

EASTER RISING

THE EASTER RISING BEGAN ON THE MORNING OF 24 APRIL (EASTER MONDAY) 1916 AND LASTED 6 DAYS ENDING ON 29 APRIL WITH THE UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER OF THE REBELS.



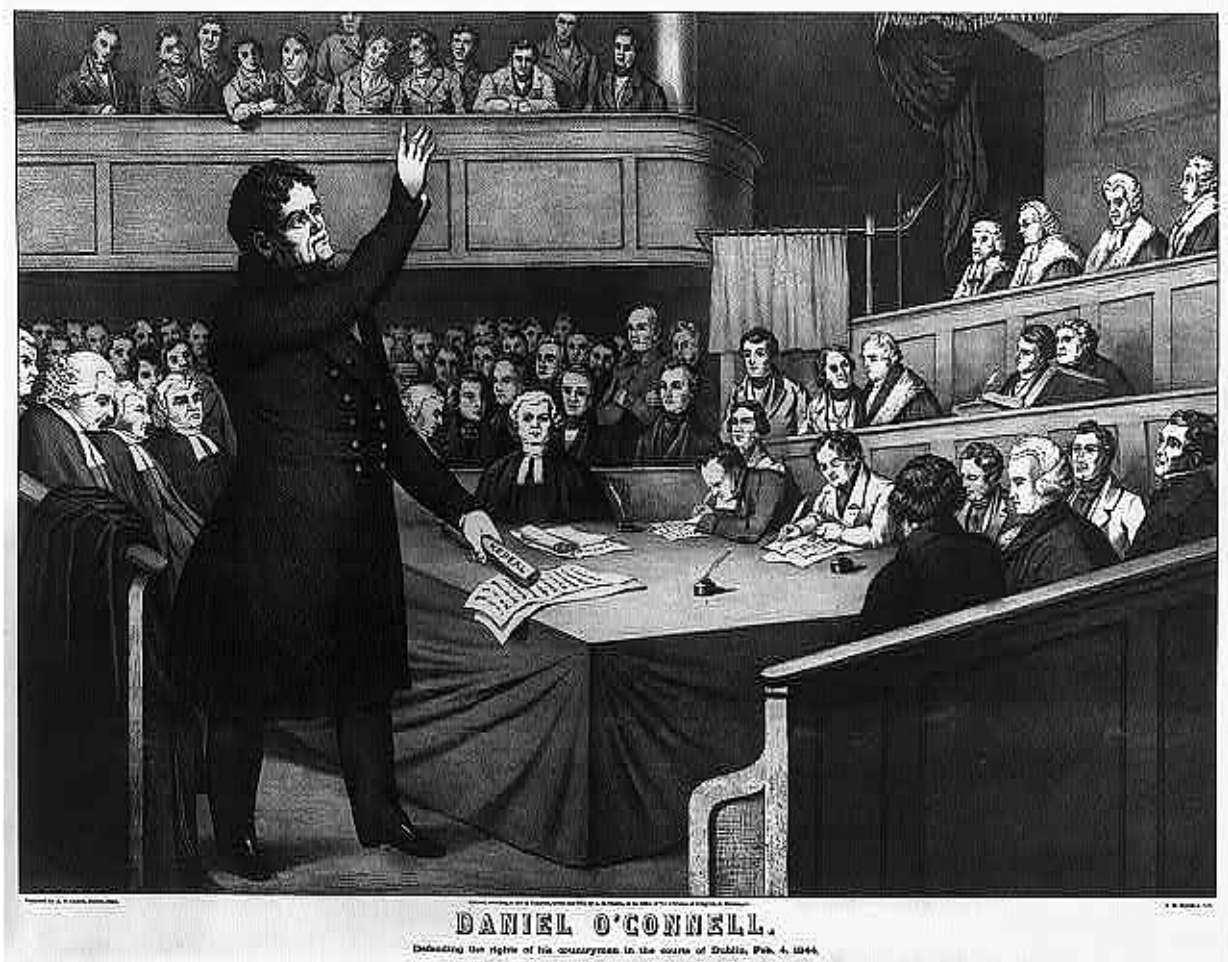
A roadblock in Dublin during the Easter Rising

