

The survival of popular blood sports in Victorian Ulster

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Abstract

Despite legislation making pastimes such as cock-fighting and animal-baiting illegal in Victorian Ireland, these activities persisted through the nineteenth century and beyond. In part, their survival in Ulster reflected the inadequacy of the law and the problems associated with its enforcement. However, the enduring popularity of such practices might also have been a product of the socio-economic conditions of the province during that period. Ulster remained a predominantly rural society, in which animals and their sufferings were familiar to the majority of the population; and where both religious and secular ideas of treating animals with humanity received little popular support. Moreover, the failure of the authorities to suppress these pastimes, and the refusal of many in the population to abandon them, may indicate much about prevailing attitudes to the law. Catholic estrangement from the criminal justice system in Ireland has been asserted by many historians, who argue that it resulted from Protestant manipulation of the processes of the law and domination of the organs of the state. In this case, however, it may be that while opposition to the law was affected by sectarian considerations, innovations in legislation ran contrary to established cultural norms, and were just as important in generating resistance to it. In essence, substantial numbers of the Irish population saw the law as irrelevant and illegitimate, not because it was the tool of a rival faction, but because it required them to act in ways that were contradictory to established traditions, and for reasons with which they had no sympathy.

Introduction

As early as 1714 there seem to have been suggestions that blood sports in Ulster were facing some opposition. A pamphlet published in Belfast in that year noted that, for some, hunting was ‘a compound of noise, dirt and fatigue, danger and expense’.¹ Fifteen years later, the Bishop of Derry wrote to a confidante that the obsession of the Ulster gentry with shooting and hunting was such that his ‘aversion to misery’ prevented him from ‘joining in the amusements of the place’.² In 1756 an article in the *Belfast News-Letter* condemned the ‘barbarous and inhuman custom of throwing at cocks and hens’ as ‘a practice shocking to humanity’.³ John Tenant, the son of a dissenting clergy-

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¹ Arthur Stringer, *The experienced huntsman* (Belfast, 1714, repr. 1977), 142.

² James Dallaway (ed.), *Letters of the late Thomas Rundle, LL.D. Lord Bishop of Derry in Ireland to Mrs Barbara Sandys, of Miserden, Gloucestershire* (Dublin, 1789), 103–4.

³ *Belfast News-Letter* (henceforth *BNL*), 24 February 1756.

man apprenticed to a Coleraine merchant, recorded in his diary of 1790 that, as he was growing older, he now thought his former pastimes, such as cock-fighting, 'giddy, vain and foolish'.⁴ In 1804 the weaver poet James Orr commented on the bull-baiting which he had witnessed in the time-honoured practice at Carrickfergus. He suggested that:

Such scenes amuse the slave and sot,
But saints and heroes shun the spot.⁵

Bull-baiting ended in the town in 1811 though an unsuccessful attempt was made to revive 'this barbarous diversion' the following year.⁶ In 1806 cock-fighting had been condemned in Belfast as 'productive of serious evils'.⁷ The Irish edition of the *Methodist Magazine* in 1813 dismissed the pastime of shooting as 'replete with cruelty' and urged true Christians to avoid it. Although God created animals for the use of man, this was no excuse to use their suffering for 'mere amusement'.⁸ An outraged inhabitant of Belfast in 1822 wrote upon the 'inhuman custom' of baiting bulls before slaughtering them, and this practice's tendency to 'the destruction of all moral principle'.⁹ A pamphlet on man's Christian duty to animals, written by the Larne-born minister William Hamilton Drummond, was published in Belfast in 1830. He argued that 'man is cruel when he seizes animals, not for food but pleasure; when he tortures before he kills; when he hunts and destroys for his amusement'.¹⁰ By 1834 a student at Trinity College Dublin, the centre of Irish Protestant intellectualism, was willing to denounce all huntsmen as 'a pack of dull, dastardly, sanguinary, brutal and ferocious miscreants'.¹¹ The following year one of Belfast's religious magazines included the observation that 'he who wantonly tortures even a fly, is serving an apprenticeship to cruelty'. Another noted that men's 'mercy should be extended not only to our fellow men, but to those inferior creatures that God has made subservient to our use'.¹² An English observer in one Co. Londonderry parish in the 1830s thought that 'the gradual increase in seriousness of the general character' had largely led the local inhabitants to abandon the twin activities of card-playing and cock-fighting.¹³ In 1836 the *Ulster Times* noted that bear-baiting was a common occurrence

⁴ Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), D/1748/28, Diary and autobiography of John Tenant of Coleraine, 1786–90, 60.

⁵ James Orr, *Poems on various subjects* (Belfast, 1804), 76.

⁶ Samuel McSkimmin, *The history and antiquities of the county of the town of Carrickfergus, from the earliest periods, to the present time* (Belfast, 1811), 69; *BNL*, 10 November 1812.

⁷ *BNL*, 29 July 1806.

⁸ [*Irish*] *Methodist Magazine*, XXXVI (November 1813), 517.

⁹ *BNL*, 20 September 1822.

¹⁰ William Hamilton Drummond, *Humanity to animals: the Christian's duty* (Belfast, 1830), 26. Extracts of Drummond's work appeared on an irregular basis in the Ulster press for some years (see, for example, *Enniskillen Chronicle and Erne Packet*, 27 June 1839 and *Larne Literary and Agricultural Journal*, 12 (October 1839), 96). The author is extremely grateful to Dr Andrew Holmes for providing this first reference, and for comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

¹¹ 'My opinion of sportsmen', *Dublin University Magazine* 3 (February 1834), 124–7:124.

¹² *Christian Freeman*, 4 (1835), 387; *The Bible Christian* 1, 4 (May 1836), 142–3.

¹³ Cited in Sam Martin, *Historical gleanings from County Derry* (Dublin, 1948), 36.

on the streets of Belfast, though it was a ‘demoralising practice’.¹⁴ The *Belfast Commercial Chronicle* looked forward to ‘a material change in the general treatment of the dumb creation’.¹⁵ The following year the *News-Letter* remarked on the ‘moral evil resulting from ... any cruelty to the “dumb creation”’.¹⁶

However, it seems that such attitudes were not widespread. Throughout the nineteenth century and beyond, incidents of cock-fighting, dog-fighting and animal-baiting continued to be reported in the press, alongside extended accounts of hunts. This was despite the fact that, from 1837, these former activities took place in the face of the criminal law. Legislation was introduced from that year to prevent wanton cruelty to animals in Ireland, which included some forms of blood sports.¹⁷ The rest of this paper will offer some reasons for the failure of the authorities to effectively suppress blood sports in the north of Ireland, and for the abject failure of the population there to reject them entirely.

The law

The first problem was undoubtedly the law itself. In 1835 a measure was put through Parliament in London that effectively outlawed the baiting or fighting of animals. Only two Irish Members of Parliament (MPs), out of more than a hundred, voted on the measure. One was a Liberal, the other a Repealer; both opposed the measure.¹⁸ As it transpired, they need not have been too concerned with the act’s immediate ramifications. It included the provision that fines levied on offenders should be divided between the prosecutors and the ‘overseers of the poor’. However, despite an early attempt to prosecute men in Dublin under the new act, it quickly became clear that the measure could not be applied in Ireland, as the country lacked a poor law, and, therefore, any overseers.¹⁹ It was then two years before a new bill was brought forward, to extend the 1835 act to Ireland. With the backing of the administration, it passed easily through Parliament, though an attempt to insert a clause to prevent dogs being used as draft animals was defeated.²⁰ Under its provisions, anyone convicted of keeping premises for the fighting or baiting of animals could be fined up to £5; prosecutions were required to take place within three months of the event. Ireland now enjoyed the same legal protection for its animals as that of England and Wales. In 1849 a new act replaced both those of 1835 and 1837.²¹ Just one Irish MP spoke regarding the new measure. This was in opposition to a clause that sought to make steeplechasing an offence. On this occasion the Irish interest was successful.²²

¹⁴ *Ulster Times*, 13 September 1836.

