

# Ireland

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## Summary

Ireland's war experience cannot be separated from Irish politics. Indeed, the story is not one of 1914-18 but of 1912-23, as the vast majority of people sought to change Ireland's place in the United Kingdom, resisted by others who, though a minority, were concentrated in the area that would become Northern Ireland after the war. This article explores how both sides of the divide initially supported the war effort, but that following the Easter Rising of April 1916, opinion changed. Within this political context it considers Ireland's military contribution, society and the economy, and how the war has been remembered.

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## Introduction

Thorough analysis of Ireland's experience of the First World War necessarily begins in 1912 and ends in 1923. Unlike any other part of the United Kingdom, Ireland's war experience was inseparably linked to debates over its place in the UK which affected how people engaged with the war effort throughout 1914-1918, with 1916 a pivotal year. Even after

independence, the memory of the war continued to be profoundly connected to politics. Such memory remains politically salient while connected to wider events, with 2012 to 2022 or 2023 widely termed a “Decade of Commemorations” or “Decade of Centenaries”.<sup>1</sup> After a brief summary of previous research, this article thus considers politics in Ireland in 1912, before examining Irish military involvement in the war and the effect that had on society, politics and the economy. It concludes with reflections on memory of the period.

Research on the field is in a state of growth, and has been for almost three decades since historians and the public began to reassess existing work. Thorough reflections on writing until the early part of that growth are provided by Keith Jeffery in *Ireland and the Great War* (2000).<sup>2</sup> Much work has appeared since then, however, and needs to be added to the titles cited by Jeffery. An online bibliography<sup>3</sup> fulfils part of that task and relevant points from specific works are cited below. However, to summarise phases and themes in existing work, seven points can be made. First, issues relating to recruitment have been persistent, with writers addressing why and in what numbers Irish people were involved in the war effort, including discussion of overall [casualties](#).<sup>4</sup> Second, local studies have been central, whether linking the war and politics,<sup>5</sup> or telling the story of an area, both in terms of the home front and also the experiences of those who served.<sup>6</sup> Third, Ireland’s war is now well served by unit histories, whether dealing with the three volunteer divisions across the war,<sup>7</sup> or more specific battalion studies.<sup>8</sup> Fourth, the war has been addressed thematically.<sup>9</sup> Fifth, there are a vast number of general studies of Ireland’s revolution,<sup>10</sup> which should be read alongside war studies, and have included rediscovery of parliamentary Irish [nationalism](#).<sup>11</sup> Sixth, a significant growth area is the study of [remembrance and/or commemoration](#).<sup>12</sup> Finally, general surveys of the war as a whole, or aspects of it across a broad period, serve as standard reference points.<sup>13</sup>

## Home Rule and Irish Politics before the First World War

If Ireland’s Decade of Centenaries begins with commemoration of 1912, the story of 1912 goes back to the Act of Union (1800), which scrapped Ireland’s Parliament and saw the country become part of a formal union in the United Kingdom of [Great Britain](#) and Ireland.

Throughout the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Irish nationalists campaigned for, among many other issues, repeal of the Union.

However, by the 1870s, “[Home Rule](#)” had become the clarion call of nationalists. As initially

proposed, this would have involved an Irish Parliament controlling domestic matters, but as part of a federal UK, with Irish MPs taking seats in an Imperial Parliament in Westminster, which would control defence, foreign policy, some fiscal policy, and macroeconomic matters.<sup>14</sup> Home Rule steadily secured mass support in Ireland. Home Rulers, by then known as the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP), won eight-five of Ireland's 103 seats in the 1885 general election.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, the Liberal Party under [William Ewart Gladstone \(1809-1898\)](#) became persuaded of the case and, short of a majority in Parliament after the 1885 election, introduced a Home Rule Bill for Ireland. However, Conservatives were resolutely opposed, as were some Liberals. The Liberal Party split and Home Rule was defeated. For the next two decades, Home Rule was a persistent and occasionally dominant issue within British politics. That was so much the case that Conservatives and Liberal Unionists (those Liberals who opposed Home Rule) worked together under the shared label of "Unionist". A Liberal government again proposed Home Rule in 1893, but the Unionists controlled the House of Lords and could block any legislation. Nothing could bring about Home Rule unless the Liberals came to dominate the Lords, or the powers of the Lords were changed. It was the latter that happened in the 1911 Parliament Act, brought about by a dispute over [David Lloyd George \(1863-1945\)](#) "People's Budget" of 1909-1910. Following deadlock between Lords and Commons, the Act removed the Lords' permanent blocking powers.

