegal in the highest degree*".⁴¹ However, other secret signs were designed less for practical purposes of identification than for their symbolism. Whoever wrote the rules for the proposed Order of St. Patrick in the early 1780s (see chapter 7.2.3), condensed the whole of Patriot politics into two simple gestures: "*putting his right hand on his left breast under his waistcoat, denoting fidelity to his country, and immediately raising it to his left shoulder, as an emblem that he has a musquet to support the rights of Ireland*".⁴²

In the politically tense 1790s even masonic signs of recognition could be put to political use. William Sprol of Magheralin was standing outside a public house in June 1796 when he was approached by two United Irish or Defender agents. They "*threw him a sign*" that he, being a freemason, could recognise. The men, having attracted his attention, asked him whether he was an Orangeman. When Sprol denied that he was one, the two men swore him to secrecy and then revealed to him details of their plans for rebellion (see chapter 8.2).⁴³

Some members of fraternal organisations definitely regarded passwords and related phenomena as defining characteristics. The Orange historian Ogle R. Gowan went to ridiculous lengths in his attempt to prove that Irish Protestants had used secret

⁴⁰ Examination of William Lawles (27 August 1795). Reb. 620/22/35.

⁴¹ Resolutions of the inhabitants of the parishes of Lower and Upper Badony (29 September, 1 October 1795). Reb. 620/22/46.

⁴² *Public principles of the Order of St. Patrick*. MSS and correspondence of Charlemont, vol. II, undated letters and papers no. 50, pp. 404-405.

⁴³ Information of Alex. Moore (4 July and 31 July 1796). Information of William Sprol (5 August 1796). Reb. 620/24/100.

signs, words and tokens since 1688.⁴⁴ However, many of the better-educated leaders of militant oathbound societies took a more practical, not to say cynical view of such features of their organisations. Dean Holt Waring Jr, son of the prominent eighteenth-century mason and an early patron of Orangeism, suggested in the 1820s that

private or mysterious selection of signs or questions by which they [the Orangemen] should know each other...became absolutely necessary by certain circumstances which had occurred in the county of Armagh previously; and in order that they should know each other for their future protection.

However, Waring stressed that such signs or questions had been "*contrived by persons of the lowest description, just as a sort of freemasonry among themselves*" and that he regarded them as "*mere gibberish*".⁴⁵ When Waring's fellow Orangeman, Stewart Blacker faced the 1835 select committee enquiry into Orangeism, he replied to the question "*why is a sign necessary among Orangemen for recognition?*" in similarly derogatory terms:

*To be certain of a brother in a remote district or in different countries; but my own opinion is, that the sign is, among intelligent Orangemen, considered but a matter of very secondary importance; a measure merely thrown out to attract the attention, and keep together the lower orders, who are pleased with the idea of sharing in the same secret with so many of those moving in the highest sphere of society....*⁴⁶

Waring and Blacker, representatives of official Orangeism which had purged the Orange ceremonies of what can only be described as masonic rituals (see chapter 10.2.1), naturally tried to play down the role of such superstitious and potentially suspicious activities within their organisation. However, their explanation for the need for secret signs of recognition was perfectly in line with William Drennan's desire for ceremonies that would attract supporters "*without impeding real business*". As with other aspects of the masonic roots of Orangeism, the issue of signs and passwords has been obscured by the fluctuating fortunes of Irish freemasonry. When Waring and Blacker tried to play down the importance of such "masonic" features, masonry was not deemed to be respectable. Another of the Orange witnesses of the 1835 committee even tried to argue that such signs were the only link between masonry and Orangeism, and only amounted to a superficial resemblance:

⁴⁴ Gowan, Ogle R: *Annals and defence of the Loyal Orange Institution of Ireland*, pp. 19-21, 29-30.

⁴⁵ MSS history of Orangeism. Wallace Papers, D 1889/6/4/1. PRONI. Reprinted in Kilpatrick, Cecil (ed): *The formation of the Orange Order 1795 - 1798*, p. 53.

- *Did not the Orange society spring very much from freemasonry?*
- *Its signs were supposed to have been to a great extent taken from freemasonry.*⁴⁷

Later, when Irish freemasonry became again more respectable (and also almost exclusively Protestant in membership), Orange antiquarians had no qualms about fitting masonic roots of Orangeism into their narrative. Orange folklore, as recorded in the second half of the nineteenth century by Col. Wallace, stressed the passion of the "lower orders" for mysticism: the founders of the Order "*had no claim to be regarded as educated men*". Wallace (who strongly influenced the early twentieth-century Orange historian, R. M. Sibbett) sought to play down the militant side of the Orange Order by emphasising masonic-style rituals which in his Victorian times were regarded as fairly harmless. "*Seriously puzzled how to form signs and passwords, and construct a ritual*", writes Wallace, a group of early Orange leaders decided to meet in Portadown. A Mr Templeton, veteran of the Diamond and freemason, conveniently happened to be around. He invited the Orangemen into a house where a masonic lodge meeting had been held the night before. In the house "*satisfactory arrangements were made*" and the Orangemen emerged with a ritual of their own.⁴⁸

In Wallace's account, the early history of Orangeism becomes a curious, sanitised quest for signs and passwords - as if those (rather than the threat, and then reality, of revolution and civil war) were the most important things on the minds of the founders of the Order in the 1790s. The story of Orange leaders "shopping around" for obscure rituals and the emphasis put on it by Wallace contains little information about the reality of the 1790s. However, the fact that descendants of the first Armagh Orangemen had preserved a tradition of masonic influence through a period when official Orangeism was hostile to masonry, supports the suggestion that freemasonry (in its conservative, 1790s Co. Armagh manifestation) was a major factor in the birth of the Orange Order as we know it.

⁴⁶ Evidence of Stewart Blacker (8 June 1835). *[1st] report from the select committee appointed to inquire into... the Orange lodges*, p. 127.

⁴⁷ Evidence of Lt.-Col. Verner (7 April 1835). *[1st] report from the select committee appointed to inquire into... the Orange lodges*, p. 30.

⁴⁸ MSS history of Orangeism. Wallace Papers, D 1889/6/4/1, p. 136. PRONI. Reprinted in Kilpatrick, Cecil (ed): *The formation of the Orange Order 1795 - 1798*. In a footnote Wallace further explains that he "*had the narrative from his [Templeton's] son many years ago...in Portadown*" - a typically antiquarian assertion of credibility of the sort that is used also by later Orange writers, such as Sibbett.

10.5. Public processions

The common impression of a masonic lodge is that of men meeting together in secret for reasons best known to them. However, this common view of the lodge is a misapprehension created by the later development of freemasonry. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the masonic lodges in Ireland did indeed have their private, indoors aspects just as they do today. However, there was also an important public, outdoors side of their activities that has since disappeared and has been all but forgotten except by some masonic antiquarians. The masonic procession on St. John's Day, 24 June, was an important annual celebration in many, if not most Irish towns of any significance well into the nineteenth century. 27 December, also called St. John's Day, was another masonic anniversary although occurring as it did in winter, it was usually celebrated with less pomp and ceremony.

A procession of freemasons wearing their aprons, sashes, medals and carrying banners was an event rich in ceremony and ritual. The freemasons assembled at their lodge room (usually a local tavern) and then marched to a church, meetinghouse or chapel for a service. Afterwards, they returned to the tavern for dinner which more often than not was accompanied by the consumption of a considerable amount of alcohol. Parades were an accepted and essential part of Irish freemasonry, although later historians have not always been aware of the fact.⁴⁹

The first reported masonic procession in Ireland took place on 24 June 1725 when the grand lodge and Dublin lodges proceeded to the King's Inns for the election of grand officers. The parade was clearly modelled on earlier processions by craftsmen's guilds on the days of their patron saints. Indeed, the long newspaper report of the elegant proceedings of the "*gentlemen freemasons*" concluded with a brief reference to another event: "*St. John being likewise the patron of the taylor's, they marched in great order to St. John's church, and afterwards to the Walshes Head, where they had a splendid entertainment*".⁵⁰

The grand lodge parade set the example for public masonic processions that continued well into the nineteenth century. However, the average eighteenth-century

⁴⁹ See e.g. Nowlan 1973, p. 183: "The loud demonstrations and Orange 'Walks' were alien to Freemasonry - one of the most discreet of secret societies".

⁵⁰ *Dublin Weekly Journal* 26 June 1725 (reprinted in Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 55-58).

masonic procession was to bear more resemblance to the Dublin tailors' parade than to that of the first grand lodge one. Typically, the lodge or lodges would march to a church for a service, followed by a dinner and possibly other entertainment.

