

## **What was the significance of the Coleraine University Controversy and/or the activities of the Apprentice Boys of Derry**

Both the Coleraine University controversy and the Apprentice Boys of Derry proved to be of great significance in the history of Northern Ireland. Both activities sparked feuds and controversies in the North. While the Apprentice Boys of Derry clearly celebrated Protestant, Unionist beliefs yet people also believed that the Coleraine University was a predominantly Protestant affair. Both the Apprentice Boys of Derry and the Coleraine University controversy are believed to have sparked the significant efforts that were made afterwards to restore peace in Northern Ireland.

The Coleraine University Controversy all began when there was a demand for a second university in Northern Ireland. The North's only university in the 1960's was Queen's University. It also had Magee College but degrees could not be completed there. After the Education Act (1947) which entitled more of the Northern Irish population to attend school and further their studies, meant there was a growth in attendance of secondary schools and therefore a demand for third level courses. O'Neill's government was then faced with the decision of either expanding Queens or founding a second university. The

Lockwood Committee was established in order to reach a decision. This was an eight member committee who enquired the area of third level education. This committee was chaired by Sir John Lockwood the other members were drawn from Northern Ireland. This committee was asked to "review the facilities for university and higher technical education in Northern Ireland having regard to the report of the Robbins Committee and to make recommendations". Little did they know these 'recommendations' would prove highly significant in Northern Irish history.

The Committee ruled out the expansion of Queens almost immediately. The college themselves opposed to the idea and the site of Queens was too small and underdeveloped which meant the establishment would prove far too expensive. This brought the Lockwood Committee to a final decision to build a new university. The next decision to be reached was the new location. Four possible locations were decided: Armagh, Craigavon, Derry and Coleraine. Armagh was ruled out almost immediately because the population was too small and it was situated too close to Belfast which they feared might distract from its industry. Craigavon was also ruled out early due to it being a relatively new city which was quite underdeveloped. The committee felt that it would put strain on the new establishment and would prove costly. This left the Committee to evaluate Derry and Coleraine in more detail. Both presented cases supported by their own city councils and awaited a verdict, unaware of the controversy that would follow.

The Lockwood Committee Report was published in February 1965. The committee recommended Coleraine as the site for the second university as they believed it "satisfies the criteria better than any of the other areas we have considered". The committee's criteria were that the location would be of an adequate size; there would be enough space for halls of residence, a site of around 300 acres and the potential for development within the boundaries. Coleraine met the majority of their criteria; it could provide residential facilities, suitable accommodation, it wouldn't be a competitor to Belfast and its industry, it would attract first rate staff, it's convenient to Belfast and the Northern Irish Airport, it could be sponsored and it would even be suitable for marine biology to be studied. In conjunction with this, the Lockwood Committee rejected Derry because according to them, the size was too small, the governing structure was poor, there was a shortage of private accommodation and most importantly it was believed that the local sectarian tension would impact on the development of the university. The report also recommended the closure of Magee College, Derry, because it would only be a drain on resources needed for the new university. This sparked outrage causing controversy and protests that would prove significant in Northern Irish history in years to come.

Derry felt the need to fight back against what they felt was 'sectarian injustice'. They set up a University for Derry Committee, founded by John Hume. It was supported by both Unionists and Nationalists. They argued that Magee College could be the basis for a new university, various other sites in Derry could have been used or at least examined and

Derry had historic claims to 'The Site'. They also found that this decision was biased and heavily political as there was no Catholic present on the Lockwood Committee.

Nationalists and Derry Unionists said the decision to site in Coleraine was evidence of more neglect of Derry and many nationalists believed this decision was a deliberate attempt to build up Unionist areas to maintain Unionist power. As a result, the 'University for Derry Committee' staged a huge protest went to Stormont with a motorcade of 2,000 cars as business in the city closed for the day. A debate took place in Stormont to discuss the Lockwood Report. O' Neill's government supported the Lockwood recommendations, except the closure of Magee College. The government won the debate by 27 voters to 19, where 2 Unionists voted against the Government. This seemed like the end of the controversy, however its significance did not end in Stormont.

In May 1965, a Unionist MP Dr. Robert Nixon said that "nameless, faceless men from Londonderry" had gone to Stormont to advise against the locating of a second university in Derry. These "named figures" were local Unionists and members of the Apprentice Boys of Derry. It was said that they feared losing power if Catholics were to benefit from a new university. Nationalists were outraged by this information and this led to a further split between nationalists and unionists this providing great significance in the history of the divide between Nationalists and Unionists in the North of Ireland.

Unionists proceeded to defend the decision to locate the university at Coleraine. They said Lockwood would not be influenced by prejudice and that they were simply following and obliging the criteria. Eventually it was decided that Magee College would remain in operation as a result of the controversy and that Coleraine University would be built. The opening of the university coincided with the beginning of the Troubles, which sparked more controversy while causing low enrolment rate in the 1970's. The controversy was said to be so significant that it in fact ignited the Civil Rights Movement.

The Apprentice Boys of Derry were a form of Loyal Orders set up to commemorate the events of the Siege. Members has to be of the Reformed Protestant religion, respect and worship the Throne of England, attend celebrations and continue to keep the events of the Siege alive. The events they had to attend included the 'Shutting of the Gates' and the 'Relief of the City'. These events celebrated Unionist, Protestant beliefs and as enrolment rates soared, their controversies did too, proving significant in Northern Irish history.

The Apprentice Boys of Derry sparked controversies as their events were often riot points, this labeled them as an organization who allegedly used to violence to practice their beliefs. Catholics also felt belittled by their preaching. The Apprentice Boys did not approve of Civil Rights Parades and any means of peace policies. This caused great upset in Northern Ireland as once again they were led to belief that the Apprentice Boys were

holding back any progress in civil developments. Many of their events conflicted with Civil Rights events which led to the banning of the 'Apprentice Boys of Derry Parade'. Their events often became violent and sparked many feuds. The Apprentice Boys were the direct cause of the Battle of Bogside, thus proving their significance in Northern Irish History.

Both the Coleraine University Controversy and the Apprentice Boys of Derry proved significant by creating controversy, feuds, protests, riots and eventually changes. Coleraine University Controversy demanded 'political' decisions to be analysed, criticized and reconsidered while the Apprentice Boys of Derry demanded an overpowering and sometimes violent organisation to be criticizing. Both proving their significance in Northern Irish History.