

# Lady Lilian Spender

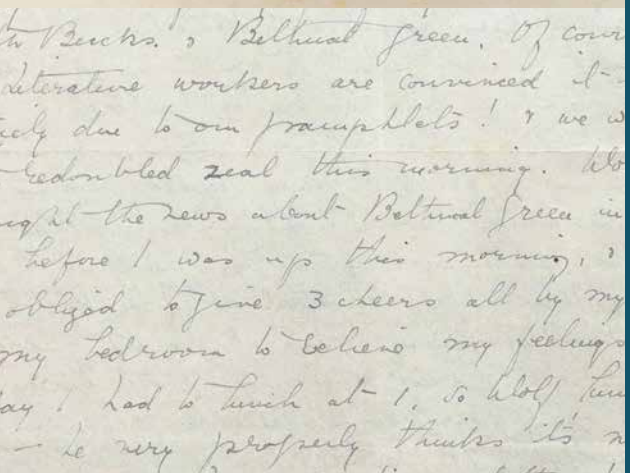
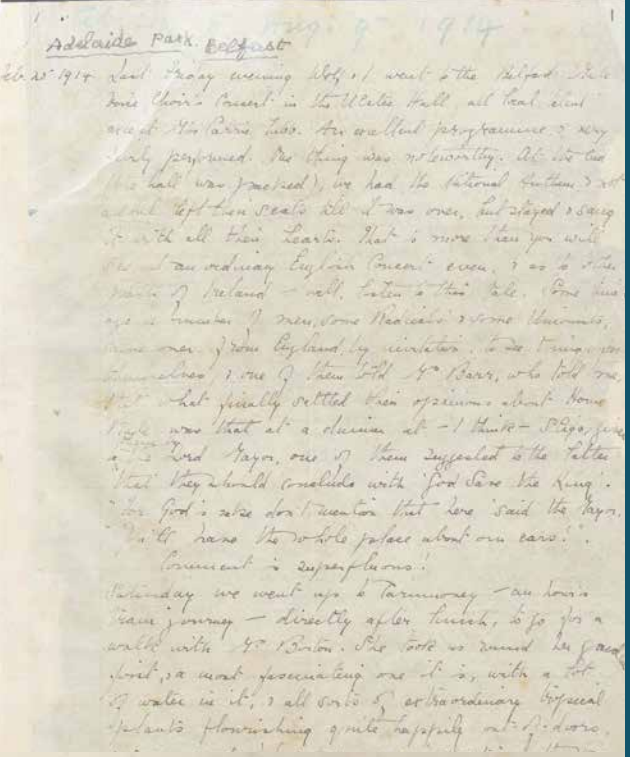


**Creative  
Centenaries**

The story of  
**Lady Lilian Spender**

**Key Stage 3** Learning Resource





**The story of Lady Lilian Spender has been developed by the Nerve Centre's Understanding the Decade of Commemorations project, in partnership with the Tower Museum.**

It is the latest in a series of graphic novels connected to the Decade of Centenaries, which highlight important historical events and people from Ireland's history during the years 1912-1923.

This is a Key Stage 3 curriculum linked resource that explores the diaries of Lilian Spender, who had a unique perspective of one of the most turbulent periods of Irish history, from the Home Rule crisis to the Anglo-Irish Treaty and beyond.

This graphic novel has been produced in 2020 to mark the anniversary of the Government of Ireland Act in 1920 and the subsequent partition of Ireland into two political jurisdictions - Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland.

Further graphic novels, as well as a suite of animations and interactive resources, are available to access from [www.creativecentenaries.org/resources](http://www.creativecentenaries.org/resources).

Artwork by Hilary Lawler and script by Seth Linder. With thanks to Brian Dingwall, Silvia Dingwall, Dr Adrian Grant, Professor Fearghal McGarry, Rachel Sayers, and the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.

[creativecentenaries.org](http://creativecentenaries.org)  
[towermuseumcollections.com](http://towermuseumcollections.com)



This graphic novel is part of the Understanding the Decade of Commemorations project, supported by the European Union's PEACE IV Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).





