

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF IRISH HISTORY

The Coming of the Gaels to the Battle of the Boyne

[Compiled by Marc Conner, Washington & Lee Department of English © 2002]

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event or Action</u>
by 1 st c. B.C.	Peoples designated as Celtic are established in Ireland, Scotland, Wales; the Gaels reach Ireland from Gaul, conquer and mingle with existing Celts. (Early Irish epic and myth likely based on these conflicts.) The Gaels practice a form of Druidism, follow “Brehon Law,” and are organized into several kingdoms (seven, by the 5 th century), with at times a nominal “high king” (<i>ard ri</i>).
432	Legendary date for beginning of St. Patrick’s ministry to Ireland, converting the island to Christianity
6 th - 8 th c.	Irish monasteries formed; Irish monks play decisive role in preserving and restoring classical learning in Europe, as they establish monasteries from England to Italy
7 th - 11 th c.	The O’Neill (Ui Neill) clan rule Ireland jointly, north and south (1 st true “High Kings of Ireland,” established in the 4 th c. under “Niall of the Nine Hostages”)
795	Norse (Viking) Invasions begin, sacking wealthy Irish monasteries, and establishing the first true cities in Ireland: Dublin, Wexford, Waterford, Cork, Limerick.
1014	Last of the Norse invaders defeated by Brian Boru, High King of Ireland, in Battle of Clontarf (Viking settlers, called “Ostmen,” continue throughout Ireland, particularly in Dublin).
1170	Strongbow (Richard, Earl of Pembroke), invited by Dermot MacMurrough, king of Leinster, to aid Dermot in his conflict with Rory O’Connor. Strongbow lands near Waterford and begins conquest of southeastern Ireland, ruled by Rory O’Connor, King of Connaught (last of the High Kings, <i>ard ri</i>)
1171	Henry II, King of England, invades Ireland to consolidate Strongbow’s claims to the crown (he is backed by the Papacy, who want to see the Irish Church conform to Roman standards and practices); Anglo-Norman rule of Ireland begins (Lordship of Ireland)
1175	Treaty of Windsor: Rory O’Connor, King of Ireland, submits to Henry II. Though Rory is named <i>ard ri</i> , the title is merely nominal, and he had no successor as High King of Ireland.

- 12th / 13th cc.** English barons invade, settle in, and expand into Ireland, claiming lands and developing feudal estates. Gradually English civil government established in Ireland: exchequer, chancery, courts of justice, division into counties, parliament (Anglo-Irish only). During this time the great Old English (Anglo-Norman) families—Fitzgerald, de Burgh, Butler—form their power, and the Old Irish Kings—O’Connor, O’Brien, and O’Neill—still retain much of their ancient kingdoms.
- 1210** King John comes to Ireland, marches throughout the country, reasserting English law and power (last English king to visit until Richard II in 1394)
- 1315** Edward Bruce, brother of Robert Bruce of Scotland, invades Ireland and combats the English powers, aided by some of the Irish leaders. He proclaims himself King of Ireland, but is defeated by English in Battle of Faughart, 1318. Three great Anglo-Irish Earldoms created: Kildare, Desmond, and Ormond, who would in effect rule Ireland into the 16th century; in 1366 the Statutes of Kilkenny established, designed to prevent Gaelicization of the English colony in Ireland.
- 14th / 15th cc.** Native Irish strength & culture gradually increases, as Anglo-Irish (Anglo-Norman) population assimilates, becoming “more Irish than the Irish,” despite Kilkenny statutes. By the 1400’s, effective English control extended no further than the coastal area around Dublin (“the Pale”).
- 15th / 16th cc.** Rise to power of the Kildare family (the Leinster Geraldines), who would control Anglo-Norman Ireland for over fifty years
- 1534** Ninth Earl of Kildare recalled to England; his son, “Silken Thomas,” believing his father executed, rebels against the King. The Kildare War (rebellion of the Kildare family) follows, pitting the Geraldines and their native Irish allies against the Butlers and the pro-English forces. It ends in 1540 with the destruction of the Kildare family power, and the actual conquest of Ireland soon follows.
- 1534** Henry VIII declares the Anglican Church independent of the Roman Church; English Protestantism begins, and the England-Ireland conflict becomes a Protestant-Catholic conflict as well. Gradually the monasteries are dissolved, and their lands used as rewards to loyal aristocrats.
- 1536** Irish Parliament passes the Act of Supremacy, acknowledging Henry VIII supreme head of the Church of Ireland, replacing the Pope
- 1541** Irish Parliament recognizes Henry VIII as King of Ireland (no longer “Lord”). Thus Henry’s title is no longer dependent upon Papal grant.
- 1553-58** Queen Mary restores Catholicism to England

