



IRELAND

1922

INDEPENDENCE,  
PARTITION,  
CIVIL WAR

— LEAVING CERTIFICATE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES —





## CONTENTS

Introduction—4

Ireland in 1922—5

Notable personalities from the *Dictionary of Irish Biography*—7

1. The Treaty Debates—8

2. The Belfast ‘Pogroms’ and the McMahon Murders—16

3. The ‘spark’ of the Civil War; the assassination of Sir Henry Wilson—26

4. The experiences of women in the new Free State—34

Research Study Report—41

# INTRODUCTION

The year 1922 in Ireland was pivotal; it witnessed three major events that ushered in the final phase of Ireland's revolution – the ratification of the Anglo-Irish Treaty leading to the establishment of the Irish Free State, the final confirmation of partition when Northern Ireland opted out of that Free State settlement, and the outbreak of the Irish Civil War.

This teaching resource is based on *Ireland 1922: Independence, Partition, Civil War* (edited by Darragh Gannon and Fearghal McGarry. Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, 2022), which consists of fifty concise and illustrated essays, each of which addresses a particular event that took place in 1922 to explore a broader theme related to the Irish revolution or its legacy. This resource pack has been designed for the Leaving Certificate Late Modern History (1815–1993) course, supporting Later Modern Ireland and particularly Topic 3, 'The pursuit of sovereignty and the impact of partition, 1912–1949'.

This resource consists of four topics, each of which comprises an exam-style documents-based question, supplemental primary source material, and historiographical interpretations from *Ireland 1922*. This will allow students to engage with and build upon the existing course material with its emphasis on enquiry, evidence and exploration and to develop the ability to debate the usefulness and limitations of different types of primary and secondary sources of historical evidence. Students will require an awareness of the key events in Ireland during the Revolutionary period (1916–23) to orientate them when reading through the documents. This resource facilitates the exploration of the contemporary and historical issues raised by events that took place in Ireland in the year 1922, using current historiography and new primary source material. Teachers and students can choose which topic to focus on and how best to use it in the classroom.

The Royal Irish Academy's *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (DIB) can be used as a reference document for key personalities related to these topics; it is available for free, as well as the RIA's *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy* (DIFP) and *Judging Dev* educational resources. These can be used to further contextualise and understand the featured topics and can all be accessed here: <https://www.ria.ie/educational-resources>.

# IRELAND IN 1922

The truce of 11 July 1921 ended the Irish War of Independence, paving the way for the establishment of formal peace negotiations between the British government and the Irish.

However, by the beginning of 1922, Ireland once again faced the prospect of war. The Anglo-Irish Treaty, which had been signed in London on 6 December 1921 following two months of negotiations, was extremely divisive. It was ratified in the Dáil on 7 January 1922 by a vote of 64 to 57, following acrimonious Dáil debates. But its opponents refused to accept the treaty – Éamon de Valera resigned as president of the Dáil, to be replaced by Arthur Griffith, and thus triggered a split in the republican movement that spread from the Dáil to Sinn Féin and then the IRA, eventually leading to the Irish Civil War (28 June 1922 – 24 May 1923).

1922 was a confusing, unsettled and unsettling, year, when things did not turn out as hoped. There was still much to play for at the outset, but it ended in violence and disillusionment. It was marked by acts of violence north and south of the border, and while the War of Independence had come to an end, it was unclear what kind of state would emerge from it, with what level of independence. Many of the issues would not be settled for years or decades, and some remain unresolved.

It was a year of enormous change: its events cemented partition and established the Irish Free State which, in turn, provided the basis for the Ireland that Éamon de Valera went on to create.

## KEY DATES

- 7 January 1922: Dáil Éireann passes the Anglo-Irish Treaty
- 14 January 1922: Establishment of the Provisional Government
- 21 January 1922: First Craig–Collins ‘pact’
- 24 March 1922: McMahon killings
- 26 March 1922: Meeting of the IRA ‘Army Convention’
- 30 March 1922: Second Craig–Collins ‘pact’
- 7 April 1922: Special Powers Act passed by the Northern Ireland government
- 14 April 1922: Seizure of the Four Courts by anti-Treaty IRA garrison
- 2–20 May 1922: Joint Free State Army–IRA ‘Northern offensive’
- 20 May 1922: Agreement of election ‘pact’ between pro- and anti-Treaty Sinn Féin
- 1 June 1922: Establishment of the Royal Ulster Constabulary
- 18 June 1922: Pro-Treaty Sinn Féin candidates win the general election

- 21 June 1922: Official opening by King George V of new Belfast Parliament
- 22 June 1922: Assassination of Sir Henry Wilson by anti-Treaty IRA in London
- 26 June 1922: Kidnapping of Free State General J.J. O'Connell by Four Courts IRA garrison
- 28 June 1922: Firing on Four Courts IRA garrison by Free State Army
- 28 June – 5 July 1922: 'Battle of Dublin'
- 5 July 1922: Killing of Cathal Brugha by Free State Army in Dublin
- 20 July 1922: Capture of Limerick and Waterford cities by Free State Army
- 31 July 1922: Killing of Harry Boland by Free State Army in Skerries, Co. Dublin
- 10 August 1922: Capture of Cork city by Free State Army
- 12 August 1922: Death of Arthur Griffith
- 22 August 1922: Assassination of Michael Collins by anti-Treaty IRA in Cork
- 18 October 1922: Emergency Powers Act passed by Provisional Government
- 25 October 1922: Free State constitution adopted by Provisional Government
- 24 November 1922: Execution of Erskine Childers by Provisional Government
- 6 December 1922: Formal establishment of the Irish Free State
- 7 December 1922: Northern Ireland 'opts out' of the Irish Free State
- 7 December 1922: Assassination of pro-Treaty TD Seán Hales by anti-Treaty IRA in Dublin
- 8 December 1922: Execution of Rory O'Connor, Liam Mellows, Dick Barrett and Joe McKelvey by Irish Free State in Mountjoy Prison
- 10 April 1923: Killing of Liam Lynch by Free State Army in Tipperary
- 27 April 1923: Formation of Cumann na nGaedheal
- 24 May 1923: IRA Chief of Staff Frank Aiken orders ceasefire

# NOTABLE PERSONALITIES FROM THE DICTIONARY OF IRISH BIOGRAPHY

Below is a list of the personalities relevant to the topics included in this resource; you can access the *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (DIB) for free through Scoilnet, or see the RIA's dedicated resource 'Dictionary of Irish Biography – Key Personalities' here: <https://www.ria.ie/educational-resources>

**Barton, Robert Childers** (1881–1975):  
agriculturist and revolutionary

**Béaslaí, Piaras** (1881–1965): writer,  
revolutionary, politician, language  
revivalist  
and journalist

**Brugha, Cathal** (1874–1922):  
revolutionary

**Byrne, Edward Joseph** (1872–1940):  
Catholic archbishop of Dublin

**Clarke, Kathleen** (1878–1972):  
republican activist

**Collins, Michael** (1890–1922):  
revolutionary leader, chairman of the  
Irish Provisional Government, and  
Commander-in-chief of the Provisional  
Government army