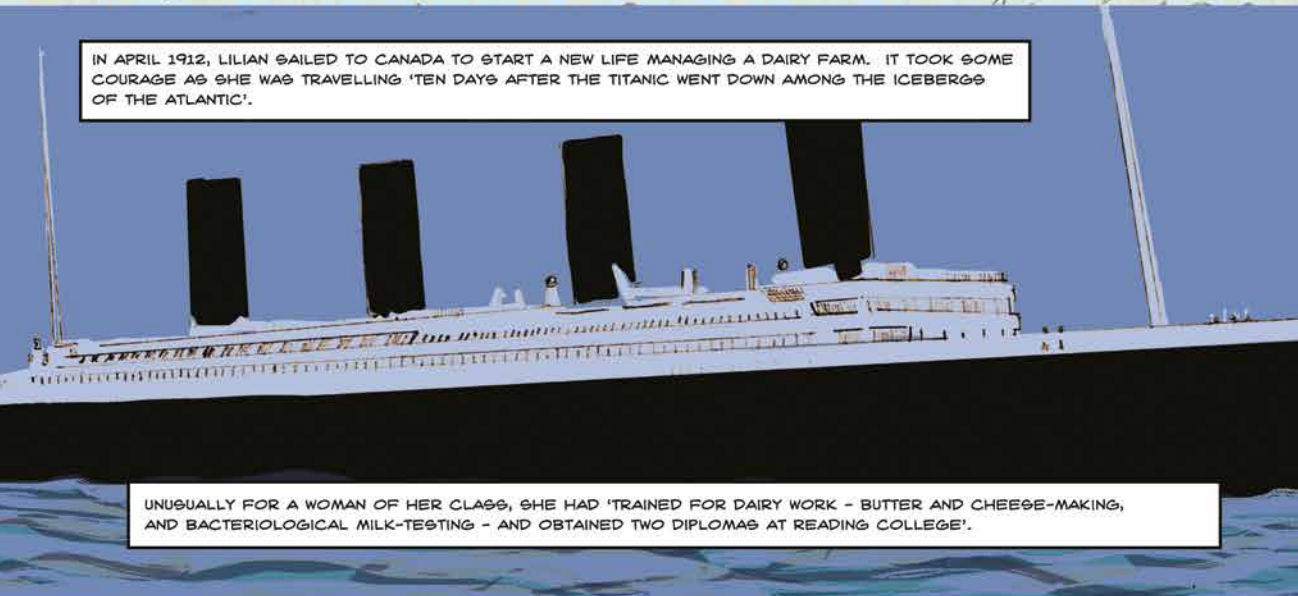
LILIAN SPENDER DID NOT PLAY A MAJOR ROLE IN THE GREAT EVENTS OF HER TIME BUT HER PRIVILEGED PLACE IN SOCIETY GAVE HER A FASCINATING INSIGHT INTO THE TURBULENT TIMES IN IRELAND FROM THE HOME RULE CRISIS TO THE ANGLO IRISH TREATY AND BEYOND.



BORN IN 1880 IN LONDON AND BROUGHT UP IN A WEALTHY FAMILY, LILIAN DEAN BEGAN HER DIARIES IN 1898 AND CONTINUED UNTIL HER DEATH IN 1966.

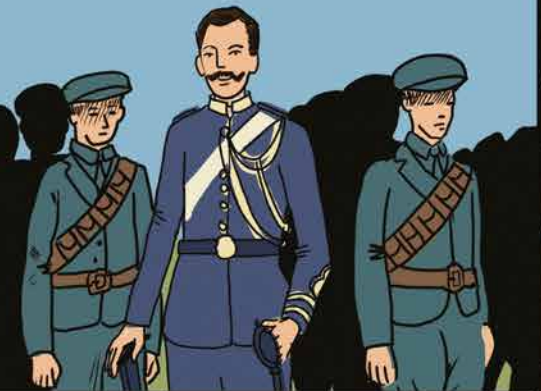


IN APRIL 1912, LILIAN SAILED TO CANADA TO START A NEW LIFE MANAGING A DAIRY FARM. IT TOOK SOME COURAGE AS SHE WAS TRAVELLING 'TEN DAYS AFTER THE TITANIC WENT DOWN AMONG THE ICEBERGS OF THE ATLANTIC'.



UNUSUALLY FOR A WOMAN OF HER CLASS, SHE HAD 'TRAINED FOR DAIRY WORK - BUTTER AND CHEESE-MAKING, AND BACTERIOLOGICAL MILK-TESTING - AND OBTAINED TWO DIPLOMAS AT READING COLLEGE'.

IN MAY 1913, RETURNING TO ENGLAND FOR A HOLIDAY, LILIAN MET WILFRID SPENDER, AN ARMY OFFICER HOME ON LEAVE FROM INDIA. THEY WERE QUICKLY ENGAGED, MARRYING IN SEPTEMBER.



