

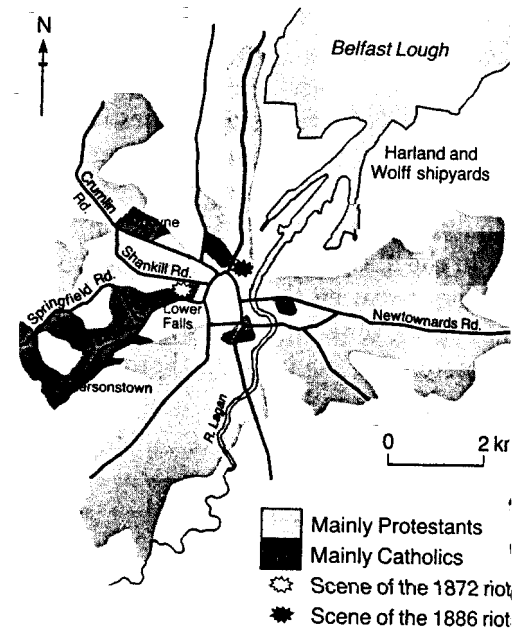
# The Irish Free State

## The creation of the Republic

It is perhaps truer of Northern Ireland than elsewhere in the United Kingdom, that the people there are prisoners of their own past. This unit examines how in the twentieth century, the past came to divide the island and people of Ireland.

Illustrated  
London News,  
15 August 1872

The two sides met for a battle in the brick fields between the Shankill and the Falls Road. The police tried in vain to separate them and the military were sent for. The houses on the Shankill Road had been gutted by mobs. Protestants living in Catholic areas and Catholics living in Protestant districts have found it necessary to change their quarters.



A map of Belfast by religion

### Ireland

The division between Protestant and Catholic in Ireland goes back several centuries. Key events in Anglo-Irish relations are still celebrated in one community, and mourned in the other:

- After the Reformation in England Henry VIII and Elizabeth I attempted to force the Irish to accept their authority.
- From 1610 the Stuart kings created 'Plantations', loyal communities of Protestant settlers. They gave them the best farming land, especially in the north.
- 1688 James II lost the throne of England because he wanted to restore the Catholic faith. He began his campaign to regain the throne in Ireland.
- 1690 the new Protestant king of England, William III, met Catholic James II in Ireland and defeated him at the Battle of the Boyne.
- 1697-1727 Protestants made laws to ensure that Catholics were kept out of political power in Ireland.
- 1798 Wolfe Tone's rebellion was defeated by the British.
- 1800 Britain passed the *Act of Union* which abolished the Irish Parliament and made Irish MPs sit in the British Parliament.
- 1846-1849 The Great Famine, due to the failure of the potato harvest, caused a million Irish people to die.
- 1848, 1867 Attempts at uprisings by groups such as the Young Ireland Movement (1848), and the Fenians (1867) failed.
- From the 1850s onwards, many Irish Catholics chose to take a chance and migrate to America rather than to remain as second class citizens in their homeland.



William of Orange's  
victory at the Boyne  
on 1 July 1690

## The partition of Ireland

At the start of the twentieth century there were two Irish revolutionary organisations seeking independence from England: the Fenians, and Sinn Fein (Ourselves Alone). They proposed opting out of British rule and that Irish MPs should set up their own government in Dublin.

Whilst the ordinary people of Ireland would not support revolution, many wanted peaceful change. They were led by the Irish Nationalists, who campaigned to persuade the British to grant Home Rule to Ireland. Twice, in 1886 and 1893, Home Rule Bills came before the House of Commons at Westminster, but were defeated. Under a new Nationalist leader, John Redmond, it seemed that a third Irish Home Rule Bill in 1912 might be successful. This particularly alarmed Protestants in the north of Ireland, who feared being outnumbered by Catholics in an Irish Parliament. They formed their own party, the Ulster Unionist Party, to keep Britain and Ireland united. The Unionists were supported by the Conservative Party. Although the Bill was passed by the House of Commons, the Conservative majority rejected it in the House of Lords.



HANDS OFF PRIEST!