**Cosgrave, William Thomas**  
(1880–1965): revolutionary and politician

**Craig, James** (1871–1940): 1st Viscount  
Craigavon, first prime minister of  
Northern Ireland

**De Valera, Éamon** (1882–1975): teacher,  
revolutionary, Taoiseach and president  
of Ireland

**Devlin, Joseph** (1871–1934): nationalist  
leader

**Griffith, Arthur Joseph** (1871–1922):  
journalist and politician

**MacSwiney, Mary** (1872–1942):  
republican

**Markievicz, Constance Georgine**  
(1868–1927): countess, republican and  
labour activist

**McCartan, Patrick** (1878–1963): medical  
doctor, revolutionary and politician

**Mellows, William Joseph** ('Liam')  
(1892–1922): revolutionary and socialist

**Nixon, John William** (1877–1949):  
policeman and politician

**O'Callaghan, Kate** (Kathleen)  
(1885–1961): teacher and politician

**O'Connor, Roderick** ('Rory')  
(1883–1922): republican

**O'Duffy, Eoin** (1890–1944): soldier,  
policeman and politician

**O'Higgins, Kevin Christopher**  
(1892–1927): politician

**Pearse (Brady), Margaret** (1857–1932):  
nationalist and Dáil deputy

**Sheehy Skeffington, (Johanna) Hanna**  
(1877–1946): political activist

**Stack, Austin** (1879–1929): revolutionary

**Wilson, Sir Henry Hughes** (1864–1922):  
1st baronet, soldier and politician

# 1.

## THE TREATY DEBATES

### INTRODUCTION

Following the Treaty negotiations, October–December 1921, and in the face of a renewed threat of war from Prime Minister David Lloyd George, the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed on 6 December 1921. The seven-member Dáil cabinet voted to recommend the Treaty to the Dáil by a margin of four to three: Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins, Robert Barton and W.T. Cosgrave voted in favour, while Éamon de Valera, Cathal Brugha and Austin Stack voted against.

As the Dáil debated the ratification of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the University College Dublin lecture theatre at Earlsfort Terrace in Dublin's city centre became incredibly tense. The Dáil debates have long been seen as a climactic point in the history of the Irish revolution; they were the moment when the camaraderie of the republican movement was fractured and the bitterness and divisions of the civil war began.

These debates have been the focus for many historians, with particular attention being paid to the constitutional arguments both for and against the proposed treaty, and the gender dynamics, with the majority of female speakers in opposition, and, latterly, the class dimensions of the treaty split. But alongside these questions, the most noted feature of the Treaty Debates was the tone of the exchanges.

Ultimately, on 7 January 1922, the Dáil voted to approve the treaty by a vote of 64 to 57 but its opponents refused to accept this result, leading eventually to the Irish Civil War.

### PRIMARY SOURCE EVALUATION

A sample exam-style documents-based question is provided here, as well as supplemental primary source material to provide teachers and students with additional documents for discussion.

#### **Sample documents-based question:**

Case study to which the documents relate: The Treaty negotiations, October–December 1921.



### **Document A**

Extract from a speech made by Kathleen Clarke, Sinn Féin TD and widow of Easter Rising leader Tom Clarke, during a debate in the Dáil on the Anglo-Irish Treaty, 22 December 1921 (Dáil Éireann: [www.oireachtas.ie](http://www.oireachtas.ie))

I rise to support the motion of the President to reject this Treaty. It is to me the simple question of right and wrong. To my mind it is a surrender of all our national ideals [...] Arthur Griffith said he had brought back peace with England, and freedom to Ireland. I can only say it is not the kind of freedom I have looked forward to, and, if this Treaty is ratified, the result will be a divided people; the same old division will go on; those who will enter the British Empire and those who will not, and so England's old game of divide and conquer goes on. God, the tragedy of it! [...] there is not power enough to force me, nor eloquence enough to influence me in the whole British Empire into taking that Oath [...] I took an Oath to the Irish Republic, solemnly, reverently, meaning every word. I shall never go back from that.

### **Document B**

Extract from a speech made by Arthur Griffith, Minister for Foreign Affairs, during a debate in the Dáil on the Anglo-Irish Treaty, 7 January 1922 (Dáil Éireann: [www.oireachtas.ie](http://www.oireachtas.ie))

Does this Treaty give away the interests and the honour of Ireland? I say it does not. I say it serves the interests of Ireland; it is not dishonourable to Ireland. It is not an ideal thing; it could be better [...] You can take this Treaty and make it the basis of an Irish Ireland. You can reject this Treaty and you can throw Ireland back into where she was years ago, into where she was before—well I do not like to speak about the dead—before the sacrifice that the dead men have made raised her up; the men who died for the last four or five years made this Treaty possible; without them it could not have been done. You are going to give away the fruits of their sacrifices, and to condemn the other young men of Ireland to go out on a fruitless struggle [...] I can see no better way than this Treaty; no better way for the Irish people.

### **Section 1: Comprehension**

- a) Who was Kathleen Clarke?
- b) According to Document A, will Clarke accept the Treaty?
- c) According to Document B, what will happen if they reject the Treaty?
- d) Why, according to Arthur Griffith, should they accept the Treaty?

### **Section 2: Comparison**

- a) How far do the sources support the view that divisions within Sinn Féin caused the Irish Civil War? Explain your answer, referring to both documents.
- b) Do both documents illustrate the tone and emotion of the debates? Give reasons for your answer, referring to both documents.

### Section 3: Criticism

- a) Does Document A discuss the arguments for and against the Treaty? Give reasons, referring to the source.
- b) Does Document B show the value of speeches as a historical source? Explain your answer, referring to the document.

### Section 4: Contextualisation

To what extent did the Treaty achieve Irish nationalists' aims?

#### Guidance for students on how to approach primary sources

Think about who/what/when/why:

- Who produced this?
- What type of source is the document? What does it say?
- When was it written: close to the event or some time after?
- Why was it written? In what circumstances?

Think about the strengths and weaknesses of the sources:

- What can this document tell you?
  - What questions can it answer?
  - What questions can it not answer?
- Below are further examples of primary source extracts with questions for discussion.

#### Source 1

Extract from a speech made by Liam Mellows, Sinn Féin, during a debate in the Dáil on the Anglo-Irish Treaty, 4 January 1922 (Dáil Éireann: [www.oireachtas.ie](http://www.oireachtas.ie))

I stand definitely against this so-called Treaty and the arguments in favour of acceptance [...] [The plenipotentiaries] had no mandate to sign away the independence of this country as this Treaty does [...] We are hearing a great deal here about the will of the people [...] The will of the people, we are told by one of Deputies who spoke here, is that this Treaty shall be ratified [hear, hear]. The will of the people! [...] I found that the people who are in favour of the Treaty are not in favour of the Treaty on its merits, but are in favour of the Treaty because they fear what is to happen if it be rejected. That is not the will of the people, that is the fear of the people [hear, hear]. The will of the people was when the people declared for a Republic.

#### Questions for discussion:

- 1) Why does Liam Mellows raise the issue of the plenipotentiaries' mandate?
- 2) Why does Mellows label it a 'so-called' Treaty?
- 3) What does this speech reveal about the divisions within the Dáil?
- 4) Were these fears justified?

## **Source 2**

Extract from a speech made by Arthur Griffith, Minister for Foreign Affairs, during a debate in the Dáil on the Anglo-Irish Treaty, 7 January 1922 (Dáil Éireann: [www.oireachtas.ie](http://www.oireachtas.ie))

Does this Treaty give away the interests and the honour of Ireland? I say it does not. I say it serves the interests of Ireland; it is not dishonourable to Ireland. It is not an ideal thing; it could be better [...] You can take this Treaty and make it the basis of an Irish Ireland. You can reject this Treaty and you can throw Ireland back into where she was years ago, into where she was before [...] the sacrifice that the dead men have made raised her up; the men who died for the last four or five years made this Treaty possible; without them it could not have been done. You are going to give away the fruits of their sacrifices, and to condemn the other young men of Ireland to go out on a fruitless struggle [...] I can see no better way than this Treaty; no better way for the Irish people.

