PARADES ARE public demonstrations of organizational strength and personal commitment. They mark holidays and commemorate anniversaries. They can be political or religious, or a combination of both.

Ever since the Middle Ages, Irish marchers have carried elaborate banners to proclaim who they are and why they are marching. The standard banner is seven feet long by six feet wide. They are usually hand-painted on pure silk.

Magnificently painted banners, carried by two or more marchers, and single-person bannerettes are a mainstay of Northern Irish parades. Banners usually feature a central panel honoring religious or political figures, famous battles, vignettes of virtuous acts, or biblical stories. These are surrounded by elaborate scroll work, the organization’s name and location, and a motto.

In Northern Ireland, the parading season runs from Easter until late August. The Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland (GOLI), a Protestant fraternal organization founded in 1795, holds many parades. The Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH), a Catholic fraternal organization; trade unions; temperance societies; and other Irish groups, such as the Royal Black Preceptory, the Apprentice Boys of Derry, and the Irish National Foresters, also organize parades.