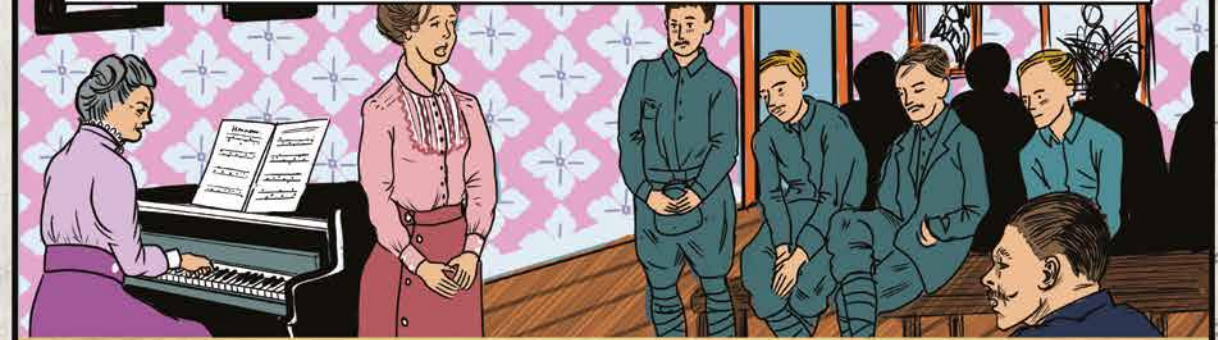
UNIONIST LEADER EDWARD CARSON INVITED WILFRID TO BELFAST TO HELP ORGANISE THE ULSTER VOLUNTEER FORCE (UVF), A PARAMILITARY FORCE. WILFRID JOINED THE STAFF OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL SIR GEORGE RICHARDSON AS QUARTERMASTER.

THE SPENDERS SETTLED QUICKLY INTO ULSTER LIFE AND BECAME FRIENDLY WITH MANY ESTABLISHMENT FIGURES, INCLUDING ARISTOCRATS, POLITICIANS, INDUSTRIALISTS AND MILITARY LEADERS. FEBRUARY 1914, LILIAN IS INVITED TO WATCH THE LAUNCH OF TITANIC'S SISTER SHIP, HMS BRITANNIC AT HARLAND & WOLFF.



February 1914.  
It was a dismal day, very misty, and a thick, fine rain falling, but it was a fascinating sight. Punctually to a second, as the last rocket went, the giant hulk began to move, & without a sound or a ripple even, she slowly glided into the water.

LILIAN JOINED THE UVF NURSING CORPS AND WORKED IN THE ULSTER DIVISION COMFORTS FUND. IT WAS EXPECTED SHE PLAYED HER PART IN SUPPORTING THE ORGANISATION.



March 25th, 1914.  
Tomorrow the men (that is the U.V.F. men) at Craigavon are having a sing song, and I believe I am to sing for them! Won't it be fun? Unluckily I have a cold, but it hasn't gone to my voice as yet, so I hope for the best.

LILIAN TOOK HER WORK AS A UVF NURSE SERIOUSLY. SHE DESCRIBES A TRAINING SESSION FOR AMBULANCE WORKERS IN BELFAST CASTLE, THE PREMISES DONATED BY THE OWNER, LORD SHAFTESBURY.



One of the rooms was fitted up as a ward, with 8 or 9 beds, and as soon as we were all assembled, the men did a little drill... then we went into the ward, and got the beds all ready, and the ambulance men began bringing in the "wounded", the men being "first-aided" outside, and then brought in on stretchers with labels attached, saying what was the matter with them.

On Monday I stayed in the garden in the morning  
in the afternoon was summoned by an

lunch with us, I eventually persuaded her  
also for the night - as he had told me he would



AS PART OF HIS ROLE TO PREPARE THE UVF TO FIGHT AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT, SHOULD HOME RULE BE INTRODUCED, WILFRID OVERSAW A SERIES OF GUN-RUNNING OPERATIONS, AFTER ARMS WERE SMUGGLED INTO LARNE ON APRIL 25, 1914.



May 14th, 1914.

It must have been a wonderful experience, the procession of some half dozen huge 5-ton motor lorries - the men on top of them armed to the teeth - and 15 or 16 motorcars, thundering over the quiet country roads, or through the sleeping towns where, here and there, a window would open, and a bewildered inhabitant would lean out, and either clap his hands delightedly when he saw what it was, or scowl fiercely, according to his sympathies.