### **Questions for discussion:**

- 1) Was Arthur Griffith pro- or anti-Treaty?
- 2) According to Griffith, in what way would the Treaty serve Ireland's interests?
- 3) Does Griffith view the Treaty as the best possible outcome?
- 4) What would be the outcome of rejecting the Treaty, according to this speech?

## **Source 3**

Extract from a speech by Winston Churchill, Colonial Secretary in the British Government, to the House of Commons, 26 June 1922 (House of Commons Hansard)

When, on the night of 6 December, 1921, we signed a Treaty with the plenipotentiaries of the Irish people, we had every right to believe, and every reason to believe, that the Irish signatories represented the settled view of the vast majority of the Dáil and the united authority of the Sinn Féin cabinet. But we learned almost immediately that Mr de Valera and a very large number of his followers repudiated the action taken by his own plenipotentiaries, and the Treaty was only carried through the Dáil, after prolonged wrangling, by a majority of seven votes [...] We therefore pressed upon the Provisional Government the importance and urgency of an election, which alone could give them the status of a national administration and which alone could enable them to govern with native authority [...] The presence in Dublin, in violent occupation of the Four Courts, of a band of men styling themselves the Headquarters of the Republican Executive, is a gross breach and defiance of the Treaty [...] The time has come [...] for us to make to this strengthened Irish Government and new Irish Parliament a request, in express terms, that this sort of thing must come to an end.

### **Questions for discussion:**

- 1) What perspective of the Treaty negotiations and debates does Churchill provide?
- 2) Does Churchill's speech reflect the emotion of the Treaty Debates?
- 3) What request does he make?
- 4) What significant event followed soon after this speech?

#### Source 4

An anonymous anti-Treaty handbill published in 1922 (Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland)



#### **Questions for discussion:**

- 1) Explain what is happening in this cartoon.
- 2) Why is Michael Collins depicted as forcing the Treaty down an Irish citizen's throat?
- 3) Does this portray the Treaty in a positive or a negative light?
- 4) Why was the Anglo-Irish Treaty not universally accepted?



## SECONDARY SOURCE INTERPRETATION

The extract below provides additional contextual information and material for understanding and interpreting secondary sources.

### **Guidance for interpreting secondary source material:**

- Assess and evaluate what the historians are saying, stating strengths and weaknesses of each interpretation
- State whether you agree or disagree with their interpretations and explain why
- Use relevant knowledge to support your arguments
- Don't be afraid to challenge a historian's point of view using relevant contextual knowledge to support your argument.

Extract from Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid, 'Emotions in the Treaty Debates', Ireland 1922: Independence, Partition, Civil War (Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, 2021)\*

The mood of the lecture halls was frequently noted, from the cheers from the waiting crowd outside as deputies entered, to the tension, gravity and gloom that progressively engulfed the debates themselves.

The range of emotions of the treaty debates formed a significant part of how the Irish public learned about the emerging split in the republican movement. Despite the bitterness which was the abiding memory of the debates, the emotion most frequently expressed in the debates themselves was love – of Ireland, and of each other. But fear was present too: it stalked the chamber. The prospect of a split and of dividing the political community which had been forged through the revolutionary process was uppermost in deputies' minds. Some accused their opponents of being motivated by fear, while others were adamant that the people in Ireland were steadfast and fearless in spite of the terror that was waged against them.

In this pressure-cooker atmosphere, feelings bubbled over and passions ran high. This fevered emotional environment also was reflected in the tone of many of the speeches. The bitterness and anger of many of the speeches have been much commented upon: notably Cathal Brugha's railing against Michael Collins where clearly his personal dislike bled into his political opposition, or Arthur Griffith's tetchy and bad-tempered responses throughout, encapsulated in his dismissal of Erskine Childers as a 'damned Englishman'.

A feature of the disintegration of republican unity in the months leading up to the outbreak of civil war is the spilling over into the public sphere of these emotions – recrimination, anger, accusations of bad faith, pragmatism, and hope. This complex bundle of emotions can all be charted in the public statements made by both sides as Ireland slid towards fraternal conflict. Thinking about the treaty debates as a decisive moment in the emotional history of the Irish revolution opens up new ways of thinking about how emotions were expressed and instrumentalised as a means to support or undermine political arguments throughout the revolutionary period.

\*Because of the nature of the editorial process, extracts in this document may differ slightly from corresponding passages in the published book.

### Questions for discussion:

- 1) How far does this extract support the view that divisions within Sinn Féin caused the Irish Civil War?
- 2) What can the tone and emotion of the Treaty Debates tell us about their significance for the Irish population?
- 3) What does the overflowing of these emotions into the public sphere tell us about the strength of republican unity in the months leading up to the outbreak of civil war?
- 4) Does this extract present different perspectives?

## DISCUSSION TOPICS

To what extent was the Anglo-Irish Treaty (1921) responsible for the Irish Civil War?

What made the Treaty Debates the watershed moment in the lead-up to the Civil War?

Liam Mellows claimed that ‘it is not the will of the people but the fear of the people’ that propelled the pro-Treaty arguments. Discuss.

What role do you think emotions play in creating a watershed moment such as the Treaty Debates?

What was the significance of the Treaty Debates for the Irish Revolution?

Why were the Treaty Debates so divisive?

## FURTHER READING

Listed below are relevant individuals whose biographies are available in the *Dictionary of Irish Biography* and suggested texts for further reading. This will also be of use for students working on their Research Study Report.

- Barton, Robert Childers
- Brugha, Cathal
- Clarke, Kathleen
- Collins, Michael
- Cosgrave, William Thomas
- De Valera, Éamon (‘Dev’)
- Griffith, Arthur Joseph
- MacSwiney, Mary
- Markievicz, Constance Georgine
- Mellows, William Joseph (‘Liam’)
- O’Duffy, Eoin
- Pearse (Brady), Margaret
- Stack, Austin

- Kathleen Clarke, *Revolutionary woman: my fight for Irish freedom* (edited by Helen Litton) (Dublin, 1991)
- Linda Connolly (ed.), *Women and the Irish Revolution: feminism, activism, violence* (Dublin, 2020)
- Frank Gallagher, *The Anglo-Irish Treaty* (London, 1965)
- Anne Haverty, *Constance Markievicz: Irish revolutionary* (Dublin, 2016; first published as *Constance Markievicz: an independent life*, 1988)
- Jason Knirck, *Imagining Ireland's independence: the debates over the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921* (Plymouth, 2006)
- Nicholas Mansergh, *The unresolved question: the Anglo-Irish settlement and its undoing, 1912–1972* (New Haven, 1991)
- Liam Weeks and Mícheál Ó Fathartaigh (eds), *The Treaty: debating and establishing the Irish state* (Newbridge, 2018)

## 2. THE BELFAST 'POGROMS' AND THE MCMAHON MURDERS

### INTRODUCTION

Against the backdrop of partition and the intensification of the War of Independence in the South, violence erupted in Belfast in the early 1920s, with almost 500 people killed in the city between July 1920 and July 1922. Unlike in the rest of Ireland, however, the violence in Belfast consisted largely of urban rioting, with almost 80 per cent of the victims being civilians, as opposed to members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) or the security forces. Despite the signing of the truce on 11 July 1921, violence intensified in Belfast that summer, the brunt of it borne by the local Catholic community, which constituted 25 per cent of the city's population.

