

Murals in Northern Ireland 1 - symbols

'Ireland in Schools'

Loyalist murals



Theme: Loyalist flags and symbols

Title: Loyalist mural, Londonderry

Text: 'Londonderry'; 'Vita Veritas Victoria'

Location & date: Bonds Street in the Waterside area, Derry, 1991

This loyalist mural commemorates the Siege of Derry, with the coat of arms of the city flanked on both sides by the flags of the Apprentice Boys of Derry, with the Union Jack on the outside, and the red and white flag of Ulster at the top on either side.

The shield of the City of Derry in the centre depicts a skeleton. This is a reference to the Siege of Derry, 1689, when Jacobite forces laid siege to the city after the pro-Williamite citizens refused to surrender. Starvation led to many deaths during the siege.



Theme: Red Hand of Ulster and various flags

Title: Red Hand

Text: 'No Surrender'; 'IRA'

Location & date: Tullevin Drive, Newtownards, nr Belfast, 1988

This mural was in protest against the Irish Republic's involvement in Northern Ireland affairs, showing the Red Hand of Ulster in a Victory formation trampling on the Irish tricolour with 'IRA' written on it.

The Red Hand of Ulster is a traditional symbol of the O'Neill clan, the major clan in the northern part of Ireland up to the time of the Plantation, in the early 17th century. The Plantation was in fact a strategic move on the part of the Elizabethans to undermine the power of the O'Neills in the area. The symbol derives from a myth of two chieftains rowing in separate boats towards a shore. Their agreement is that the one who touches the shore first may claim the land as his kingdom. The losing chieftain cut off his hand and threw it ahead of the winning boat, thus claiming the land. Thus, traditionally the symbol is that of an open and upright right hand dripping blood. It is reworked by the Loyalist Prisoners' Association, shown wrapped in barbed wire, the ultimate insult to loyalists 'whose only crime was loyalty'. Sometimes it is shown as a fist, a symbol of power, in murals supporting the UFF, Ulster Freedom Fighters, the nom de guerre of the Ulster Defence Association. Here, the Red Hand has sprouted feet and dances derisively on the Irish tricolour, which also bears the initials of the IRA, Irish Republican Army. The mural is a response to the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in November 1985, when the governments in Dublin and London agreed to consult each other over matters pertaining to Northern Ireland.



Theme: UVF volunteers in action with automatic weapons

Title: UVF mural

Text: 'Ulster Volunteer Force: 1st Battalion B/Company'; 'The UVF reserves the right to strike at Republican targets where and when the opportunity arises'

Location & date: Ohio Street, Belfast, 1985

The mural incorporates the UVF crest flanked by the official UVF flag and that of the Young Citizen Volunteers. It shows two members of the UVF with weapons, underling the statement of intent on the left.

The original UVF was founded in 1912 to oppose home rule for Ireland and later immersed in the British Army during World War I as the Ulster Division. The current UVF was formed in 1966. The slogan alongside the paramilitaries states that the UVF have the right to strike at republican targets, but the difficulty is identifying such targets. Consequently, loyalist paramilitary groups have killed 911 of the 3,285 people killed in the conflict between 1969 and the end of 1993. Of these, 28 were republican activists, 32 were nationalist or republican political activists, 714 were civilians (of whom 43 were killed in the Irish Republic).

Murals in Northern Ireland 1- symbols

'Ireland in Schools'

Republican murals



Theme: Killing of eight IRA volunteers at Loughgall, Co. Armagh, May 1987

Title: Republican mural

Text: 'Loch gCal' - Loughgall

Location & date: Springfield Avenue Belfast, 1987

The mural gives the names of the IRA volunteers, in Irish. In the background is a Celtic Cross, with an Easter Lily in the middle, and Sunburst at the bottom. The four shields at each corner of the mural represent the four provinces with their names in Gaelic.

An active service unit of the IRA attacked by an RUC station in Loughgall. The SAS was waiting for them. The eight IRA men were killed, plus one civilian passer by. The Easter Lily is associated with the 1916 Rising because of the seasonal decoration in churches during that period. The Sunburst forms part of the flag representing the youth wing of the IRA, Fianna na hÉireann, literally means warriors of Ireland, taken from an ancient Celtic legend. The symbol of the Sunburst appears in some Republican murals, highlighting the dawn of a new era.



Theme: Celtic warrior and Celtic symbols

Title: Celtic mural, Derry

Text: 'Mise Eire', a poem by Patrick Pearse, leader of the 1916 Rising

Location & date: Chamberlain Street, Derry, 1985

The mural shows a Celtic warrior with sword and shield, wearing clothing adorned with Celtic emblems. At the top is the republican sunburst emblem. There is also a cat - a symbol of wisdom, a dolmen (marking the burial chamber of a chieftain), a decorated rock (like the one at the entrance to the passage grave at Newgrange) and a stone circle.

Celtic mythology is deeply rooted in the nationalist and republican culture. Translation of poem:

I am Ireland/ I am older than the Old Woman of Bearra/ Great is my glory/ I who gave birth to Cuchulian the Brave/ Great is my shame/ My own family/ Have sold their mother/ I am Ireland/ I am lonelier than the Old Woman of Bearra.



Theme: Republican tradition

Title: Cú Chulainn mural

Text: 'I nDíl Cuimne' - in loving memory

Location & date: St James Road, Belfast, 1984

This mural shows the mythological warrior, Cú Chulainn, dying upright with shield and sword, framing a plaque containing the names of local IRA members killed in action.

Prehistorical or mythical themes occasionally figure in republican murals. Here is depicted, as in the eighth century epic tale Táin Bó Cuailnge, dying upright. Cú Chulainn is claimed by both communities in Northern Ireland, because, although he comes from Celtic mythology, he was also the defender of Ulster.