

Gracey, (Samuel) Harold

by Patrick Maume

Gracey, (Samuel) Harold (1935–2004), Orangeman, was born in Portadown, Co. Armagh, on 30 June 1935, son of Samuel Gracey, deliveryman and Orangeman, and his wife Lizzy, a member of the Women's Orange Order; he had two sisters and a brother. He was educated at Edenderry elementary school before becoming a cabinetmaker's apprentice in Richhill, Co. Armagh. He worked as a machine operator with private firms in Portadown, then worked for a pottery firm in the town, and ended his working life as a storekeeper with Northern Ireland Electricity. Gracey was a football fan, supporting Glenavon Football Club (based in Lurgan) rather than Portadown FC (his father came from Lurgan).

During Gracey's adolescence his family moved to Seagoe Park in east Portadown, where he lived for the rest of his life. Gracey was a devout and active, though not ultra#strict, member of the Church of Ireland and for much of his later life attended daily morning service in Seagoe parish church. This church had strong ties to the Blacker family, prominent in Orange history; in 1995 Gracey laid a wreath at their tomb in Seagoe cemetery to commemorate Colonel William Blacker (qv) and the bicentenary of Orangeism.

Gracey's attachment to Orangeism was influenced by an uncle, Albert Greenaway, Portadown district lecturer. (A lecturer studies, and instructs members in, the order's history, traditions and ethos, and prepares candidates for various degrees of membership.) Gracey joined Edenderry JLOL No. 51 aged seven; at sixteen he joined Wingfield Verner's Crimson Star LOL No. 25 (founded 1796), because many of his friends were members. In 1954 he received a lecturer's certificate and became a Royal Arch Purpleman in 1955. He subsequently became district lecturer; instructing large numbers of Portadown Orangemen contributed to his popularity. He was appointed deputy grand lecturer to Armagh County Lodge in 1990.

He was also a member of the Black Order – registrar of Churchview RBP No. 110 – and a founder of Seagoe Masonic Lodge No. 851. For him, as for many rural and provincial Ulster protestants, social life revolved around this protestant associational culture. His wife Ingrid, whom he met at a dance in Banbridge, Co. Down, was a member of the Women's Order. They had a son and a daughter; Gracey's son and son#in#law, and in due course his grandsons, joined the Order.

In the first decades of Gracey's life Portadown Orangeism was closely integrated with the Stormont political regime (three of the four district masters in the period 1926–81 were Stormont MPs, the fourth being a prominent local businessman); its control of public space was uncontested, and local catholics generally acquiesced in parades; this was cited by Gracey as proof that 'decent Catholics' (such as those

with whom he had been employed), as distinct from terrorist sympathisers, had no objection to parades.

His election in 1985 as Portadown district master reflected a wider late#twentieth#century trend. As the protestant landed and professional classes withdrew from Orangeism and unionist politics, activists who would not previously have advanced beyond local level were promoted. Gracey was ill#equipped for the political challenges awaiting him.

Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s Portadown and surrounding areas of north Armagh and east Tyrone witnessed some of the worst violence of the political troubles. Catholics were driven out of loyalist areas of the town and moved to north Portadown, where formerly mixed estates became predominantly catholic as protestants fled. This had implications for traditional Orange parade routes, notably Obins Street in the town centre, and Garvaghy Road to the north.

In the first years of his district mastership, Gracey participated in the controversy surrounding re#routing of parades from Obins Street after the 1985 Anglo–Irish agreement. After violent confrontations, Orangemen tacitly accepted re#routing via the Corcrair Road and reduced the number of parades, so that only two (a church parade on the Sunday before 12 July and a feeder parade for the main 12 July parade) went down Garvaghy Road. Orangemen thought this a definitive and binding agreement; police regarded it as informal and open to revision.

The appearance in 1995 of the Garvaghy Road Residents' Coalition (GRRC) was widely attributed by unionists to Sinn Féin intrigue. The choice as GRRC spokesman of Breandán Mac Cionnaith, who had served a prison sentence for planting a bomb that damaged a British Legion hall, was seen as particularly provocative. (The Orange/unionist leadership had a general ban on meeting terrorists.) Orangemen (including Gracey) believed that calls to re#route the Garvaghy Road parade indicated that one concession would lead to another until their parade traditions were extinguished.

On 9 July 1995 after a sit#down protest by Garvaghy Road nationalists, police banned the Drumcree church parade from returning by the usual route. A large crowd of Orangemen and supporters gathered, and Gracey called for Orangemen elsewhere to protest. As disturbances spread across the province, Gracey and the local MP, David Trimble, negotiated with the police. At 10.30 a.m. on 11 July the parade went ahead. For the first time the Order had mounted a province#wide protest and achieved visible concessions; radicals formed the Spirit of Drumcree group which criticised the Order's leadership and proclaimed that intransigence brought victory.

1996 saw larger and more violent clashes at Drumcree and elsewhere, after police announced on 6 July that the church parade (7 July) would be banned.

Gracey and Portadown district officers declared the continuance of the parade the central and only consideration, to the dismay of the county and grand lodge authorities who, under the Order's rules, had to defer to Portadown district. Loyalist paramilitaries led by Billy Wright (qv) were much in evidence. Gracey's attitude towards Wright was somewhat equivocal; the loyalist, himself influenced by unionist hardliners, allegedly exercised his considerable abilities at manipulation to steer Gracey towards greater intransigence. At one point Gracey, having previously agreed to negotiations, refused to attend them and was shut in a room by moderate Orange leaders while talks continued. One Orange moderate told Ruth Dudley Edwards: 'Billy Wright has filled the vacuum that is Harold's head' (*Faithful tribe*, 343). After Wright's death Gracey attended his funeral, a major paramilitary show of strength. Edwards saw Gracey as a decent man out of his depth, and suggested (unsuccessfully) that Grand Lodge should revise its structures to prevent local leaders precipitating disaster (Kennaway, 105). Faced with the threat of massive violence, the police allowed the parade down the Garvaghy Road. Media coverage significantly influenced world opinion against unionism and Orangeism. Gracey, however, like many unionists, thought the media inherently anti-unionist and made little attempt to cultivate them.

