



Education Leaflet 5

ULSTER'S SOLEMN LEAGUE AND COVENANT



On the 28 September 1912 - 'Ulster Day' – Sir Edward Carson had the honour of being the first person to sign Ulster's Solemn League and Covenant at a ceremony at the City Hall, Belfast. Altogether, almost half a million people – 471,414 – pledged their opposition to Irish Home Rule by signing the Covenant or, in the case of women, the Declaration. Those who signed the Covenant pledged:

to stand by one another in defending for ourselves and our children our cherished position of equal citizenship in the United Kingdom and in using all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule parliament in Dublin.

Contrary to popular mythology, there is no evidence of anyone signing the Covenant in blood: black ink was the preferred medium. Interestingly, women did not sign the Covenant: instead they signed the Declaration, although this was very similar in content to the 'proper' Covenant. While the City Hall in Belfast was a rallying point, with literally thousands of people anxious to sign up to the Covenant in the same building as its instigator, thousands more added their names in less august surroundings throughout Ireland, England and Scotland. 218,206 Ulstermen, and a further 19,162 men of Ulster origin living outside Ulster, signed the Covenant, while 228,991 Ulster women and a further 5,055 expatriate Ulster women, signed the Declaration.



Left: Sir Edward Carson after signing the Solemn League and Covenant at the City Hall, Belfast, September 28, 1912. To the left is Lord Charles Beresford and Lord Londonderry, and to the right Captain Craig (Lord Craigavon), Mr J.H. Campbell, K.C., (Lord Glenavy), and Dr William Gibson.

Right: Covenant signed by Sir Edward Carson.



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Until recently to find a name among 47,150 forms (there was usually ten names to each form) was an impossible task but the names have now been indexed and the actual forms digitised so that you can search the index of names and then view the digitised image of the page where the name occurs. The searchable index and digitised images are available on the PRONI website.

The forms are to be found in the Ulster Unionist Council (UUC) archive in PRONI (D1327). This archive comprises 200 volumes and c.60,000 files and documents, dating from 1886 to 1986. Requests for permission to access any records in this archive other than the Ulster Covenant signatures which can be accessed on-line must be put *in writing* to the Council *via* PRONI. Attempts to speed up the process by writing directly to the UUC are counterproductive as the UUC will direct the writer to apply through the proper channels.

For those interested in the period generally, PRONI holds a number of archives, besides those of the Ulster Unionist Council (D1327 and D972), that are a rich source of information. The following are a few of the highlights.

Northern Ireland Information Service	INF/7/A/2
Abercorn Papers	D623
Sir Edward Carson	MIC665
Craigavon Papers	D1415
Joseph Cunningham	D1288
H Montgomery Hyde	D3084
7th Marquess of Londonderry	D3099
Sir Robert Lynn MP	D3480/59
Ellison Macartney	D3649
Joshua Peel	D889
Col. Saunderson MP	MIC281, T2996
Ulster Women's Unionist Council	D2688, D1098

The birth and growth of Unionism is well documented through a large collection of printed material. The material available in PRONI includes: press cuttings and items produced by Irish unionists for propaganda purposes (maps, posters, leaflets and pamphlets); minute books, correspondence, etc., relating to the various unionist organisations such as The Irish Loyal and Patriotic Union (D989), The Irish Unionist Alliance (D989), the Unionist Anti-Partition League

(D4125), the Unionist Clubs Council (D1327); and the records of the Unionist Party of Northern Ireland (D3061).

In addition, PRONI also has many collections of private correspondence and papers of individual unionists. Particularly useful are the papers of the Co. Tyrone Liberal Unionist, H de F Montgomery (D627), the diaries of Lady Craigavon (D1415) and the correspondence of Major 'Fred' Crawford (D1700). Most of these sources are exemplified in PRONI's still-available *Irish Unionism, 1885-1923: a documentary history* by Patrick Buckland (Belfast, HMSO, 1973).

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