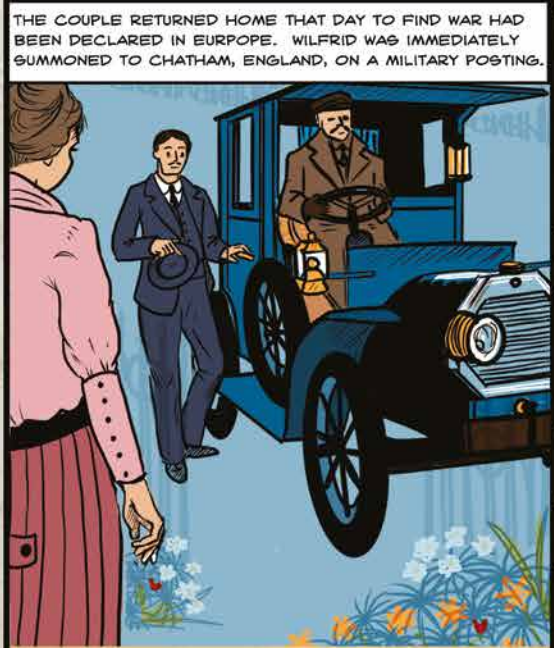
LILIAN WAS NOT ALWAYS IMPRESSED BY THE MEMBERS OF ULSTER SOCIETY SHE MET. TYPICAL WERE HER THOUGHTS ON TWO LEADING CITIZENS.



August 4th, 1914.

After church we strolled to the lake with... Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon - very nouveaux riches, who live in Hillsborough Castle, Lord Downshire's Place.

THE COUPLE RETURNED HOME THAT DAY TO FIND WAR HAD BEEN DECLARED IN EUROPE. WILFRID WAS IMMEDIATELY SUMMONED TO CHATHAM, ENGLAND, ON A MILITARY POSTING.

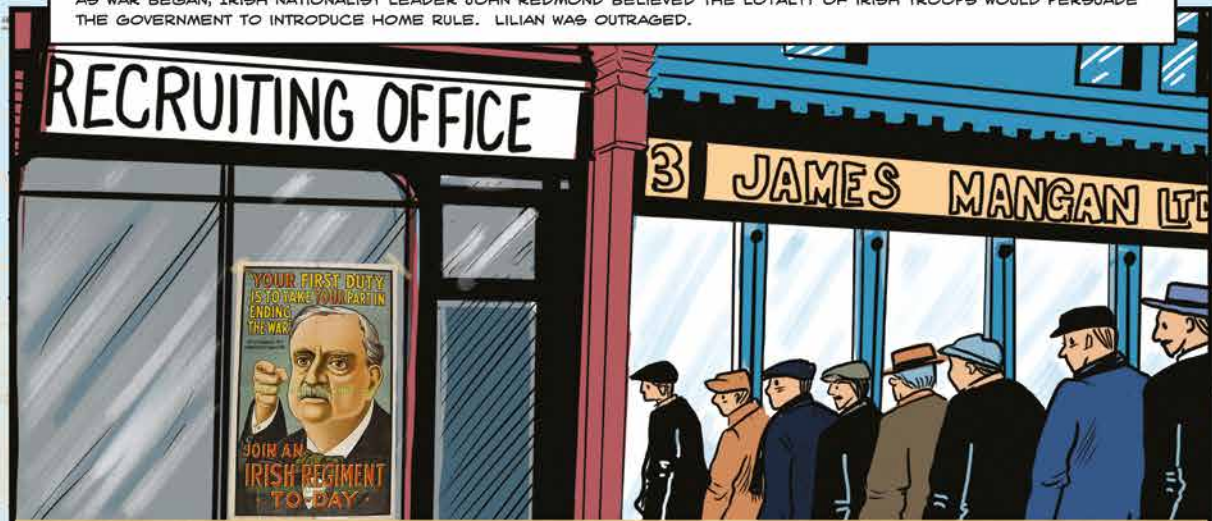


All his things were packed ready, and he just had time to go and telephone for a cab, and when it came, to catch the 9.30 boat to Fleetwood. It was horrible to have him go off like that, and be left behind.



I didn't sleep much that night, and lying awake in the small hours, I heard about 3 o'clock what I thought was a big gun firing, but it proved next day to be an explosion caused by suffragettes, who blew out the ancient east window in Lisburn Cathedral, the brutes.