A newspaper report of the 1757 celebrations in Loughrea, Co. Galway, sums up all these aspects of a St. John's Day:

This day the freemasons' lodge no. 248, attended by the masters and officers of no. 210, met at the Fountain Tavern to celebrate the festival of St. John. They adjourned to a hill near the town, from which they walked in a grand procession, preceded by a band of musick, amidst a numerous crowd of spectators, to the said tavern, where an elegant entertainment was prepared, and after passing several resolutions, they agreed unanimously to subscribe for a prize of fifty guineas, to be run for next August, at the course of Loughrea, by 4-year-old horses, etc., the property of freemasons of any regular lodge whatsoever.⁵¹

The masonic processions are also well-documented in other countries. The American masons were parading by the late 1730s.⁵² A public masonic procession and sermon at Cowbridge in Wales 1765 attracted a great crowd, which according to a contemporary, had not happened before, Welsh masonry seem to have experienced a period of growth in popularity in the 1760s.⁵³

Masonic events could tie in with other public and civic events. The 1781 St. John's Day procession of the Belfast lodges was "*headed by the mayor and corporation*" and "*preceded by a fine band of musick*". After the church service, £20 was collected for the local poor house.⁵⁴ The masonic symbolism could be put to civic use: the freemasons as builders could be engaged in a symbolic way in the construction of the town. Thus the laying of the first stone of public buildings could be performed with masonic ceremony, as in the cases of the Belfast White Linen Hall⁵⁵ and the Ballynahinch markethouse built by the Earl of Moira.⁵⁶

In order to be able to participate in a parade, one naturally had to be able to afford the membership fees and the cost of the masonic regalia. There was also the indirect cost of the leisure time required. The two St. John's Days were not particularly moveable feasts: they were celebrated on 24 June and 27 December except when they fell on a

⁵¹ *Pue's Occurrences* 28 June 1757.

⁵² Bullock 1996, p. 52.

⁵³ Jenkins 1979, p. 397.

⁵⁴ BNL 29 June 1781.

⁵⁵ Stewart 1992, pp. 164-165.

⁵⁶ BNL 14 July 1792.

Sunday. In that case, the celebration was postponed, usually to the Monday following. Local fair-days could also cause the postponement of the celebration. As the main public weekly holidays (Sundays) were excluded, the parades, services and dinners by definition clashed unavoidably with working days. Thus it must be assumed that the participants (and spectators) could afford to or were permitted to take time off. Consequently, any report of a well-attended masonic parade proves implicitly that in that locality, masonic anniversaries were if not public holidays, at least not full working days.

Typically, a masonic St. John's Day procession did not have immediate political aims. As it was not a spontaneous event but took place on a fixed anniversary, the parade was seldom an immediate response to recent political events.⁵⁷ It was a distinct and multi-faceted phenomenon, resembling a religious procession and indeed having a religious component; yet for the average spectator of an average parade, the celebratory and recreational rather than the religious, philosophical or ideological aspects were to the fore. Most of the freemasons were young men, whose wives or sweethearts were among the spectators: the parade was closer to a carnival than a demonstration. This side of the parade was reflected in masonic poetry:

*One morning fair to take the air, it being on June the 24th,
As by Gill Hall I took my way towards the sweet Dromore.
The pretty birds on every tree their notes melodiously they sung,
To my great joy I there did spy my true love and his apron on*

*His dress was neat, his limbs complete, and on his breast a medal wore
Most lovingly he says to me, come my dear to sweet Dromore,
For this day we do display our flags in memory of St. John,
Then lovingly he pressed me and kissed me with his apron on.⁵⁸*

However, in exceptional circumstances, such as at times of high political tension, the usually politically neutral masonic celebration could be put to a political use. Minute changes in the form the parade took could reflect the political circumstances; these could and did range from local issues to the grand political causes of either parliamentary reform (on its own or linked to Catholic emancipation) or loyalty to the house of Hanover and the Protestant Ascendancy. Subtle messages could be conveyed to the community at large by the decision to march to a dissenting meetinghouse or a Catholic chapel rather than to the parish church; by the selection of the preacher and the topic of the sermon;

⁵⁷ An example of political events coinciding with masonic celebrations is the formation of the first openly "masonic" Volunteer corps in Newtownstewart in 1782 (see below). The embodiment of the corps took place on St. John's Day (24 June), three days after the passing of the Renunciation Act.

⁵⁸ "A masonic song" (London, n.d.) reprinted in McClelland 1986, p. 108.

and by the toasts drunk at the dinner. Although the outward forms of the celebration remained the same, a new content was given to it by these means; a recreational event could be turned into a de facto political demonstration if need be. In the eyes of outsiders, all the parades no doubt looked much the same. Yet the locals knew which lodges marched together to the same church and which ones went to another to hear a sermon of a different political shade. They knew the social class, religion and political opinion prevalent in each lodge and could read the signs accordingly.

Perhaps surprisingly, the single most significant "masonic" feature adopted by others - and the most lasting influence bequeathed to Ulster society by eighteenth-century freemasonry - is the public parade. From the very beginning, the Orange parades imitated those of masonry, complete with banners, wands and swords, implements that have a long history of ceremonial use and a special place in masonic symbolism. The resemblance to a masonic procession is not surprising given that the early Ulster Orangemen considered themselves freemasons (see chapter 8.3) and were well acquainted with the customs associated with the St. John's Day parades. Consequently, their parades were, to all intents and purposes, masonic parades and conformed in most respects to the traditional pattern. For instance, the description of an early Orange parade given by Lord Gosford could be that of a masonic parade - except for the intimidatory overtones and the fact that it took place on 12 July rather than the traditional 24 June:

*The party had...two or three men in front with painted wands in their hands who acted as commanders. They posted two men at each side of my gate with drawn swords to prevent any person coming in but their own body.*⁵⁹

Admittedly, the masonic parades were by no means the only or primary ingredient in the birth of the latter-day Orange parade. The territorial and confrontational aspects of the Orange parade have not been recorded in eighteenth-century Irish freemasonry and their origins must be sought in the political and sectarian confrontations that affected Co. Armagh from the 1780s onwards. In that county, Volunteer parades were regarded as insulting by Catholics by the late 1780s and some Volunteers deliberately provoked them by playing tunes such as "The Protestant Boys" and "The Boyne Water".⁶⁰ David W. Miller

⁵⁹ Lord Gosford to Camden (13 July 1796). Printed in *Aspects of Irish social history, 1750 - 1800*, p. 179. Most historians have interpreted Gosford's report as a glowing account of a force at his command. On the other hand, Allan Blackstock (in an unpublished paper given at the "Crowds in Ireland" colloquium at Queen's University Belfast, 21-22 September 1998) has seen the parade through Gosford's demesne as a show of force aimed at intimidating Gosford himself.

⁶⁰ Rev. William Campbell to Charlemont (26 November 1788) and Thomas Prentice to Charlemont (28 November 1788) Printed in Miller, David W (ed): *Peep O'Day Boys and Defenders*, pp. 67-72.

has placed at 1788 the starting point of "demonstrations which asserted, or were taken to assert, the local dominance of either Catholics or Protestants" in Co. Armagh.⁶¹ Allan Blackstock has stressed the role of the yeomanry as the origin of such features of popular loyalism as "the military regalia, the pikes and swords, carried at Orange processions... [and]... the accompanying military-style flute bands".⁶² However, as we have seen, some if not necessarily all of the apparently "military" features of the Orange parade actually originate in freemasonry.

The custom of masonic parades died out in the nineteenth century, albeit very slowly. *"I recollect formerly the free masons were in the habit of marching in procession twice in the year, but latterly this has been given up in the neighbourhood I have lived in"*, recalled William Sharman Crawford, an MP and a magistrate, in 1835.⁶³ Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, lodges were disciplined for public displays of regalia and for parading.⁶⁴ However, some local lodges were not in a great hurry to obey and the parades continued much longer in some localities than in others.

After the Catholics began to heed the call of their clergy to leave freemasonry (around 1815), the order became more and more associated in the public mind with Protestantism and loyalism. By the 1820s, a joint meeting *"of the members of the Masonic and Orange Societies of Newtown Hamilton"* could pass a resolution expressing their "detestation" of *"the unprincipled efforts of disaffected men in every direction - and a particular manner in our own metropolis [Dublin]"*.⁶⁵ Such incidents may explain why the Irish freemasons, unlike their English brethren, were not at first exempted from the provisions of a 1823 act against secret societies in Ireland. By that time, Irish freemasonry was in serious decline. The abandonment of masonry by most Catholics destroyed the non-sectarian, civic role of the order. Recruitment was also hampered by the competition of the Orange Order for the remaining potential members, the Protestants. As parading became associated not with freemasonry but with sectarian demonstrations, the masons were first discouraged and then banned from marching by the Grand Lodge of Ireland.

⁶¹ Miller 1983, pp. 172-175.

⁶² Blackstock 1998, p. 300.

⁶³ Evidence of William Sharman Crawford Esq. MP (15 July 1835) [1st] report from the select committee on...the Orange lodges, p. 403.

⁶⁴ See e.g. Bashford 1993, p. 175; Register, 2nd series, lodge 1000; Henderson 1977, p. 11.

⁶⁵ *Newry Telegraph* 16 January 1821.

11 CASE STUDIES

Before concluding this thesis, it is time for an in-depth look at freemasonry at a local level. The approach in the preceding chapters has been thematic, and to some extent chronological within some of the themes covered. However, it cannot avoid generalisation for an area as large as Ulster and a body of people as numerous as all the freemasons within that province. One has to keep in mind that "Ulster freemasonry" as presented in the thematic chapters 3 - 10 was not a monolithic phenomenon, and the diversity within it is best demonstrated by case studies on individual localities.