While Belfast's middle-class constitutional nationalists hoped that a policy of 'recognition' of the Northern parliament and its government would result in an end to persecution, this view was entirely out of step with the experiences of Catholics in working-class areas of the city, given events on the ground. From January 1922, the IRA launched a campaign to destabilise Northern Ireland; its attacks on the security forces were frequently met with vicious reprisals from loyalists who targeted Catholic communities in Belfast. In February 1922, the IRA ambush and killing of A Specials in Monaghan led to loyalist attacks on IRA-reinforced Catholic districts, and in March the situation deteriorated further with intimidation, house burning, rioting and assassinations.

The attack that shocked contemporaries most was the murder of a prosperous Catholic publican, Owen McMahon, together with four of his sons (aged between 15 and 26 years) and a barman who was present during the attack at the family's home in north Belfast in the early hours of 24 March 1922. The killings were seen by many as a reprisal for the shooting of two policemen (of the Ulster Special Constabulary) the day before. News of the attack reverberated throughout Ireland and beyond.



## KEY DATES

- 30 March 1922: Second Craig-Collins Pact
- 7 April 1922: Special Powers Act is passed
- 1 June 1922: Royal Ulster Constabulary begins operations

This is a useful timeline of events in Ulster: <http://centenariestimeline.com/index.html>

## PRIMARY SOURCE EVALUATION

A sample exam-style documents-based question is provided here, as well as supplemental primary source material to provide teachers and students with additional documents for discussion.

### **Sample documents-based question:**

Topic to which the documents relate: Later Modern Ireland Topic 3: The pursuit of sovereignty and the impact of partition, 1912–1949

### **Document A**

Sir James Craig, Prime Minister, speaking in the Northern Irish House of Commons, quoted in the *Irish News*, 29 March 1922

[I] could not allow the charge to go out against the great Protestant community in that city [Belfast] that they are engaged in these murders ... The long and short of it is, they are not in any way to blame [...] They have been loyal to the Crown and Constitution, and I cannot allow charges to be made against them as a body when they have stood provocation unparalleled in the history of the whole world ... Therefore, do not let us have these very easily criticised individual cases made so much of in the press. If those people only knew of the provocation – if they thought for a moment what it meant for two of our gallant men observing the peace of the city to have assassins steal up behind them in broad daylight, pull the trigger, and leave them lying on the ground. Sir, the less said about these things the better.

## **Document B**

‘Extermination Plan in Belfast’, *Irish Independent*, 22 April 1922, quoting a telegram from the Belfast Catholic Protection Committee to Winston Churchill and Austen Chamberlain

“Belfast Catholics being gradually but certainly exterminated by murder, assault, and starvation. Their homes burned, streets swept by snipers, life unbearable, military forces inactive, Special Police hostile, Northern Government either culpable or inefficient. Your Government saved the Armenians, Bulgarians. Belfast Catholics getting worse treatment. Last two days here appalling” [...] Pogroms reviewed: more than 200 Catholic houses have been burned or looted; hundreds of families have been compelled to abandon their homes or business premises or both under threat of death; numbers of respectable Catholic business people have been assassinated in their shops or private residences [...] A father, who was certainly not a Sinn Féiner, and five sons have been taken from their beds and shot in their drawing room during Curfew hours, when only Government forces had access to the streets.

### **Section 1: Comprehension**

- a) What was Sir James Craig’s role at this time?
- b) According to Document A, who does Craig suggest is not responsible for the McMahon attack?
- c) According to Document B, what were conditions like in Belfast for Catholics?
- d) Who is blamed for the McMahon killings in Document B?

### **Section 2: Comparison**

- a) How far do the sources support the view that Belfast’s Catholic community were unfairly targeted? Explain your answer, referring to both documents.
- b) Do both documents illustrate the extent of violence prevalent in Belfast in the early 1920s? Give reasons for your answer, referring to both documents.

### **Section 3: Criticism**

- c) To what extent does Document A support the view that the McMahon murders were widely perceived as the worst witnessed in Ireland in the period? Explain your answer, referring to the document.
- a) Do you consider Document B to be an objective source? Give reasons, referring to the source.

### **Section 4: Contextualisation**

To what extent does the violence in Belfast demonstrate the failings of the Anglo-Irish Treaty?

**Guidance for students on how to approach primary sources:**

Think about who/what/when/why:

- Who produced this?
- What type of source is the document? What does it say?
- When was it written: close to the event or some time after?
- Why was it written? In what circumstances?

Think about the strengths and weaknesses of the sources:

- What can this document tell you?
- What questions can it answer?
- What questions can it not answer?

Below are further examples of primary source extracts with questions for discussion.

Source 1

'The Mad Bull', *Punch*, 15 February 1922

PUNCH, OR THE LONDON CHARIVARI.—FEBRUARY 15, 1922.



THE MAD BULL.

FARMER CRAIG. "IF YOU CAN'T KEEP THAT BRUTE ON YOUR SIDE OF THE FENCE I SHALL DEAL WITH HIM AS I THINK FIT."

FARMER COLLINS. "WELL, BETWEEN YOU AND ME, I WISH TO GOD YE WOULD."

### **Questions for discussion:**

- 1) What is happening in this cartoon?
- 2) What does the caption mean? What are Collins and Craig discussing?
- 3) When was this cartoon published? What is the significance of this?
- 4) What image of the IRA does this cartoon put forward?

### **Source 2**

Joseph Devlin, MP for West Belfast, speaking in the House of Commons, 28 March 1922  
(House of Commons Hansard)

I intend to-night to take advantage of this opportunity to raise the whole question of the appalling conditions in Belfast, the massacre of innocent and unoffending Catholic citizens, the continued bombing of women and children, the establishment of a system of wholesale terrorism amongst the Catholic minority in the city, culminating in the cold-blooded assassination of Mr. McMahon and his family, which has shocked almost the entire world [...] He was a leading merchant in the City of Belfast. He was a man who, if you were to go through the whole city would be regarded as the most unoffending citizen. He took no part in politics [...] at 1 o'clock in the morning, a band of assassins entered Mr. McMahon's house, dragged his wife and little niece out and forced them into a room, and [...] murdered him and four of his sons and mortally wounded two others.

### **Questions for discussion:**

- 1) Who was Joseph Devlin and what was his role?
- 2) Why was McMahon's murder deemed so shocking?
- 3) Is Devlin's description of the violence as a 'massacre' accurate?
- 4) Does Devlin hold anyone responsible for the murder of the McMahons?

### **Source 3**

Winston Churchill, Secretary of State for the Colonies, speaking in the House of Commons, 28 March 1922 (House of Commons Hansard)

It is impossible to describe more powerfully and more horribly the massacre of the McMahon family than has been done in the quotations from a Unionist newspaper [the *Belfast Telegraph*] [...] I think one would have to search all over Europe to find instances of equal atrocity, barbarity, cold blooded, inhuman, cannibal vengeance—cannibal in all except the act of devouring the flesh of the victim—which will equal this particular event. But I can find other instances in other places in Ireland equalling it in horror [...] If we are to paint these horrors in lurid terms, with all the resources of powerful descriptive rhetoric, they will have to be painted on both sides.



### **Questions for discussion:**

- 1) What is the significance of the murders being denounced in a Unionist newspaper?
- 2) What effect does focusing attention on other instances of violence in Ireland have?
- 3) How does Churchill's unionist perspective differ from that of nationalists?
- 4) Does Churchill attempt to diminish the significance of the murders? Why?