The Lords could only delay the Bill (refer to p.11). In the meantime the Ulster Protestants, led by Sir Edward Carson MP, launched their own campaign to make sure that the Bill would never become law. They wanted to remain under British rule. 400,000 Ulster Protestants signed a 'Solemn Covenant' or agreement to fight Home Rule. They formed a private army, the Ulster Volunteers, which was soon 100,000 strong and had £1 million to buy weapons which could be obtained from Germany.

The fierce opposition of the Ulster Protestants cast doubt over independence for Ireland. It seemed increasingly unlikely that the British government would force Irish Protestants to accept an Irish Parliament against their will. Many Irish Nationalists and the Fenians, seeing the possibility of victory being snatched from their grasp, responded by forming an army of their own, the Irish Volunteers. Within a year 75,000 Catholics had joined and they too were buying arms from Germany.

At the outbreak of the First World War, the majority of Irish thought that the war would be short, and that the Home Rule Bill would then take its course. In the meantime, over 200,000 Irish men, Catholic and Protestant, joined the British army. Although, in 1915, Redmond was offended that Carson was given a Cabinet post and he was not, he still urged Irish Catholics to fight for King and Empire.



Anti-Home Rule demonstration in Portadown, September 1912



A view of the influence of the Roman Catholic Church in Irish affairs, 1891

Not all Irish Catholics agreed with him. The Fenians saw the war as an opportunity to free Ireland. On Easter Monday 1916, in Dublin, they started a rebellion. Only after several days' fighting was their symbolic capture of the General Post Office ended by the British army. The majority of Irish people were dismayed at the Easter Rising. One eye-witness to the Rising recalled, 'If Ireland as a whole could have got hold of Tom Clarke and his Fenians during that week it would have torn them to pieces.' But the manner in which the British dealt with the ringleaders upset

many Irish people. The British decided to make an example of the rebels for causing a rebellion and diverting so many troops that were needed elsewhere. It was thought to be an opportunity to discredit militant nationalism in the eyes of the Irish people. But this was a serious misjudgement. Fifteen of the captured rebels were executed. One of them, James Connolly, was so badly injured he had to be strapped to a chair to be shot. Incidents such as this helped to turn the anti-British minority into a majority. In 1918 alone, the number of Sinn Fein members grew from 66,270 to 120,080.

This trend was made clear in the general election of 1918, when voters rejected Redmond's idea of Home Rule and voted for Sinn Fein and complete independence. Only in Ulster was there a wish to keep the Union with Britain. Sinn Fein MPs acted immediately: they refused to go to Westminster and instead set up their own Parliament, The Dail, in Dublin. At the same time, a campaign of violence against Britain began. The Irish Volunteers were organised into the Irish Republican Army under the leadership of Michael Collins. From 1919, the IRA fought a bitter guerilla war with the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC). The Police were ambushed and the RIC stations attacked. The British government reinforced RIC numbers by recruiting the 'Black and Tans' and the RIC 'Auxiliaries'. These forces quickly gained a reputation for cruelty: IRA suspects were beaten up, and some were killed. Because of the increasing violence on both sides, by June 1920, 200 RIC men were resigning each month.

The British government under Prime Minister Lloyd George desperately looked for compromise. As a temporary measure, Ireland was divided into north and south, each with its own Parliament. The fighting continued, and not until June 1921 was a truce arranged. From July to December, the Nationalists, the Unionists, and the British government negotiated a settlement. At the finish the Nationalists, led by Michael Collins and Arthur Griffiths, signed the peace treaty which created The Irish Free State and Northern Ireland.



**B** The front cover of a special edition of *Irish Life*, 1916

▼ The centre of Dublin after the Easter Rising, 1916



Not all of the Irish were happy with the settlement. Between 1922 and 1923 a brutal war was fought within the IRA. One of those who died was Michael Collins, who was shot during an ambush by anti-Treaty Nationalists on 22 August 1922. He had foreseen the future: as he signed the treaty, he had said, 'I am signing my own death warrant.' Even so, the supporters of the treaty were successful, and remained in power for a decade.