As few such studies have been carried out before (with the exception of some expanded lodge histories or histories of several lodges meeting in the same town or region), there were plenty of unexplored topics from which to choose. The main consideration in the final choice was simply to find towns or districts where the patterns of masonic membership and activity would be different enough to clearly demonstrate and put in local context some of the enormous diversity in Ulster freemasonry that was discovered during this research. Many other towns would have made interesting reading and any choice would be arbitrary, but Newry and Aughnacloy should fill the above modest criterion reasonably well. The two towns are geographically distant and economically different: Newry a major port engaged in international trade, Aughnacloy an inland market town. Moreover, their masonic histories differ. There may have been masonic activity in Newry already in the 1730s, while the first lodge in Aughnacloy was not warranted until 1770.

11.1. Newry, Co. Down

When the Elizabethan marshal Arthur Bagenal was granted the lordship of Newry and Mourne, he also secured the temporal powers of the abbot of Newry for himself. Consequently, even in the eighteenth century, there was no municipal government separate from the manor and the Anglican parish vestry. Due to the feudal privileges of the lordship, even the independence of the parish was more limited than elsewhere as the tithe was paid directly to the lord of the manor. A seneschal appointed by the Bagenals, or their successors the Nedhams, ran the town administration and its judicial system. Ordinary courts did not exist - court officers, constables and bailiffs were all appointed by

the seneschal.¹ However, there was one important exception to the feudal (or semi-ecclesiastical) dictatorship of the ruling "lay-abbot" and his seneschal. Newry was a "potwalloping borough" where every taxpaying householder (except Catholics before 1793) could vote. Consequently, the elections for the town's two seats in the Irish House of Commons were often fiercely contested.² Newry was also an important centre of commerce. Its significance for transport of goods was enhanced by the opening of the canal from Lough Neagh in 1742 and its port remained the busiest in Ulster (it was estimated the fourth busiest in Ireland in 1777) until overtaken by Belfast in the 1780s.³

The original town of Newry stood on the Co. Down side of the Clanrye river. On the Co. Armagh side there grew a suburb, Ballybought or Ballybot (from Irish *Baile Bocht*). Ballybot was not considered part of Newry until 1715; in that year the potentially eligible voters living on the western side could take part in a Newry election for the first time.⁴ However, this extension to the electoral boundary was disputed as late as at the time of the by-election of 1774. It was only after a successful petition to the parliament that the rights of Ballybot voters were secured.⁵

The earliest record of interest in freemasonry in the town is the fact that a William Ponder of Newry was among the subscribers of a 1730 book of masonic constitutions. Seven years later, Ponder was the master of lodge 77, the first warranted lodge in the town and only the third one in the whole of Ulster. As Ponder and the other two lodge officers (James Hollyman and John Ard) are called "*our trusty and well-beloved brothers*" on the warrant, they seem to have been freemasons prior to the issuing of the warrant.⁶ In 1751, six men in Newry were among the subscribers to Spratt's 1751 book of constitutions.⁷ Lodge 77 was followed by lodge 269 in 1756 and by lodge 16 (see below) in 1766.

The foundation of lodge 16 marked the high point of the social respectability of masonry in Newry. Of the sixteen founding members of the new lodge, four were called "esquire" in the grand lodge register, two were "gentlemen" and the other ten

¹ Canavan 1989, pp. 96-98.

² Canavan 1989, pp. 76-77.

³ Bardon 1992, pp. 202-204.

⁴ Canavan 1989, p. 79.

⁵ Canavan 1989, pp. 101-102.

⁶ Lepper & Crossle 1925, pp. 119-120.

"merchants". It seems certain that from the beginning, the new lodge was meant to be a more exclusive club than the old 77 and 269 had been. The fact that the lodge was given the vacant number 16 (rather than the next consecutive number on the grand lodge list at the time, 445) suggests that the founder-members possessed an unusual level of influence as re-issuing an old warrant to a new lodge was very rare in those days.⁸ Numerical precedence was regarded as important: the lodge with the lowest number (usually also the oldest) had a place of honour among the other lodges of its district and could, for instance, march first in St. John's Day processions.

Until the 1770s, freemasonry in Newry seems to have been dominated by the mercantile élite of the town. One of those Newry masons who transferred to the new lodge was the merchant George Anderson.⁹ With his partners and fellow freemasons, George, John and William Glenny, Hill Wilson and William Beath,¹⁰ he even owned a ship called the "Freemason".¹¹ Another former member of lodge 77 who moved to no. 16 was the merchant and bookseller Francis Boyd.¹² At that time, freemasonry in Newry seems to have been the preserve of Protestants. Not one of the twenty-four Newry Catholics who took the oath of allegiance in 1778-83 appears in the grand lodge register under any of the Newry lodges.¹³ Even the surnames of those taking the oath do not match those of the contemporary masons in Newry, suggesting that the lodges remained Protestant clubs. However, a new lodge (no. 521) founded in Ballybot in 1775 appears to have been less socially exclusive and soon, perhaps from the beginning, it was admitting Catholics. As regards the lodges in the town itself, no such change is apparent. Francis Crossle, the masonic historian of Newry, refers to "a number" of Catholics in lodge 77 but does not say at what point in the history of the lodge they were members.¹⁴

In Newry, the Volunteering period of the late 1770s and early 1780s does not appear to have been a golden age of freemasonry, as it was in Belfast (see chapter 7.2)

⁷ The subscribers were James Anderson, Westenra Cross, Andrew Campbell, Samuel McGowan, Sam. Pettycrew and John White. Spratt, Edward: *The new book of constitutions of the most ancient and honourable fraternity...*(1751).

⁸ Register, 1st series, lodge 16. One of the four esquires actually appears without the title in this entry but is recorded as such in the entry for lodge 77 only seven months earlier. The original warrant no. 16 had been issued to a lodge in Arklow c. 1732. IMR.

⁹ Register, 1st series, lodge 77 (28 March 1764), lodge 16 (6 February 1766).

¹⁰ Hill was a member of lodge 16 and the others members of lodge 77. Register, 1st series, lodge 16 (16 May 1769); lodge 77(11 November 1763, 24 June 1765).

¹¹ Dickson 1966, pp. 252, 273.

¹² Register, 1st series, lodge 77 (1758), lodge 16 (6 February 1766). Boyd was titled "bookseller" in 1758 and "merchant" in 1766. For Boyd's publishing activities, see Adams 1987, pp. 26-27.

¹³ Catholic Qualification Rolls, National Archives 2/446/23.

and elsewhere. A comparison of a membership list of the First Newry Volunteers with the grand lodge register reveals only five possible matches among eighty Volunteers and even their identification is by no means certain.¹⁵ Perhaps the best known of the Newry Volunteers was Joseph Pollock, Presbyterian barrister and Volunteer captain, who wrote the *Letters to the men of Ireland by Owen Roe O'Neal* in 1779¹⁶ but does not seem to have been a mason. In fact, the old lodges of Newry (nos. 16 and 77) did not request the registration of a single member after 1775-76.¹⁷ With the establishment of the Ballybot lodge in 1775, freemasonry was perhaps not exclusive enough to the tastes of the social élite of Newry. Admittedly, grand lodge registrations are not complete accounts of membership but the total silence suggests that the élite was moving onto new hobbies. From 1778 at the latest, a club called the "Snug Club" seems to have replaced masonry as the peak of "respectable" club life.¹⁸

William Drennan, the future United Irishman, arrived in Newry in 1783 and practised medicine there for seven years before moving to Dublin.¹⁹ During Drennan's stay in the town, some of the Newry Volunteers openly supported Catholic emancipation despite the opposition of Lord Charlemont, the commander-in-chief of the Volunteers.²⁰ A. T. Q. Stewart suggests that there was a link between freemasons and the Newry Union Volunteer corps, which consisted of Protestants and Catholics: "The Newry Union was undoubtedly Masonic. It was founded in the year 1784, long after the older Newry companies, and it would account for Drennan's Masonic preoccupations just at that time".²¹ Many radical Volunteer corps did have links with masonic lodges after 1783 (see chapter 7.2.3). However, Stewart's conclusion that the very existence of those corps was "entirely a masonic initiative" is doubtful, given the lack of one "masonic" view of politics. Given the apparent decline of the older Newry lodges, it seems that the only way to prove Stewart's theory would be a comparison of the membership of the Newry Union with that of lodge 521 in Ballybot, and perhaps lodge 269 in the town. In any case, there appears to be no evidence confirming that Drennan was a mason. If he was ever a member of a Newry lodge, he did not bother to register his membership.²²

¹⁴ Crossle 1909, p. 37.

¹⁵ Crossle's copy of the First Newry Volunteers minute book. T/3202/1A. PRONI.

¹⁶ Rogers 1934 pp. 64-65.

¹⁷ Lodge 16 registered its last member in 1775 and lodge 77 in 1776, although the latter started registering members again in 1806. Register, 1st series.

¹⁸ Crossle's transcripts of Snug Club minutes. T/3202/3A. PRONI.

¹⁹ Canavan 1989, pp. 110-111.

²⁰ Rogers 1934, p. 161.

²¹ Stewart 1993, pp. 129-130, 174.

²² Register, 1st series, lodges 16, 77, 269, 521 and 706.