When a Third Home Rule Bill was introduced in April 1912 it became clear that it would eventually be passed, raising the prospect of conflict in Ireland. Although the vast bulk of Irish people had supported Home Rule, the Protestant minority, which constituted the majority of people in much of the north-east of Ireland, commonly referred to as Ulster, were vehemently opposed. They feared that Home Rule would mean "Rome Rule", with a Dublin Parliament dominated by the Catholic majority. A militant campaign of resistance ensued. On 28 September 1912, under the leadership of [Edward Carson \(1854-1935\)](#), nearly half a million men and women pledged their opposition to Home Rule through signing the Ulster Covenant, including resistance "by all means necessary", raising the spectre of violence.<sup>16</sup> When the Third Home Rule Bill passed the Commons on 16 January 1913, the prospect of violence, even civil war, soon became real. Unionists established the Ulster Volunteer Force,<sup>17</sup> a [paramilitary](#) group which, within a year, claimed to have over 90,000 members. Then, in November 1913, nationalists responded by forming the Irish Volunteers (IVs) who were ready to fight in defence of Home Rule. Initially, the IPP, led by [John Redmond \(1856-1918\)](#), was wary of the IVs, but they steadily gained control of the organisation and endorsed it, with its membership reaching 129,000 by May 1914. 1913 also saw the formation of a small, Dublin-based socialist militia, known as the Irish Citizen Army (ICA), which was likely to side with nationalists in the event of armed conflict. While these rival armies had been formed, the

Lords had rejected Home Rule; however, they could now only reject each bill twice, and the Commons finally passed it in May 1914. Faced with the prospect of war in Ireland, the Liberal Prime Minister, [Herbert Henry Asquith \(1852-1928\)](#), sought a compromise whereby Ulster could be excluded from Home Rule. Efforts to do this, or seek another solution, were ongoing as war broke out on 4 August 1914.

## Politics at the Outbreak of the War

Faced with other priorities, Asquith ceased trying to amend Home Rule. Instead, the Home Rule Bill received Royal Assent on 18 September 1914 but implementation was suspended on the same day for a year. That suspension was later extended periodically throughout the war.<sup>18</sup>

Tensions ran extremely high in Ireland in the ten days or so that preceded the British declaration of war. In particular, the shooting of three civilians (with scores more wounded and one further death two months later from wounds sustained in the incident) by British soldiers in Bachelor's Walk in Dublin on 26 July saw a mass public turnout at the funerals of the three who died that day. The dead had been shot following the landing of guns at Howth by nationalists, but there was no evidence that they were gun-runners, and a Royal Commission later placed blame on local police.<sup>19</sup> By the eve of war, however, circumstances had changed to a marked degree, to the extent that the British foreign secretary, [Edward Grey \(1862-1933\)](#) could declare on 3 August "The one bright spot in the whole of this terrible situation is Ireland."<sup>20</sup> This was partly because it had become clear that nationalists would support the British war effort, with John Redmond declaring that if British troops were withdrawn from Ireland to fight on the continent, the Irish Volunteers would be used for the defence of its shores (including alongside the UVF). Carson had also pledged Unionist support. There was nothing remarkable in that - how could Unionists not heed a call to fight for King and Country? However, Carson was also in the process of agreeing with the War Office that the Ulster Volunteer Force would become the basis of a new division in the British army, maintaining much of its own command, with the men from individual UVF units going together into one infantry battalion. Once Carson was satisfied that Home Rule would not be implemented for the time being, he was able to commit his party to this 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division which began to be formed in early September.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, six weeks into the war, after stories of German [atrocities](#) in [Belgium](#) had affected public opinion, John Redmond gave greater support for the war effort. In a speech at Woodenbridge, County Wicklow, on 20 September, which is remembered as marking a shift in Redmond's position, he called on all Irishmen to enlist in the British military. This in fact

followed a lower profile statement in Parliament on 15 September (the day on which Asquith pledged to place Home Rule on the statute book) that on his return to Ireland he would say to all of his “fellow countrymen...that it is their duty, and should be their honour, to take their place in the firing line in this contest”. That statement was itself followed two days later, on 17 September, by a call for all Irish recruits to be part of an “Irish Brigade” within the [British Expeditionary Force](#).<sup>22</sup> While this new position was not universally popular among nationalists, the vast majority supported the line. Redmond’s supporters were ousted from the Irish Volunteers’ Provisional Committee, but among the membership around 80 percent backed him, forming a new organisation, the Irish National Volunteers (INVs).

Following Woodenbridge, Redmond sought to establish an “Irish Corps” within the British army, sometimes deploying the term “Irish Brigade”, which was reminiscent of Irish service in previous “foreign” armies. By mid-October, it became clear that this Brigade would be in the already established 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division and [Horatio Herbert Kitchener \(1850-1916\)](#) soon agreed to clear one brigade (47<sup>th</sup> Brigade) of that division to take men from the INVs.<sup>23</sup> With something approaching a nationalist unit now in place in the British army, Redmond set about recruiting.

That the war so soon saw two rival private armies both under the British flag as volunteers depended on four key factors. First, both sides had ensured that their cause was not defeated through the passage or defeat of Home Rule. Second, through Home Rule being suspended temporarily, both believed that they could in due course secure a satisfactory solution if they supported the British Empire in its time of danger. Third, the two political volunteer divisions had enough of an air of uniqueness about them to ensure that they did not look like just any other British army division. Finally, each side was fighting for causes entirely consistent with their politics: “King and Country” for unionists, and for nationalists both “the rights of small nations” and “Catholic Belgium”. Ireland thus entered the war more united than it would ever be in the future. At this stage, opposition to the war was marginal while there was broad support for what was seen as a “just” war.<sup>24</sup>