In 1932 Eamon de Valera came to power in the Free State. He believed that Northern Ireland had no right to exist and called for a united Ireland. He set about building a strong independent state in the

south. He changed the name of the Irish Free State to Eire, and the Roman Catholic Church was given a special place in the Constitution of the country. In 1936 the IRA was banned in Eire because its violent activities had become an embarrassment to the Dublin government, but it continued its struggle to make an independent united Republic of Ireland.

- 1 The Irish problem was difficult to solve for a number of reasons. These included the distant past, religion, Ulster, and the attitude of the British government. Use these reasons as a starting point to analyse the causes of the Irish problem.

### *The evidence*

#### **C** Redmond's Irish (Nationalist) Party and the war

It almost makes me cry to think of Irish soldiers fighting not for Ireland but for Carson and what he stands for. Home Rule is dead and buried and the Irish Party is a tool of the British Empire.

The Catholic Bishop of Killaloe, who previously supported Redmond, wrote this in June 1915

#### **D** The Easter rising

You are washing out our whole life's work in a sea of blood. Thousands of people in Dublin, who ten days ago were bitterly opposed to the whole of the Sinn Fein movement and to the rebellion, are now becoming infuriated against the government for these executions.

John Dillon, an Irish Party MP, spoke to the House of Commons on 11 May 1916

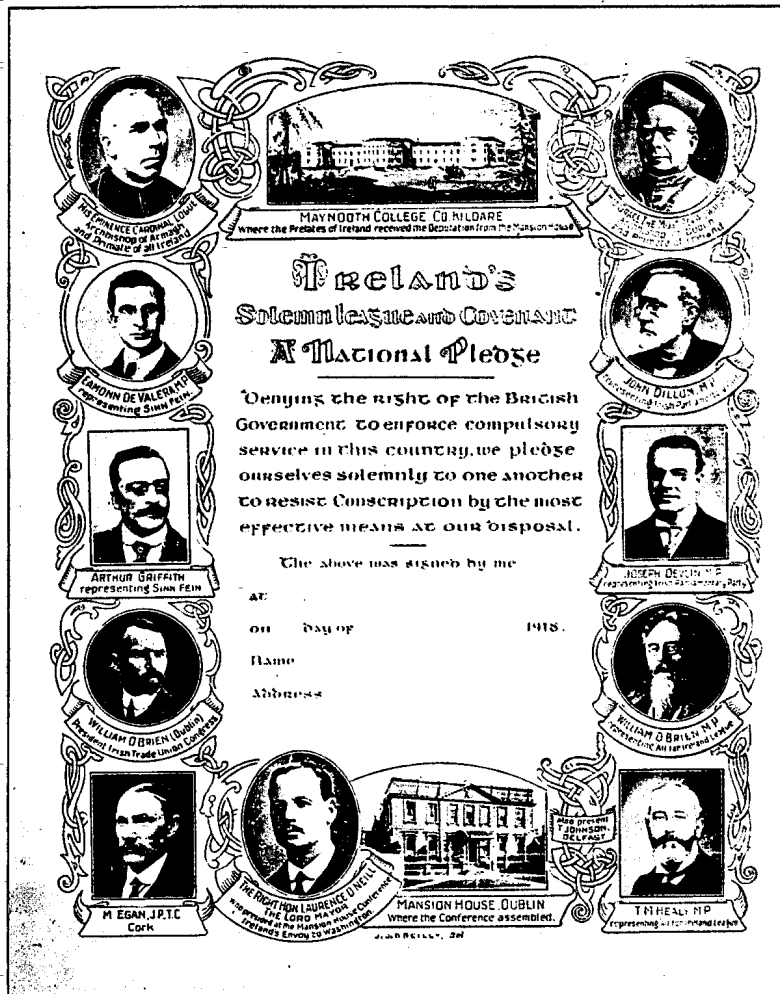
#### **E** What the hell am I doing?

In 1916 I was in Iraq with the British army. I saw a notice telling us of this rising in Dublin, and the executions of men I'd never heard of. I said to myself, 'What the hell am I doing with the British army? It's with the Irish I should be!'