¹⁵ *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, 6 April 1836.

¹⁶ *BNL*, 23 June 1837.

¹⁷ Act of Parliament of the United Kingdom, 7 Will. IV and 1 Vict. c. 66 (1837). Stag and fox hunting, along with rabbit and hare coursing, remained legal practices.

¹⁸ 5 and 6 Will. IV c. 59 (1835); *Hansard’s parliamentary debates*, 3rd series (London, 1829–91) 29, col. 537–8.

¹⁹ *BNL*, 28 October 1836.

²⁰ 7 Will. IV and 1 Vict. c. 66 (1837); *Journals of the House of Commons* 92 (1837), 574–5, 579–80, 582, 592, 652 and 662; *Hansard*, 3rd series 38 (1837) col. 1761–2.

²¹ 12 and 13 Vict. c. 92 (1849).

²² *Journals of the House of Commons* 104 (1849), 535; *Times*, 24 July 1849.

The penalties and procedures for cases involving blood sports remained the same under the new legislation, though the law was extended in an attempt to prevent the infliction of pain on animals during slaughter and transport. Further consolidation of the law followed in 1854, and while dogs were now no longer to be used as beasts of burden, the situation regarding blood sports again remained unchanged. No Irish member of either House spoke on the bill.²³ Thus the laws governing the suppression of blood sports in Ireland were initially rather complex and confusing. Clarification of the law proceeded largely without any great input from Irish parliamentarians.²⁴ The omens were not good for the years to come.

The initial legislative failure in Ireland was followed, at some length, by further disappointments in the Irish courts. In 1861 the conviction of a man for allowing his premises to be used for cock-fighting was overturned on appeal because the place was not used 'regularly' for that activity, as was implied in the act.²⁵ By 1887 one legal authority in Ireland was noting that the 1849 act had 'given rise to no small difficulty' as its wording had 'the vagueness inherent in every-day conversation'.²⁶ These comments seem to have arisen following an attempted prosecution of more than 50 men for cock-fighting in Queen's County, modern-day Co. Laois. Defence counsel secured acquittals on the grounds that cocks were not defined as animals within the relevant legislation, and that the cruelty inflicted on the birds was actually performed by other birds, and not directly by the defendants.²⁷ Three years following the acquittal it was thought that the legal definition of 'cruelty', which was central to the acts, was 'ambiguous' and 'uncertain'.²⁸ The law was thus barely fit for its intended purpose.

Enforcement

If the law itself was a stumbling block in the suppression of blood sports, so too was its implementation. Enforcing the law against blood sports could be problematic. In a number of incidents it seems that witnesses were reluctant to testify against offenders, despite the enticement that they would receive half of any fines imposed. A case against a dozen men accused of cock-fighting collapsed in Fermanagh in 1861 when the key witness did not appear in court.²⁹ In 1887 the prosecution of a group of men in Co. Londonderry almost failed when the key prosecution witness appeared, but made a series of contradictory statements.³⁰ A case of dog-fighting was

²³ 17 and 18 Vict. c. 60 (1854); *Hansard* 3rd series 134, col. 639, 1075–1080 and 1429–1436.

²⁴ However, Richard Martin, an Irish MP, is remembered as the sponsor of the earliest British parliamentary measures aimed at protecting domestic animals from cruelty, and was a leading figure in the early animal protection movement. See Shevawn Lynam, *Humanity Dick: a biography of Richard Martin, MP 1754–1834* (London, 1975); A.W. Moss, *Valiant crusade: the history of the RSPCA* (London, 1961), 37–43.

²⁵ *Irish Common Law Reports* 12 (1862), 577–80.

²⁶ *Irish Law Times and Solicitors Journal* 21, No.1079 (October 1887), 536–8.

²⁷ *Leinster Leader*, 15 and 20 August 1887.

²⁸ *Irish Law Times and Solicitors Journal* 24, No.1238 (October 1890), 535–6.

²⁹ *Impartial Reporter and Fermanagh Farmer's Journal*, 14 February 1861.

³⁰ *Coleraine Chronicle and North of Ireland Advertiser*, 18 June 1887.

successfully prosecuted in Belfast in 1856 despite the fact that even the witnesses called by the prosecution ‘did all they could to prevent conviction’.³¹ An Englishman touring Ireland in the 1830s remarked that, even in cases of animal cruelty, informers were loathe to come forward for fear that their lives ‘would be of little worth’.³² Without witnesses, prosecutions were difficult to mount, and convictions were hard to secure.

The situation was not improved by the fact that the police do not seem to have made suppressing blood sports a priority. Over a three and a half year period in the 1860s members of the Belfast Borough Police force were instructed three times to deal with the excessive dropping of orange peel on the town’s pavements, and four times to monitor the numbering of houses in the town. The subjects of animal fighting and baiting, however, were never mentioned, though such activities were regularly reported in the local press.³³ From 1860 it was regarded as necessary by the Dublin administration to include in the Irish Constabulary’s standing orders a reminder to officers that any constable failing to act in cases of cruelty to animals, in any form, would ‘expose himself to punishment’.³⁴ The Belfast Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BSPCA) had, in 1854, sent a delegation to Dublin to wait on the Inspector General of the Irish Constabulary, with a view to receiving ‘more efficient assistance from that force, for carrying the law into effect, for the protection of animals’ (Pl. I). A little over a decade earlier, the Society, in an attempt to see greater efforts made to suppress animal cruelty in general, had come to an arrangement with the Belfast Commissioners of Police to clothe and pay a constable in order ‘to carry into effect their principles’.³⁵ It seems, therefore, that, as a rule, the police in Ireland were less than assiduous in acting against those involved in cruel acts against animals, including the fighting and baiting of animals. Yet, even when the police did act, success was far from certain. In 1906 in Co. Down, two Royal Irish Constabulary constables who attempted to break up a cock-fight and arrest those present were reportedly beaten unconscious by the crowd.³⁶ Some years earlier, further south in similar circumstances, the crowd was dispersed, but took the precaution of giving the constables present a series of false names (Pl. II).³⁷

³¹ *BNL*, 15 October 1856.

³² John Barrow, *A tour round Ireland, through the sea-coast counties, in the autumn of 1835* (London, 1836), 47–8.

³³ Police Service of Northern Ireland Museum (Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) Museum), Acc. No. 810/86, Belfast Borough Police daily order book, 1 July 1860–19 December 1863; Brian Griffin, *The Bulkies: police and crime in Belfast, 1800–1865* (Dublin, 1997), 104–8.

³⁴ *Standing rules and regulations for the government and guidance of the Constabulary Force of Ireland* (2nd edn, Dublin, 1860), 103.

³⁵ BSPCA, *The 20th annual report of the BSPCA together with a list of contributors, office-bearers, treasurer’s accounts etc* (Belfast, 1854), 6; PRONI, LA1/ADD, Belfast Town Police Committee minute book 9 December 1834–3 May 1842.

³⁶ *South Wales Daily News*, 23 April 1908.