### **Source 4**

*Ulster Herald*, 1 April 1922

Our Dublin Letter. – The Belfast atrocities have aroused the Irish capital to a deep sense of indignation [...] It is evident to everyone that the Belfast Government is either unwilling or unable to save the lives and property of the Catholic people. The murder of Catholic men, women and children has run into hundreds since the Pogrom was first inaugurated, yet not a single Orange assassin has been brought to justice. The appalling brutality of the McMahon murders, while shocking the civilised world, has aroused the people of the twenty-six counties beyond anything that has previously happened in Ulster [...] It speaks well for the toleration of the people of Dublin that many prominent members of the Orange Order residing [there] have not suffered as a result of the revolting deeds of the black brethren in Belfast.

### **Questions for discussion:**

- 1) What perspective on violence in Belfast does this source offer?
- 2) According to the document, how do the people of Dublin feel about the Belfast Government?
- 3) According to this document, who is responsible for the McMahon murders?
- 4) Does this document give a clear idea of the contemporary situation in Northern Ireland?

### **Source 5**

Witness statement of Seamus McKenna, Commandant of 1st Battalion Belfast Brigade & Lieutenant of Cavan Active Service Unit. Dated 6 October 1954 (WS 1016, Seamus McKenna, Military Archives of Ireland, Bureau of Military History)

The pogrom against the Catholic population in Belfast broke out in July, 1920. At the beginning [...] the I.R.A. were ordered to take no part in what was regarded as sectarian strife, but after a few weeks when Orange gangs and mobs, armed and partly armed were attacking isolated Catholic districts in the city and Orange gunmen were deliberately shooting down Catholics on the streets, in their homes, or at their places of employment, it became necessary for the I.R.A. to participate in the struggle, to the extent of defending Catholic areas and institutions which were in danger [...] a noticeable increase in recruiting began [...] In July, 1920, the total Volunteer strength in Belfast would hardly have exceeded three hundred men

[...] in January, 1922, there were at least a thousand men on the rolls. I would say that about two-thirds of these recruits [...] joined the I.R.A. for sectarian reasons only, to fight defensively or offensively against the Orange gangs.

### Questions for discussion:

- 1) What is the context for this source? Why did Seamus McKenna write this statement?
- 2) How does this statement explain the violence in Belfast, 1920–22?
- 3) Does this statement suggest that IRA violence in Belfast was retaliatory?
- 4) According to this statement, what effect did the pogroms have on IRA membership?

## SECONDARY SOURCE EVALUATION

The extract below provides additional contextual information and material for understanding and interpreting secondary sources.

### Guidance for interpreting secondary source material:

- Assess and evaluate what the historians are saying, stating strengths and weaknesses of each interpretation
- State whether you agree or disagree with their interpretations and explain why
- Use relevant knowledge to support your arguments
- Don't be afraid to challenge a historian's point of view using relevant contextual knowledge to support your argument.

Laurence Marley, 'Class and Killing in Belfast: the McMahon Murders', extract from *Ireland 1922: Independence, Partition, Civil War* (Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, 2021)

Winston Churchill had urged the arming of Protestants in Ulster as a means of defeating the IRA, the result of which was the formation of the state-sponsored Ulster Special Constabulary, the most notorious section of which was the B-Specials. What was unleashed by this new strategy in 1922 were concerted attacks on republicans and Catholics generally, much of it directed in Belfast by RIC District Inspector, John Nixon. It is generally accepted that it was this unit that planned and executed the McMahon attack.

For some time, Joe Devlin, MP for West Belfast and leading nationalist politician in the north, had been protesting about Crown force involvement in the killing of Catholics. But the attack on the McMahons stands out in one hugely important respect. There seems to be little doubt that it was principally designed to send out the unambiguous message that even a Catholic of Owen McMahon's social standing and wealth was not off limits. McMahon was one of the wealthiest Catholics in Belfast, where he had business and leisure ties with middle-class Protestants. His home was situated in a predominantly Protestant neighbourhood and an affluent section of the city.

However shocking the McMahon attack was in terms of scale, it was the class dimension that gave the attack its real significance, and the rationale for those who planned it. Speaking in the House of Commons on 28 March 1922, Devlin declared that the assassinations had ‘shocked almost the entire world’. He even read from the leading unionist paper, the *Belfast Telegraph*, which described the deed as ‘the most terrible assassination that has yet stained the name of Belfast’.

The funeral of McMahon and his sons attracted at least 10,000 mourners, among whom were members of the Catholic political and clerical elite and Protestants, particularly from the business community. The murder served as a rallying point for a Catholic community that was now more alarmed than ever. In this part of the United Kingdom, where the minority status of Catholics derived from the crude demographic arithmetic of partition, McMahon’s rights of citizenship were not assured nor protected by political leaders in London.

### Questions for discussion:

- 1) To what extent does this extract support the view that the McMahon murders were widely condemned?
- 2) What can this extract tell us about the role of class and religion in 1920s Belfast?
- 3) Why did this particular event serve as a rallying point for the Catholic community?
- 4) Does this extract present different perspectives on the causes of violence in Belfast?
- 5) What subsequent measures were taken by the British government and the government in Dublin to address violence in Belfast?

## DISCUSSION TOPICS

How do the McMahon murders complicate the understanding of violence in Belfast in the early 1920s?

How accurate is the term ‘pogrom’ to describe the violence in Belfast, 1920–22?

Historians have noted the McMahon murders as a landmark event in the troubled period of Northern Ireland’s birth. Discuss.

Historian Tim Wilson stated that: ‘the McMahon murders gave a sharp jolt to standard unionist assumptions that their community’s violence was essentially reactive, and hence, at least, partially excusable’. Discuss.

Why did violence intensify in Belfast after the truce, signed on 11 July 1921?

What can the McMahon murders tell us about gendered violence during the Belfast pogroms?



## FURTHER READING

Below are relevant individuals whose biographies are available in the *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (DIB), as well as suggested texts for further reading. This will also be of use for students working on their Research Study Report.

- Devlin, Joseph
- Nixon, John William

Joe Baker, *The McMahon family murders* (Belfast, 1992)

John D. Brewer, Chapter 3: 'Northern Ireland: 1921–1998', in *Anti-Catholicism in Northern Ireland, 1600–1998* (Basingstoke, 1998). Available for free online through CAIN:

<https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/sectarian/brewer.htm>

Kieran Glennon, *From pogrom to civil war: Tom Glennon and the Belfast IRA* (Cork, 2013)

Robert Lynch, *The Northern IRA and the early years of Partition* (Dublin, 2006)

Alan F. Parkinson, *Belfast's unholy war: the Troubles of the 1920s* (Dublin, 2004)

Eamon Phoenix, *Northern nationalism: nationalist politics, partition and the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland, 1890–1940* (Belfast, 1994)

James Quinn and Patrick Maume (eds), *Ulster political lives, 1886–1921* (Dublin, 2016)

Margaret Ward, 'Gendered memories and Belfast Cumann na mBan 1917–1922', in Linda Connolly (ed.), *Women and the Irish Revolution: feminism, activism, violence* (Dublin, 2020)

Tim Wilson, "'The most terrible assassination that has yet stained the name of Belfast': the McMahon murders in context', *Irish Historical Studies* 37/145 (May 2010), 83–106

### 3.

## THE 'SPARK' OF THE CIVIL WAR; THE ASSASSINATION OF SIR HENRY WILSON

### INTRODUCTION

At 2.20 p.m. on Thursday 22 June Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, chief security advisor to the new Northern Irish government and former Chief of the Imperial General Staff, was shot dead on the doorstep of his Belgravia home in London by IRA Commandant Reggie Dunne and Volunteer Joe O'Sullivan. Wilson's was the first assassination of a Westminster MP since Spencer Perceval in 1812 and it both shocked and gripped public attention.