## Ireland’s Military War

### The Regular Army

At the outbreak of war, Irishmen were already serving throughout the British military, with just over 20,000 in the army.<sup>25</sup> In the Royal Navy and embryonic Royal Flying Corps they were not concentrated in specific ships or units. In the army, men served in many non-Irish regiments. Indeed, the first Victoria Cross of the war was awarded to an Irishman serving in

the 4<sup>th</sup> Royal Fusiliers, Lieutenant [Maurice James Dease \(1889-1914\)](#).<sup>26</sup> Yet inevitably, Irish men's army service was focused on the Irish regiments. These were comprised of the Irish Guards (1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, based at Caterham in Surrey) and eight line regiments (their main depots in Ireland, often indicating their core recruiting area, are in brackets):<sup>27</sup>

- Royal Irish Regiment (Clonmel)
- Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers (Omagh)
- Royal Irish Rifles (Belfast)
- Royal Irish Fusiliers (Armagh)
- Connaught Rangers (Galway)
- Leinster Regiment (Birr)
- Royal Munster Fusiliers (Tralee)
- Royal Dublin Fusiliers (Naas)

Each regiment was comprised of two battalions, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>, each with a peacetime strength of approximately 500 to be supplemented in war by a similar number of reservists. Meanwhile, each regiment had 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> reserve battalions (and in the case of the Leinsters, Dublins, Munsters and Royal Irish Rifles, a 5<sup>th</sup>) as training units for reservists.<sup>28</sup>

There were four Irish [cavalry](#) regiments, not all based in Ireland:

- 4<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Dragoon Guards (Newport, Monmouth)
- 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Lancers (Woolwich)
- 6<sup>th</sup> Inniskilling Dragoons (Newport, Monmouth)
- 8<sup>th</sup> Kings Royal Irish Hussars (Dublin)

These were supplemented by two reserve cavalry regiments, the North Irish Horse (Belfast) and the South Irish Horse (Dublin).

In line with standard procedures of the British army, when war broke out one regular battalion of each [infantry](#) regiment was based at "home" (which often meant England rather than Ireland) and one overseas. Five Irish battalions were in [India](#) (the 1<sup>st</sup> Irish Regiment, Inniskillings, Connaughts, Leinsters and Dublins), as were two cavalry units (6<sup>th</sup> Inniskilling Dragoons and 8<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Hussars), two in Aden (1<sup>st</sup> Irish Rifles and 2<sup>nd</sup> Irish Fusiliers), and one in [Burma](#) (1<sup>st</sup> Munsters). Thus when the original [British Expeditionary Force](#) was formed,

the home battalions rapidly became part of it in different divisions. The first Irish battalion to arrive in [France](#) was the 1<sup>st</sup> Irish Guards on 13 August, followed by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters, Connaughts, Irish Regiment and Irish Rifles the next day. By the end of August, all regular Irish infantry and cavalry units (plus the North and South Irish Horse) based at home were in France except for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Leinsters who arrived on 12 September. As for those units overseas, all regular Irish battalions except the 1<sup>st</sup> Inniskillings, Dublins and Munsters (all of which would be deployed at [Gallipoli](#) in April 1915) had landed in France by the end of 1914. Consequently, Irish regiments took a significant part in the early stages of the war on the [Western Front](#), in particular at [Mons](#) and Le Cateau from 23 to 26 August, La Bassée in October and 1<sup>st</sup> Ypres in October to November.<sup>29</sup>

The continued contribution of the regular battalions went well beyond 1914. Regular Irish battalions played a particularly important role in the early stages of the Gallipoli campaign with the 1<sup>st</sup> battalions of the Inniskilling, Dublin and Munster Fusiliers landing at Cape Helles on 25 April 1915. Each battalion remained at Gallipoli until the allied evacuation in January 1916, and went on to serve on the Western Front.

## Volunteer Divisions

Ireland also contributed three volunteer divisions of the new army, the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) and 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) divisions already discussed, plus the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish). The 10<sup>th</sup> was the first to be established, on 21 August 1914, and consisted of battalions from across Ireland. It had no political allegiance and consequently included both Protestant and Catholics volunteers, some of whom had been involved in the Ulster Volunteer Force or the Irish Volunteers. Of the volunteer divisions, it was the first to be recruited and the first to see action, at Gallipoli.<sup>30</sup> There, on 6 and 7 August 1915 the division took part in the landings at Suvla Bay and Anzac Cove, subsequently fighting at Chocolate Hill, Sair Bair and Hill 60 before withdrawing on 29 September after losing 2,017 men killed in action or who died of wounds.<sup>31</sup>

The 10<sup>th</sup> Division's next posting was Salonika, where it took part in the fighting at Kosturino on 7 and 8 December 1915 before serving in [Macedonia](#) in 1916-17 and [Egypt/Palestine](#) in late 1917 and early 1918 where it helped to defend Jerusalem.<sup>32</sup> Over April to May 1918 all Irish battalions steadily left the 10<sup>th</sup> Division (replaced mainly by Indian battalions) for redeployment to the Western Front where they saw service scattered across different divisions.