Although the mercantile élite of Newry seems to have lost its enthusiasm for freemasonry and developed new forms of sociability, on the whole masonry in Newry was becoming more popular (and less exclusive). A new lodge (no. 706) was started in 1789. Its first officers Matthew Campbell, Adam Rice and Thomas Byrne were all previously members of the Ballybot lodge, no. 521.²³ Lodge 269 was moved to Four Mile House outside the town by 1791. At about the time of the move, the lodge started admitting Catholics. Thus in the early 1790s, the main division in Newry freemasonry was primarily social rather than political. The old lodges long patronised by the mercantile élite (nos. 16 and 77) were probably in decline, while the new echelon of lodges were drawing their membership from lower down the social scale and included many Catholics.

As in Armagh and Tyrone, the establishment of a county committee for Down turned out to be a process full of dispute and controversy. The grand lodge select committee which in 1790 recommended the establishment of the Armagh committee, suggested that Down should be organised in a similar manner. A committee was accordingly set up by a group of lodges towards the end of 1790. However, the majority of lodges in the county vehemently opposed the plan. At a meeting at Dromore in April 1792, no less than twenty-eight lodges resolved unanimously that in their opinion, no such committee was necessary. Twenty-three of them passed a further, more extreme resolution, refusing to "admit of" any such committee and declaring that they were prepared to defend the privileges and autonomy that they believed they possessed in respect of their warrants.²⁴ The county committee struggled on, supported only by a minority of the Down lodges, until it gave up and dissolved itself in 1796.²⁵

As the Down schism arose before the political crisis in the winter of 1792-93, it is likely that the lodges opposed to the county committee were more worried about fees than politics. Had it been implemented according to the Armagh model, the new layer of administration would have meant increased financial burden for the lodges. Particularly those lodges with less than "respectable" membership were thus bound to be concerned over the issue. A county committee would also have circumscribed the traditional autonomy of the lodges - in other words, their ability to obey or ignore the grand lodge as they saw fit.

²³ Register, 1st series, lodge 521 (18 October 1777, 13 June 1783).

²⁴ Cochrane 1994, pp. 34-36.

²⁵ Grand lodge minutes (5 May 1796). GLI.

The political crisis of the winter of 1792-93 complicated the already tense relations between Co. Down lodges. In Newry, the conservative resolutions of the Armagh county committee were denounced by the newer and socially less exclusive lodges 521 and 706. Their resolutions show that they had carefully read the various resolutions published by other lodges. For instance, their repudiation of "*the doctrines of passive obedience and non-resistance*" originated in the resolutions of the Killead lodge (no. 627), one of the earliest radical responses to the Armagh resolutions. The Newry masons' demand for parliamentary reform and Catholic emancipation shows that politically they were close to the thinking of the Tyrone county committee as expressed in the Dungannon resolutions (see chapter 7.3):

*That we consider a parliamentary reform not by any means as an innovation of the constitution, but are convinced it would renovate the strength and vigour of its powers, and ultimately tend to the happiness and prosperity of the inhabitants of this kingdom.*²⁶

What the political makeup of the rival factions in the Down county committee dispute was, is more difficult to establish than the divisions prevailing in Armagh or Tyrone. Even the lodges which composed the Down county committee have not been identified with certainty; Keith Cochrane thinks that they were all located in the neighbourhood of Dromore and Waringstown. The influence of Holt Waring (see chapter 8.3.2) in Waringstown suggests that they may have been more conservative than the average Down lodge. If the politics of some of the opposition lodges in the winter of 1792-93 (such as the Newry lodges 521 and 706) are anything to go by, the radicals of the early 1790s may have been concerned that the Down committee would become a mouthpiece of conservatism like the Armagh one.

In the mid-1790s, the growing unrest in the neighbouring county of Armagh was viewed with concern by many in Newry. According to the magistrate and former Volunteer captain, Joseph Pollock:

*the universal opinion of R[oman] Catholics appears to be, that Gov[ernemen]t palpably connives at the outrages of Orange-Boys...Several houses have been racked, as they call it, only three or four nights ago, near Tandragee...Mr Verner and his associates are objects of horror among the R[oman] C[atholics] here.*²⁷

²⁶ Gordon's *Newry Chronicle*, 21 January 1793. For the Killead resolutions, see *Northern Star* 29 December 1792.

²⁷[Joseph Pollock] to [Col.] Robert Ross (n.d.). Reb. 620/24/161.

In a later letter, Pollock named three of the 42 inhabitants who had requested a town meeting.²⁸ Of these, two (William Beath and George Anderson) may have been freemasons, supposing they were two merchants who joined the lodges in the 1760s and not their younger relatives.²⁹ However, even if Beath and Anderson were the prominent masons of the 1760s and 1770s, there is no evidence to show that they were still active members. It has been suggested above that freemasonry lost its appeal to the social élite of Newry from the 1770s onwards. The most fashionable of the Newry lodges, no. 16, seems to have ceased to meet altogether, judging by the fact that its warrant was transferred to Armagh in 1796.³⁰

A surprising source, a book of patriotic poetry published by John Corry of Newry in 1797 may shed some light on the developments among the freemasons of Newry at the time.³¹ Louis M. Cullen has called its list of subscribers "almost...the equivalent of a telephone directory of the United Irishmen and Defender leaders of the region".³² The poet himself is not listed among the registered members of any of the Newry lodges, but several of his readers are:

TABLE 9 NEWRY FREEMASONS AMONG THE SUBSCRIBERS TO CORRY'S BOOK, 1797³³

Subscriber	Lodge	Year of registration
John Campbell	521	1790
Michael Campbell	521	1794
Wm Ferguson	706	1790
Thos. Gorman	521	1794
Thos. Harris	706	1797
Robert Hamilton	521	1799 (4 copies)
Lauchlan M'Intosh	706	1793 (bookbinder, 4 copies)
Patrick O'Hare	269	1796
John O'Neil	706	1800
Edward Richardson	706	1795
T. J. Stafford	706	1797
John Thomson	269	1797
Daniel Toye	521	1794

²⁸ Joseph Pollock (Newry) to Col. Ross (25 August 1796). Reb. 620/24/189.

²⁹ For Anderson, see Register, 1st series, lodge 77 (1764), lodge 16 (1766). For Beath, see Register, 1st series, lodge 77 (1765). GLI.

³⁰ Duplicate warrant of lodge 16. PGL Armagh.

³¹ Corry, John: *Odes and elegies, descriptive & sentimental: with 'The Patriot', a poem.*

³² Cullen 1990, p. 129.

Even allowing for some incorrect matches between subscribers and masons, it seems that the same two lodges (521 and 706) that were in the vanguard of the 1792-93 radicalism, still contained people who were radical even by the very different standards of 1797. Among them was Michael Campbell, at whose house twenty-five suspected radicals were arrested in 1798 (see below).

At the beginning of 1798, Joseph Pollock of Newry was one of the magistrates to whom Dublin Castle sent a copy of Robison's *Proofs of a conspiracy* (see chapter 2.1). The aim of this move may have been to scare the magistrates and make them fight even harder against subversion. If so, Pollock must be counted among the most spectacular successes of the campaign. Soon after, he sent to chief secretary Pelham a masonic handbill "*sent ...to a free-mason lodge [identified as no. 706 in another letter] of a low order here, & which bears evident marks of intended Illumination...It was brought to me by one of them (a servant of mine) to whom I lent Robison's Proofs of a conspiracy".*

To a latter-day observer, the handbill, a purported "*discourse...lately pronounced at Brunswick, Lower Saxony...by the Comte T-----, at the initiation of his son*", does not appear particularly revolutionary. However, in conjunction with Robison's conspiracy theories, it was sufficient to scare lodge 706 into requesting that Pollock would obtain for them a copy of Robison's book. Pollock graciously presented them with one and suggested to Pelham that the government should distribute copies among both masonic and Orange lodges, both of which he thought were "*capable of much ill*".³⁴

Whether Pollock actually succeeded in frightening lodge 706 away from subversion (as he no doubt believed) or not, some radicals were still active under the guise of masonry. In May 1798, twenty-five men were arrested in the house of Michael Campbell, one of the subscribers to Corry's book. The men had gathered "*under the pretence of a freemason meeting*" but according to the arresting magistrate, J. Waring, "*not one third of the[m] belonged to the lodge at which they met*". All were charged under the Insurrection Act and sentenced to be sent to the navy as "idle and disorderly persons". The mass arrest may have been meant to be only a warning shot to the local radicals. The magistrates were prepared to admit them to bail: even standardised bail bond forms had been printed for the occasion. However, the rebellion and the declaration

³³ Two other matches have been left out as the lapse of time between the registration of the mason and 1797 make it more unlikely that the two were the same person: Wm. Moore (lodge 16, 1776) and John Walker (lodge 26, 1762). Register, 1st series. GLI.

³⁴ Joseph Pollock to Pelham (23 February, 25 February 1798). Reb. 620/35/152 and 156.

of martial law intervened and the magistrates were left unsure how to proceed.³⁵ In the end, the prisoners were sent under guard to Lisburn or Belfast.