AS WAR BEGAN, IRISH NATIONALIST LEADER JOHN REDMOND BELIEVED THE LOYALTY OF IRISH TROOPS WOULD PERSUADE THE GOVERNMENT TO INTRODUCE HOME RULE. LILIAN WAS OUTRAGED.



August 1914.

If Redmond insists on Home rule now, surely the country will recognise him for the traitor he is.

TO LILIAN'S FURY, THE HOME RULE BILL WAS PASSED ON SEPTEMBER 18TH, 1914, THOUGH IT WAS SUSPENDED UNTIL THE END OF THE WAR.

**WE SERVE NEITHER KING NOR KAISER  
I BUT IRELAND I**



I can't write what I feel about the Home Rule Bill being a fait accompli. It is too depressing and disheartening, but we'll fight the Govt. yet, when the war is over. ...Major Drage came back from Dublin on Monday and says the whole city is - or was then - plastered with placards saying: "We serve neither King nor Kaiser," and apparently no steps were being taken to remove them!

IF LILIAN HAD NO TIME FOR REDMOND AND HIS IRISH PARLIAMENTARY PARTY, SINN FÉIN, WHO WANTED TOTAL INDEPENDENCE FROM BRITAIN, WERE BEYOND CONTEMPT.



It is only a portion of Nationalists who are so disloyal (at any rate openly), and they are, in fact, hopelessly divided amongst themselves. The Sinn Féiners even give three cheers for the Germans at some of their meetings, poor fools.



NOW LIVING ON THE SOUTH COAST OF ENGLAND AS WILFRID HELPED THE 36TH ULSTER DIVISION PREPARE FOR THE WESTERN FRONT, LILIAN WITNESSED THE ARRIVAL OF KING GEORGE V TO REVIEW THE TROOPS.



I could have stroked his horse, he pranced so close to where I stood. He looked v. well and extremely cheerful. Everyone who talked to the King said he seemed extraordinarily cheerful about the war, and appears to think that the Germans are pretty nearly ready to ask for peace, and that their men won't face another winter campaign. I wonder.

IN THE FIRST TWO DAYS OF THE SOMME OFFENSIVE, THE 36TH ULSTER DIVISION SUFFERED OVER 5,500 CASUALTIES. WILFRID WROTE TO LILIAN SOON AFTER.



To: Lillian Spender  
July 2nd, 1916.

I am not an Ulsterman but yesterday as I followed their amazing attack I felt that I would rather be an Ulsterman than anything else in the world. My position enabled me to watch the commencement of their attack from the wood in which they had formed up, but which, long prior to the hour of assault, was being overwhelmed with shell fire so that the trees were stripped and the top half of the wood ceased to be anything but a slope of bare stumps with innumerable shell holes pitted in the chalk.

It looked as if nothing could live in the wood, and indeed the losses were heavy before they started, two companies of one battalion being reduced to a fourth in the assembly trenches.

When I saw their men emerge out of the smoke and form up as if on parade, I could hardly believe my eyes.

REMARKABLY, THE ULSTER DIVISION FOUGHT THROUGH FIVE GERMAN LINES, THEIR NUMBERS GROWING THINNER ALL THE TIME. BUT THE SPEED AND FEROCITY OF THEIR ATTACK LEFT OTHERS BEHIND. WITH NO TROOPS ON THEIR FLANKS TO COVER THEM, THEY BECAME ISOLATED. THEIR FINAL POSITION, FAR ADVANCED, COULD NO BE HELD.



The order to retire was given, but many parties preferred to die in the ground they had won hardly...

My pen cannot describe adequately the hundreds of heroic acts that I witnessed nor how yesterday a relieving force was organised of men who had already been fighting for 36 hours to carry ammunition and water to the gallant garrison still holding on...

The Ulster Division has lost more than half the men who attacked, and in doing so has sacrificed itself for the Empire which has treated them none too well.

The much derided Ulster Volunteer Force has won a name which equals any in History.

Wilfrid

BACK IN LONDON, LILIAN COULD OFFER LITTLE BUT SYMPATHY WHEN SHE WROTE BACK.



Your two scraps of July 2nd have come and I can think of nothing else. I never dreamt I should hear yet. It must have nearly broken your heart to watch such things but oh, how proud I am. I can't write about it. My heart is too full. It seems too cruel a thing to have happened that the flanking Divs. should have failed to come up.