It also hastened the onset of the Irish Civil War as the British government placed responsibility for Wilson's killing on the anti-Treaty sections of the IRA, who had been occupying the Four Courts in Dublin since April 1922 in defiance of the pro-Treaty Provisional Government led by Michael Collins. Winston Churchill warned Collins that British troops would move against the IRA leadership at the Four Courts, whose presence there he considered a violation of the Treaty, if the Provisional Government themselves failed to act.

Reluctantly, Collins ordered Free State troops to attack the Four Courts on 28 June 1922, with the aid of British artillery. Fighting ensued in Dublin and the conflict quickly spread to the rest of the country – this is generally regarded as the start of the Civil War in Ireland.

### PRIMARY SOURCE EVALUATION

A sample exam-style documents-based Question is provided here, as well as supplemental primary source material to provide teachers and students with additional documents for discussion.

#### **Sample documents-based question:**

Topic to which the documents relate: Later Modern Ireland Topic 3: The pursuit of sovereignty and the impact of partition, 1912–1949

## **Document A**

*Irish Times*, 23 June 1922

Our whole country ought to be in mourning today, not only for the death of a great Irishman, but for the harm and shame which, as we must fear, the manner of it will bring to Ireland. Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson was murdered yesterday in London, and all the circumstances suggest that the crime had its origin in the bitter conflicts and hatreds of Irish politics [...] The murder, whatever its motive may have been, is a cruel blow to Ireland. If it be proved that the assassins are Irishmen, much of the sympathy with which the British peoples are following the course of Irish settlement may be alienated [...] We fear that anger may breed hasty action [...] Until yesterday we had cause for hope that the relations between Northern and Southern Ireland soon would begin to improve [...] How tragically these hopes have been dashed by the murder of Sir Henry Wilson [...] It may provoke reprisals and counter-reprisals until not only Belfast, but the whole country, runs with bloodshed and collapses into a state of civil war [...] On the other hand, this detestable crime may be a means of stirring into activity all public influences that, realising the peril, are willing to make a last effort to save Ireland from disaster.

## **Document B**

Reginald Dunne's speech which he was prevented from making from the dock, later published in the *Irish Independent*, 21 July 1922

We [Dunne and O'Sullivan] have both been in the British Army. We both joined voluntarily for the purpose of taking human life in order that the principles for which this country stood should be upheld and preserved. These principles we were told were self-determination and freedom for small nations [...] We came back from France to find that self-determination had been denied to Ireland. We found that our country was being divided into two countries – that a Government had been set up in the Belfast district, and that under that Government outrages were being perpetrated [...] The Irish nation knew [Henry Wilson] not so much as a great British Field-Marshal but as the man behind the Orange terror [...] He raised and organised a body of men known as the Ulster Special Constables, who are the principal agents in this campaign of terrorism [...] The same principles for which we shed our blood in the battlefield of Europe led us to commit the act we are charged with. You cannot deprive us of the belief that what we have done was necessary to preserve the lives, the homes and the happiness of our countrymen in Ireland.

### **Section 1: Comprehension**

- a) According to Document A, why was Wilson's assassination cause for mourning?
- b) What two potential outcomes of the assassination does the *Irish Times* predict?
- c) According to Document B, for what reasons did Dunne enlist in the British Army?

d) Why did Dunne and O'Sullivan assassinate Wilson?

## Section 2: Comparison

- a) Do both documents suggest that the assassination occurred as a reaction to past violence? Explain your answer, referring to both documents.
- b) Do both documents refer to the fallout from the Anglo-Irish Treaty? Give reasons for your answer, referring to both documents.
- c) Section 3: Criticism
- d) Does Document A provide context for Henry Wilson's assassination? Explain your answer, referring to the source.
- e) Is Document B a useful historical source? Give reasons, referring to the source.

## Section 4: Contextualisation

To what extent did Henry Wilson's assassination hasten the onset of the Civil War?

### Guidance for students on how to approach primary sources:

Think about who/what/when/why:

- Who produced this?
- What type of source is the document? What does it say?
- When was it written: close to the event or some time after?
- Why was it written? In what circumstances?

Think about the strengths and weaknesses of the sources:

- What can this document tell you?
- What questions can it answer?
- What questions can it not answer? Below are further examples of primary source extracts with questions for discussion.

### Source 1

*The Times* (London), 23 June 1922

Belfast. – General horror and indignation have been aroused here by the murder of Sir Henry Wilson. It is assumed in most quarters that the assassins are associated with the Sinn Féin movement. The *Telegraph* describes the murder as 'IRA's crowning crime'. Should this assumption prove ultimately correct the situation here will immediately become one of extreme gravity which it will tax Sir James Craig to the utmost to control. The daily murders, incendiarism, and other outrages have already inflamed popular opinion to a dangerous degree [...] It has been difficult enough for the authorities to check the intelligible desire for reprisals for the murder of comparatively unknown and humble individuals [...] Sir Henry Wilson was universally respected and admired by the Unionists here [...] The general conviction that he has died for Ulster may, it is feared, result in some uncontrollable sections of the exasperated majority taking revenge upon their opponents.

### Questions for discussion:

- 1) Where is the author of this extract writing from?
- 2) Who does the newspaper suggest was responsible for the assassination?
- 3) What events had already 'inflamed popular opinion to a dangerous degree'?
- 4) What did the *Times* fear would happen as a result of Wilson's murder?

### Source 2

Winston Churchill, Secretary of State for the Colonies, speaking in the House of Commons, 26 June 1922 (House of Commons Hansard)

A much stricter reckoning must rule henceforward. The ambiguous position of the so-called Irish Republican Army, intermingled as it is with the Free State troops, is an affront to the Treaty. The presence in Dublin, in violent occupation of the Four Courts, of a band of men styling themselves the Headquarters of the Republican Executive, is a gross breach and defiance of the Treaty. From this nest of anarchy and treason [...] murderous outrages are stimulated and encouraged [...] The time has come ... for us to make ... to this strengthened Irish Government and new Irish Parliament a request, in express terms, that this sort of thing must come to an end. If it does not [...] we shall regard the Treaty as having been formally violated [and] shall resume full liberty of action in any direction that may seem proper.

### Questions for discussion:

- 1) What events is Churchill referring to when he says 'murderous outrages'?
- 2) Who does he blame for planning and undertaking these 'outrages'?
- 3) Why does Churchill state that the Treaty had been violated? What course of action does he propose?
- 4) What significant event followed soon after?



### Source 3



Crowds paying their respects as the funeral procession of Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson travels through London, June 1922 (Getty Images)

#### **Questions for discussion:**

- 1) What event is depicted in this document?
- 2) Describe what is happening in this photograph.
- 3) What does this photograph tell us about public perceptions in Britain of Henry Wilson?
- 4) How does this document show the value of photographs as a historical source?

**Note:** British Pathé has online video footage of the funeral – this illustrates the scale of the funeral and could be shown to students in conjunction with this document:  
<https://www.britishpathe.com/video/funeral-of-sir-h-wilson-aka-funeral-of-sir-henry/query/field>

#### Source 4

Witness statement of Mary McGeehin, Cumann na mBan member (1917–) and Secretary of the Gaelic League of London (1920–), regarding the plan for the shooting of Sir Henry Wilson. Dated 14 November 1953 (WS 902, Mary McGeehin, Military Archives of Ireland, Bureau of Military History)

The story we heard at the time was that he [Dunne] was arranging with the Treaty people in Dublin at the highest level to get rid of Wilson who was torturing the Catholics in the North [...] Among the English, feelings about the whole matter were very mixed. They were very embarrassed by the pogroms in the north of Ireland which had been ordered by Wilson [...] The expectation was that the two boys would be let off with a life sentence. But the bigoted anti-Irish crowd would not be satisfied with anything less than their execution and the government yielded.

