

1. The Battle of Linwood Bridge

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The migration of Northern Irish workers to the mining and textiles industries of the Paisley district introduced many of the problems experienced in factional religious squabbling. There appears to have been a division of labour and religion, with Protestant folk principally in textiles, and Roman Catholics in labouring and in mining. The division is though not that clear cut and some at least of the oversmen in the ironstone mines of Linwood were of Irish Protestant stock from North Ayrshire. Given the turbulent nature of the labour force, trouble was never far from the surface.

Orange meetings were a part of Paisley experience from the 1850s, action often being taken to curtail demonstrations. In the year 1858 outdoor activities were stopped but a meeting at The Exchange Rooms in Moss Street was allowed. This was attended by 300 men, women and children. Though outdoor action had been curtailed, a large crowd hung around all day till heavy afternoon rain drove the crowd home.

The newspaper coverage of the events at Paisley suggests that though action at curtailment had been taken, it was more the advent of rain which averted fighting. Certainly the local police would appear to have taken little action. The Paisley police were notoriously ambivalent in their attitudes to crowd control and to religion. They would appear to have had little control over their prison as well. On 3 January 1859, James Garvock, a tobacco spinner was badly beaten by Henry Darroch in one of the cells, after the latter had inquired "if he was an Orangemen, a Catholic or a Presbyterian; and exclaimed he would thrash the d...d Presbyterian stomach out of him, and immediately commenced to put his threat into action." Given this attitude the events of 12 July 1859 were not surprising.

The Glasgow Advertiser 16 July 1859 summed up the start of the day in the following terms:

"To the surprise of many of the peaceably disposed inhabitants of Paisley and surrounding district, a party of Orangemen, numbering upwards of a hundred, mustered near the cross on Tuesday morning [12 July 1859], a little after 6 o'clock, decorated with orange sashes, and other party emblems. At half-past six precisely they marched in procession westward along High Street, Wellmeadow Street, &c., with a band of music at their head, and carrying six or seven orange flags with emblazonments and mottos of the usual irritating character..."

This 6.00am muster was to allow a march to Johnstone and around the district back to Paisley, allowing the Orangemen at Linwood to participate in the main part of the march. Also, though according to the account of the Glasgow Advertiser the march had taken Paisley by surprise, the Morning Journal in its account suggests the marchers were well armed and expecting trouble. This came very quickly because the marchers, after running the gauntlet of general abuse in Paisley, were physically attacked at Millarston by a large group of well armed coal and ironstone workers.

The Morning Journal commenting in their issue for the 14 July 1859 suggested "a battle was a deliberate part of the day's programme", given the preparedness of both groups. Whatever the argument for a pre-arranged fight, the Millarston squabble was bloody enough. Again according to the Morning Journal:

"Roman Catholics [were] the first to resort to actual violence, and the first of course to flee...."

Which was perhaps no wonder, for the heavily armed Orangemen had beaten off the attack, and the miners had fled bloodied from sword cuts and bludgeons.

The Orange march continued to Johnstone, where after a rest about Thorn Brae, they continued on their way toward the mining area about Quarrelton and Corseford. The marchers do not appear to have met with problems at this location. The march then made its way to Millikenpark, when it turned at the station and made its way to Deafhillock Toll, arriving there about 1.00pm. The Linwood Orangemen left the main march at that point and headed for their village. The Paisley and Johnstone Lodges proceeded for the West Toll, where they intended to go their separate ways.

But, as the Orange marchers approached Linwood Bridge, they found their way blocked by a group of angry mine workers. The Miners were apparently some 300 in number and seeing this the Orangemen took to their heels for the safety of Linwood Village. After rallying, it was decided that they would once again try for the bridge and the battle began. Hand to hand fighting with mining tools, bludgeons, knives and paling stobs left terrible injuries. The news of the battle soon spread and as a result a mob turned up to watch the fight, and at one point a crowd was blocking the Paisley to Johnstone Road. The fight is reported to have lasted at least 45 minutes, though a contemporary report in the Scotsman suggests that sporadic violence continued as injured men were still staggering into Paisley during the evening.

The Battle of Linwood Bridge itself ended when the miners fled for Inkerman with some of the Orangemen in pursuit. Once the battle was over the process of attending to the injured began and Doctors Daniel, Donald, McKinlay and McHutcheon arrived from Paisley. They were joined by doctors from Johnstone, these were Messrs Calligan, McLaren and Shiling.

Those most seriously hurt were John Marshall, an engineman from Inkerman, who had been shot in the face; John Burns, a Roman Catholic miner's drawer, had been stabbed, so too Patrick McGraw, who had suffered a leg injury. Orangemen, Edward Little, John Dickson and John Mellon, all from Paisley, had been badly beaten; so too John Fraser, an Orangeman from Linwood. In terms of injuries the Orangemen had got the worst of it. But there were others too, including a little girl who had followed the march from Paisley and barely escaped being trampled in the affray; as it was her arm had been broken.