Despite such apparently plentiful sources, establishing the links between masonry and radicalism in Newry in the late 1790s is complicated. For instance, none of the thirteen members of the United Irish "Down & Armagh no. 2" society identified by the informer Robert Dickson in 1797 were registered masons.³⁶ We know that lodge 706 (which included Pollock's servant) was regarded as being of "low order" and that lodge 521 included many Catholics. In a typically lower-class fashion, that lodge also practised the "higher degrees".³⁷

Given the involvement of Michael Campbell, it seems likely that the raided May meeting was disguised as a meeting of lodge 521. Hence, that lodge could be regarded as a possible example of a masonic lodge acting as a United Irish "front". However, as "*not one third*" of the arrested men belonged to the lodge, it is by no means certain that it was a meeting of the lodge as such. Had it been a regular meeting of a local lodge, it would have been difficult to exclude visitors from other lodges, including prying loyalists. It is more likely that the May 1798 meeting was a United meeting disguised as a meeting of lodge 521 with the help of radicals who were masons, who may have brought some of their regalia with them to add a "masonic" touch to the meeting.

Political arguments persisted within the ranks of masonic lodges for a long time after the rebellion of 1798. A good example of this is lodge 933 which was founded in Ballybot in 1803. Only a few years later, the lodge was split by a political disagreement. In 1809, the two factions applied for and were granted two new warrants, disposing of their old one by selling it to a group of freemasons in Rathfriland. The nature of the political row can be guessed at by looking at the names of the new lodges: the Nelson (no. 18) and the Union (no. 23) lodges. Although we know nothing more about the Union, further proof as to the loyalist nature of the Nelson lodge is copiously available. The thirteen founder-members included such pillars of society as the Rev. Charles Atkinson, who was senior canon and treasurer of Armagh cathedral, justice of the peace and deputy governor of

³⁵ T. Waring to Lord NN (25 May 1798). Reb. 620/37/160. The incident is also mentioned in V. Moyne to J. Lees (24 May 1798). Reb. 620/37/144.

³⁶ Francis Carleton (Newry) to Cooke (24 August 1797). Reb. 620/32/67. Register, 1st series; lodges 16, 77, 269, 521 and 706. A John Walker appears both on the United Irish list and in the grand lodge register under lodge 269. However, as the mason Walker was registered in 1762, it is probable that he was not the United Irishman of 1797.

Co. Armagh. Most of the others - at least seven of the thirteen - were or had been officers either in the yeomanry or the militia. The first master of the lodge, Jonathan Seaver, had served in both. The first son of a Co. Armagh landed gentleman, he had served in Armagh militia and later in a yeomanry corps raised by himself. According to Crossle, "of all the local yeomen none were more active...he and his men were a terror to evildoers". A further two had earlier served in the Volunteers; one of these resigned from the lodge after attending only twice although whether because of political disagreement or other reasons, is not known. As regards the civilian professions of the thirteen founder-members (apart from Atkinson and Seaver), at least seven were merchants, one a doctor, one a senior partner in a bank and one a solicitor. Several members also belonged to the Newry Amicable Annuity-Company and the day of the lodge meeting was changed to avoid a clash with the meetings of the company.³⁸

If any further proof of the Protestant character of the "Nelson" lodge is needed, it may be observed that the Annuity-Company, which provided for the widows and orphans of deceased contributors, only accepted Protestant members. Its rules, drawn up in 1770, stipulated that widows who married "*a Papist [were] to be absolutely debarred and excluded from all benefit*". Likewise, "*in case any child, or children of a deceased member shall be bred a Papist, or shall marry a Papist, such child or children shall not be intitled to any manner of benefit*".³⁹ The Annuity-Company was still exclusively Protestant as late as in 1814.⁴⁰

In the early nineteenth century as in the late eighteenth, freemasonry in Newry continued to encompass many different strands of thought and classes of people. Far from declining, freemasonry was revitalised: new lodges were started (such as the "Nelson" and the "Union") and old ones reactivated.⁴¹ Catholics remained strongly involved: in 1817 the *Newry Telegraph* reported the funeral "in the Chapel Yard" of a 99-year-old John O'Hanlon, "*for 77 years, a free and accepted brother*".⁴² As late as in

³⁷ A Christopher Ross of lodge 521 was a Royal Arch mason by 1796. Copy of a certificate, Crossle's scrapbooks, box 1, p. 40. GLI.

³⁸ Crossle 1909, pp. 5-9, 11, 53, 55-56, 60, 64-66, 77, 95, 116, 119, 126-128, 137-138. Crossle's book includes biographies of all known members of the Nelson lodge up to his own time, including himself.

³⁹ *The charter-party of the Amicable Annuity-Company of the town of Newry...* pp. 7, 17-23.

⁴⁰ *The Irish Magazine and Monthly Asylum for Neglected Biography*, vol. 7, 1814.

⁴¹ Lodge 77 started to register members again in 1806, for the first time since the 1770s. Register, 1st series. GLI.

⁴² *Newry Telegraph* 23 July 1817.

1835, a police report specifically mentioned that in Newry the masonic 24 June parade was still "*composed of Protestants and Roman Catholics*".⁴³

11.2. Aughnacloy, Co. Tyrone

Aughnacloy, also known as Mooretown, is located in the Blackwater valley in southern Co. Tyrone, on the border with Monaghan. Until it was "improved" in the 1720s by the local landlord, Aughnacloy was but a small hamlet, a convenient stopping-place for those travelling between Armagh and Omagh but otherwise insignificant. The improving landlord, Acheson Moore, constructed mills, encouraged the construction of a brewery and a distillery and promoted a linen market in the town. By the late eighteenth century, linen-weaving was the single most important industry in the district. When Moore, a reputed Jacobite died in 1770, the estate passed (after much litigation) to his grandson, Nathaniel Montgomery-Moore (d. 1834). According to the historian of the town, John J. Marshall, little else of "worthy of note" happened until the Volunteer enthusiasm gripped the little town in 1778-79.⁴⁴

Freemasonry, at least in its "regular" form, arrived late in Tyrone (see chapter 3.1); the first lodges were warranted in 1759. The arrival of regular masonry in Aughnacloy was part of a second wave of expansion in 1769-73, when the number of regular lodges in Tyrone doubled from nine to eighteen. The first warrant (no. 483) for Aughnacloy was issued in 1770. Another lodge (no. 502) followed three years later.

The first known political statement by an Aughnacloy lodge was the June 1782 notice by which lodge 483 "*consisting of volunteers*" thanked William Irvine ("Irwin"), "*President of the Dungannon Glorious Congress...for his polite conduct respecting the emancipation of Ireland - they being convinced of his sincerity as a freemason and a lover of his country*" (see chapter 7.2.2).⁴⁵ A local corps, Aughnacloy Volunteer Light Infantry also expressed their approval of the decisions of the 1782 convention. The William Moore Esq. who chaired the meeting at which the resolutions were passed, may have been the Wm. Moore who belonged to lodge 483 in 1784 and possibly earlier - although Moore was

⁴³ Testimony of Capt. David Duff (29 July 1835). *3rd report from the select committee on...Orange lodges*, pp. 127-128. The other town where a mixed procession took place was Garvagh, Co. Derry.

⁴⁴ Marshall 1925, pp. 16-21, 24. Montgomery-Moore served as a MP for Tyrone in 1781-90 and for Strabane 1798-1800. He was lieutenant-colonel of the Royal Tyrone militia from 1793 to 1799.

⁴⁵ BNL 28 June 1782.

for obvious reasons a common surname in Aughnacloy.⁴⁶ Nathaniel Montgomery-Moore, the landlord of Aughnacloy and commander of the corps was not a registered member of any of the three local lodges.

1782 saw also the foundation of a new lodge (no. 599) in the town. The first officers of 599, Thomas Finlater, Andrew Thompson and Thomas Abraham, were all former members of 483.⁴⁷ They were joined by Alexander Campbell, a member of lodge 502⁴⁸ and others who had not been registered members of either lodge. There is no direct evidence of any political disagreement that would have led to the creation of a new lodge: the older lodges may have grown so large that secession of some members was unavoidable, or younger members may have wanted a lodge of their own that they could run as they please. Nevertheless, from about this time onwards, the three lodges in the town began to develop in different directions. Interestingly, lodge 502 seems to have had many more Catholic members than the other two. The denominational breakdown of any of the lodges is not known with certainty and once again, we have to indulge in the hazardous game of basing a guess on the lists of the members' names. However, a significant portion of the members of 502 registered in or after 1781 bore names such as Pat Cavanagh, Neill Keenan, James Connolly, John Gallagher, Owen Moynagh, and Edward Mullan, a mix of names significantly different to that of the other two lodges.⁴⁹

At the end of the eighteenth century, freemasonry spread rapidly into the Ulster countryside (see chapter 5.1.2). In the neighbourhood of Aughnacloy, this process was particularly notable in the late 1780s and early 1790s. In addition to the three lodges in Aughnacloy itself, masonic lodges were founded in several surrounding small towns and villages: in Carnteel, Ballygawley (two lodges) and in Ram's Flush in Irish Cravenney; all within the radius of 8 km (5 miles) of Aughnacloy.⁵⁰ The "higher degrees" which had become increasingly popular in the 1780s (see chapter 6.4) also arrived in Aughnacloy around this time. By 1792, Leslie Bane, *Captain General &c &c of the Grand Assembly of*

⁴⁶ C. H. Wilson: *A compleat collection of the resolutions of the Volunteers...*, p. 30. Register, 1st series, lodge 483 (10 April 1784).