#### **Questions for discussion:**

- 1) What roles did Mary McGeehin hold during the revolutionary period?
- 2) Why, according to McGeehin, was Henry Wilson targeted?
- 3) Who reportedly ordered the assassination?
- 4) What does this document reveal about Irish nationalist views of the English response to the event?

## SECONDARY SOURCE EVALUATION

The extract below provides additional contextual information and material for understanding and interpreting secondary sources.

#### **Guidance for interpreting secondary source material:**

- Assess and evaluate what the historians are saying, stating strengths and weaknesses of each interpretation
- State whether you agree or disagree with their interpretations and explain why
- Use relevant knowledge to support your arguments
- Don't be afraid to challenge a historian's point of view using relevant contextual knowledge to support your argument.

Extract from Fearghal McGarry, 'An Irish Tragedy: The assassination of Sir Henry Wilson', *Ireland 1922: Independence, Partition, Civil War* (Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, 2021)

Dunne and O'Sullivan claimed in court that their actions were a spontaneous response to the Ulster Special Constabulary's reign of 'Orange Terror' against Belfast Catholics, which they (wrongly) blamed on Wilson. Republicans in London believed the killing had been ordered – whether as an IRA or IRB operation, before or after the Truce – by Michael Collins.

Wilson, who epitomised British imperial repression in Ireland, was born in Longford. His IRA killers were Londoners. All had served in the same army during the First World War, where O'Sullivan had lost a leg. Dunne, who would lead the IRA in post-war London, enlisted in the British army after the Easter Rising. Addressing his jury, he attributed his actions in part to his role in the war fought for the right of small nations to self-determination. Wilson belonged to a Protestant, landowning, unionist family, and embodied an imperial Irish tradition that would not survive the revolutionary era.

Wilson's fate exemplifies one of the era's most enduring legacies: the narrowing of identities caused by political violence. Family experiences often diverged sharply from the political narratives which framed the public memory of the revolutionary dead. Although David Lloyd George reminded Westminster of his friendship with Wilson, his ministers were denounced as murderers by Lady Wilson whose diehard husband never forgave their willingness to settle with the IRA. Despite Wilson's regret at the sundering of the Union with Ireland, he was quickly claimed by Ulster Unionists as a 'founding martyr for the Northern Ireland state'.

In contrast, despite the insistence of witnesses across the Civil War divide that they had acted on orders received, and the argument that the Irish government had 'a certain moral responsibility', neither Dunne nor O'Sullivan's parents were judged to meet the criteria for the allowance paid to dependents of Volunteers who died in military service.

On 8 July 1967, following a campaign for the return of their remains, Dunne and O'Sullivan finally received a public funeral befitting their status as heroic patriots. In Belfast, Ian Paisley roused a 'great Protestant demonstration' to protest Prime Minister Harold Wilson's decision to return the remains: 'While Dublin honours the murderers Belfast honours the martyr'.

### Questions for discussion:

- 1) How far does this extract support the view that Henry Wilson was a founding martyr for the Northern Ireland state?
- 2) How were Dunne and O'Sullivan viewed in comparison to Wilson?
- 3) What can this extract tell us about the narrowing of identities during this period?
- 4) Does this extract present different perspectives to other sources you have studied?
- 5) Is this a convincing interpretation of the events surrounding Wilson's assassination?

## DISCUSSION TOPICS

What circumstances in Ireland and Britain precipitated the assassination of Sir Henry Wilson?

Why can it be argued that the assassination of Sir Henry Wilson hastened the onset of the Irish Civil War?

Historian Keith Jeffery states that 'to characterise Henry Hughes Wilson simply as "Irish" is not without its difficulties'. Discuss.



## FURTHER READING

Listed below are relevant individuals whose biographies are available in the *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (DIB), as well as suggested texts for further reading. This will also be of use for students working on their Research Study Report.

- Collins, Michael
- Wilson, Sir Henry Hughes

Marie Coleman, *County Longford and the Irish Revolution 1910–1923* (Dublin, 2003)

Keith Jeffery, *Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson: a political soldier* (Oxford, 2006), especially Chapters 1, 13 and 14

Keith Jeffery, 'Wilson, Sir Henry Hughes, baronet' in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*: [www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com)

Peter Hart, 'Michael Collins and the assassination of Sir Henry Wilson', *Irish Historical Studies*, 28/110 (1992), 150–170

## 4.

# THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN IN THE NEW FREE STATE

### INTRODUCTION

The Anglo-Irish Treaty brought a limited form of independence to most of Ireland and led not only to civil war but also, to an extent, to the demise of revolutionary ideals.

Under the terms of the new Constitution of the Irish Free State (Saorstát Eireann), 1922, the future for women in the Irish state looked bright. Article 3 of the Constitution guaranteed the equal rights of ‘every person, without distinction of sex’, while the parliamentary franchise had been extended to women on equal terms with men, six years before women in the United Kingdom could claim such a victory. Feminist activists were therefore, unsurprisingly, optimistic about the future of Irishwomen.

But despite these promises of equality, Irish women’s citizenship in the Free State came to be defined by life in the home, marriage and motherhood, culminating in Article 41 of the 1937 Bunreacht na hÉireann (Constitution), which stated that:

In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.

For many, little changed in the Free State; for some, things had got worse.

### PRIMARY SOURCE EVALUATION

A sample exam-style documents-based question is provided here, as well as supplemental primary source material to provide teachers and students with additional documents.

#### **Sample documents-based question:**

Topic to which the documents relate: Later Modern Ireland Topic 3: The pursuit of sovereignty and the impact of partition, 1912–1949

### **Document A**

Extract from a letter from Constance Markievicz to Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington from Cork Jail, 21 August 1919 (Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland)

This stand of yours and what you are suffering will put so much courage into our girls and help so many of them out of the old-fashioned corner of slyness and submission [...] What is going to happen to the world at all? Everything, everywhere – except here in Ireland – seems to be heading for ruin. It was such a joy to me here to think of you in No 6 [Harcourt Street; HQ of Sinn Féin]. It's splendid to have a woman in your job! Women so rarely get a chance, and it's so gratifying when the one woman who should get it gets the chance.

### **Document B**

Extract from a letter from Mrs Anna Lalor\* to the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Edward Byrne, 4 March 1922 (Dublin Diocesan Archive)

Dear Archbishop, I humbly ask pardon for the liberty I take of writing to you + also hope you will excuse me as I don't know how to address you I am the wife of a plasterer + we have 7 children the eldest only 14 years old [...] last October twelve months, there was a strike declared in the Building Trades in Dublin and at the very time I was in Bed seriously ill my husband was forced to go to England to get Bread for his children leaving me heartbroken as I was so ill, he got work in England + was allowed to join the English Trades Union for the sum of 8d with a lot more Irish men [...] Last christmas my husband came home + I prayed + tryed to [*illegible*] persuade my husband to remain with me + the children.

### **Section 1: Comprehension**

- a) According to Document A, what future does Constance Markievicz see for women in Ireland?
- b) Which 'old-fashioned' qualities does Markievicz refer to?
- c) According to Document B, what was life like for Mrs Lalor?
- d) Why has Mrs Lalor written to the Archbishop?

### **Section 2: Comparison**

- a) Do both documents suggest that independence could bring positive change? Explain your answer, referring to both documents.
- b) Do both documents discuss the experience of life for the ordinary Irish citizen in the new Free State? Give reasons for your answer, referring to both documents.

