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Summary Article: **Orange Order**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

In Northern Ireland, solely Protestant organization founded in County Armagh in 1795 in opposition to the Defenders, a Catholic secret society. It was a revival of the **Orange Institution** founded in 1688 to support William (III) of Orange, whose victory over the Catholic James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 has been commemorated annually by Protestants in parades since 1796. The new order was organized into **Orange Societies** in a similar way to freemasonry, with a system of lodges. It has institutional ties with the Ulster Unionist Party.

Early history The Orange Order was established following the victory of the Protestant Peep o'Day Boys over the Defenders in the sectarian Battle of the Diamond (1795) near Loughgall, County Armagh. During the late 1790s the order spread to many Irish counties and centralized its leadership in Dublin in 1798. Initially a proletarian organization, this development reflected growing support among the gentry officials who saw its wider military and political potential in opposing the radical reformist United Irishmen. **Orangemen** served as armed auxiliaries in the suppression of the Rebellion of 1798, and lodges spread into the armed forces.

Orangemen resisted Catholic emancipation in the early 19th century. This opposition was sometimes violent and the government banned the Orange Order in 1825, along with the Catholic Association. Gentry support had declined and the Grand Lodge voluntarily dissolved in 1836. **Orangeism** survived at a popular level and was reactivated as a political force in the 1880s by landlords opposed to home rule. This revival continued as the Orange Order became an integral part of unionist resistance to home rule. The link continued with the formation of Northern Ireland in 1921 and the Orange Order still retains institutional ties with the Ulster Unionists.

Membership The Orange Order has strongly supported the rights and powers of Irish Protestantism in Northern Ireland against any threat from the Catholic Irish. The organization has a religious basis, and prayers are said at all meetings and before marches. Throughout most of the 19th and 20th centuries the Orange Order was dominated by middle- and upper-class Protestants, making it a powerful and respectable organization. In the last few decades, however, membership has become more reflective of the wide social spectrum of Protestants. Many more hard-line unionists and loyalists have joined the Orange Order, making some lodges very radical in their actions. While control of the Orange Order in the centre remains in the hands of more moderate men, branches such as the 'Spirit of Drumcree' in Portadown have been vociferous in their demands for the right to march wherever they choose.

Orange Order marches The Orange Order has had to compromise over their traditional parade routes in recent years with various Catholic nationalist residents' groups. These view the marches of the Orangemen past their homes as offensive and provocative. The Order has been accused of being triumphalist and representing the domination of Protestants over Catholics in Ulster. The Orange Order counters such accusations by claiming that it simply wishes to celebrate Protestant unionist culture and history.

Most parades pass off each year without major incident, but they remain catalysts for potential sectarian disorder. The quasi-judicial Parades Commission, which was set up by the British government

in 1997, can place restrictions on contentious parades, or ban them altogether.

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