- 1558-1603** Queen Elizabeth I returns to Protestant Rule; passes the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity in Ireland, enforcing the Anglican Church rule (1560). Three great rebellions--O'Neill (1559), Desmond/FitzMaurice (1569-83, the Munster Rebellion), and Tyrone (1594-1603)-- reveal religious strife joined with nationalism in Ireland.
- 1601** Battle of Kinsale (defeat of Spanish Force, come to aid the O'Neill (Tyrone) rebellion)
- 1607** The Flight of the Earls: Ulster Earls flee to continent; the Ulster Plantation, mainly of Scottish Presbyterians, begins (first formulation of Protestant Northern Ireland). British restrictions on Irish trade and economy begin.
- 1641** Ulster Rebellion
- 1649-1660** Commonwealth of England, under Oliver Cromwell; Cromwell lands in Ireland in 1649--his campaigns in Ireland result in several infamous massacres of Catholics, seizures of Catholic estates, and oppression of Catholic clergy. Control of property shifts from Catholic to almost wholly Protestant.
- 1690-1691** Battle of the Boyne and Battle of Aughrim: decisive defeats of the pro-Catholic forces of King James II by King William III. Signals the end of Irish hopes for a Catholic king in England. Following the Treaty of Limerick, the remaining Irish Catholic gentry flee for the continent ("Flight of the Wild Geese"). Penal Laws against Catholics begin, and by 1703 Catholics own less than 10 per cent of the land in Ireland.

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From the Eighteenth Century through the Civil War

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- 1704** The Sacramental Test Act, making political office & membership in municipal corporations available only to those who receive communion according to the Church of Ireland (excluding both Roman Catholics and Protestant dissidents); penal laws reduce Catholic landowners; English trade laws restrict Irish export & trade industries □ **The Protestant Ascendancy** begins.
- 1720** The Declaratory Act, gave to the British Parliament legislative jurisdiction over Irish affairs, the authority “to make laws and statutes of sufficient force and validity to bind the kingdom and people of Ireland.” (“The Sixth of George I”)
- 1723-25** Controversy over “Wood’s halfpence” → Swift’s Drapier’s Letters (1724), objecting to English domination of Ireland
- 1759** The “Whiteboy” movement, in opposition to enclosures of common lands, begins--the first action of agrarian unrest
- 1767-1722** Lord Townshend establishes a resident Lord Lieutenant-ship in Ireland, as direct representative of Royal English power in Irish government
- 1778** First Protestant Volunteer Force forms, a national volunteer army formed by, and for the defense of, the Protestant Ascendancy (what Grattan terms “the armed property of the nation”). Their threat, combined with the crisis in America, leads to removal of most restrictions on Irish trade.
- 1782** “The Constitution of 1782”: a series of concessions to the Irish Parliament, including repeal of Declaratory Act, initiated largely due to British concern over the revolutions in France and America
- 1782-1800** “Grattan=s Parliament”: under leadership of Henry Grattan, the Irish Parliament holds its greatest legislative independence. Irish economic revival follows. As English and Anglo-Irish aristocracy settle in Ireland, the splendor of Georgian Dublin reaches its height.
- 1791** United Irishmen established. Irish Republicanism gains strength, fueled by revolutionary movements in France and America.
- 1793** Catholics restored to the Parliamentary Franchise

