

'The Old Divide' Sectarianism in Scotland: A History

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Author, journalist and socialist activist, **Chris Bambery** was born and educated in Edinburgh. He has written extensively on history and politics, contributing to the BBC, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Scotsman* and others and was head of the Islam Channel's History Department. He is a regular contributor to *Conter*, *Counterfire*, *Brave New Europe* and other news/politics/current affairs websites. He was also parliamentary assistant to George Kerevan, MP for East Lothian 2015-2017 and was the Public Point of Enquiry for the All Party Parliamentary Group on Catalonia from 2017 until 2024. His other books include *A People's History of Scotland* (2014) and *Catalonia Reborn* (with George Kerevan) (2018).

People's History of Scotland: 'Bambery offers a Scottish version of E P Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*.' Roger Hutchinson, *The Scotsman*

Catalonia Reborn: 'Past and present are nicely linked through visits to sites of social memory in the Catalan capital...well-researched, well-structured and well-explained.' Ned Thomas, *The Planet*

Sectarianism has been a blight on modern Scotland. Today, it is blamed on the lower orders, particularly football fans. Sectarianism like other forms of racism, however, originates at the top of society and travels down the ladder. It is intertwined with Scotland's role in subjugating Ireland and began as a reaction to the mass migration of Irish people fleeing the

Great Famine. Sectarianism subsequently gained traction as the Conservative Party - rebranded as the defender of the British Empire - led mass resistance to three Irish Home Rule Bills promising devolution to Ireland. The Tories were quick to ally with the Orange Order in Glasgow and Scotland's industrial belt. In 1913 and 1914, Glasgow saw the Conservative leader, Andrew Bonar Law, sharing platforms with Orange Order leaders, and armed units of the Ulster Volunteer Force parade in the city. During the interwar period, sectarianism reached new heights, with a full-scale pogrom in Edinburgh. The Scottish elite faced an uncertain future, and the Church of Scotland led a crusade against supposed mass immigration from Ireland. Today, Glasgow hosts more Orange Order marches than Belfast.

Chris Bambery argues these marches are about territorial control and, in Ireland, have a bloody history extending to today. Although we do not live in the 1930s, sectarianism remains.

'*The Old Divide*' looks at the roots of this problem and its toxic record and concludes that unless we understand and confront this history, it will remain a stain on Scottish society.