The two other volunteer divisions served only on the Western Front. Efforts were made to form the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division entirely from Ulster (except for the artillery which was formed from London volunteers.)<sup>33</sup> It trained in Ireland until July 1915 when it finished training at Seaford, not going to France until October 1915. Its first major engagement was on 1 July 1916, the first day of the [battle of the Somme](#). The division was initially successful in securing parts of the German lines at the Schwaben Redoubt, but divisions either side of it made less progress. In particular, the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division failed to take Thiepval village and the 36<sup>th</sup> came under heavy fire from machine guns there. The 36<sup>th</sup> lost over 5,000 men as casualties that day, of whom just over 2,000 were killed.

The 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division also fought on the Somme. Though notionally the nationalist counterpart to the 36<sup>th</sup>, in reality only one brigade of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division (47<sup>th</sup> Brigade) had been solely recruited from the Irish National Volunteers. But the 16<sup>th</sup> still stands as the most coherent representation of nationalist Ireland on the Western Front. It left Ireland later than the 36<sup>th</sup>, training in England from September 1915, and did not reach France until December. Its first major action was on 3 September 1916 at Guillemont, and then on 9 September at Ginchy. Both were successful advances in which objectives were gained and held during the phase of the Battle of the Somme during which the British army was making consistent gains. [Tom Kettle \(1880-1916\)](#), a former nationalist MP and scholar, who was then serving as a junior officer in the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, was mortally wounded at Ginchy.

Following the Somme, the next major engagement for the 16<sup>th</sup> and 36<sup>th</sup> divisions was at Messines on 7 June 1917. This battle holds a special place in the memory of the two divisions because they fought alongside each other (the 16<sup>th</sup> on the left flank of the 36<sup>th</sup>), capturing Wytschaete in what was probably the most successful advance by the British army at that stage of the war. Some symbolism of the occasion was found in the death of Major [William "Willie" Redmond \(1861-1917\)](#), nationalist MP for East Clare. Serving with the 6<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Regiment in the 16<sup>th</sup>, the stretcher-bearers who made the first efforts to save his life were from the 36<sup>th</sup>.<sup>34</sup>

After Messines, the 16<sup>th</sup> and 36<sup>th</sup> took part in the early stages of the Third [Battle of Ypres](#), specifically Langemarck and engagements in late March 1918 during the [German spring offensive](#). However, by this stage, both divisions were ceasing to resemble the political divisions which had left Ireland in 1915. There had been reinforcements from Great Britain



after the Somme, and there had been reorganisations of the divisions (as there were throughout the British army) from late 1917. Although other Irish battalions joined both divisions, they had no political character, while some battalions from throughout the UK were also transferred in.<sup>35</sup>

## Air, Sea and Other Theatres

Although most fighting took place on the Western Front, it did not all occur on land, and some of it was very far from either the well-known fronts in western Europe, Gallipoli, Salonika or Palestine. Men from Ireland took part in operations to support the Russians on the [Eastern Front](#).<sup>36</sup> Men from Belfast saw action in [Italy](#), [Mesopotamia](#), [East Africa](#), [South Africa](#) and the [Falkland Islands](#).<sup>37</sup> In the air, [Edward "Mick" Mannock \(1887-1918\)](#) won the Victoria Cross and is often hailed as an Irish war hero, though his connections to Ireland are tenuous.<sup>38</sup> At [Jutland](#), the UK's great naval battle of the war, Dublin men were lost on ships such as the HMS *Indefatigable*, *Queen Mary* and *Defence*.<sup>39</sup> There were also civilian deaths when non-military vessels were sunk, most notably the [Lusitania](#), which was sunk off the Cork coast on 7 May 1915.<sup>40</sup>

## Service and Recruitment

Across the areas of service, motivations for enlistment have been the subject of significant debate. David Fitzpatrick has made one of the most significant contributions in a seminal article on the "logic of collective sacrifice".<sup>41</sup> Challenging the idea that economic factors offer the primary explanation for Irish service in the British military, Fitzpatrick argues that "the readiness of individuals to join the colours was largely determined by the attitudes and behaviour of comrades – kinsmen, neighbours, and fellow-members of organizations and fraternities."<sup>42</sup> This is based on the fact that enlistment tended to be highest where economic insecurity was less.<sup>43</sup>

Meanwhile, there have been other general interpretations of matters such as discipline and the effectiveness of Irish troops.<sup>44</sup> However, the central and ongoing debate on Ireland's war contribution concerns the levels of service and fatalities. Reviewing the debate, Keith Jeffery points out that the figure of 49,000 dead put forward in *Ireland's Memorial Records* includes all those who served in Irish units, regardless of where they were from.<sup>45</sup> So it is commonly accepted that that figure is likely to be too high, and alternatives that have emerged from academic research range from 25,000 to 35,000, with the latter tending to be more

commonly cited.<sup>46</sup> These figures, however, do not include the thousands of men of Irish birth who lost their lives while serving in the armies of the British dominions and the U.S. forces. Less contentious is a figure of approximately 210,000 men from Ireland having served in the military during the war.<sup>47</sup>

## Society and Economy

### Women

Just as volunteering drove Ireland's men to military service, it also led [women](#) to a variety of activities.<sup>48</sup> Probably the majority of those involved were Protestant (reflecting established patterns in Irish charity),<sup>49</sup> but voluntary work did cut across political divides. Organisations including the Ulster Volunteers and the nationalist *Cumann na mBan* took part in the initial meeting to establish [Red Cross](#) work in Dublin on 10 August 1914.<sup>50</sup> Over 4,500 women from Ireland served in [nursing](#) and auxiliary roles in Voluntary Aid Detachments and as members of Queen Alexandra's Imperial Army Nursing Service.<sup>51</sup> A small number of these women died while serving on the Western Front.<sup>52</sup>