³⁷ *Freeman’s Journal*, 27 June 1887. The author is exceedingly grateful to Dr Brian Griffin for this reference and many others included in this paper.

WANTED.

BELFAST SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION
OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

CONSTABLE WANTED; must be an active intelligent man, whose character will bear the strictest investigation; wages 20s a week.— Apply, by letter, enclosing copies of testimonials, to Honorary Secretaries, 14, High Street.

W. H. PATTERSON, } Hon.
ROBERT BOAG, } Secs.

24789

PL. I—The BSPCA advertised in 1889 for a ‘constable’. The title stems from the fact that until 1865 the Society paid the wages of a police constable in the Belfast Borough Police force on the understanding that he would devote most of his time to enforcing the laws against animal cruelty. The arrangement did not continue under the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC).

COCK-FIGHTING. — Yesterday morning, between two and three o’clock, Head-Constable Egan saw a number of men driving along the Shankill Road on an outside car in the direction of Ligoneil. They had some bags and hampers with them, and knowing them to be cock-fighters he suspected they were bound for some rendezvous to engage in their illegal and cruel pastime. He returned to the nearest police-station for assistance, and in company with Constable Mills, Constable Harve, and Sub-Constable Muloughney, drove in the direction in which they were going. On coming near Flush Hill, about a mile from Ligoneil, they saw a crowd of men and by stealing along by the ditches they came upon them unperceived. They found as they suspected that the men were engaged in cock-fighting. Some of them ran away, but the police were able to take the names of thirteen of the party and brought away two cocks, which were spurred and plucked for fighting.

PL. II—This report, from the *Belfast News-Letter* of 8 June 1868, of police acting against cock-fighters on the outskirts of the city was probably untypical, as it suggests that officers were keen to suppress blood sports, and were assiduous in attending to their duties in this direction.

Moreover, even when offenders were eventually brought to court, and convictions secured, the Irish magistracy seems to have been reluctant to impose sentences that unleashed the full severity of the law. In Limavady, Co. Londonderry, 27 men found themselves before the bench accused of attending a cock-fight in June 1887. However, the justices 'were disposed to take a lenient view of the offence' and imposed on most a fine of just 2s 6d.³⁸ Although the sentences were seen as 'ridiculously trifling' and 'an encouragement to the half-civilised', they were subsequently repeated at further proceedings.³⁹ In 1871 a dozen men accused of cock-fighting in the Glens of Antrim were acquitted on a technicality at the Cushendall petty sessions court by a magistrate who reportedly saw no real objection to the pastime beyond the fact that such events 'were not generally frequented by good characters'.⁴⁰ Back in Co. Londonderry, the magistrates in Magherafelt chose to inflict only 'small penalties' on 21 men convicted of cock-fighting in 1881 'on the understanding that the practice of cockfighting was to be discontinued'.⁴¹ Even observers who had welcomed innovations in the law withheld their full support for its implementation. The *Belfast News-Letter*, which had actively promoted the extension of the 1835 act to Ireland, argued in the wake of the first prosecution for dog-fighting in the city that rather than the imposition of a fine 'a few words of admonition from the bench' might best serve the purpose.⁴² Even when comparatively severe sentences were imposed, their impact may have been limited. In 1844 a Belfast man fined £2 for keeping a cockpit boasted that he had made £35 from renting out the venue to bird-owners.⁴³ Sometimes the acquiescence of those involved in the law went rather further than simply expressing a misplaced sympathy, or even turning a blind eye. As late as 1886 rumours spread through the Ulster press of an incident in Monaghan, in which a local sessions-house was used to stage a series of cock-fights. The implication was that this occurred with the tacit agreement of the local magistracy.⁴⁴

Finally, the implementation of the law was affected by the geography of the country. In 1859 the annual report of the BSPCA rather optimistically reported that animal-fighting was 'now almost banished from Belfast and its neighbourhood'.⁴⁵ In part, this was due to the relative activity of the police, and changing public opinions. It may also have been crucial that Belfast was a growing urban centre, in which the population lived in often uncomfortably close proximity to each other, their social and moral superiors, and the authorities. In rural Ulster, however, there were

³⁸ *Londonderry Sentinel*, 16 June 1887.

³⁹ *Londonderry Standard*, 17, 20 and 29 June 1887.

⁴⁰ *Northern Whig*, 22 July 1871.

⁴¹ *Coleraine Constitution*, 6 August 1881.

⁴² *BNL*, 12 October 1838.

⁴³ *BNL*, 16 April 1844.

⁴⁴ *Belfast Morning News*, 15 June 1886; Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (USPCA), *Minute book of the Belfast [later Ulster] Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals* (Belfast, 6 January 1864 to 10 February 1898), entry for 22 June 1886.

⁴⁵ BSPCA, *The twenty third annual report of the BSPCA together with a list of contributors, office-bearers, treasurer's accounts etc, Feb 1859* (Belfast, 1859), 9.

numerous isolated and inaccessible venues that could be utilised for blood sports. In South Armagh, Camlough Mountain staged a series of cock-fighting meetings in the 1880s.⁴⁶ Near Newry in Co. Down, an isolated hilltop known as the 'Eagle's Nest' was pressed into use by both the cock- and dog-fighting fraternities.⁴⁷ The Sperrin Mountains of Co. Tyrone were allegedly the home of a widespread gang of cock-fighting aficionados.⁴⁸ By 1861 reports were made of Belfast men travelling to rural Down to fight cocks on the 13 July.⁴⁹ Rural Ulster provided a myriad of such places, where, away from the prying eyes of the law, nefarious activities could continue uninterrupted.

The ability of blood sports enthusiasts to gather what seems to have been relatively large crowds, often estimated as in their hundreds, at isolated venues, hints at two further possible reasons for the failure of their complete suppression in Victorian Ulster. Firstly, it seems that the blood-sports fraternity was surprisingly well-organised. In the 1840s it was alleged that teams of cocks representing Belfast and Dublin had met near Belfast, with a 'pavilion' even being erected for the occasion.⁵⁰ In 1889 it was reported that teams of cocks from counties Armagh and Down met 'as usual on Easter Monday' near Newry, despite a large police presence.⁵¹ The fact that fighting cocks were often noted as being fitted with purpose-made metal spurs also suggests a considerable level of premeditation.⁵² Secondly, the simple fact that cock-fighting and dog-fighting attracted large crowds is evidence in itself that these sports were popular. In short, blood sports and cruelty to animals in general continued to have mass appeal. Those involved were not all from the working classes, but included 'some who were well-dressed, and evidently not of the lowest order'.⁵³ In 1862 John Wiley, a town missionary in Belfast, was successfully prosecuted for cruelty to a dog by running it through with a pitchfork and then disembowelling it while it was still breathing.⁵⁴ The following year, a former policeman was observed letting out a badger 'at twopence a turn' for it to be baited by dogs.⁵⁵ A 'market constable', employed to keep order in the town's markets, had already been fined 10s for helping to stage a cock-fight in a yard in the town.⁵⁶ In 1854 the annual general meeting of the BSPCA heard that cock-fighting was 'abetted by those whose influence in society enabled them to employ means for the keeping secret of the matter'.⁵⁷ Those who sought to discourage blood sports, and cruelty to animals in general, had failed to reach a substantial part of the community (Fig. 1).

⁴⁶ *Armagh Guardian*, 22 March 1889.

⁴⁷ *Newry Reporter*, 13 July 1889.

⁴⁸ *Tyrone Constitution*, 24 June 1870.