⁴⁷ Register, 1st series, lodge 483 (Finlater: 20 July 1776; Thompson and Abraham: 29 May 1780), lodge 599 (4 April 1782).

⁴⁸ Register, 1st series, lodge 502 (25 September 1781), lodge 599 (14 February 1784).

⁴⁹ Register, 1st series, lodge 502.

⁵⁰ Lodges 657 Carnteel (1786), 679 Ballygawley (1788), 723 Ram's Flush (1790), 727 Ballygawley (1790). IMR. In addition to these lodges in Co. Tyrone, there was lodge 688 in Emyvale, Co. Monaghan (1788).

Knights Templars and Knights of Malta", was conferring them on his fellow masons under the authority of lodge 483.⁵¹

The seven lodges of the district represented nearly one fourth of the Tyrone lodges present at the 7 January 1793 county committee meeting and claimed to have a total of 505 members, ranging from 169 members of the oldest lodge, 483 Aughnacloy, to the twenty members of the newest one, 727 Ballygawley.⁵² At 72.1 members per lodge, the masons of the Aughnacloy district claimed a much higher average membership than the county as a whole (47.7 members per lodge, see chapter 3.5.2). The total number of members claimed by each lodge was significantly higher than the number of registered members, further illustrating the incompleteness of the grand lodge register. For instance, lodge 483 was said to have 169 members in January 1793 (of whom only 35 were registered). For lodge 502, the figures were 100 (of whom 19 registered) and for lodge 599, 70 (46 registered).

Aughnacloy is an instructive example of how freemasonry in Ulster was far from immune to the political and religious divisions that existed outside the lodge room. The first sign of political disagreements can be detected in March 1792, when all except one (no. 727 in Ballygawley) of the seven lodges in Aughnacloy and its neighbourhood were involved in the Dungannon barony committee which soon evolved into the Tyrone county committee.⁵³ The absence of the newest lodge in the district was significant. During the 1792-93 dispute over the proposed Ulster reform convention, the "Royal Blue Lodge" of Ballygawley (no. 727) was the only lodge in the whole county to openly oppose "*all innovators*", warning of "*anarchy and confusion*" in language borrowed from the Bellaghy resolutions which had started the newspaper war between radical and conservative lodges.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the lodge was represented at the Dungannon meeting famous for its call for "*every lodge in the land [to] become a company of citizen soldiers*" on 7 January 1793. Whether the lodge had split upon the issue or whether it had heeded the calls for masonic unity by other lodges (see chapter 7.3) is not known.

Although an outward unanimity thus prevailed among the masons of Aughnacloy, the process of fragmentation had begun. Lodge 502 differed from the other two

⁵¹ Thomas Greer's Knight Templar and Knight of Malta certificate, 19 May 1792 (photocopy). PGL Armagh. Why the president of the Armagh county committee, Thomas Greer, chose to be initiated into the Knights Templars in Aughnacloy, is not known.

⁵² BNL 22 January 1793, *Londonderry Journal* 29 January 1793.

⁵³ BNL 16 March 1792. Lodge 727 was not represented.

Aughnacloy lodges because of its largely Catholic membership (see above). Now a divide was beginning to appear between the two "Protestant" lodges. The oldest lodge, no. 483 which had in 1782 "consisted of Volunteers" and the "Catholic" lodge 502 were content to approve the Dungannon resolutions. The third lodge, no. 599, was even more radical in sentiment. In resolutions published in the *Northern Star*, the members of 599 joined their Newry brethren in mocking the loyal resolutions of the Armagh county committee. With significant emphasis, they declared their loyalty to "*but one earthly king, George the Third, whose crown, dignity and just prerogatives we will support*". Using the radical formula of "*constitution in its original purity*", they expressed their support for both parliamentary reform and Catholic emancipation. According to the resolutions, the constitution

was formed for the happiness and security of all the people, without distinctions, but...many shameful impurities have crept into that constitution, which...render a radical and impartial reform not only necessary, but politic...we will...use every constitutional means in our power to obtain it...We believe our Catholic brethren to be peaceable, loyal and oppressed people, that they labour under intolerable grievances and we wish them that success in their exertions for constitutional freedom which their firmness and the justice of their cause do fully deserve.

The resolutions concluded with the satirical prayer, "*Finally, we believe that there is yet a kingdom to come, where corrupt representatives, placemen, pensioners, and the whole tribe of the people's enemies will, without a speedy repentance, meet the reward of all their works - world without end, amen*".⁵⁵ As the lodge has thus declared itself the standard-bearer of the extremism (by the standards of 1792-93) in Aughnacloy, it is not surprising to find Dr James Reynolds choosing the lodge-room of no. 599 as the meeting-place of the county committee in the following November. The published agenda of the meeting was vague to say the least: the delegates were to "*consider a business in which the honour and character of every member is intimately concerned*";⁵⁶ Keith Cochrane presumes that the meeting was "probably more political than masonic" in character.⁵⁷ What exactly happened at the meeting and what was the reaction of the other Aughnacloy lodges is not known.

The changing political climate and the rising sectarian tension did not pass Aughnacloy by. By the summer of 1795, bands of Defenders had been formed in the neighbourhood. As has been demonstrated in chapter 8.3, two different varieties of

⁵⁴ Resolutions of 727 (passed on 28 December 1792). BNL 11 January 1793.

⁵⁵ *Northern Star* 9 January 1793.

⁵⁶ *Northern Star* 14 November 1793.

⁵⁷ Cochrane 1994, p. 94.

loyalism developed in Armagh and the neighbouring parts of Tyrone, both with masonic links albeit very different from one another. The more "respectable" of the two groups included the lodges of the Armagh county committee while the other was a lower-class faction that found expression in what the contemporaries would have called "hedgemasonry", lodges unaffiliated to the Grand Lodge of Ireland. The significance of Aughnacloy in this process of Protestant mobilisation lies in the meeting held on 1 August 1795, at which the two loyalist factions openly and formally concluded an alliance with one another for the first time.

By 1795, "regular" freemasonry in Aughnacloy had polarised into three factions. Lodge 599 remained the most radical, while conservatives had been gravitating towards the old Volunteer lodge 483. In addition, there was the more or less "Catholic" lodge 502. In addition to the "regular" masons, there were the Defenders, who were not without masonic links of their own (see chapter 8.2) and an emerging lower-class Protestant group calling themselves "unwarranted masons". In the politically tense summer of 1795, this last-named body found an ally in the "regular" lodge 483 and published the details of their alliance, calling for others to follow their example. Declaring that their alliance was against the *"parcel of fanatics, who call themselves the Defenders"*, the *"clandestine or unwarranted masons to the amount of one hundred and upwards"* placed themselves *"under the protection of lodge no. 483"*. That the formation of some sort of home guard was intended is shown by the permission granted to their allies by lodge 483 to wear a blue ribbon, a modest imitation of an uniform.⁵⁸

Not surprisingly, the other two "regular" lodges (502 and 599) were absent from these proceedings. Thus the three lodges which had joined together in 1793 to demand Catholic emancipation and parliamentary reform, were taking different sides in 1795. The people with whom lodge 483 was allying itself were soon to develop into and be known as Orangemen. Keith Cochrane calls the loyalist alliance of Aughnacloy "a change of heart" on the part of lodge 483 as it had previously participated in the proceedings of the Tyrone county committee.⁵⁹ It is not implausible that as political divisions deepened, conservatives from other lodges moved to 483 and managed to dictate a change in its policy. The internal balance of the lodge may also have been swung in the favour of loyalism by moderate reformers who disagreed with the rising United Irish extremism and were frightened by Defender activity. They probably did not regard themselves as having

⁵⁸ BNL 14 August 1795.

⁵⁹ Cochrane 1994, p. 95.

had a change of heart; rather, they proceeded from their own premises to a logical conclusion in changed circumstances (see chapter 7.3). Although on the side of reform if it was an option, in the polarised political situation of 1795 they were faced with the simple choice between acceptance or rejection of revolution. Like many other masons including the grand master, Lord Donoughmore himself, they chose to side with loyalists rather than with rebels.

Possibly in a bid to bring some of its new-found allies into the fold of "regular" masonry, lodge 483 seems to have relaxed its rules of admission somewhat. A man called Michael Murphy was admitted for a fee lower than that prescribed by the Grand Lodge of Ireland. Ironically, the offence was brought to the attention of the grand lodge by Thomas Greer, the president of the conservative county committee of Armagh. After all, the Co. Armagh committee had its origins in social snobbery rather than in politics. Although politically close to the Aughnacloy alliance and willing to advance the cause of loyalism on their home turf, the committee was not willing to jeopardise its fight to defend the social "respectability" of masonry. The grand lodge discussed the issue on 1 October 1795, in the immediate aftermath of the "Battle of the Diamond" and as the so-called Armagh outrages were gathering pace. A letter from 483 "*relative to a late publication of theirs*", apparently the declaration of their alliance with the hedge-masons - was also read. Possibly the grand lodge was divided or not quite sure how to proceed: Greer was thanked for his vigilance and the matter referred to the Tyrone county committee.⁶⁰ When the "Armagh outrages" started, an alliance as close as that concluded in Aughnacloy was probably seen as embarrassing by status-conscious conservatives such as Greer.