Such work involved the standard tasks of the Red Cross around the world, but there was one specifically Irish angle. The Irish War Hospital Supply Depot provided surgical dressings made from the sphagnum moss with which Irish bogs were replete. Women and [children](#) were the volunteer workforce.<sup>53</sup> In contrast to the rest of the UK, Irish women did not take on many of the roles which had been the work of men, since there was no conscription in Ireland, although there was work in munitions manufacture.<sup>54</sup> However, women from the College Guild at Alexandra College (Dublin) housed Belgian [refugees](#), knitted socks and served in Western Front canteens.<sup>55</sup> Gifts for soldiers were provided by a range of organisations from local groups throughout Ireland to the Ulster Women's Unionists Council, which even provided shamrock for the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division on St. Patrick's Day in 1915.<sup>56</sup>

### Economy and Munitions

Of course, many women were already working in industries which responded to and benefited from the war. Inevitably, that applied to Belfast, where most heavy industry was located. Shipbuilding and [aircraft](#) manufacture flourished. Linen initially lost continental orders but recovered as a supplier of aeroplane cloth. Mackie's (an engineering firm) in Belfast turned to munitions and ultimately produced 75 million shells. Kynoch's in Arklow was

already in existence producing high explosives and employing over 2,000 workers. New National Shell Factories were opened in Dublin, Waterford, Cork and Fermoy, but employed only just over 2,000 between them (700 men and 1,400 women). Irish trades unions began the war talking less supportively of the national effort than their counterparts in Britain, but the conflict's demands saw them closely incorporated into the economic system by the armistice.

Farming prospered, with wages rising and the value of agricultural produce doubling over 1913-1918. There was an increase in tillage which contributed to Ireland having a surplus rather than a shortage of [food](#) during the war. Ireland greatly improved its trading position, increasing its excess of exports of imports from £3.2m in 1914 to £17.3m in 1919. Levels of poverty and unemployment fell.<sup>57</sup>

## Irish Politics during the War

At the outbreak of war, the IPP retained its dominance of Irish politics. With Home Rule on the statute book there were reasons to believe that support of the British war effort could deliver the IPP's long sought after goal. However, implementation of Home Rule became steadily more distant, not least after Carson became a minister in the coalition government formed in May 1915 while Redmond was excluded.<sup>58</sup> A sign of rumbling discontent was that the Catholic Church in Ireland steadily became less supportive of Redmond's line, ceasing to support recruiting by the end of 1915.<sup>59</sup>

At Easter 1916 "All changed, changed utterly", in the words of [W.B. Yeats \(1865-1939\)](#).<sup>60</sup> Prior to 1916, radical (or "advanced") nationalists or republicans had been few in number. [Arthur Griffith \(1872-1922\)](#) formed a separatist party, Sinn Féin, in 1907, but it was a marginal force by the beginning of the war. Dissenters from the Redmond line existed in a small minority of Irish Volunteers led by [Eoin MacNeill \(1867-1945\)](#), and more significantly, two more militant groupings: first and foremost the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) and the smaller ICA.<sup>61</sup> It was within the Military Council of the IRB, that an armed rising was planned from August 1914, with [Thomas "Tom" Clarke \(1857-1916\)](#) usually seen as the most significant figure. Plans for a [Rising](#) in Dublin were based on the view that if arms could be secured from [Germany](#), if the German navy could prevent the landing of British reinforcements, and if there could be simultaneous uprisings in other parts of Ireland, it would be possible for the rebels to take power in an Irish revolution.

On Easter Monday, 24 April 1916, the rebels proclaimed a Republic from the portico of the General Post Office in Dublin.<sup>62</sup> Read by [Patrick Pearse \(1879-1916\)](#), who had been named as

President of the Provisional Government, their Proclamation claimed “the Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State”.<sup>63</sup> Treason against the British state was confirmed in the assertion of support from “gallant allies in Europe”, which meant the Central Powers. As many as 1,600 ultimately took part – including women such as [Constance Markiewicz \(1868-1927\)](#) – in seizing key buildings around Dublin, but support from elsewhere was not forthcoming. German arms were intercepted off the south-west coast and naval support did not materialise. Action outside Dublin was restricted largely by MacNeill who, believing the insurrection to be doomed, countermanded the order for the mobilization of the Irish Volunteers. The British reacted by sending reserve troops, many of them from Irish regiments, to quell the rebellion. Fierce fighting saw significant damage to central Dublin. On 29 April, the rebels surrendered. Sixty-four of them had been killed, with 132 British soldiers and around 230 civilians.<sup>64</sup> The proclamation had also referred to the “readiness” of Ireland’s “children to sacrifice themselves” which has led to some debate over how far the Rising was intended to be an heroic sacrifice to inspire the nation. However, such a belief in “blood sacrifice” was probably only held by Pearse and perhaps a few others and, in terms of rhetoric, was by no means unique to Irish Republicanism during this period.<sup>65</sup>

