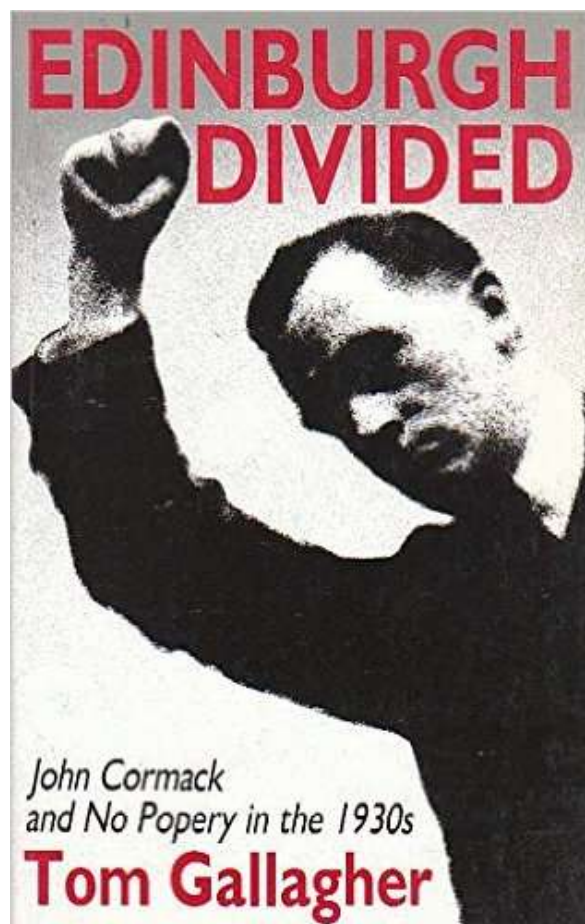


## Introduction

The following section provides an overview of *Edinburgh Divided* by Tom Gallagher and is an excellent starting point for finding out more about the Protestant Action Society. This very much hidden piece of Leith's history became a key discussion point across all of the Leith anti-sectarian Project's activities.

A copy of this book is available in the physical handling box of this toolkit.



## Edinburgh Divided

### John Cormack and No Popery in the Late 1930s

By Tom Gallagher.

In this book which can be obtained from the toolkit, Gallagher provides an analysis of the socio-economic and political landscape, which led to the formation of the Protestant Action Society (PAS.) and the rise of its populist leader John Cormack. The rationale behind the inclusion of this book in the toolkit came from Members of the Leith community, who highlighted the effect of the PAS. activities both in Leith and Edinburgh as a whole. Community members felt that in order to understand current intra-Christian relations this book would be helpful in providing a comparison with the near past. By focussing on Cormack and the PAS., Gallagher is able to illuminate not only the problem of Anti-Catholic feeling which Cormack was able to inspire among great numbers of people, who would normally not have become involved in such action. But also provide opportunities to gain insight into the structural conditions which allied to facilitate a rise in sectarian activities which became a hallmark of the times. Themes raised in this book, can be used to promote dialogue around the subject of not only intra-Christian

sectarianism, but also the wider issues of other faith based intolerance and racial intolerance.

It is possible to compare the social and political circumstances which prevailed between the first and second world wars with current social and political ideologies. These being a time of high unemployment and low opportunity of advancement from poverty; a wide gap between the richest and the poorest members of society; a lack of state intervention to alleviate structural inequalities and an overriding Liberal/Neo-Liberal ideology which promotes individualism and self-reliance as a panacea for all of society's ills. Gallagher highlights that it was against this background that Cormack, was able to instil firstly a great fear among the Protestant majority of Edinburgh's population. That not only their jobs but their whole way of life was at risk from a Catholic underclass. But turn this fear into belief and then direct action, which manifested in both physical and political arenas. In the physical arena, Cormack was able to count on numbers of up to ten thousand people to disrupt any events which he deemed a danger to the Protestant way of life, such as outdoor masses or civic events. But perhaps the main thrust of this book and point of interest, is the fact that Cormack and PAS, were able to turn this populist movement into political power, by winning multiple

seats on the Edinburgh council on multiple occasions. Such a fear of difference and the worry of job security, which Cormack exploited can be compared with the rise of far right political ideology in Britain today which seeks to gain political capital, by playing once again on people's fears of migrants and their effect on job security. Identifying such similarities is a useful tool in developing dialogue which promotes the seeking of a deeper understanding of who profits from the division of labour and communities. Finally Gallagher provides a discussion of the relationship between PAS, and institutions such as the Police, other political parties and the Press. By doing this Gallagher shines a light on a time when they appeared to be a great deal of tolerance of the actions of PAS, ranging from simple tolerance to outright collusion in order to maintain the balance of power in favour of anti-socialist alliances. This book is well researched and written and contains many areas for discussion, a few of which I have outlined in this introduction. It provides many interesting facts and is an ideal starting point for anyone who wishes to deepen their understanding of sectarian attitudes.