

Powerful connections.

by Marjorie Halligan

The city of Armagh is renowned for its ecclesiastical traditions. The residence of the leaders of the Anglican and Roman Catholic religions here, earns Armagh the title of the ecclesiastical capital of Ireland. In political matters, Armagh has a more muted reputation. The important convention of the Irish Volunteers where the legislative independence of the Irish parliament was claimed was held in Dungannon in 1782 (Beckett 222). The Hillsborough Agreement of 1985 gave the settlement of the Troubles an Anglo-Irish dimension (Coogan 604-608). In the nineteen twenties, however, Armagh had connections with two political leaders who each in their own time affected Armagh and influenced events in Ireland. Michael Collins was the first of these. He was an MP for Armagh in 1921 in the new Stormont Parliament, though as a Sinn Fein representative, he did not take his seat. Des Fitzgerald's article 'Michael Collins in Armagh' in *History Armagh*, graphically describes the impact of his visit of

September 4, 1921. Collins used his visit as an opportunity to present Sinn Fein's policy on Ulster (7). The Reverend Ian Paisley MP MEP is the second politician to have Armagh connections. In 1921, his father, Mr. James Kyle Paisley was the pastor of Armagh Baptist church. He had been one of its founder members in 1917, and was elected its pastor in October, 1918. They met in the Catch-my-Pall Hall in Lonsdale Street. The car park of Armagh College of Further Education directly behind the Court House occupies the site now. His first home, in Armagh was in Edward Street. He later moved to a house at Station Terrace in Railway Street which had been left to the church by Miss Hester Coote as a manse. She died in 1924. Kyle Paisley and his wife, Isabella, left Armagh for Ballymena Baptist church in 1928, having seen the Baptist community settled in premises on the Mall (Weir 10-18). Ian Paisley, their eldest child was born in 1926, in Armagh (Coogan 477). His visit of November 30, 1968, to Armagh was as disruptive

of normal city life as had been that of Collins on September 4, 1921 (*Armagh Gazette* Dec. 1968). His purpose was to lead a rally in opposition to a Civil Rights march scheduled for that day. Armagh was again a platform from which to project strong views on Ulster's political future. Perhaps if the proposed biographic film of his life comes about, Armagh may play a supporting role.

Acknowledgements:

Armagh Gazette November 28, December 5, 1968.

Beckett, J. C. *The Making of Modern Ireland 1603-1923*. London: Faber & Faber; 1973, 222.

Coogan, T.P. *Ireland in the Twentieth Century*. London : Arrow Books; 2003, 604-608.

Fitzgerald, D. "Michael Collins in Armagh" *History Armagh: Armagh & District History Group*; 2005, Vol. 1 No 2, 7.

Weir, B. *Armagh Baptist Church*. Armagh: Trimprint; 2003, 10-18v



PRIVATE COLLECTION

The Catch-My-Pal Hall, Lonsdale Street where James Kyle Paisley was pastor of Armagh's fledgling Baptist congregation in the years following the First World War