In July 1997 Gracey responded to proposals by sympathetic commentators that the Order should 'take the high moral ground' by declaring that, if every other Orangeman backed down, he would march the road alone. In his view the right to march was a simple issue of right and wrong and compromise was betrayal. The secretary of state, Mo Mowlam (qv), allowed the march to go ahead for fear of greater unrest (though also influenced by the willingness of other Orange leaders to negotiate).

The nemesis of Gracey's intransigence came in July 1998 after the newly established Parades Commission banned the Drumcree parade. The Orangemen now faced major defensive structures across the route manned by the British army, while hardline unionists used the parade to weaken the newly concluded Belfast Agreement. Gracey and his officers failed to restrain violent elements who attacked the security forces. Many Orangemen were dissatisfied with Portadown district's approach, and these divisions came into the open when prominent Orange moderates called for the protest to end after the deaths of three children in an arson attack in Ballymoney, Co. Antrim.

As the protest disintegrated, Gracey announced he would maintain a vigil in the churchyard. A caravan was set up, fitted with light, heating, a telephone and a television; Ingrid Gracey tied an orange ribbon outside the family residence. Gracey acquired the nickname 'the man on the hill', spending his first Christmas away from home and attracting significant admiration and media curiosity. Orangemen periodically paraded to the security force lines; sporadic violence also continued. In 1999 he adopted a more conciliatory approach and participated in Orange negotiations with the British prime minister, Tony Blair, who engaged in parallel

talks with the GRRC; after a largely peaceful July protest, Gracey accused Blair of reneging on a commitment to allow a parade later in the year.

Gracey's commitment to his vigil began to flag in 1999; he returned home for some time when his mother died shortly before Christmas. A *Sunday Times* reporter who repeatedly called on the caravan in mid#January 2000 found no signs of occupation, and Gracey was photographed putting out the bin at the family home. Gracey denounced Orangemen who failed to mobilise in support of the protest and protestant church leaders for opposing it or remaining silent. At a rally to mark 1,000 days of protests he exhorted RUC members to 'support your own protestant community'.

The last major outburst of violence at Drumcree came in July 2000, with a show of strength by loyalist paramilitaries led by the maverick Shankill UDA commander Johnny Adair. Although Gracey and the district tried to calm the situation, he refused to condemn the loyalist presence, and told a BBC interviewer: 'I am not going to condemn violence because Gerry Adams never condemns violence.' After this public relations disaster the continuous protest dwindled, though Orangemen marched to the police lines every Sunday, desultory negotiations continued, and Gracey regularly declared Portadown district would complete the parade.

Gracey eventually abandoned his increasingly nominal vigil for health reasons. Late in 2002 he had a minor stroke; he was already suffering from the cancer that killed him. At the July 2003 protest Gracey, having had a hip replacement, sat in his car. His last lodge meeting was in February 2004. Three weeks before his death, at a ceremony in his home, he received a medal to mark fifty years as a lodge member.

He died 28 March 2004. His funeral went to Seagoe Church and he was buried in the churchyard. His lodge subsequently unveiled a banner portraying Gracey; a portrait was commissioned for Carleton Street Orange Hall, and an Orange arch with images of Gracey and Drumcree church was erected in Portadown.

Gracey was representative of a generation of Orange and unionist activists drawn into positions beyond their abilities by the departure of the traditional leadership, and with political expectations derived from the unionist dominance of the Brookeborough era (which they regarded as normality) and traditional rhetoric which maintained simplistically that 'no surrender' guaranteed victory. Gracey's intransigence cannot be understood unless it is recognised that for him, as for many others, the deepest personal friendships and loyalties were inarticulately bound up with the rituals and comradeship of the lodge room and the Orange march.

R. David Jones, James S. Kane, Robert Wallace, Douglas Sloan and Brian Courtney, *The Orange citadel: a history of Orangeism in Portadown district* (Portadown, 1996) (contains an introduction and reminiscences by Gracey); Gordon Lucy, *Stand#off! Drumcree: July 1995 and 1996* (Lurgan, 1996); Ruth Dudley Edwards, *The faithful tribe: an intimate portrait of the loyal institutions* (1999); Garvaghy residents, *Garvaghy: a community under siege* (1999); Chris Ryder and Vincent Kearney, *Drumcree: the Orange order's last stand* (2001); *Belfast Newsletter*, 29, 30, 31 Mar. 2004; *Irish News*, 29, 31 Mar., 3, Apr. 2004; 12 Apr. 2007; *Belfast Telegraph*, 29, 31 Mar. 2004; *Ir. Times*, 29 Mar. 2004; *Orange Standard*, 1995–2004, esp. April, May, Oct. 2004; *Daily Telegraph*, 2 Apr. 2004; *Portadown Times*, 2, 16 Apr., 10 Sept. 2004; Brian Kennaway, *The Orange order: a tradition betrayed* (2006); Mervyn Jess, *The Orange order* (2007); John A Pickering, *Drumcree* (2009); 'Tributes for Orange Order leader', BBC News, 28 May 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/3576327.stm; Portadown District LOL No. 1, <http://www.portadowndistrictlolno1.co.uk> (web sites accessed 23 July 2010)