⁴⁹ *BNL*, 5 August 1861.

⁵⁰ *BNL*, 13 April 1847 and 14 April 1848.

⁵¹ *Newry Telegraph*, 23 April 1889.

⁵² See, for example, *Ballymena Observer*, 13 June 1868.

⁵³ *BNL*, 6 October 1860.

⁵⁴ *BNL*, 21 June 1862.

⁵⁵ *BNL*, 25 March 1863.

⁵⁶ *BNL*, 4 June 1852.

⁵⁷ *BNL*, 5 April 1854.

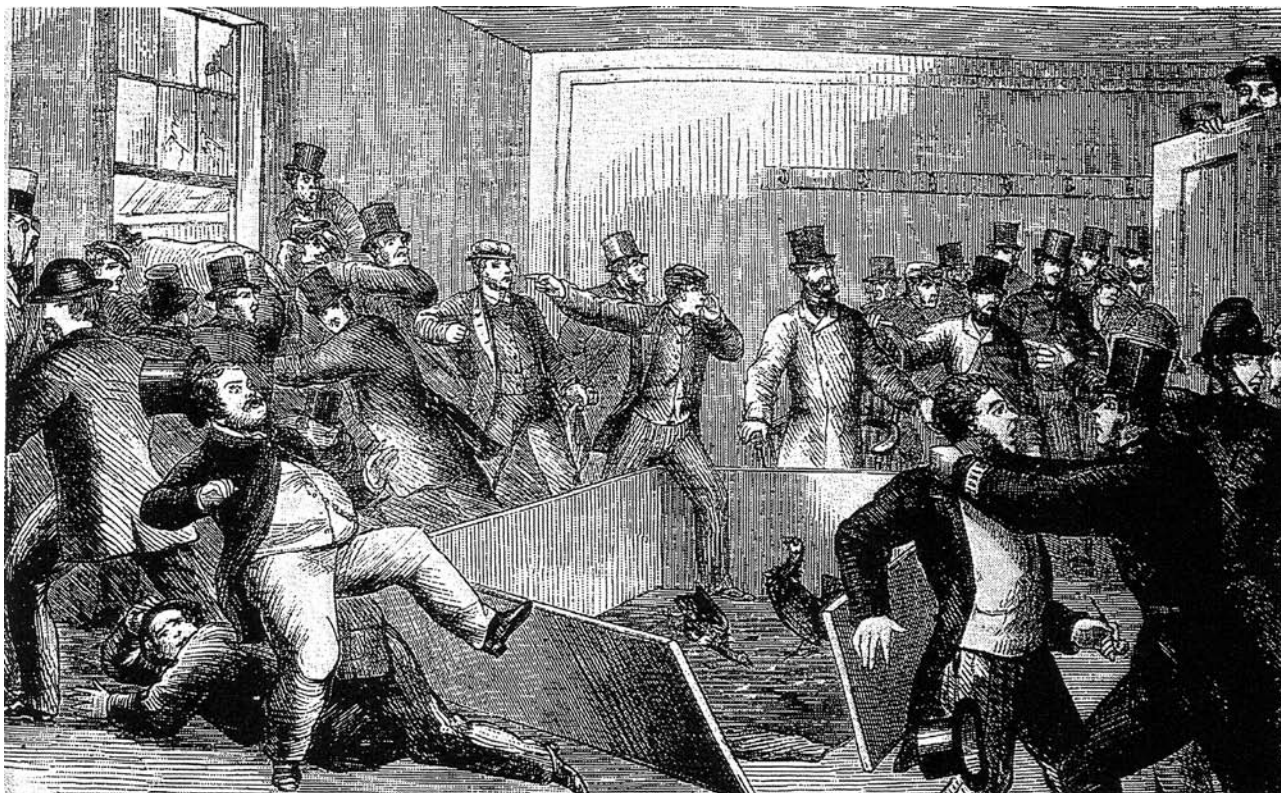


FIG. 1—Although this illustration, from the *Illustrated London News* of 4 June 1864, shows police disrupting a cock-fight in London in the 1860s, the socially mixed nature of those attending was mirrored in Ireland.

Persuasion

The methods employed to dissuade the population from supporting blood sports, and from indulging in cruelty to animals in general, were various. The initial moves came through the medium of the sermon, one of which, given by Reverend Josias Wilson in 1838, went to at least three editions in its printed form. He condemned hunting as ‘repulsive to the spirit of Christianity’.⁵⁸ The sermon eventually became a regular occurrence, with various clergymen preaching on the subject (Pl. III).⁵⁹ However, the sermon’s utility may have had rather more to do with raising funds than in disseminating ideology. The efficacy of such efforts in imparting moral messages to those most in need of them is debatable.⁶⁰ To a large extent this may simply have been the perfect example of preaching to the converted.

⁵⁸ Josias Wilson, *The sin of cruelty to animals proved from the scriptures: with an appendix, containing extracts from the reports of the London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; and a summary of the Acts of Parliament on the subject* (3rd edn, Belfast, 1838), 6. A shorter version of this sermon seems to have been published anonymously in 1836 (*The sin of cruelty to animals* (Belfast, 1836)).

⁵⁹ See, for example, *BNL*, 5 December 1857.

⁶⁰ On the sermon as a means of communication in this period see, J.N.I. Dickson, ‘More than discourse: the sermons of evangelical Protestants in nineteenth-century Ulster’, unpublished PhD thesis, Queen’s University Belfast, 2000.

SERMON ON KINDNESS TO ANIMALS,
BELFAST SOCIETY FOR PREVENTION OF
CRUELTY TO ANIMALS.

BY SPECIAL REQUEST THE REV. R. J.
LYND has kindly consented to RE-
DELIVER, in ELMWOOD CHURCH, on next
SABBATH EVENING, 4th April, at Seven
o'clock, the SERMON Preached by him in
December last.

A Collection in aid of this useful Society, whose
operations are much restricted by want of funds,
will be taken up, and the attendance and aid of all
interested is earnestly requested.

(By order of Committee)

4115 W. H. PATTERSON, } Hon.
ROBERT BOAG, } Secs.

PL. III—The 1880 advertisement for a sermon in support of the BSPCA notes that ‘want of funds’ was hampering the Society’s work. This included opposition to blood sports such as cock-fighting and badger-baiting, but also stag- and fox-hunting.

A rather more practical innovation came in 1836, when a group of Belfast philanthropists formed the BSPCA. It was seen as an offshoot of the London SPCA, and attracted some who had been active in the anti-slavery movement in Belfast, and a number of evangelical clergymen.⁶¹ This organisation set about mounting a concerted and pragmatic campaign against blood sports and animal cruelty in general. In 1837 it petitioned Parliament for the extension of the 1835 act to Ireland, implying that it was ready to see blood sports criminalised, and the effective prosecution and punishment of offenders.⁶² This attitude found other outlets. From 1841 the BSPCA paid the wages of an additional constable in the Belfast Borough Police force, on the understanding that he would spend the majority of his time acting against animal cruelty and blood sports.⁶³ This apparently unique development continued, to the satisfaction of all those concerned, until the disbandment of the force in 1865. An approach to the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) to continue the practice was rejected however (see Pl. I).⁶⁴ Eventually, the Society opted to present medals, in gold, silver and bronze, to policemen who were active in suppressing blood sports and animal cruelty, with five silver medals

⁶¹ Florence Moore Holmes, *The Tree: the centenary history of the Ulster society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals* (Belfast, 1936), 1–4.