Initial reactions to the Rising were far from positive. There were vivid stories of women whose husbands were away fighting in the British army treating arrested rebels with hostility.<sup>66</sup> But what changed opinion “utterly” was the brutal British treatment of rebel leaders, with fifteen of them executed between 4 and 12 May 1916, combined, in the longer term, with an increase in popular anti-war and therefore anti-British sentiment.<sup>67</sup> Opinion did not, however, turn immediately. There was a new phase of negotiation between the Redmondites and the British, with Home Rule offered immediately in July 1916, but that failed because nationalists objected to permanent exclusion of Ulster (as did southern Unionists).<sup>68</sup> Following this, Sinn Féin became a vehicle for Irish discontent in a series of by-election successes. During the war there were nineteen by-elections in seats held by members of the IPP. Prior to the executions only one of the eight seats was lost (and that to an Independent Nationalist). However, after the executions, while the first was held, Sinn Féin won four of the next five contests, and six of the eleven in total.<sup>69</sup>

Opinion was clearly shifting by May 1917 when Sinn Féin had already gained Roscommon North and Longford South. The [British government](#) announced an Irish Convention of all parties to discuss options, which ran until the spring of 1918. However, it failed to reach agreement, partly on the issue of Ulster’s exclusion. In any case, Sinn Féin boycotted the Convention. Meanwhile, on 6 March 1918 John Redmond died and was succeeded by the

more hard-line [John Dillon \(1851-1927\)](#).<sup>70</sup> In response to the German spring offensive of March 1918, conscription was introduced for Ireland to tackle a manpower shortage (recruitment had fallen markedly in Ireland in the absence of conscription.)<sup>71</sup> The IPP joined Sinn Féin and the Catholic Church in an anti-conscription pledge on 21 April 1918 and a general strike two days later. This radicalisation of the IPP helped to defeat Irish conscription, which was dropped in June, but came too late to save most IPP seats at the December 1918 general election. Sinn Féin rose from its six by-election gains to a total of seventy-three. The IPP was virtually annihilated gaining just six compared to its eighty-three Irish seats eight years before. Devolution was no longer enough for an Irish population worn down by war, dismayed by delays to Home Rule, appalled by the executions of rebel leaders, and affronted by an attempted introduction of conscription. The struggle was now one for independence.

## Aftermath

The end of the war did not see war's end in Ireland. Most soldiers did not return home until after the 1918 election had seen Sinn Féin almost destroy the IPP. For those who in 1914-1915 had believed that enlisting would secure Home Rule, return exposed them not only to the fact that it had not, but also that most nationalists now wanted more radical change. Meanwhile, in the north, unionism was commemorating the service of the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division as a sign of its loyalty to the [empire](#).

Following the Easter Rising and the execution of its leaders, [Éamon de Valera \(1882-1975\)](#)<sup>72</sup> had emerged as the leader of Sinn Féin while the Irish Republican Army (IRA)<sup>73</sup> had been formed from a reorganisation of the Irish Volunteers. The IRA, which would not become known as such until 1919, included some former members of the British army whose experience was much valued, perhaps most notably [Tom Barry \(1897-1980\)](#) and [Emmet Dalton \(1898-1978\)](#).<sup>74</sup> It began a war against the British in January 1919, variously known as the Anglo-Irish War, the War of Independence or the "Black and Tan" War (after the nickname for the [first units of British auxiliary forces](#), which began arriving in Ireland in March 1920).

Sinn Féin was meanwhile using its political power, not in Westminster (Sinn Féin did not recognise London's authority and pursued a policy of abstention), but instead by running a shadow government in Ireland. This was done through *Dáil Éireann*, an Irish parliament, consisting of those elected as Sinn Féin MPs at the 1918 election. All other Irish MPs were invited but did not take part in this revolutionary government which was declared illegal by the British on 11 September 1919.<sup>75</sup>

Meanwhile, the British government was trying to develop an alternative solution, passing the Government of Ireland Act in December 1920, which created two “Home Rule” parliaments in Belfast (for counties Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone, creating Northern Ireland) and Dublin (for the other twenty-six counties). The ensuing elections of May 1921 saw a parliament elected and established in Northern Ireland. However, of the 128 MPs elected in the south, only the four unionists elected for Dublin University took up their seats.

All the other 124 were unopposed Sinn Féin candidates who instead formed a Second *Dáil*.<sup>76</sup> The war with the British continued until 11 July 1921 when a truce was agreed. According to the most recent and reliable research, over 2,100 were killed during the years of the War of Independence. Just under 900 (or 48 percent) of those who lost their lives were civilians, while just over 1,240 (or 52 percent) were combatants. Of the latter, some 467 were serving in the IRA when they were killed while a further 776 were members of the Crown Forces (comprising Irish police, British paramilitary auxiliaries and units of the regular British army).<sup>77</sup> Negotiations between the British and republican leaders from the Second *Dáil* resulted in the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 6 December 1921. This created the Irish Free State, which remained within the British Empire as a self-governing dominion, similar to former colonies such as [Australia](#). The leading figure of the IRA, [Michael Collins \(1860-1922\)](#),<sup>78</sup> led negotiations for the Irish. Collins was weary of war and believed that compromises could be a first step towards full independence. He also understood the enormous significance of a British military withdrawal from most of the island. But two concessions proved especially unacceptable to the *Dáil*'s President Éamon de Valera, even though the *Dáil* had narrowly endorsed the Treaty: the British King remaining as Head of State, which meant that members of the independent parliament would still have to swear allegiance to George V, King of Great Britain (1865-1936), and Northern Ireland being allowed to opt out of the new state. As a result, in a place which had become accustomed to using armed struggle as a political weapon, civil war ensued. After tensions between pro and anti-treaty elements of the IRA throughout early 1922, the battle of Dublin from 28 June saw the shelling of the Four Courts and street fighting over the course of a week.<sup>79</sup> The war continued in many parts of Ireland until a ceasefire on 30 April 1923 and the surrender of [weapons](#) by the hugely outnumbered and eventually defeated anti-treaty forces a month later. Estimates for how many had been killed run to as many as 5,000, though there are no definitive figures.<sup>80</sup>