- 1798** On 24 May the United Irishmen Rebellion arises, with particularly fierce fighting in Wexford; it is crushed within six weeks; Wolfe Tone, charismatic leader of the “Rebellion of 1798,” dies, reportedly by suicide, in prison.
- 1801** The Act of Union, dissolving the Irish Parliament and merging England and Ireland into a single legislative body within the United Kingdom, passes the Irish Parliament, despite protests led by Henry Grattan.
- 1803** Robert Emmet leads failed rebellion in Dublin; captured and executed along with 20 followers. Leads to harsher coercion acts from British parliament.
- 1823** The Catholic Association founded, organized at the parish level and funded by the “Catholic Rent”; becomes the main instrument and resource for O=Connell=s emancipation campaign
- 1829** Led by Daniel O=Connell, “The Liberator,” Catholic Emancipation occurs after decades-long campaign
- 1840-42** O=Connell leads campaign for Repeal of the Act of Union, unsuccessfully; the Irish population reaches a peak of roughly 8,000,000; new national schools virtually destroy Irish as a spoken language.
- 1845** “Queen=s Colleges” established at Belfast, Cork, Galway
- 1845-49** The Great Famine (*mort gor*, the Great Hunger): failure of the potato crop for three out of four years leads to disastrous famine, resulting in the death of as many as 1,000,000 Irish from disease and starvation; another 2,000,000 emigrate, largely to the United States and South America, many on the infamous “coffin ships.” British response is at first insignificant, but gradually charitable relief begins to arrive. By the end of the century, the Irish population will have been reduced nearly by one-half, beginning with the horror of the Famine.
- 1848** The Young Irelanders, a splinter group from O=Connell=s Repeal Association, attempt a failed insurrection
- 1850** Irish Tenant Right League forms, to work on behalf of tenants against landlords and proprietors
- 1858** The Irish Republican Brotherhood, a secret insurrectionary group, is formed out of the Fenian Movement, under leadership of James Stephens; attempts failed insurrection in 1867.
- 1870** The Home Government Association, soon to become the Home Rule League, founded by Isaac Butt
- 1875** Charles Stewart Parnell enters Parliament; soon assumes leadership of Home

Rule League from Butt

- 1879** Michael Davitt forms the Irish Land League, working for land reform and the opposition to evictions; Parnell soon becomes its president.
- 1881** Gladstone=s Second Land Act, further improving lot of tenants and decreasing power of landlords
- 1884** Reform Act extends household franchise to Ireland, tripling the electorate; Gaelic Athletic Association founded by D.P. Moran
- 1886** First Home Rule Bill defeated in Parliament
- 1889** Parnell named co-respondent in O=Shea divorce petition, leading to his split with Catholic clergy and condemnation by British public.
- 1893** Second Home Rule Bill defeated in Parliament; Gaelic League founded by Douglas Hyde
- 1905** Sinn Fein (Aourselves alone@), radical nationalist group, formed by Arthur Griffith
- 1912-1913** House of Commons passes Home Rule bill, with proviso that the Lords must act on it by 1914; as Home Rule becomes a closer possibility, the Ulster Volunteers (Protestant military force) and then the Irish Volunteers (Catholic military force--soon to become the Irish Republican Army) form; Civil War seems imminent, when World War I begins, and both Nationalists and Unionists agree to suspend the conflict.
- 1913** The labor movement, led by James Connolly, stage a series of effective strikes in the cities; the strikes are violently put down, but Connolly had managed to connect the plight of urban workers with that of the rural tenants in opposition to British rule.
- 1916** The Easter Rising: Catholic insurgents seize central areas of Dublin, and proclaim a provisional government; fighting lasts for one week before insurgents are forced to surrender; all but one of the leaders (Eamon de Valera) are executed, to increasing public and international outrage. In Yeats's words, "A terrible beauty is born."
- 1918** Parliamentary elections yield overwhelming Sinn Fein majority. De Valera takes over presidency of Sinn Fein from Griffith, establishes new provisional government; the Irish Republican Army forms, begins guerilla warfare campaign against British soldiers; most Irish police resign, replaced by British recruits referred to as "the Black and Tans." The fighting is fierce, covert, bitter, and cruel on all sides.