⁶² *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, 14 January 1837.

⁶³ *BNL*, 20 April 1841.

⁶⁴ USPCA, *Minute book*, entries for 5 September and 10 December 1865.



Pl. IVa—Medallion awarded by the BSPCA to Sergeant William McCabe RIC, Clones in 1905 for ‘humanity to animals’; b—Reverse of medal showing the arms of the city of Belfast. Photographs courtesy of the PSNI Museum. Medals like this were struck in gold, silver and bronze for the BSPCA to reward police officers who acted to support the laws against cruelty to animals. It was hoped that this would encourage greater police activity in preventing cruelty to animals.⁶⁵

being awarded to members of the RIC in the year to March 1869 (Pl. IV).⁶⁶ The Society already arranged for a solicitor to prosecute cases on their behalf at petty and quarter sessions around Ulster, travelling as far as Ballymoney in north Co. Antrim by 1860.⁶⁷

However, it would be unfair and unrealistic to see the BSPCA as a wholly repressive organisation. At the annual general meeting of the BSPCA in February 1858, a committee member noted that the Society aimed ‘to educate—to train the public mind’ rather than to simply impose its will.⁶⁸ For some time it had been publishing tracts for free distribution, and arranging public lectures on the evils of cruelty.⁶⁹ It also eventually established a children’s essay competition, which ran through the city’s schools; and offered libraries, and other public bodies, free copies of improving literature that it imported from Britain.⁷⁰ The BSPCA sought to prevent animal cruelty and certain blood sports in particular, by supporting processes to criminalise offenders, and to educate and instruct the population.

⁶⁵ The author would like to acknowledge with thanks the help of Hugh Forrester, Curator of the PSNI Museum, in obtaining these photographs.

⁶⁶ BSPCA, *The 33rd annual report of the BSPCA together with a list of contributors, office-bearers, treasurer’s accounts etc* (Belfast, 1869), 11.

⁶⁷ BSPCA, *The 24th annual report of the BSPCA together with a list of contributors, office-bearers, treasurer’s accounts etc* (Belfast, 1860), 10.

⁶⁸ *Northern Whig*, 12 February 1858.

⁶⁹ See, for example, *Northern Whig*, 20 April 1841.

⁷⁰ USPCA, *Minute book*, entries for 15 January 1868, 11 January 1869 and 2 March 1876. However, the introduction of payments by results eventually discouraged schoolmasters from taking part in these competitions (see the evidence of the headmaster of Ballymacarett Road National School, Belfast in *Vice-regal committee of enquiry into primary education (Ireland) 1913: appendix to the third report of the committee*, House of Commons papers, 1914 [7480], vol. 27, 24).

Apart from the BSPCA, similar attempts were made to wean the Ulster population off blood sports. The Reverend Anthony McIntyre, a Unitarian missionary in Belfast, included in his evening classes for children ‘a chapter on kindness to animals’, while he also lectured on the same topic to adults.⁷¹ Robert Patterson, the Vice-President of the Belfast Natural History Society pleaded in November 1840 that natural history lessons should be compulsory in schools, in part with the hope that they would generate a ‘habitual tenderness ... towards the inferior animals’.⁷² By 1847 *The Belfast People’s Magazine*, published by the town’s Working Classes Association for the Promotion of General Improvement, argued that cock-fighting was now ‘confined to the very dregs of society’ as reputable men moved towards more rational entertainments.⁷³ Diverting men away from such irrational pastimes as cock-fighting by providing more rational and congenial leisure activities had been tried for some time. By the 1820s this had allegedly been successful in the Co. Antrim town of Doagh, when it was suggested that the establishment of a reading room had led to the ‘barbarous practice of cock-fighting’ being ‘entirely given up’.⁷⁴ Calls were made in Belfast in the 1850s and 1860s for public parks to be established to encourage the town’s population to abandon less reputable forms of leisure in favour of ‘healthful outdoor activities’.⁷⁵

However, despite the best efforts of their opponents, blood sports survived and even prospered in Ulster. In 1882 the BSPCA secured 65 convictions for cock-fighting, and it was subsequently reported in the Society’s annual report that this ‘barbarous sport...[is] on the increase in some districts’.⁷⁶

Attitudes

This survival of blood sports in Ulster, and on a comparatively organised and widespread scale, hints at more deep-seated reasons for their persistence than simply inefficient policing. Similarly, the legal and practical impediments to reform were considerable, but not insurmountable. Rather more worrying than the availability of isolated venues or imprecision in the law, were the apparent acquiescence of magistrates in such activities, and the seeming reluctance of the police to deal with such offences. The law was being broken, and punishments were being evaded. It may be

⁷¹ PRONI, D/1558/2/3, Diary of Reverend Anthony McIntyre’s visits to the poor of Belfast, 1853–6, 191 and 270.

⁷² Robert Patterson, *On the study of natural history, as a branch of general education in schools and colleges* (Belfast, 1840), 16. On Patterson, see Belfast Literary Society, *Belfast Literary Society 1801–1901: historical sketch with memoirs of some distinguished members* (Belfast, 1902), 85–7.

⁷³ *Belfast People’s Magazine* 1, No.9 (September 1847), 198.

⁷⁴ A. Atkinson. *Ireland exhibited to England, in a political and moral survey of her population* (2 vols, London, 1823), vol. 2, 214–5.

⁷⁵ James Thomson, *On public parks in connection with large towns, with a suggestion for the formation of a park in Belfast* (Belfast, 1852), 2; William O’Hanlon, *Walks among the poor of Belfast, and suggestions for their improvement* (Belfast, 1853), 22–3, 83–8; *BNL*, 10 November 1855; *Ulster Observer*, 30 January 1864.

⁷⁶ BSPCA, *The 46th annual report of the BSPCA together with a list of contributors, office-bearers, treasurer’s accounts etc* (Belfast, 1882), 6.

that four contributory factors were important in creating an environment in which such attitudes and conduct could be common.

Firstly, in England, members of the Methodist movement were in the vanguard of the struggle against blood sports, on the twin grounds that such practices were both irrational and degrading, and associated with sinful activities such as gambling and drinking.⁷⁷ Other evangelical Protestants shared their aims, usually attacking blood sports and their associated sins of drinking and debauchery as part of a wider attempt to reform the morals of the people (Pl. V).⁷⁸ Although the Methodist heartland in Ireland was in south Ulster, the role Methodism played here was rather different to that in England. Numbers attending meetings remained limited, the evangelical spirit receded as the nineteenth century progressed, and, in the words of David Hempton, the movement's leading historian, the 'mission to the disreputable gradually gave way to recruitment from the respectable'.⁷⁹ Thus the reforming effects of the Methodist movement in Ireland were limited. Instead it fell to evangelical Presbyterians to perform the role of the Nonconformist conscience. Men such as the Reverend Josias Wilson, who preached against cruelty on at least a dozen occasions in the 1840s, led the way.⁸⁰ Like most charities in nineteenth-century Belfast, the BSPCA was dominated by Protestants, with Presbyterians forming the most prominent group among them.⁸¹ This occurred at a time of growing religious tensions in the north of Ireland. Across Ulster, the first-half of the nineteenth century saw increasing competition for employment and land, which led to a further hardening of existing sectarian divisions, while increasing Catholic migration to Belfast transferred rural rivalries to an urban setting.⁸² The 'Second Reformation' saw Protestant efforts to convert the Catholic population promote further deteriorations in the relationships between the religious factions.⁸³ The association of evangelical Protestant interests

⁷⁷ J.G. Rule, 'Methodism, popular beliefs and village culture in Cornwall, 1800–1850' in R.D. Storch (ed.), *Popular culture and custom in nineteenth-century England* (London, 1982), 28–52; Robert W. Malcolmson, *Popular recreations in English society 1700–1850* (Cambridge, 1973), 106–7 and 158–9; Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: a modern history* (Oxford, 1989), 33.