According to Brendan McEvoy, the situation prevailing in Tyrone by the spring of 1797 "fell very little short of open rebellion".⁶¹ Aughnacloy was regarded as a disloyal town by many loyalists. When Joseph Cassells or Castles, a watchmaker and an alleged United Irish ringleader in Aughnacloy was arrested early in 1797, Thomas Knox commented that "*the people of Aughnacloy (a vile lot) were intended to rescue him*".⁶² Edward Moore, the "rabidly loyalist" (according to Brendan McEvoy) postmaster of Aughnacloy, who had himself sworn constable for the purpose of arresting Cassells, complained in March 1797 that the people of Aughnacloy were becoming more and more disloyal and disarming anybody who dared to oppose the radical cause.⁶³

⁶⁰ Grand lodge minutes (1 October 1795). GLI. Cochrane 1994, pp. 96-97.

⁶¹ McEvoy 1961, p. 15.

⁶² Thomas Knox to Sir George Hill (4 February 1797). Reb. 620/28/231.

⁶³ Edward Moore to John Lees (30 March 1797). Reb. 620/29/142.

Lodge 599 remained famous, or notorious, for its radicalism throughout the late 1790s. In 1798, General Knox regarded it as a dangerous cell of subversives: "*The lodge no. 599 in Auchnacloy [sic] is composed of the greatest rascals in the North. It has been purged of every honest & loyal man*".⁶⁴ Knox had had a letter by the lodge secretary intercepted, and returned to the matter two days later:

*Lodge No. 720 mention'd in Campbell's letter, was held in Fivemiletown - composed of a notorious gang of United Irishmen - second as I was informed to none by [=but?] No. 599 in Auchnacloy, of which Findlater is master and Campbell secretary. By Campbell's letter, it may be inferr'd that lodge No. 599 is in fact the [United Irish] county committee.*⁶⁵

It is difficult to assess whether the lodge was really such a den of rebels as General Knox thought. Although Knox was afraid of United Irish infiltration of masonic lodges, he was also notably ill-informed about masonry in his area (see chapter 8.1.3). Neither Cassells nor another alleged local United Irishman, the brogue-maker O'Neil were registered members of any of the Aughnacloy lodges. John Walker of Aughnacloy who was a delegate at a Ulster United Irish meeting on 14 August 1797 was not a registered mason either.⁶⁶ Given Knox's unreliability as a source, it remains to be proven that Findlater and Campbell, the two masons accused by him, were United Irishmen.

By 1798, there was an Orange lodge (LOL 156) in Aughnacloy and another (LOL 676) in nearby Ballygawley.⁶⁷ The original minute book of LOL 156 was still extant when Marshall wrote his history of Aughnacloy in the 1920s. The format in which minutes were kept was obviously copied from masonry, with almost identical phrases such as "*the club parted in harmony*". Other entries reveal charity activities very much like those of a masonic lodge: paying funeral expenses, helping distressed brethren and widows of lodge members - if also prisoners in Armagh jail. The expenses recorded for the Twelfth of July 1802 are not dissimilar to those incurred by a masonic lodge on a St. John's Day: rum, spirits, port, beer and punch. The lodge also spent money on ribbons, flags, and the

⁶⁴ General Knox (Clonfeacle) to Cooke (3 May 1798). Reb. 620/37/3.

⁶⁵ General Knox (Enniskillen) to Cooke (5 May 1798). Reb. 620/37/3. A Thomas Fin[d]later was a founder-member of lodge 599 in 1782. Alexander Campbell was among the next batch of members registered at the grand lodge.

⁶⁶ Register, 1st series (lodges 483, 502, 599). For Walker's political activity, see McEvoy 1961, p. 30.

⁶⁷ 1798 list of the Orange lodges in the GOLI minute book 1798-1819. The master of lodge 196 (Aughnacloy) was called John Henderson and that of lodge 676 (Ballygawley), Richard Armstrong. Lodge 196 was said to have 60 members. GOLI/A/M/98, p. 10.

expenses of delegates travelling to district meetings. Non-attendance was censured in a manner reminiscent of masonic lodges.

Comparison between the names of local Orangemen listed by Marshall and the registered members of the three “regular” masonic lodges shows no correlation whatsoever, with the possible solitary exception of Edward Moore, the captain of Aughnacloy Yeomanry Infantry and master of LOL 197, an off-shoot of LOL 156.⁶⁸ An Edward Moore was a member of lodge 599, later famous for its radicalism but the identification with Captain Moore is not certain.⁶⁹ The total lack of overlap may support the view that the “clandestine or unwarranted masons” of August 1795 turned, not surprisingly, into Orangemen a couple of months later. On the other hand, none of the presumably Catholic radicals or Defenders named in a contemporary loyalist poem were registered masons either.⁷⁰

Aughnacloy was also a garrison town. As many army regiments had masonic lodges, there was no doubt interaction between these and the local masons. The local lodges may have encouraged the formation of regimental lodges by initiating soldiers as was the case in Coleraine and Lifford (see chapter 5.3.1). For instance, the lodge in the Wexford regiment probably obtained its warrant while the regiment was quartered in Aughnacloy in 1803-04.⁷¹ The local Orange lodge also recruited soldiers. In the early years of the nineteenth century several soldiers and non-commissioned officers joined, including the permanent sergeant of the local yeomanry. A lieutenant of Galway militia received the Purple degree according to “the new system” in 1805.⁷²

⁶⁸ Marshall 1925, pp. 44-47

⁶⁹ For Edward Moore, see Register, 1st series, lodge 599 (10 April 1784). For Cassells’s and Moore’s political activity, see McEvoy 1959, p. 301; McEvoy 1961, pp. 1, 4-5.

⁷⁰ The poem “Loyalty and the times” commences with “*That every man of honest heart/ who in the Union bears a part/ May have a farm from taxes free/ When we secure our liberty*” and then details which estate or townland each rebel would have got had they succeeded; “*Neil Scroggy may get Ballynanny/Drumcork and Crew for Round-head Johnnie/ M’Laughlin may have Collumbawn/ and Lanty Murphy claims the Bawn*” etc. Marshall 1925, p. 22.

⁷¹ For the regiments quartered in Aughnacloy, see Marshall 1925, p. 23. Warrant 935 was issued to Wexford militia on 6 October 1803. IMR.

⁷² Marshall 1925, pp. 45-46.

12 CONCLUSION

During the course of the eighteenth century, Irish freemasonry grew from the modest beginnings of a few Dublin-based eccentrics to a network of hundreds of lodges that penetrated almost every corner of the country. Freemasonry changed over time: it became less exclusive and less Protestant, embracing thousands of people in the "middling" classes and even lower down the social scale. A significant proportion of these (and also of the people of higher status, such as Daniel O'Connell) were Catholics. From a purely urban phenomenon, it developed into a largely rural mass "movement". This was the case particularly in Ulster where, towards the end of the century, more and more lodges were being founded in the countryside.

However, in describing freemasonry, the word "movement" needs to be kept firmly within quotation marks. The vast network of lodges was not homogenous and neither was its membership. The typical masonic lodge in Ulster did not fit neatly into either of the contemporary (and indeed, modern) stereotypes - Barruel's and Robison's cabal of sinister schemers or an assembly of enlightened men imparting modern rational thought in an atmosphere of fraternal courtesy. The reasons for joining were many and varied: the social life of a lodge could be as colourful and as rowdy as any meeting in a tavern of mostly young men who had some money to spare. And yet the masonic lodge served many useful purposes in the local community, providing help for the needy, charity that often extended outside the fraternity, a measure of arbitration and justice and introductions to brethren overseas for would-be emigrants. It also attempted to impose (if sometimes unsuccessfully) a code of "respectable" behaviour on the members.

If masonic historians tend to ignore connections between freemasonry and politics, other historians tend to get rather too excited about these same connections - often neglecting other aspects of masonic history. The "rediscovery" of Irish freemasonry by historians in the 1990s has been marked more by enthusiasm than meticulous research: masonry has been seen simply as the "missing link" between the Enlightenment and the United Irishmen.

However, shared membership did not mean shared political views. Irish freemasonry was a multi-faceted phenomenon: it was neither a radical movement as assumed by some historians nor a conservative institution for colonial discipline. Being a freemason may have been central to the identity of some members, but for most of them

being a gentleman, merchant, weaver, soldier, radical, conservative, Protestant or Catholic was even more important. It could be argued that there was no one Irish freemasonry. As in Newry and Aughnacloy, local circumstances were often more important than rules and principles of the fraternity. In the case of Ulster, the political and sectarian tensions were never far from the surface: thus we have United Irish masons, loyalist masons, even Defender masons. The role of freemasonry as a forum that brought together people of different religious denominations and social classes was more limited than has been previously suggested. In parts of Ulster at least, freemasonry remained a mainly Protestant organisation until the 1780s. Furthermore, there existed within freemasonry an exclusively Protestant subculture which manifested itself in lodges that did not accept Catholic members at all.

The diversity of Irish freemasonry in the period studied here imposes a further caveat on historians. An isolated reference to freemasons in the sources is of little use to them unless they know enough of freemasonry in the locality and period in question. In the absence of research, historians have had to rely on vague generalisations based on other times and places. However, being familiar with the general outline of masonic history is not enough: it is risky to jump to conclusions such as "because so-and-so was a freemason, he must have thought this and done that". One has to know more about the lodge in question, about its character, history and ethos.