Given the severity of the battle, it was a wonder no one was killed in the actual affray. The only identified fatality was a Roman Catholic worker from Paisley, 67 year old Patrick Rush, a besom maker, who had not taken part in the battle, but had been

caught by some of the mob and kicked and stabbed to death, as he tried to get clear of the battle site. His body was found on the road a considerable distance from Linwood Bridge, pointing to his misfortune in being in the wrong place at the wrong time. The news of his death sparked off a strike by the Roman Catholic miners in the Linwood area, they claiming sectarianism, but he could have been the victim of either side given the confusion of the affray.



During the affray both sides had tried to take captives but it was the well armed Orangemen, helped by the police, who were in some cases on duty and in others having been part of the march, even in uniform, who secured any prisoners. Patrick McGraw, already noted as having suffered a leg injury, would have got away but for that, and he was pounced on by a group of Orangemen who after beating him, tried to shoot him. He was rescued by some of the police, and later McGraw with another Roman Catholic, Francis Brannan, was committed for trial. It is of interest that McGraw was not local to Linwood and was a labourer living in Paisley, again suggesting some prior arrangement to the battle.

This hint at pre-arrangements is further enhanced by a comment in the North British Daily Mail 13 July 1859:

"One very extraordinary feature in the day's proceedings was the encouragement given to the Orangemen by the police. In the morning, several of the night force, so soon as they were dismissed, joined in the procession in their uniforms

The North British Daily Mail's reporting further supports this theory with a comment on 18 July 1859 that faction fighting was an established way of things in the local mining districts amongst Protestant and Roman Catholic groupings around Paisley. Possibly the Battle of Linwood Bridge was pre-arranged but got out of hand. Certainly the panic at local authority level after the event suggests that there was toleration of factions, but the drafting in of 150 Royal Sussex Militia from Glasgow to keep the peace suggests a speedy reappraisal of the developing situation. There was good reason for this for after the death of Rush, the local Roman Catholic grouping at Inkerman swore vengeance. A result was the Orangemen at Redan Mining Village mobilised on the 14 July 1859 and after parading marched toward Linwood Bridge. Though in this case nothing happened, again there was general panic and the response was the swearing in of special constables for the Johnstone district. Concern was also then expressed that fighting was planned to continue at the Paisley horse races, and this fear is reflected in Paisley Town Council's meetings for the period.

The Battle of Linwood Bridge was reported in the newspapers for the period with varying degrees of vigour and bias. The aforementioned Morning Journal 14 July 1859 expressed such views as to question whether they were stirring both sides of the potions in the melting pot of sectarianism. One truth they did come out with and it was as follows:

"The destination of the Pope here or hereafter is not to be determined by the Orange Weavers of Paisley or the Roman Catholic miners of Inkerman, even though these foolish belligerents were to exterminate each other as completely as Kilkenny cats... "

which was a perfectly reasonable statement on the pointless and vicious gesturings of sectarian Renfrewshire, or anywhere else. A more pointed comment made by the Glasgow Examiner 16 July 1859 stated:

"With regard to the right or wrong of the respective parties on this occasion it appears that the Roman Catholics, or Ribbonmen, are specially to blame as they attacked the other party without having received any provocation, at least in the way of menace".

The use of the name "Ribbonmen" set out to place the Linwood incident on the same terms as Irish agrarian violence, and was an over-reaction. But such bias is interesting and it led to correspondence in the papers on behalf of both parties and also calls for moderation.

The Glasgow Herald found itself accused of taking sides by "SB" in the correspondence columns, for its reporting of the incident. "SB" stated that had Rush been murdered, as he suggested by the Orangemen, then they could expect to escape punishment, yet Roman Catholics would be accused of being "blood-thirsty papists" and "priest ridden savages". Also according to "SB" the Orangemen had caught "a poor Catholic [McGraw] wounded and bleeding," and then shot at him. Truth was a value judgment, and the editor of the Glasgow Herald reacted to the

accusation of bias. In his denial he pointed out that Protestants were punished just as severely as Roman Catholics, the editor citing the case of a Protestant named Hare, who had been hanged for stabbing a Roman Catholic to death in a "party fight" sometime before. Condemnation, it was suggested, should be reserved for the Paisley authorities for condoning "party squabbling".

Bitter feelings also affected Glasgow; though the cited incident would have been farcical had it not been so bloody and violent. A man carrying orange-yellow letter covers in his hand was attacked by "some riot-abhorring Papists" thinking he was some Protestant with orange lilies in his hand. This curious incident was noted in correspondence responding to "SB's" letters.

In final comment on the affair, it was noted in the newspapers that 7 miners from Inkerman were heavily fined, with option of jail, for assault. The miners, Francis Pinkerton, James Anderson, David Bulloch, James Bulloch, Archibald Anderson, John Pirie and John Barr, were accused of assaulting Hugh Cowan, Peter Cowan, Joseph Elliot and Peter Lawson to their severe injury. The affair then faded from the headlines.

Linwood was a manifestation of religion's ability to destroy working class unity by encouraging sectarian disorder. Whether in the workplace as with the fighting around the coalfields of Airdrie and Coatbridge in 1835; or in the community as in Coatbridge in 1857, or Partick in 1875; the bitterness of such squabbles lasts generations, affecting community relations. Such things are handed down as memories, and after a talk to the Old Paisley Society, 30 January 1992, the author was approached by an old man who told him how his grandfather as a young man had been at the battle, and how it had started with the smashing of the big drum.

References

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