BACKGROUND

The Kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland were united by the Acts of Union 1800 (The Act of Union (Ireland) 1800, passed by the Irish Parliament, and the Union with Ireland Act 1800, passed by the British Parliament). These acts created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, abolishing the Irish Parliament and giving Ireland representation at Westminster.

The union was opposed by Irish nationalists from early on. In 1830 the Repeal Association, a political movement set up to campaign for the repeal of the Acts of Union, was established by Daniel O'Connell. In 1873 the Home Rule League political party, which campaigned for Home Rule, was established; it was replaced in 1882 by the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP). After much pressing by the IPP, Prime Minister William Gladstone put forward the First Home Rule Bill (officially the Government of Ireland Bill) in 1886. Had it been passed, the bill would have created a devolved assembly for Ireland. However, it was defeated in the House of Commons. The Second Home Rule Bill was put forward by Gladstone in 1893; unlike the first bill, it would have allowed Irish MPs to vote in Westminster in addition to creating a devolved assembly for Ireland. It was passed by the House of Commons but was defeated in the House of Lords.

Finally, the Prime Minister H.H. Asquith introduced the Third Home Rule Bill in 1912. This bill differed from its predecessors in allowing for greater Irish autonomy: it provided for a bicameral Irish Parliament to be set up and would allow some Irish MPs to continue to sit at Westminster. After several defeats in the House of Lords and subsequent reintroductions, it received Royal Assent on 18 September 1914, becoming the Government of Ireland Act 1914. It was the first act ever passed by the UK Parliament that sought to establish a devolved government in any part of the UK. The reaction to the Act was not completely positive; some nationalists felt that it involved too many concessions, and Protestant unionists, not wanting to be ruled by a Catholic-dominated Irish government, strongly opposed it. However, it never took effect; its implementation was postponed due to the outbreak of the First World War, and the Easter Rising took place before it could be carried out.



EVENTS OF THE EASTER RISING

Even after the passing of the Government of Ireland Act 1914, there was still discontent in Ireland regarding the country's relationship to Britain. The outbreak of the First World War meant that Britain might be weakened and distracted, providing suitable conditions for an uprising. On 5 September 1914 the Supreme Council of the Irish Republican Brotherhood – an organisation devoted to the establishment of an independent democratic republic in Ireland – met and decided to stage a rising before the war ended.

The Easter Rising began on the morning of 24 April (Easter Monday) 1916. About 1200 armed members of the Irish Volunteers (a nationalist paramilitary group formed in opposition to the Ulster Volunteers, a unionist militia who intended to prevent the implementation of Home Rule), Cumann na mBan (a women's republican paramilitary group, which had recently become an auxiliary of the Irish Volunteers) and the Irish Citizen Army (a nationalist group of trade unionists) assembled at points throughout central Dublin. Shortly before midday they began to seize important sites, with the aim of holding Dublin city centre; these included the General Post Office, which became their headquarters. Barricades were erected in the streets. Copies of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic were put up on walls and handed out to bystanders, and republican flags were raised at the General Post Office. Telegraph and telephone wires were cut and the railway line was damaged by bombs.

The British military, initially caught unprepared, sent soldiers in to suppress the uprising. Martial law was declared on Tuesday 25 April, and thousands of reinforcements (eventually over 16,000) were sent to Dublin from England. Fighting lasted for several days, resulting in at least 485 deaths: 260 civilians, 126 members of the British forces, 82 members of the Irish rebel forces and 17 police officers. More than 2,600 people – mainly civilians – were wounded. The General Post Office headquarters was shelled heavily by British forces, eventually catching fire. When the rebels realised that the position of their new headquarters meant they could not break out without further loss of civilian life, they decided on Saturday 29 April to surrender unconditionally.



