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978-0-521-84372-0 - The British Monarchy and Ireland: 1800 to the Present

James Loughlin

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The British Monarchy and Ireland, 1800 to the Present

This is a broad-ranging political and social history of the relationship of the British monarchy with Ireland from 1800 to the present. James Loughlin demonstrates how this relationship was shaped by the personalities of individual monarchs and by government policies in Ireland, especially during the nineteenth century when the state sought to quell Irish demands for independence. The study takes account not only of nationalist Ireland, but also of Ulster loyalism; considers the function of royal ritual and spectacle in engaging Irish popular opinion; and assesses royal allegiance within the context of both Government policies in Ireland and the Irish Viceroyalty, the British monarchy's surrogate presence. The analysis moves through to the present day, examining the monarchy's role in facilitating Anglo-Irish conciliation following the end of violent conflict in Northern Ireland. This comprehensive account makes an important contribution to the history of Anglo-Irish relations in the context of the monarchy, nationalism, unionism and the politics of identity.

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For Isabel and Ann

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Preface

This book attempts to explain the role of the British monarchy in Anglo-Irish relations since the passing of the Irish Act of Union. It is one of the few remaining aspects of that relationship yet to receive sustained treatment from historians. Standard biographies of British royal personages treat Ireland only as a very minor topic, or merely in passing, while Irish, like British, historiography until very recently has been little attracted by an institution that in the modern period had lost its role as a central political actor. The work that has appeared has been less concerned with the nature of the monarchy's relationship with Ireland than with how opposition to the royal presence in Ireland has enhanced the organisational effectiveness of the groups engaging in it,¹ or to illuminate very narrow topics.² The exception to this neglect has been James Murphy's recent work on the Victorian monarchy and Irish nationalism.³ The first substantial study of the subject, Murphy's book makes a significant contribution to knowledge. Victoria's engagement with Ireland is closely surveyed especially with reference to the major developments of the period.

This study differs from Murphy's in a number of respects. The time-span is much longer and the remit wider, taking account not only of nationalist Ireland but also of Ulster loyalism, a factor which complicated the role Westminster hoped the monarchy could play in Ireland as a whole. It also addresses more fully and directly the monarchy's relationship to the localist sphere of everyday life while situating the issue of allegiance to the throne within both the context of Government policies for Ireland

¹ Chantel Deutsch-Brady, 'The King's Visit and the People's Protection Committee, 1903', *Eire-Ireland*, 10 (1975), 3–10; Senia Paseta, 'Nationalist Responses to Two Royal Visits to Ireland, 1900 and 1903', *Irish Historical Studies*, 31 (1999), 488–505.

² Joseph Hone, 'Queen Victoria in Ireland, 1853', *History Today*, 3 (1953), 501–12; J. D. Fair, 'The King, the Constitution and Ulster: The Interparty Negotiations of 1913 and 1914', *Eire-Ireland*, 6 (1971), 35–52; Francis Costello, 'King George V's Speech at Stormont (1921): Prelude to the Anglo-Irish Truce', *Eire-Ireland*, 22 (1987), 43–57.

³ James Murphy, *Abject Loyalty: Nationalism and Monarchy during the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Cork, 2001); also, 'Fashioning the Famine Queen' in Peter Gray (ed.), *Victoria's Ireland? Irishness and Britishness 1837–1901* (Dublin, 2004), pp. 15–26.

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and the role of the Irish Viceroyalty, the monarchy's *surrogate* – as distinct from *representative* institution – in Ireland. It was an office that had its own court and all the forms and ceremonial appertaining to a court. In pursuing these issues, account is taken of the insights of relevant work on the British monarchy in general since the appearance of David Cannadine's seminal essay on the subject in the early 1980s.⁴ Of particular relevance in the Irish context is Frank Prochaska's account of 'welfare monarchism',⁵ the process by which royalty compensated for its loss of political power with a vast increase in social influence gained through the promotion of charitable works. Although Prochaska only incidentally deals with Ireland, welfare monarchism, as we shall see, was no less an essential element of the royal – and viceregal – role in Ireland than it was in Britain.

A varied approach to the monarchy's relationship with Ireland in this period, going beyond the relatively narrow parameters of political history, is needed, not least to make sense of the contrast between recurrent constitutional and militant mobilisations against the state and equally recurrent and impressive popular receptions for royal personages; the one testifying to an enduring popular commitment to national independence, the other apparently evidencing that the Union could be secured if only the right strategy was found to cultivate on a permanent basis the loyalty royal personages called forth. Some respected historians have seen such occasions as providing opportunities the state foolishly failed to capitalise on.⁶ It will be argued here, however, that popular receptions for royal personages and popular mobilisation for nationalist movements are very different kinds of phenomena, requiring different kinds of analytical approach. The former, especially, necessitates an understanding of the dynamics of ceremony and spectacle drawn no less from the discipline of anthropology than from historical inquiry.

⁴ David Cannadine, 'The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the "Invention of Tradition", c. 1820–1977' in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 101–64; also, Linda Colley, 'The Apotheosis of George III: Loyalty, Royalty and the British Nation 1760–1820', *Past and Present*, 102 (1984), 94–129; W. M. Kuhn, *Democratic Royalism: The Transformation of the British Monarchy 1861–1914* (Basingstoke, 1996); Richard Williams, *The Contentious Crown: Public Discussion of the British Monarchy in the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Aldershot, 1997); Antony Taylor, 'Down with the Crown': *British Anti-monarchism and Debates about Royalty since 1790* (London, 1999); Vernon Bogdanor, *The Monarchy and the Constitution* (Oxford, 1999).