⁷⁸ James Walvin, *Leisure and society 1830–1950* (London, 1978), 22–46; Peter Bailey, *Leisure and class in Victorian England: rational recreation and the contest for control, 1830–1885* (London, 1978), 17–19; Neil Tranter, *Sport, economy and society in Britain 1750–1914* (Cambridge, 1998), 4.

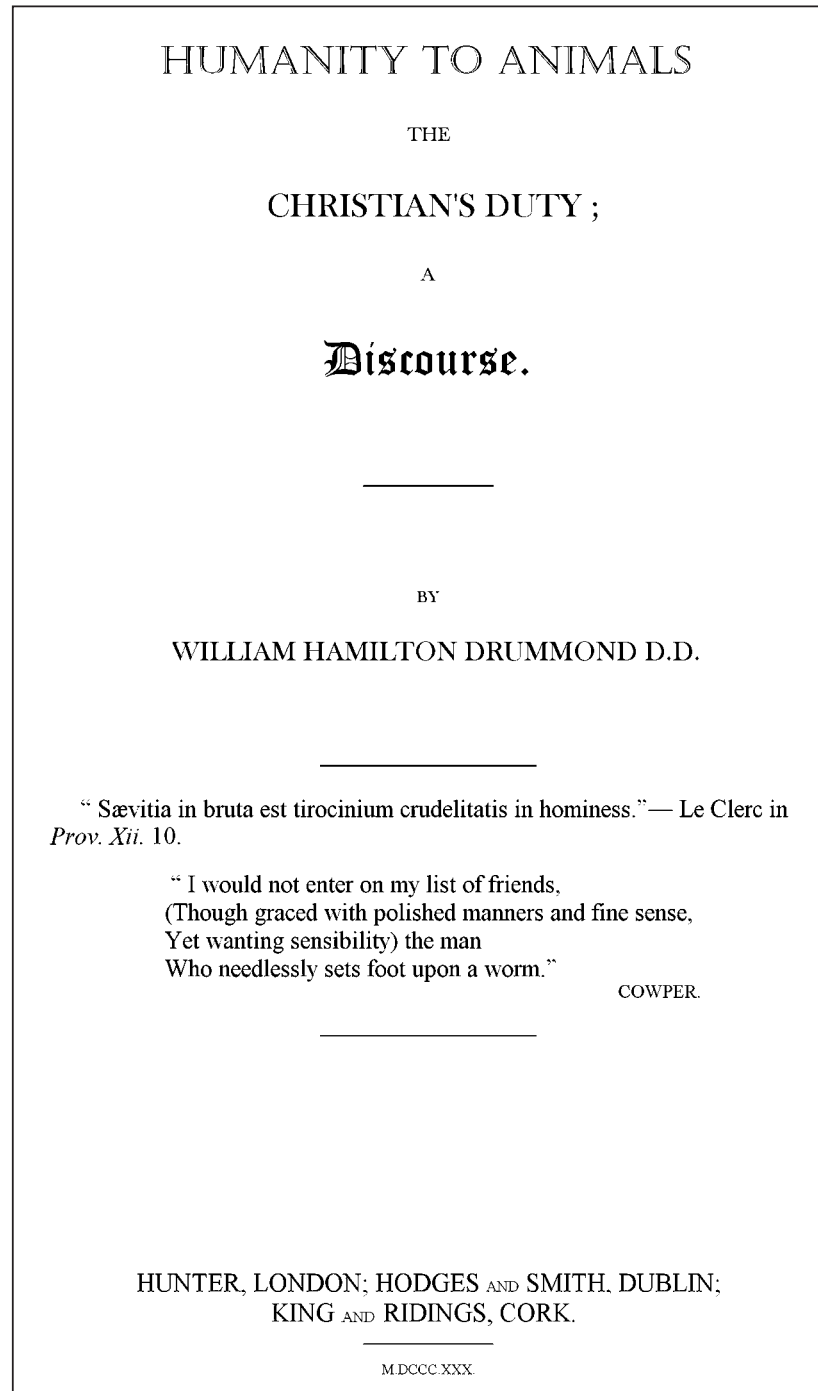
⁷⁹ David Hempton, *The religion of the people: Methodism and popular religion c. 1750–1900* (London, 1996), 35–45.

⁸⁰ See, for example, *BNL*, 24 August and 7 September 1841, 30 June and 7 July 1843.

⁸¹ Alison Jordan, *Who cared? Charity in Victorian and Edwardian Belfast* (Belfast, 1993), 191–8.

⁸² On Ulster see Frank Wright, *Two lands on one soil: Ulster politics before Home Rule* (Dublin, 1996) and Brian M. Walker, *Ulster politics: the formative years, 1868–1886* (Belfast, 1989). For Belfast see Ian Budge and Cornelius O'Leary, *Belfast: approach to crisis. A study of Belfast politics, 1613–1970* (London, 1973), 14–102; A.C. Hepburn, *A past apart: studies in the history of Catholic Belfast 1850–1950* (Belfast, 1996); Catherine Hirst, *Religion, violence and politics in nineteenth-century Belfast: the Pound and Sandy Row* (Dublin, 2002).

⁸³ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland 1800–1870* (Dublin, 1978).



PL. V—The title page of Larne-borne Reverend William Hamilton Drummond’s *Humanity to Animals the Christian’s Duty* (1830). It saw cruelty to animals in any form, particularly the use of their suffering for amusement, as an unchristian act.

with opposition to blood sports may have given the entire movement a perceived sectarian edge.⁸⁴ Certainly men who supported the BSPCA indulged in activities that may have made them less than admired by the Catholic community. For example, the summer of 1857 saw a series of sectarian riots erupt in Belfast following street-preaching by Protestant evangelists.⁸⁵ At the centre of events was the clergyman, persistent preacher against cruelty to animals, and eventual BSPCA member, the Reverend William MacIlwaine. The inquiry into the riots reported MacIlwaine to be ‘known as a controversial preacher, and a denouncer of Popery’ prone to using ‘language not unnaturally considered offensive by the Roman Catholic people’.⁸⁶ Of the 61 clergy and laity who formed the Belfast Parochial Mission under whose auspices MacIlwaine had preached, almost a third were involved with the BSPCA as committee members or officers. Renewed rioting in September of that year brought forward a satirical verse in *Punch* that named six Belfast men in particular for awakening ‘sleeping party hates’; four were BSPCA members.⁸⁷ Given these connections, it is at least possible that, as a result, the movement against blood sports was largely ignored or opposed by the Catholic population in the city. Certainly, in later years, Protestant observers in Ireland and elsewhere argued that Catholic theology did not support the humane treatment of animals. In 1834 an Irish Protestant writer alleged that Catholicism promoted a moral code that degraded its adherents ‘below the common level of humanity’, making them capable of ‘ferocious cruelty and bloodshed’.⁸⁸ One Ulster Protestant clergyman later went as far as to suggest that ‘Rome, Papal’ could be compared unfavourably with ‘Rome, Pagan’ regarding the treatment of animals.⁸⁹ An elderly Belfast resident recalled that, in the 1820s the majority of animal-baiting and -fighting took place in the city’s Millfield, Carrick Hill and Pound areas, all of which were predominantly Catholic districts.⁹⁰ Although suggestions that

⁸⁴ For allegations of sectarian attitudes in the Dublin SPCA, see *Freeman’s Journal*, 12 February 1877.