- 1919-1921** “Anglo-Irish War”: armed conflict between British forces and Irish Nationalists
- 1920** England passes the Government of Ireland Act, establishing two self-governing areas, Northern Ireland (the six counties of Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry, and Tyrone) and Southern Ireland; the next year the Anglo-Irish treaty is signed between Southern Ireland (then called the Irish Free State) and England.
- 1922-23** Civil War in Irish Free State between supporters of the treaty (“Nationals” or “Free State” troops), led by Griffith and Michael Collins, and opposition, led by de Valera (“Irregulars”). Both Griffith and Collins die during the conflict. Armed struggle ends in 1923, and the Irish Free State begins its rule.
- In Northern Ireland, the Protestant majority succeeds in suppressing the armed rebellions of the Catholic minority; they institute legal, political, and police restrictions assuring Protestant control of virtually every level of government. A bitter hatred and pattern of violence is established in the North that remains to this day.
- 1925** The border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State is accepted as definitive by both governments, and by Great Britain, establishing partition as a permanent condition.
- 1927** de Valera and his followers enter the Dail, forming the Fianna Fail party; the Griffith/Collins/Cosgrave party is termed Fine Gael—these remain today the two central parties of Irish politics. A remnant of de Valera’s followers refuse to take the oath of allegiance and form opposition parties.

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From the Civil War to the Present

- 1932-1948** de Valera assumes leadership of the government; immediately removes the oath of allegiance from the constitution. He will dominate Fianna Fail and, in effect, Ireland for the next 16 years.
- 1937** A new constitution is formalized for the Irish Free State, now called Ireland or Eire, establishing independence of relations with Great Britain (though still not declaring Eire a republic) and according a special status to the Catholic Church (a status removed in the 1970's). Eire now a constitutionally Gaelic and Catholic country
- 1941-1963** Lord Brookeborough holds office as prime minister of Northern Ireland
- 1949** On Easter Monday the new government, led by prime minister J.A. Costello, proclaim Eire a republic, formally breaking the last link to the Commonwealth of Great Britain. (The I.R.A. refuses to recognize this republic, still professing its allegiance to the Republic declared in 1916.)
- 1950's** Intermittent terrorist activity by the I.R.A. in the North, generally condemned by both the government of Eire and the Nationalist leaders in the North.
- 1963** Captain Terence O'Neill assumes prime minister position of Northern Ireland, initiates an exchange of visits with Eire.
- 1965** Comprehensive trade agreement between Eire and Great Britain, strengthening commercial and economic ties between the two countries.
- 1968** Riots in Londonderry in October between Catholics demanding increased civil rights and Protestants seeking to maintain their political superiority.
- 1969** O'Neill defeated in election, replaced by Major James Chichester-Clark; Great Britain pushes for reform in Northern Ireland; extremists of both sides (Unionist and Republican) intensify fighting in August, and British troops are deployed to restore order.
- 1970-71** The I.R.A. resumes activities with renewed vigor, firmly establishing itself in the Catholic districts of Londonderry and Belfast and titling itself the Provisional I.R.A., to distinguish itself from what it viewed as the old, outmoded I.R.A.. They conduct a guerilla war against the Ulster police (Royal Ulster Constabulary), the Ulster volunteer army (UVA), and the British army.
- 1972** British soldiers kill 13 on 30 January (Bloody Sunday) in Londonderry; the

Northern Ireland constitution is suspended, and government transferred directly to London; Provisional I.R.A. kills 19 and wounds 130 in Belfast bombings on 21 July (Bloody Friday).

- 1973** Both the United Kingdom (Great Britain, including Northern Ireland) and the Republic of Ireland (Eire) enter the European Economic Community.
- 1979** Provisional I.R.A. kill 18 British soldiers in Co. Down, assassinate Lord Mountbatten in the Republic.
- 1981** Series of hunger strikes in Maze prison by Catholic prisoners to protest living conditions, culminating in death of Bobby Sands after 66-day strike.
- 1983** Provisional I.R.A. kill 5 and injure 80 in Christmas bombing in London.
- 1985** Anglo-Irish agreement signed between Great Britain and Eire in effort to work out Northern Ireland conflict.
- 1998** Easter Agreement signed on April 10, setting up provisions for cease-fire and joint government of Northern Ireland among Protestants, Catholics, and the Irish Republic
- 1998** Three months after the Agreement is ratified, bombs erupt in Omagh, Northern Ireland, killing 29 and injuring hundreds more--the single greatest loss of life since the troubles began. An IRA splinter group (calling itself the Real IRA) claims responsibility
- 2000** After the executive government is suspended (May 6) for failure to produce decommissioning of IRA arms, the IRA issues a new statement on decommissioning (May 27) and the executive is restored . . .