⁵ Frank Prochaska, *Royal Bounty: The Making of a Welfare Monarchy* (New Haven and London, 1995).

⁶ Frank Hardie, *The Political Influence of Queen Victoria 1861–1901* (2nd edn, London, 1938), pp. 177–8; Algernon Cecil, *Queen Victoria and Her Prime Ministers* (London, 1953), p. 83; Elizabeth Longford, *Victoria R.I.* (London, 1964), p. 191; Stanley Weintraub, *Victoria: Biography of a Queen* (London, 1987), p. 207.

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The core positions of the historian and the anthropologist for understanding ceremony have been stated as follows: the historian is ‘interested in the working of ceremonial *in* society . . . [He] wants to know how the ceremonial image and the stability of the state relate to each other, whereas the anthropologist wants to know how a society constructs a transcendent symbolic idiom.’⁷ In practice, however, there is much cross-fertilisation between their approaches.⁸ This is true of the present inquiry. Discussions of the great Irish royal occasions are informed both by historical assessments of the developments that underlay them and by a number of studies that illuminate the workings of public ritual, spectacle and the liminal conditions that surround them.⁹ Moreover, the assessment of public ritual requires due attention to the public sphere, or arena, in which it is performed.

The Anglo-Irish arena – the imaginative arena – in which British royal ceremonial was exercised was the United Kingdom the monarchy emblematised. It was, however, geographically riven by the Irish Sea, often politically complex and dysfunctional, and informed by sectarian and national divisions. Moreover, as the process of educational, communicative and political modernisation accelerated in the post-famine period¹⁰ its internal contradictions and lack of homogeneity became ever more problematic, stimulated not least by British ethnocentric discourses that posited the Catholic Irish as culturally underdeveloped and especially susceptible to royal charm. In this context, the significance of Scotland as a model of the successful integration of a ‘Celtic’ nation into the British state for Ireland to follow should be noted; persuasive not least owing to the idyllic scenario of a socially ‘organic’ and hierarchical society presented each year by Queen Victoria’s sojourn at Balmoral. But for profound historical, religio-cultural and political reasons Scotland was a misleading paradigm for Ireland. Moreover, an overview of the Anglo-Irish arena reveals the existence of a number of sub-spheres of meaning,

⁷ David Cannadine, ‘Introduction: The Divine Rites of Kings’ in Cannadine and Simon Price (eds.), *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 14.

⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 14–15.

⁹ A. M. Hocart, *Kings and Councillors: An Essay in the Comparative Anatomy of Human Society* (1936; Chicago, 1970); Lucy Mair, *Primitive Government* (Harmondsworth, 1962); Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, NY and London, 1974); Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit, 1983); Clifford Geertz, ‘Centres, Kings and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power’ in Joseph Ben-David and T. N. Clark (eds.), *Culture and Its Creators: Essays in Honour of Edward Shils* (Chicago, 1975), pp. 150–71; Steven Lukes, *Essays in Social Theory* (London, 1977).

¹⁰ For the role of the media in facilitating the social influence of monarchy in Britain, see John Plunkett, *Victoria: First Media Monarch* (Oxford, 2003).

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not just in Scotland and England, but in Ireland itself, in Ulster and the south.

In the latter the most important site for the exercise of royal ritual was Dublin, and in Britain a royal success in the capital was easily read as synecdochal of Ireland as a whole. Accordingly the cityscape was often the site of struggle between the authorities and opposition forces. This could take a number of forms, of which a situational conflict of competing symbols expressed in monuments and statuary was one of the most significant. It characterised the Irish landscape in general from the mid-nineteenth century, but especially the Dublin cityscape,¹¹ and close attention will be paid to it in this work. Furthermore, the constitutional fracturing of the Irish public sphere into two separate arenas following the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 had a profound effect on the monarchy's relationship with Ireland.

In Northern Ireland a Government established on the basis of a Protestant majority would allow for a more direct engagement with monarchy that was denied Ulster loyalists in the nineteenth century, and almost inevitably in a way that served to compromise significantly the Bagehotian ideal the institution was believed to embody. In southern Ireland, the contested constitutional formation, the Irish Free State, ensured that the monarchy became a focus of conflict in a way that it had not been hitherto. And yet, if the status of the monarchy in Ireland has historically been a function of political and ethno-national conflict, as will become clear, the harmonisation of Anglo-Irish relations resulting from Northern Ireland's emergence from a long period of violent conflict has allowed a context to develop for the exercise of royal influence, one that allows royal personages to address concerns about the institution in Britain through contributing to the development of a shared Anglo-Irish culture.

This work has been in gestation over several years and the debts incurred several. I wish to thank Lady Sheila de Bellaigue, Pamela Clark and the staff of the Royal Archives at Windsor Castle for their unfailing helpfulness in accessing royal collections; Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II for permission to quote from materials in the Royal Archives; Lady Mairi Bury and the Deputy Keeper of Records, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, for permission to quote from letters of Sir

¹¹ Paula Murphy, 'The Politics of the Irish Street Monument', *Irish Arts Review*, 10 (1994), 202–8; Judith Hill, *Irish Public Sculpture* (Dublin, 1998); Elizabeth Darby and Nicola Smith, *The Cult of the Prince Consort* (New Haven and London, 1983); Yvonne Whelan, *Reinventing Modern Dublin: Streetscape, Iconography and the Politics of Identity* (Dublin, 2003).

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