IN 1920, THE SPENDERS RETURNED TO BELFAST AFTER SIR JAMES CRAIG ASKED WILFRID TO REORGANISE THE ULSTER VOLUNTEER FORCE. PARTITION HAD NOW BEEN AGREED, THOUGH NOT IMPLEMENTED. BELFAST WAS IN THE GRIP OF RIOTS.



August 1920.

*It's a queer sort of existence this. Very much like living on top of a particularly active and lively volcano!... You see, the Sinn Féiners have a way of hiding in side streets and firing at random into the main thoroughfares, which is rather upsetting!... There are endless cases of people being turned out of their houses - S.F.'s turning out Unionists and vice versa, sometimes with violence, sometimes more or less peacefully. Sometimes when the S.F. lives in a Protestant district and the Unionist in an R.C. one, an exchange is effected, and the cart that removes the S.F.'s belongings also fetches away the Unionist's!! It's a crazy business altogether.*

THE SPENDERS SOON GOT BACK INTO THE SWING OF SOCIETY LIFE. ON NOVEMBER 20TH, 1920 THEY STAYED WITH COLONEL PAKENHAM OF LANGFORD LODGE, NEAR LOUGH NEAGH. IT WAS A RIOTOUS EVENING WITH THE COLONEL, HIS SISTER IN LAW, MRS. MOLLOY, LADY MABEL ANNESLEY AND HER SON GERALD AND LILIAN'S FRIEND JOAN BRISTOW.



*We had music in the evenings, Joan and I singing a lot, and then we discovered the Plantation Songs and all sang them lustily. Joan played ragtime for Col P and Lady Mabel who danced wildly in and out of the furniture. I didn't take too much to Lady Mabel, but Col P is delightful and so is Mrs. Molloy, both so gay and merry.*

*Pha... who has a lovely home down by...*

ON THAT SAME SATURDAY, DUBLINERS WITNESSED THE WORST DAY OF VIOLENCE OF THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE. FOLLOWING THE KILLING OF 12 BRITISH INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS AND TWO AUXILIARY POLICEMEN BY THE IRA, BRITISH FORCES KILLED 14 CIVILIANS AT A GAA GAME IN CROKE PARK. FOUR OTHERS WERE KILLED THAT DAY.



*Monday was a glorious morning with a hard frost. We got a shock at breakfast when Col P. opened the paper, and read about the Dublin murders.*

TENSIONS WERE ALSO HIGH IN BELFAST.



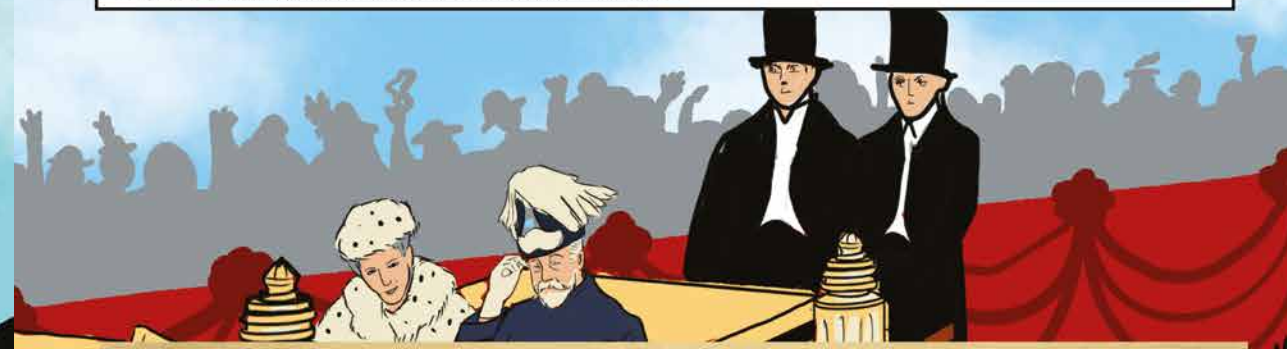
*It is a fact which has not yet found its way into the newspapers, that there are Sinn Féin police, I.R.A. men - in multitudes of course - posted everyday at Castle Junction, which is, as it were, the Oxford and Piccadilly Circuses rolled into one! Incredible, but true.*

THE SIGNING OF THE ANGLO-IRISH TREATY ON DECEMBER 6TH, 1921, BROUGHT AN END TO THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE. NORTHERN IRELAND, COMPRISING SIX OF ULSTER'S NINE COUNTIES, WOULD REMAIN BRITISH.