⁸⁵ Andrew Boyd, *Holy war in Belfast* (Belfast, 1987), 34–44; Janice Holmes, ‘The role of open-air preaching in the Belfast riots of 1857’, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 102C (2002), 47–66.

⁸⁶ *Report, minutes of evidence and appendices of the Commission of Inquiry into the origin and character of riots in Belfast, July and September 1857*, House of Commons papers, 1857–8 [2309], vol. 26, 12, 11.

⁸⁷ Mission members are listed at *Commission of Inquiry*, 256. *Punch*, 26 September 1857. Officers and committee members of the BSPCA have been extracted from the printed annual reports of the Society from 1859.

⁸⁸ ‘On the Roman Catholic religion in Ireland’, *Dublin University Magazine* 4 (September 1834) 315–22: 318 and 319.

⁸⁹ David Magill, *A sermon on behalf of the Belfast Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, preached at the request of the Society in St Enoch’s Church, Belfast on 22 February 1874* (Belfast, 1874), 17. Demand was such that the sermon was given again, two months later, in another Belfast church.

⁹⁰ Thomas Gaffikin, *Belfast fifty years ago* (3rd edn, Belfast, 1894), 50. This pamphlet was the text of a lecture given to the Belfast Working Men’s Institute in April 1875. It was first published in 1875 and has been reprinted many times. Gaffikin, a member of a family of linen merchants, had been, at one stage, a market inspector in Belfast, and had at least once

Catholicism was indifferent to the plight of the animal population were refuted by the Catholic Church itself, Catholic teaching on the treatment of the ‘lower animals’ was confusing. Writing in the 1890s two Catholic fellows of the Royal University of Ireland suggested that while it was ‘never lawful for a man to take pleasure directly in the pain given to brutes’, man had ‘the same right over them that he has over plants or stones’. Thus it was arguably acceptable to ‘to put them to death or to inflict pain on them, for any good or reasonable end ... or even for the purposes of recreation’.⁹¹ On at least one occasion, a parish priest was willing to stand in court and argue the case of his parishioners charged with fighting cocks.⁹² Sectarianism and religious teachings may thus have entered even into the animal world in Ulster.

Secondly, it may be important that Ulster had differing demographic and economic bases to those of other areas of the United Kingdom. Although Belfast grew immensely as an urban centre in the nineteenth century, Ulster, as a province, remained overwhelmingly a rural society. Even by 1881 less than a quarter of the province’s population lived in settlements of 2,000 or more inhabitants.⁹³ For some, the growth of attempts at controlling popular pastimes, of which sports such as cock-fighting and animal-baiting were part, were intimately linked to growing urbanisation. The growth of towns, in which all classes were confined cheek by jowl, and in which conflicts over space were recurrent and often bitter, led to demands for ‘discipline, [being] vigorously and repeatedly asserted’.⁹⁴ Throughout much of Ulster, such developments were limited. Most of the population remained resident in small settlements or relatively isolated rural dwellings. The competition for space, at least with regard to popular pastimes, was yet to come.

Thirdly, a series of articles and papers produced in the 1980s concerned with the growth of humanitarian views in nineteenth-century Britain and America, have argued that the growth of capitalism and a market economy helped promote apparently compassionate and charitable views. Rational treatment of men, and animals,

prosecuted a man for the cruel treatment of ducks (see *BNL*, 25 July 1853). He was also an active BSPCA member, and a member of Belfast Corporation. On the Catholic nature of these areas by the time of Gaffikin’s lecture, see Sybil E. Baker, ‘Orange and Green: Belfast 1832–1912’, in H.J. Dyos and M. Wolff (eds), *The Victorian city: image and reality* (2 vols, London, 1973), vol. 2, 789–814.

⁹¹ William E. Addis and Thomas Arnold, *A Catholic dictionary containing some account of the doctrine, discipline, rites, ceremonies, councils, and religious orders of the Catholic Church* (London, 1883), 30–1. The author is extremely grateful to Professor Terry O’Keeffe for his help on this matter.

⁹² *Ballymena Observer*, 13 May 1871. The priest in question also possibly accused the prosecuting counsel of acting with a sectarian motivation. The five accused were convicted and fined.

⁹³ W.E. Vaughan and A.J. Fitzpatrick (eds), *Irish historical statistics: population, 1821–1971* (Dublin, 1978), 36–9.

⁹⁴ Malcolmson, *Popular recreations*, 161; Bailey, *Leisure and class*, 18–34; James Turner, *Reckoning with the beast: animals, pain and humanity in the Victorian mind* (Baltimore, 1980), 25–9. For a partial reassessment see Emma Griffin, *England’s revelry: a history of popular sports and pastimes, 1660–1830* (Oxford, 2005), 243–54.

was the result of striving for efficiency and market dominance. The extended networks that modernised trade generated also created wider feelings of responsibility, sympathy and guilt regarding the fate of others. Cruelty to animals in general was counter-productive, and was less likely to be tolerated by a modernising consumer society.⁹⁵ Here, too, it is perhaps the case that the north of Ireland lagged behind much of Britain. Outside of Belfast and the Lagan Valley, Ulster remained, like the rest of Ireland, ‘predominantly rural’ and ‘the small family farm ... dominated the rural economy’.⁹⁶ Ireland as a whole remained a comparatively poor society, with Irish Gross Domestic Product probably no more than 60% of the British level during the second-half of the nineteenth century.⁹⁷ Just as there was a relative lack of conflict over space for these activities, so there may have been a lack of an underlying economic motivation for the growth of humanitarian values and sympathy towards animals.

Finally, the failure of large sections of the Irish population to abandon blood sports despite their outlawing may hint at a wider problem in Irish society. The extent to which the rule of law was accepted as legitimate by the populace in nineteenth-century Ireland has been a subject of some debate amongst historians. Oliver MacDonagh argued simply that ‘the legal system of the state was distrusted and abhorred’ by the majority of the population, while Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh suggests that ‘the mass of people had no trust in a system from which all members of their own creed were excluded’.⁹⁸ Marianne Elliott has suggested that, as the nineteenth century opened, ‘Catholics felt they could expect little from the law’ in Ulster.⁹⁹ F.S.L. Lyons remarked merely that the extension of central government control over the lower courts in the nineteenth century acted as ‘a form of security both for the Ascendancy class and for the Union itself’, while K.T. Hoppen suggests that ‘magistrates used quarter sessions as much for tribal solidarity as for law enforcement’.¹⁰⁰ It is not difficult to find contemporary assertions that the majority of the population felt alienated from the legal process. In 1823 an article in the *Dublin and London Magazine* noted that ‘the once well-founded notion of there being no justice for a Catholic has become hereditary; and its consequence is obvious in an open disrespect

⁹⁵ Thomas L. Haskell, ‘Capitalism and the origins of the humanitarian sensibility’, *American Historical Review* 90 (1985), 339–61 and 547–66. For criticism of this argument see John Ashworth, ‘The relationship between capitalism and humanitarianism’, and David Brion Davis, ‘The perils of doing history by ahistorical abstraction’, in Thomas Bender (ed.), *The anti-slavery debate: capitalism and abolitionism as a problem in historical interpretation* (Berkeley, 1992), 290–309 and 180–99.