The Easter Proclamation of 1916

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Henry Street and the GPO after the Easter Rising

AFTERMATH

More than 3,500 people were arrested as a result of the Rising; 90 were sentenced to death. However, support in Ireland for the rebels remained; reports of atrocities committed by the British forces, such as the North King Street Massacre (in which British soldiers broke into houses and killed fifteen unarmed male civilians whom they accused of being rebels) helped sway public sympathy away from Britain and towards the rebels. Many republicans joined the political party Sinn Féin, which in 1917 committed itself to the establishment of an Irish republic. Its popularity increased dramatically. In the 1918 General Election, Sinn Féin won 73 out of 105 Irish seats; many of the members who were elected had fought in the Rising, and more than thirty were still in prison. The elected members refused to attend Westminster and formed their own parliament, Dáil Éireann. Although the British administration refused to recognise it, on 21 January 1919 the Dáil issued a Declaration of Independence and proclaimed itself the parliament of the Irish Republic. The British government abandoned plans to amend the Third Home Rule Act; they instead passed the Government of Ireland Act 1920, another attempt at Home Rule which divided Ireland into two territories, Northern and Southern Ireland. This never took effect in Southern Ireland, where resistance to Home Rule remained strong. The signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty on 6 December 1921 instead provided for the establishment of the Irish Free State, a self-governing Commonwealth dominion.

...from the date hereof.

12. This instrument shall be submitted forthwith by His Majesty's Government for the approval of Parliament and by the Irish signatories to a meeting summoned for the purpose of the members elected to sit in the House of Commons of Southern Ireland, and if approved shall be ratified by the necessary legislation.

Dec 6th 1921.

On behalf of the
British Delegation
A. Lloyd George
David Lloyd George
Birkenhead.

On behalf of the Irish
Delegation
Michael Collins (under signature)
Michael Collins
Robert Gordon
E. J. Duggan
James Connolly

Winston Churchill
L. M. Hughes
James Connolly
James Connolly

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

The Chief Secretary for Ireland at the time of the Easter Rising was Augustine Birrell, a Liberal Party politician and a member of the Inner Temple. He was called to the Bar in 1875, took silk in 1893 and became a Bencher of the Inner Temple in 1903. From 1905 to 1907 he was President of the Board of Education, but conflict over the Education Bill 1906 introduced by Birrell meant he was unable to remain in the position. He was subsequently appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland in 1907.

In 1907 Birrell introduced the Irish Council Bill in an attempt at devolution. This would have transferred certain powers to Ireland, although only to a limited extent. It was welcomed by several Nationalist leaders, but opposed by radical Nationalists who were not prepared to settle for anything less than Home Rule. It was rejected by the convention of the United Ireland League and the Bill was dropped.

During the discussions surrounding the Third Home Rule Bill, Birrell reacted to a proposed amendment which would have excluded six of the nine counties of Ulster by offering his resignation, opposing the exclusion of any part of the country. However, when the First World War broke out in 1914, the Bill was passed without further debate.

In the period leading up to the Easter Rising, Birrell felt that the danger of a bomb outrage was greater than that of an insurrection. He was in London when the Rising began. Birrell resigned on 1 May, the day after the Rising ended, having written to the Prime Minister to say that he "couldn't go on". He never returned to Ireland.



Augustine Birrell

BOOKS BY BIRRELL IN THE INNER TEMPLE LIBRARY

Essays about men, women, and books, 1894

Obiter dicta, 1896

The duties and liabilities of trustees, 1896.

Sir Frank Lockwood: a biographical sketch, 1898.

In the name of the Bodleian, and other essays, 1905

Frederick Locker-Lampson, a character sketch, 1920

The collected essays & addresses, 1880-1920, 1922

Things past redress, 1937