*Tuesday, yesterday, came the news in the paper that a Settlement of the Irish Question was reached at Downing Street at 3 o'clock that morning... In the evening W., who didn't get home until 10.30, brought home the Terms of the Settlement. He says they are a trifle better than he expected, as far as Ulster is concerned, but I hate and loathe the whole thing. And as for the paper this morning, I got as far as "the tense moment when Mr. LI. G. reached out and grasped the hands of Michael Collins, &c.", and then I flung it into the grate.*

THE NEW NORTHERN IRELAND PARLIAMENT WAS OPENED BY KING GEORGE V ON JUNE 22ND, 1921, AT CITY HALL, BELFAST. DESPITE HER ANXIETY ABOUT THE 'BLACK DREAD OF WHAT THE ENEMY IN OUR MIDST MIGHT TRY TO DO', LILIAN WAS DELIGHTED WITH THE RECEPTION FROM HER SEAT IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER.



*By the greatest luck I was near a window, and was able to lean out and command a perfect view of the street approaching the City Hall, so saw the procession arrive, and heard the roar of cheers that greeted the King and Queen. I've seen many a Royal procession in London, and have never heard louder or heartier cheering... It was very short, but the King's speech was most impressive, although he read it all. His voice is rather hoarse, but he has a beautiful delivery, and not a trace of a German accent as some people say he has.*



LILIAN DID NOT JUST RECORD THE LIFESTYLES OF THE WEALTHY AND POWERFUL. SHE WAS HORRIFIED BY THE CONDITIONS SHE SAW IN THE YORK STREET SPINNING MILLS, LARGELY STAFFED BY CATHOLIC WORKERS IN AUGUST 1921.



It really was very interesting, but I was distressed to see what unhealthy conditions are necessary. The room where the actual spinning is done has to be kept artificially damp, and the warm steaming atmosphere was almost unbearable even for a few minutes. It always affects the workers injuriously in the long run, and only the very poorest class - RCs of course - will work in that room. Something is wrong there, but it is difficult to see the remedy.

ON MARCH 17TH, 1923, THE SPENDERS' ONLY CHILD, PATRICIA DAFFODIL CLEATHER, WAS BORN. LILIAN WAS 42.



ALTHOUGH THE ANGLO IRISH TREATY HAD ENDED THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE IN 1921, IT WAS NOT THE END OF THE VIOLENCE. ON A WALK NEAR BELLEEK IN COUNTY FERMANAGH, LILIAN AND WILFRID MET MAJOR MOORE IN HIS HOUSE, JUST OVER THE BORDER.



The Major was forced to keep 150 Republicans in his house for several weeks, and they wrecked the whole place, till it looks, with its bare rooms, broken furniture, smashed mirrors and disfigured walls, like a house in the war zone in France. They destroyed his water supply so that now he has to fetch his water in pails from a well - they stole his war medals - they strode about his garden in his fur coat on hot summer days... when they finally departed the house was in an indescribable condition of filth.

WILFRID SPENDER WAS SECRETARY TO THE NORTHERN IRELAND CABINET, 1921-1925, PERMANENT SECRETARY TO THE MINISTER OF FINANCE FROM 1925 TO HIS RETIREMENT IN 1944. HE WAS KNIGHTED IN 1929. HE WON THE MILITARY CROSS FOR HIS PART IN THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME.



THE SPENDERS STAYED IN NORTHERN IRELAND UNTIL 1955 WHEN THEY RETURNED TO ENGLAND. WILFRID DIED IN 1960. LILIAN CONTINUED TO WRITE HER DIARY UNTIL HER DEATH IN 1966.



... eventually persuaded her magistrates to stop for the night, as he had told me he would...  
 ... street in the garden in the morning...





## Record a podcast with Lady Lilian Spender

Students will imagine a scene where Lilian Spender is being interviewed on leaving Northern Ireland in 1955. In groups, students will research some of the main events that Lilian observed and commented on in her diaries between 1913 and 1923. Students will script an interview between Spender and a fictional interviewer, exploring how Ireland has changed from when she first arrived and asking about some of the dramatic moments she has witnessed. Students will assume the role of both characters and use audio recording software to create their podcast.