⁹⁶ Philip Ollerenshaw, ‘Industry, 1820–1914’, and Liam Kennedy, ‘The rural economy, 1820–1914’, in Liam Kennedy and Philip Ollerenshaw (eds), *An economic history of Ulster, 1820–1939* (Manchester, 1985), 62–108 and 1–61: 1 and 62.

⁹⁷ Frank Geary and Tom Stark, ‘Examining Ireland’s post-Famine economic growth performance’, *Economic Journal* 112 (2002), 902–28: 927.

⁹⁸ Oliver MacDonagh, *States of mind: a study of Anglo-Irish conflict, 1780–1980* (London, 1983), 41; Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, *Ireland before the Famine 1798–1848* (Dublin, 1972), 87.

⁹⁹ Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster: a history* (London, 2000), 225.

¹⁰⁰ F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine* (London, 1973), 75; K.T. Hoppen, *Elections, politics and society in Ireland 1832–1885* (Oxford, 1984), 119.

for the legal institutions of the country'.¹⁰¹ The Catholic poet, Thomas Moore, put the same ideas more lyrically by suggesting:

That, as to laws made for the good of the many,
We humbly suggest there is nothing less true;
As all human laws (and our own, more than any)
Are made *by* and *for* a particular few.¹⁰²

However, some recent commentators have pointed to the widespread participation of the population in the legal system, as prosecutors, plaintiffs and witnesses, as indicating some level of acceptance of the law as at least useful, if not completely legitimate.¹⁰³ The latest assessment of the situation, based on a study of the petty sessions courts in pre-Famine Galway, argues, however, that the situation was perhaps more complex. While the use of the law was open to almost all, and it was a weapon taken up with some enthusiasm by many, its use always had to be balanced against notions of popular justice and community beliefs. Thus the courts provided a venue for 'an on-going negotiation between popular belief and official regulation'.¹⁰⁴ This seems to be a particularly astute observation. Although many used the courts in attempts to ameliorate their grievances, where the law came into conflict with popular practices, established rituals, and existing cultural norms, it was widely ignored, obstructed and opposed. However, whether the law was seen as legitimate may have had less to do with religious or political denomination and attitudes to the legislature or the constitutional position, than it did with the wider cultural standpoint of the members of Irish society. If the law actually came to coincide with popular tastes, acceptable manners and cultural mores, it was legitimised by the actions of individuals. Where it did not, it was rejected as irrelevant and perhaps illegitimate. Cultural values of this sort were as much a creation of socio-economic class as they were of religious or political affiliation. In Ireland, manners could be disseminated down the social structure, from the elites to the middle classes, largely regardless of religion. Prior to the Great Famine, the temperance crusade of Father Theobald Mathew demonstrated the modernising manners and social ambition of the Catholic middle classes. This was further indicated by the founding of institutions, such as the Catholic Young Men's Society (CYMS)

¹⁰¹ *Dublin and London Magazine* 1, No.9 (November 1823), 419.

¹⁰² Thomas Moore, *The poetical works of Thomas Moore* (Apollo edn, London, 1897), 342. The poem, entitled 'The petition of the Orangemen of Ireland', was written in 1825. See also Robert Bell, *A description of the conditions and manners as well as of the moral and political character, education etc of the peasantry of Ireland* (London, 1804), 32.

¹⁰³ Desmond McCabe, 'Law, conflict and social order: County Mayo, 1820–45', unpublished PhD thesis, University College Dublin, 1991, 429–60. See also Neal Garnham, *The courts, crime and the criminal law in Ireland 1692–1760* (Dublin, 1996), 256–80.

¹⁰⁴ Richard McMahon, 'The court of petty sessions and society in pre-Famine Galway', in Raymond Gillespie (ed.), *The remaking of modern Ireland 1750–1950* (Dublin, 2004), 101–37: 129.

in 1849, which demonstrated the willingness of the genteel Catholic Irish to both adopt and encourage new modes of behaviour, and to imitate the institutions and share the manners of their Protestant bourgeois brethren.¹⁰⁵ Through the nineteenth century, the lower-middle class in Ireland, irrespective of its religious denomination, acquired common 'puritanical mores'.¹⁰⁶ The laws against the abuse of animals and the pursuit of blood sports in Ireland ran counter to the established beliefs and practices of many, if not the majority of the population in nineteenth-century Ireland. The somewhat predictable result may have been a widespread rejection of such laws.

Conclusions

The survival of illegal blood sports in Victorian Ulster must, to some extent, indicate a rejection of the law by a proportion of the community. However, this should not lead historians directly to a perception of the law as some illegitimate or alien code, imposed and enforced by a proto-colonial regime that was politically and culturally isolated from the majority of the population. Rather, in this case, as in many others, the law may be seen as a mechanism for attempting to inculcate the moral values of a modernising, expanding and upwardly-mobile middle class in a society that was for the most part socially and economically unready to offer a receptive audience for them. The widespread survival of blood sports in Victorian Ulster was perhaps guaranteed by the province's comparative lack of economic and demographic growth, and thus its social retardation. Simultaneously, it may be that the north of Ireland exhibited the cultural lags that are common in a peripheral region distant from the metropolitan core. Modes of behaviour took their time to be disseminated to the provinces. However, in this case, the north of Ireland seems to have been lagging even behind the equally distant areas of the Scottish midlands and rural Northumberland.¹⁰⁷ Underlying this Irish cultural lethargy may have been more profound differences in circumstances than mere geographical distance. Sectarian tensions may have been played out in yet another arena. The population of Ulster may simply have remained too familiar with animals, and been too accustomed to their usage and suffering, to care about their fate. The failure of Ireland to develop a widespread modern market economy may have played its role in preventing the growth of humanitarian values. Alienation from the state and its organs

¹⁰⁵ H.F. Kearney, 'Father Mathew: apostle of modernisation' in Art Cosgrave and Donal McCartney (eds), *Studies in Irish history presented to R. Dudley Edwards* (Dublin, 1979), 164–75; Colm Kerrigan, *Father Mathew and the Irish temperance movement 1838–1849* (Cork, 1992), 132–52. The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), founded in 1844, seems to have provided a model for the CYMS. The Irish Presbyterian equivalent in Belfast, the Central Presbyterian Association, was founded in the 1860s.

¹⁰⁶ R.V. Comerford, *Inventing the nation: Ireland* (London, 2003), 113.

¹⁰⁷ Neil Tranter, 'Popular sports and the Industrial Revolution in Scotland: the evidence of the statistical accounts', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 4, 1 (1987), 21–38: 29–30; Alan Metcalfe, 'Organised sport in the mining communities of south Northumberland', *Victorian Studies* 25, 4 (1982) 469–95: 474–6.

may also have played a role. Whatever the truth of the situation, change was slow to come. In 1826 a Belfast magazine had included an article that dealt widely with ideas of acting with humanity towards animals. Its author argued that:

until the whole system of tastes and habits, prevalent in a people, engendered by their circumstances and ministering for their appetites for pleasure ... shall have undergone a *gradual* and therefore *permanent* alteration, it will be to no purpose that either individuals *lecture* them, or senates *legislate* ...¹⁰⁸

This eloquent appeal seems to have pinpointed the crux of the matter. In Victorian Ulster, the people's tastes in leisure continued to be formed by their environment and their wider beliefs and perceptions. Lecturing and legislation would have a very limited effect in the face of these established influences.

¹⁰⁸ *Bolster's Quarterly Magazine* 1, 3 (August 1826), 277.