Although freemasonry as a whole was not a political movement, there were occasions when factions of freemasons were deeply involved in politics. The crucial factor in the politicisation of Irish freemasonry appears to have been the American war. The colonists' fusion of the concepts of a patriot soldier and a freemason was eagerly copied in the Ireland of the Volunteers. Although the evidence is inconclusive, masonic membership may have been for some a way of expressing dissatisfaction with the war or government policy in general. However, from the time of the mass mobilisation of the Volunteers in 1779, freemasonry as a potential avenue of protest was superseded by Volunteering. Whether this can be taken to mean that setting up the Volunteers was a "masonic" initiative is a matter of definition: does any idea supported by several masons (and many others besides) constitute a masonic initiative? It would be tempting to see freemasonry as a cause, rather than a symptom, of major political and social changes in Ireland. However, the fact that there was no one masonic body in Ireland capable of expressing the collective opinion (had there been such a thing) of the Irish freemasons, suggests that sweeping claims about the influence of masonry are best treated with caution.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the idea of the masonic citizen-soldier was a powerful one. It was kept alive after 1782-83 by masons belonging to the radical wing of the Volunteers and successfully revived a decade later when the two conventions, those of the Catholics (1792) and of the Ulster reformers (1793), sharply polarised political opinion. Freemasonry was not immune to the progressive splitting of Irishmen into radical and loyalist camps during the course of the 1790s. However, the divisions of 1782 do not correspond to the divisions of 1792 and most definitely not to those of 1798. As the world around them changed, many lodges and individuals who had been radical by the standards of the 1780s, or even by those of the early 1790s, ended up on the government side. Most notably, this was the case with the liberal middle ground that included the grand master, Lord Donoughmore himself. There was no one interpretation among Irish freemasons of what a mason should be: whether an enlightened conspirator for the rights of man, a peaceful subject concerned with fraternal dinners and charity, or a loyal defender of the constitution. In short, the masons of the 1790s were just as divided among themselves as Irishmen in general.

As freemasonry was not a political movement, its uses for political activity were limited. Its organisation, by and large, would have been worthless from a military point of view, had anyone succeeded in infiltrating it sufficiently. Only in a county with an effective county committee could any significant use be made of the organisation by political factions: only in Tyrone is there any evidence of the political radicals doing so in 1792-93. In the late 1790s, the authorities do not seem to have been unduly concerned about freemasonry: they were content to leave curbing any radical infiltration of it in the hands of Lord Donoughmore. Even in 1797, when it was rumoured that the government was about to prevent the lodges from meeting, it was the masons themselves who put their house in order.

The support of the only other successful county committee, that of Armagh, was a significant asset for the loyalist side. Armagh loyalism was a two-tier movement: "regular" lodges helped found armed loyalist associations in 1795-96 but these were later subsumed into the yeomanry. On the other hand, an "irregular" or "hedgemasonic" element organised lower-class Orange societies. Although the Orange leadership soon began to stress the separate identity of the Orange Order, many of the early Ulster Orangemen seem to have regarded themselves as freemasons, albeit unconnected with the Grand Lodge of Ireland which they probably regarded as a suspect, moderate, even pro-Catholic body. The form taken by the Orange Order was strongly influenced by the time and place where it was first created - near Loughgall in 1795. In the interim between

the disbanding of the Volunteers and the raising of the yeomanry, the masonic-style brotherhood was the most efficient form of organisation available. The early Orangemen were well acquainted with freemasonry: the large cluster of masonic lodges around Loughgall was unique by Irish, Ulster, or even Co. Armagh standards.

After as before 1798, there were lodges and individual masons of different political shades. The immediate result of the rebellion was to polarise the masons into Catholic, loyalist Protestant or radical lodges. The Union controversy may have shuffled the deck again, creating new alliances and animosities among masons just like among others. The radicalism survived at least until the second United Irish rebellion of 1803, particularly in western Ulster, and a tradition of non-sectarianism and hostility to the Orange Order survived in some lodges much longer.

The crisis and split of 1806-13 finally ended the golden age of Irish freemasonry. The end of the Ulster schism proved to be a pyrrhic victory for the Dublin grand lodge. Weakened by the split, Irish freemasonry entered a period of serious decline as regards both numbers and "respectability". The lingering suspicions about the political loyalty of masonic lodges, the hostility and competition of the Orange Order and finally, the growing animosity of the Roman Catholic church all but wrecked Irish masonry as a significant social movement.

Before Irish freemasonry started its long nineteenth-century decline, it undoubtedly had an influence on other organisations that emerged when it was still going from strength to strength. Unfortunately, the extent and some of the details of this influence have been misunderstood by many historians. For instance, it has become commonplace to refer to various features of Orangeism, Defenderism, Ribbonism and so on as "masonic" based on the writer's own impression of what is masonic - without much study of what freemasonry was like in the past. This misconception works in two ways: phenomena that were widespread in the eighteenth-century Ireland - the swearing of oaths, for example - have since become "masonic" in popular imagination. On the other hand, features such as the public processions that were definitely "masonic" at the time, are not perceived as such since they are no longer practised by masons.

This thesis cannot possibly provide more than a modest contribution to the study of the history of Irish freemasonry. There are many more issues yet to be studied: how typical or unique Ulster was compared with the other provinces, the vibrant masonic scenes of Dublin and Cork, local studies of towns and districts other than those covered

here and the decline of Irish freemasonry in the nineteenth century are just some of the topics awaiting their historians. Particularly on the crucial subject of the role of masonry in politics, the work is only beginning: much essential local and biographical research remains to be done.

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TABLE 10 NUMBER OF NEW WARRANTED LODGES IN ULSTER, 1733 - 1759												
	Belfast	Antrim	Armagh	Cavan	Derry	Donegal	Down	Fermanagh	Monaghan	Tyrone	ULSTER	
1733								1			1	
1734											0	
1735											0	
1736											0	
1737							1				1	
1738				1							1	
1739		1	1								2	
1740											0	
1741					1						1	
1742					1		1				2	
1743		1	1		1						3	
1744											0	
1745											0	
1746											0	
1747											0	
1748	1	1			2		1				5	
1749		1			1				1		3	
1750						1					1	
1751											0	
1752		1	1						1		3	
1753		1				1					2	
1754											0	
1755	1	2	1								4	
1756	1	1	1				1				4	
1757						1					1	
1758		1			1				1		3	
1759		5	2	1	1		1			3	12	
TOTAL	3	15	7	5	5	2	5	1	3	3	49	

TABLE 11 NUMBER OF NEW WARRANTED LODGES IN ULSTER, 1760 - 1780												
	Belfast	Antrim	Armagh	Cavan	Derry	Donegal	Down	Fermanagh	Monaghan	Tyrone	ULSTER	
1760			2				1		1	1	5	
1761		1			1		2	1		2	7	
1762		1			1	1		1			4	
1763		3	4	1	1		1	1	1	1	13	
1764		2			2		2	1	2	1	8	
1765		6	1		2	3	1	1	1	1	16	
1766		1				1	3	1			6	
1767				2				2	1		5	
1768			4		1			1			6	
1769							1	2		5	8	
1770		2						1	1	3	7	
1771	1	1									2	
1772											0	
1773		1								1	2	
1774			1	1				1			3	
1775			1		1		2			1	5	
1776		2			3						5	
1777		3	1	1			2			1	8	
1778				2		1				3	6	
1779					1	1			1		3	
1780		2			2	1				1	6	
TOTAL	1	25	14	7	13	8	15	13	8	21	125	

NB these figures indicate the numbers of new or transferred warrants (warrants ordered - including some that were granted by the grand lodge but never actually issued to the applicants)

TABLE 12 NUMBER OF NEW WARRANTED LODGES IN ULSTER, 1781 - 1806											
	Belfast	Antrim	Armagh	Cavan	Derry	Donegal	Down	Fermanagh	Monaghan	Tyrone	ULSTER
1781	1	2	2		3	2		1			11
1782		4	2				2			3	11
1783	1	1	3		1	1	1		1		9
1784	1	2		1	2					3	9
1785		1			2	2					5
1786		4			1		2	1		1	9
1787		1		1	1	1		1	1	5	13
1788	2		3		1	1	2	1	2	3	13
1789		3	1		1		3	1		2	13
1790		2			4		1		1	10	18
1791		3	2		1		3		1	3	13
1792	3	2	2	1	2		3	1		5	19
1793		3	1		4			2	1	2	13
1794	1	2		2				1	1	2	9
1795		2				1	5	3		3	14
1796	1	2	2	1	5		3	5	1	7	25
1797										1	1
1798						1		2			3
1799		1						3	1		5
1800			1			1			1	1	4
1801		3		1				7		7	18
1802		4	1	2			2	2		2	13
1803	2		1		1		2	1			7
1804	2	3	1	2	1	1	3	1	1	2	17
1805		5	3		3		2	1		4	18
1806		1					1				2
TOTAL	14	51	25	11	33	11	35	33	13	66	292

TABLE 13
Members of Ulster lodges registered at the grand lodge, 1760 - 1800

