News

People watch as the completed Craigyhill bonfire burns on the '11th night' to usher in the 12t

People watch as the completed Craigyhill bonfire burns on the '11th night' to usher in the 12th of July celebrations in Larne, Northern Ireland, July 11. The Police Service of Northern Ireland said it is investigating a possible crime after an image of Pope Francis was burned in another bonfire in Belfast, Northern Ireland. (CNS/Reuters/Clodagh Kilcoyne)

Michael Kelly

View Author Profile

Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Dublin — July 13, 2022

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

The Police Service of Northern Ireland said it is investigating a possible crime after an image of Pope Francis was burned in a bonfire.

Other fires — lit by Protestants to commemorate a battle 332 years ago which ended the Catholic monarchy in England — also contained signs reading "kill all Taigs," a derogatory term for Catholics.

Posters and images of prominent politicians from a Catholic background also were set ablaze during the so-called "eleventh night" bonfires on the eve of the July 12 commemoration of the Battle of the Boyne.

In a statement July 13, the police service said it is "gathering evidence" about the incidents.

An image of Pope Francis was erected on a pyre in north Belfast along with election posters belonging to the Irish nationalist party Sinn Féin and the Palestinian flag.

Advertisement

At other sites, election posters belonging to the Social Democratic and Labor Party and Alliance Party, both supporters of Irish unification, and People Before Profit, an electoral alliance, also appeared on bonfires, as did signs bearing the message "KAT" — kill all Taigs.

The police said it had "received a number of complaints relating to flags, effigies, election posters and other emblems being placed on bonfires."

"We are gathering evidence in respect of these complaints and will review to establish whether offences have been committed," a police spokesman said.

Sinn Féin councilor Gary McCleave, whose election poster appeared on a bonfire in Belfast, tweeted saying, "Tonight I am having to answer questions from my children who came across this on social media why their Daddy is on a bonfire to be burnt. This is not culture, it is a hate crime. Those within political unionism need to show leadership and stand up against this sectarian hatred."

July 12 is celebrated by many Protestants as the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne which took place in 1690 in what is now the Irish Republic along the Boyne River. The forces of the Catholic King James II of England and Ireland were defeated by the Dutch prince William of Orange who went on to rule as King William III.

James, the last Catholic king of England, died in exile in France in 1701 and his defeat in 1690 marked the decisive end of attempts to regain the monarchy for Catholic hands.

Orangemen — who set the bonfires each year — take their name from William of Orange.