## Conclusion

An overall assessment of the unique nature of Ireland's First World War is best rooted in the experiences of veterans and in memory of the war. For those returning, the changes in Irish politics and the emergence of the British army as the enemy meant that for nationalists,

service in the British army was unlikely to be celebrated. However, responses were rather more mixed than might have been expected in the south, with historians pointing to varying features of memory, including disengagement, amnesia, embarrassment and resentment.<sup>81</sup> Though some work<sup>82</sup> has pointed to active hostility towards veterans in the south, a recent and more detailed study has suggested that by and large veterans were well-treated there.<sup>83</sup> Meanwhile, the Irish Nationalist Veterans Association was active across Ireland in the 1920s for those who had heeded Redmond's call, though much nationalist memory, especially in Northern Ireland, steadily became private rather than public. Republicans wanted no part in what became pro-British unionist commemorative activities heavily linked to bolstering the new Northern Ireland state.<sup>84</sup> The major shift towards nationalist Ireland's amnesia regarding the First World War began in the decades after 1945, with the fiftieth anniversaries of both the Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme in 1966 dividing commemoration along regional and religious lines. This divided memory was greatly exacerbated by the profound cultural entrenchment that emerged after the outbreak of the Northern Ireland conflict, commonly referred to as the "Troubles", in 1969.

However, significant changes have taken place, especially since the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994, which began the end of the "Troubles", though there were signs of a shift as far back as 1987 after the IRA bombing of the Remembrance Sunday ceremony in Enniskillen. There is now full engagement from the Dublin government and even Sinn Féin plays a role in war commemoration in Northern Ireland.<sup>85</sup> Queen Elizabeth II's visit to Dublin in May 2011 was an especially important moment of reconciliation. How far there is genuine cross-community engagement with the war during the Decade of Centenaries remains to be seen, which means that part of the story of Ireland's First World War is yet to be told.

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## Notes

1. Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht: <http://www.decadeofcentenaries.com/>; Dublin City Council: <http://www.dublincity.ie/decadeofcommemorations>; Community Relations Council: <http://www.community-relations.org.uk/programmes/marketing-anniversaries/>; and British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly: <http://www.britishirish.org/assets/BIPA-Commemorations-Report-FINAL.pdf> (all retrieved: 28 April 2014). ↑
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33. *Falls*, 36th 1922, p. 8. ↑
34. Denman, *Redmond* 1995, pp. 117-121 ↑
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36. Perrett, Bryan / Lord, Anthony: *The Czar's British Squadron*, London 1981, p. 43. ↑
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  41. Fitzpatrick, Logic 1995, pp. 1017-1030. ↑
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  45. Jeffery, *Ireland’s 2000*, pp. 33, 35, 150. ↑
  46. Over 49,000 are listed in Ireland’s Memorial Records, but this figure is widely held to be inaccurate since it includes all those who served in an Irish regiment, greatly increasing the numbers while simultaneously excluding those who served outside specifically Irish units. ↑
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  50. *Ibid*, p. 49. ↑
  51. Jeffery, *Ireland’s 2000*, p. 32; McEwen, Yvonne: *“It’s a Long Way to Tipperary”. British and Irish Nurses in the Great War*, Dunfermline 2006. ↑
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66. Jeffery, Ireland's 2000, pp. 45-47. ↑
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[http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Historical\\_Information/1916\\_Commemorations/The\\_Executed\\_Leaders\\_of\\_the\\_1916\\_Rising.html](http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Historical_Information/1916_Commemorations/The_Executed_Leaders_of_the_1916_Rising.html) (retrieved 2 June 2014). The figure of sixteen executions is often given, including Roger Casement (1861-1916) hanged in London on 3 August for collaboration with Germany. ↑
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## Key Person(s)

[Redmond, John](#); [Griffith, Arthur](#); [Mannock, Mick](#); [Dillon, John](#); [Yeats, W.B.](#); [Carson,](#)



[Edward](#); [Redmond, Willie](#); [Kettle, Tom](#); [Gladstone, William Ewart](#); [Dease, Maurice James](#); [MacNeill, Eoin](#); [Clarke, Thomas Tom](#); [Markiewicz, Constance](#); [Barry, Tom](#); [Dalton, Emmet](#); [Lloyd George, David](#); [George V, King of Great Britain](#); [Kitchener, Horatio Herbert Kitchener, Earl](#); [Asquith, Herbert Henry](#); [Grey, Sir Edward](#); [Pearse, Patrick](#); [De Valera, Éamon](#); [Collins, Michael](#); [nursing](#)