Tom Barry who later became a commander in the IRA, speaking in 1982



Prisoners from the Easter Rising being marched out of Dublin, May 1916



**F** Conscription, 1918

No one who has not been in Ireland during the last six weeks can possibly realise the resentment aroused by conscription. Men are ready to take to the hills or die fighting in their homes rather than be forced to join the army.

In March 1918 the government decided to force Irish men to join the British army to fight in the First World War. Hugh Law, an Irish Party MP, wrote this in June 1918

- 2 Study the sources and then answer the question, 'Why did events during the First World War change Irish opinion towards the British?'

**G** Anti-conscription oath of April 1918 showing the backing of the Catholic Church for Sinn Fein.

**Interpreting the evidence – The Black and Tans**

**H** Not sadists and perverts

The Black and Tans became identified with terror. They were not, as legend had it, the sweepings of English jails, sadists and perverts let loose upon an innocent countryside. Their admission to the force was governed by the strict rules the RIC had always applied, though as numbers rose it is hard not to believe that the rules were relaxed, and some people with criminal tendencies slipped through the net. The Black and Tans were for the most part young men who found it hard to settle down after the war and who had become used to a career of adventure and bloodshed. They were the

same type as the Congo mercenaries of our own day. Their ruthlessness and contempt for life and property stemmed from four years of trench warfare, and the intense strain of service in Ireland. It's not surprising that the Tans should, before long, have come to regard the whole population as hostile, which, once it had experienced them, it very soon became. A similar judgement may be made upon the Auxiliaries. Opinions of them at the time are interestingly divergent, but in action they seem to have been every bit as tough and uninhibited as the Black and Tans.

F. S. L. Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine*, 1973. Professor Lyons is a leading Irish historian based in Dublin. His previous books include *The Irish Parliamentary Party*; *The Fall of Parnell*; and *Internationalism in Europe*

From the end of 1919 advertisements appeared in English papers for men to carry out 'a rough and dangerous task'. The 'task' was to carry out a shoot to kill policy. From March, when the Black and Tans began to arrive in Ireland, they carried out the policy in two ways; the satisfying of their collective thirsts and of the itch in their trigger fingers. The Tans made their debut in Limerick in a manner that was typical of their behaviour all over the country. They arrived in a string of lorries and proceeded to shoot up the city. 'We were awoken at 12.30 am and saw thirty or forty Black and Tans all lying on the road shooting at Tate's clock with their rifles.

Getting tired of this, they forced their way into the Glenworth Hotel and demanded the management open up the bar. After drinking for about an hour they left.'

The Tans were not, as was said, the scourings of the jails of England, they were merely encouraged to behave as if they were. They were ex-servicemen, generally unemployed, to whom ten shillings a day and the offer of a free hand to make Ireland 'hell for the rebels' were attractive bait. They owed their name to their uniform, which resulted in the Irish giving them the nickname, after a famous pack of hounds.

The Tans, as the Tate clock episode indicates, made Ireland safe neither

for the law-abiding nor for anyone else for that matter. They made the country a hell for an entire population. Churchill is credited with thinking up the second force, the Police Auxiliary Cadets (Auxiliaries). They were mostly ex-officers, with a view to bolstering the RIC and controlling the Black and Tans, and were paid £1 a day as befitted their status. The 'Auxis', as they were known, were more formidable than the Tans, a tough, ruthless, energetic and courageous force willing and able to use their guns. Time and time again the Volunteers testified to their bravery, but too often the mangled corpse of a woman or an old man did as much for their savagery.



T. P. Coogan, *Michael Collins*, a biography, 1990. Coogan is a leading Irish journalist. His previous books include *The IRA; Ireland since the Rising*; *On the Blanket* (a study of the H-Block protests), and *Disillusioned Decades 1966-1986*. He wrote this best selling biography of Michael Collins at the suggestion of his former History teacher, Father Michael O'Carroll. Coogan called Collins, 'the founder of modern guerilla warfare, the first freedom fighter, or urban terrorist.'

**J** Black and Tans

- 3 Coogan and Lyons both agree on the behaviour of the Black and Tans, but disagree on its causes. How do the writers differ in their explanation of the savagery of the Tans, and how would you explain that difference?