### Key Stage 3 Curriculum Links

Key Elements	Cross Curricular Skills	Thinking Skills & Personal Capabilities	Areas of Learning
Personal Understanding; Mutual Understanding; Moral Character; Citizenship; Cultural Understanding; Media Awareness; Ethical Awareness	Communication; Using ICT	Managing Information; Thinking; Problem Solving; Decision Making; Being Creative; Working with Others	The Arts; English (with Media Education); Environment & Society



## Write Lady Lilian Spender's final diary entry

Students will imagine they are Lilian Spender, writing in her diary for the very last time and reflecting on a turbulent period in Irish history which led to the creation of Northern Ireland in 1921. Students will work independently to write a one page diary entry, putting themselves in Lilian's shoes as she looks back over some of the dramatic events she witnessed in her lifetime.

### Key Stage 3 Curriculum Links

Key Elements	Cross Curricular Skills	Thinking Skills & Personal Capabilities	Areas of Learning
Personal Understanding; Mutual Understanding; Moral Character; Citizenship; Cultural Understanding; Media Awareness; Ethical Awareness	Communication; Using ICT	Managing Information; Thinking; Problem Solving; Decision Making; Being Creative; Working with Others	The Arts; English (with Media Education); Environment & Society



## Class discussion

Women's voices are often missing from the historical record or overlooked in our telling of history. One way of bringing women's voices to the fore is through diaries and letters held in archives like those of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. These documents can provide an intimate insight into the lives of women throughout history, allowing them to speak for themselves and tell their story. What will we leave behind in a digital world? Will texts and emails survive as long as paper-based documents? Where will the historians of the future look to find our stories?



## The diaries of Lady Lilian Spender offer a unique perspective of one of the most turbulent periods of Irish history, from the Home Rule crisis to the Anglo-Irish Treaty and beyond.

Born into a wealthy London family in 1880, Lilian Dean was unusually independent for a woman of her class. In 1912, she sailed to Canada to manage a dairy farm, having taken a diploma in butter and cheese-making. The next year, returning to London on holiday, she met and married Captain Wilfrid Spender, a 37-year-old army officer home on leave from India.

The Spender's close involvement with Ulster began in 1913 when unionist leader Edward Carson invited Wilfrid to Belfast to help organise the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), a paramilitary force which was formed to fight against Home Rule.

Lilian's diary revolved around her social life, recording her encounters with the many leaders of Ulster society – aristocrats, politicians, industrialists and military men – with whom she and Wilfrid mixed. She joined the UVF Nursing Corps and wrote of the various training exercises they undertook with the soldiers.

Although not political, her great interests were singing and gardening, Lilian shared Wilfrid's strong anti-Home Rule views. As part of his role to prepare the UVF to fight against the government, should Home Rule be introduced, Wilfrid oversaw a series of gun-running operations in 1914. Lilian was furious when the Home Rule Bill was passed that September, although it was suspended for the duration of the First World War.

The Spenders travelled to England as Wilfrid helped the 36th Ulster Division, of which the UVF was part, to prepare for the Western Front. There, Lilian witnessed the arrival of King George V to review the troops. Wilfrid accompanied the 36th Ulster Division to France, recording in letters to Lilian the heroic but doomed assault by the Division during the first two days of the Somme Offensive in July 1916. He would later be awarded the Military Cross for his exploits.

The Spenders returned to Belfast in 1920 after Wilfrid was asked to reorganise the Ulster Volunteer Force. Lilian's diary describes the rioting in Belfast as both sides waited for partition to be implemented. These tensions remained after the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 which brought to an end the War of Independence. She was in a prime location in Belfast City Hall to describe King George V opening the first Northern Ireland parliament that year.

In 1923, at the age of 42, she gave birth to the Spender's only child, Patricia. Wilfrid was Secretary to the Northern Ireland Cabinet, 1921-1925, and Permanent Secretary to the Minister of Finance from 1925 to his retirement in 1944. He criticised discrimination in the new state, appointing Catholics to the Civil Service. In 1929, Wilfrid was knighted. They remained in Northern Ireland until 1955, when they moved back to England. Wilfrid died in 1960, Lilian six years later.

### FURTHER INFORMATION

#### ONLINE

Introduction to Lady Lilian Spender's diaries.

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/introduction-lady-spenders-diaries>

Diary of Lady Lilian Spender, 1913.

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/diary-lillian-spender-1913>

#### BOOK

*World War I and the Question of Ulster, The Correspondence of Lilian and Wilfred Spender*, edited by Margaret Baguley. Based on a collection of some 2750 letters in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.

#### VISIT

The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland holds an archive of Lady Lilian Spender's papers, including correspondence and diaries from 1888-1966.

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/proni>