### Key Location(s)

[Arklow](#); [Belfast](#); [Cork](#); [Dublin](#); [Fermoy](#); [Ginchy](#); [Guillemont](#); [Jerusalem](#); [Kosturino](#); [La Bassée](#); [Langemark \(Langemarck\)](#); [Le Cateau](#); [Messines](#); [Mons](#); [Salonika \(Thessaloniki\)](#); [Seaford](#); [Thiepval](#); [Ulster](#); [Waterford](#); [Woodenbridge](#); [Ypres](#)

### Title

Ireland

### Author(s)

[Richard S. Grayson](#)

### Article Type

Handbook Article

### Classification Group

Survey Article (Regional)

### Articles That Link Here

[Bergson, Henri](#); [Negotiating and Mediating Conduct of War](#); [Moral Norms and Values](#); [Bernstorff, Johann Heinrich, Graf von](#); [War Aims and War Aims Discussions \(Australia\)](#); [Great Britain](#); [Great Britain](#); [Smuts, Jan Christian](#); [Colonial Empires after the War/Decolonization](#); [International Committee of the Red Cross](#); [The Paris Peace Conference and its Consequences](#); [Post-war Conflict \(Great Britain and Ireland\)](#); [Demobilization](#); [The Paris Peace Conference and its Consequences](#); [League of Nations](#); [Non-European Soldiers](#); [Warfare 1914-1918 \(Great Britain and Ireland\)](#); [Press/Journalism \(India\)](#); [Historiography 1918-Today \(Ireland\)](#); [Propaganda at Home \(Great Britain and Ireland\)](#); [Paramilitary Violence](#); [Post-war Military Action and Violence \(East Central Europe\)](#); [Pre-war Military Planning \(Canada\)](#); [Espionage](#); [Controversy: The Media's Responsibility for Crises and Conflicts in the Age of Imperialism](#); [Post-war Economies \(Great Britain and Ireland\)](#); [Memory of the War: Popular Memory 1918-1945, 1945 to the Present](#); [Memory of the War: Popular Memory 1918-1945, 1945 to the Present](#); [The Churches](#); [Revolutions](#); [Paramilitary Violence](#); [Paramilitary Violence](#); [Historiography 1918-Today \(Great Britain\)](#); [Post-war Societies \(Great Britain and Ireland\)](#); [Balfour Declaration](#); [Press/Journalism](#); [Making Sense](#)

[of the War \(Great Britain and Ireland\)](#); [Defence of the Realm Act \(DORA\)](#); [Willingly to War. Public Response to the Outbreak of War](#); [French Canada and the War \(Canada\)](#); [Propaganda at Home and Abroad](#); [Making Sense of the War](#); [Science and Technology \(Austria-Hungary\)](#); [Property Rights and Economic Nationalism](#); [Propaganda at Home and Abroad](#); [Empire](#); [Casement, Roger, Sir](#); [Prisoners of War and Internees \(Great Britain\)](#); [Prisoners of War and Internees \(Great Britain\)](#); [1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War. Introduction](#); [Labour, Labour Movements, Trade Unions and Strikes \(Great Britain and Ireland\)](#); [War Cemeteries \(Germany\)](#); [Prisoners of War \(Italy\)](#); [Between Acceptance and Refusal - Soldiers' Attitudes Towards War](#); [Sea Transport and Supply](#); [Easter Rising \(Great Britain and Ireland\)](#); [Governments, Parliaments and Parties \(New Zealand\)](#); [Orpen, William](#); [Naval Warfare](#); [Women's Mobilization for War](#); [De Valera, Éamon](#); [Making Sense of the War \(India\)](#); [The Way to War](#); [Women War Reporters](#); [Centenary \(Turkey\)](#); [Centenary \(Ireland\)](#); [Irish Home Rule](#); [Making Sense of the War \(USA\)](#); [Suffragettes](#); [The Church \(Spain\)](#); [Literature \(Australia\)](#); [Conscription \(Australia\)](#); [Asquith, Herbert Henry](#); [Prisoners of War \(India\)](#); [Ethnic Minorities at War \(USA\)](#); [Social Conflict and Control, Protest and Repression \(New Zealand\)](#); [Post-war Societies \(USA\)](#); [Naval Warfare \(USA\)](#); [War Psychiatry](#); [Press/Journalism \(Great Britain and Ireland\)](#); [Organization of War Economies \(Great Britain and Ireland\)](#); [Sims, William Sowden](#); [Women's Mobilization for War \(Great Britain and Ireland\)](#); [Black and Tans and Auxiliaries](#); [Civilian and Military Power \(Great Britain and Ireland\)](#); [War Psychiatry and Shell Shock](#); [Social Conflict and Control, Protest and Repression \(Great Britain and Ireland\)](#); [Atlantic U-boat Campaign](#); [Commemoration, Cult of the Fallen \(Great Britain and Ireland\)](#); [Lusitania, Sinking of](#); [Lusitania, Sinking of](#); [Collins, Michael](#); [Khaki Election 1918](#) and [1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War. Introduction](#)