### **Section 3: Criticism**

- a) Does Document A provide a broad picture of women's lives in the revolutionary period? Explain your answer, referring to the source.
- b) Is Document B a useful historical source? Give reasons, referring to the source.

\*Name changed

## Section 4: Contextualisation

Sinn Féin TD Piaras Béaslaí visualised a 'free, happy and glorious Gaelic state' through the passing of the Treaty. To what extent was this achieved?

### Guidance for students on how to approach primary sources

Think about who/what/when/why:

Who produced this?

What type of source is the document? What does it say?

When was it written: close to the event or some time after?

Why was it written? In what circumstances?

Think about the strengths and weaknesses of the sources:

What can this document tell you?

What questions can it answer?

What questions can it not answer? Below are further examples of primary source extracts with questions for discussion.

### Source 1

Extract from a speech made by Kathleen O'Callaghan during a debate in the Dáil on the Anglo-Irish Treaty, 20 December 1921 (Dáil Éireann: [www.oireachtas.ie](http://www.oireachtas.ie))

The women of Ireland so far have not appeared much on the political stage. That does not mean that they have no deep convictions about Ireland's status and freedom. It was the mother of the Pearses who made them what they were. The sister of Terence MacSwiney influenced her brother, and is now carrying on his life's work. Deputy Mrs. Clarke, the widow of Tom Clarke, was bred in the Fenian household of her uncle, John Daly of Limerick. The women of An Dáil are women of character, and they will vote for principle, not for expediency [...] The delegates were [...] bluffed by the threat of war into signing that Treaty [...] I do resent some of the delegates and their supporters in this House trying to use the same bluff on us here to get us to vote for that. I cannot see what war has to do with it. You will say that is a woman's argument, but we know on whom the war comes hardest.

### Questions for discussion:

- 1) Who was Kathleen O'Callaghan? What role did she play during the revolutionary period?
- 2) Why does she refer, by name, to several specific women?
- 3) What exactly is she referring to when she states that the delegates were bluffed by the threat of war?
- 4) Who does she suggest would suffer the most from renewed violence?

## Source 2

Extract from a speech made by Kevin O'Higgins during a debate in the Dáil on the Anglo-Irish Treaty, 14 December 1921 (Dáil Éireann: [www.oireachtas.ie](http://www.oireachtas.ie))

These five men whom you sent to London, and pitted against the keenest diplomats of Europe, have acquitted themselves as well and as worthily as our army did against the shock troops of the British Empire—both they and our army have fallen somewhat short of the ideal for which they strove against fearful odds. But I ask you to say that in this Treaty they have attained something that can be honourably accepted. The welfare and happiness of the men and women and the little children of this nation must, after all, take precedence of political creeds and theories. I submit that we have attained a measure which secures that happiness and welfare, and on that basis and because of the alternative and all it means for these our people, I ask your acceptance of and your allegiance to the Constitution of Saorstát na hEireann.

### **Questions for discussion:**

- 1) How does O'Higgins describe the Treaty negotiations?
- 2) In what ways did the Irish delegates 'fall short' in these negotiations?
- 3) Did the welfare of men, women, and children actually take precedence over politics?
- 4) Did these ideals translate to the lived experience of ordinary Irish people?

## Source 3

Helena Molony, 'James Connolly and women', in the *Dublin Labour Year Book* (Dublin Trades Union and Labour Council, 1930) (Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland)

... the sorry travesty of "emancipation" [...] Women, since his [James Connolly's] day, have got that once-coveted right to vote, but they still have their inferior status, their lower pay for equal work, their exclusion from juries and certain branches of the civil service, their slum dwellings, and crowded, cold and unsanitary schools for their children, as well as the lowered standard of life for workers, which, in their capacity as home-maker, hits the woman with full force [...] The Women's movement, now unhappily long spent, which aroused such a deep feeling of social consciousness and revolt among women of a more favoured class, passed over the heads of the Irish working woman and left her untouched.

### **Questions for discussion:**

- 1) According to this document, did national emancipation lead to women's emancipation?
- 2) Does Molony suggest that women had second-class status in the new Irish Free State?
- 3) How had women's lives remained the same after independence?
- 4) Why did poverty impact women more heavily than men?

#### **Source 4**

Extract from a letter from Betty Archdale of the Six Point Group in London (a feminist organisation) to Éamon de Valera in response to his proposed Constitution of Ireland, 14 June 1937 (National Archives of Ireland, TSCH/S9880)

When the Irish Free State adopted her 1923 [sic] Constitution women felt elated at the recognition of the equality of men and women in Article 3. You can, therefore, imagine our sense of dismay at the clauses in the draft constitution, particularly clauses 40, 41.2 and 45.4.ii. These clauses are based on a fascist and slave conception of woman as being a non-adult person who is very weak and whose place is in the home. Ireland's fight for freedom would not have been so successful if Irish women had obeyed these clauses. You who have fought all your life for the freedom of your Country can surely not wish to deprive Irish women of the freedom for which they also have fought. If you would only help women to be free instead of clamping these tyrannous restrictions on them you would be doing a great service to women and to Ireland.

#### **Questions for discussion:**

- 1) Why did the Constitution of the Irish Free State (1922) appeal to women?
- 2) What aspects of the 1937 Constitution of Ireland does this feminist group find unacceptable?
- 3) How does this extract illustrate the change in attitudes towards women in the 1920s and 1930s?
- 4) How does this source compare to revolutionaries' optimism for the future in the period 1916–23?

## **SECONDARY SOURCE EVALUATION**

The extract below provides additional contextual information and material for understanding and interpreting secondary sources.

#### **Guidance for interpreting secondary source material:**

- Assess and evaluate what the historians are saying, stating strengths and weaknesses of each interpretation
- State whether you agree or disagree with their interpretations and explain why
- Use relevant knowledge to support your arguments
- Don't be afraid to challenge a historian's point of view using relevant contextual knowledge to support your argument.

Extract from Lindsey Earner-Byrne, 'Gender and poverty in the new Free State', *Ireland 1922: Independence, Partition, Civil War* (Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, 2021)

On the 4 March 1922 Mrs Anna Lalor was heartbroken. Little had changed in the previous two years for her family of nine; if anything, things had got worse. Indeed, on this morning she felt compelled to sit down in her overcrowded two-roomed house in Dún Laoghaire, County Dublin, to write to one of the most powerful men in her universe – the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Edward Byrne (1921–1940). Her letter is but one among thousands the Archbishop received: these letters represent an extensive archive of the experience of poverty in the first two decades of Irish independence.

Prior to marriage Mrs Lalor had been a domestic servant, an occupation she shared with one in three single women. In 1907, she left the formal workplace to marry, thereby entering a period in her life when little was within her control, not her fertility nor the waxing and waning of her husband's earning capacity. The meaning of this impotence must have become apparent quite quickly to her: within four years she had birthed three children, almost one a year. By 1922 Anna had seven children.

Her husband was forced to go to England; the bricklayers' strike in Dublin that had lasted between October 1920 and June 1921 had only secured the workers a temporary increase of 1d. [penny] per hour, while 'keeping the city's modest slum clearance programme on hold.' That outcome was indicative of the false promise of political independence for the new Ireland's poorest citizens. While the President of the Executive, William T. Cosgrave, oversaw welfare cuts, including to the Old Age Pension, he drew an annual salary of £2,500. The average industrial wage was £126 per annum.

The new state promoted with vigour the stay-at-home mother as the bedrock of society, however, women like Mrs Lalor could rarely afford such idealism. The poor continued to survive through seasonal migration and emigration largely to England. Mrs Lalor articulated the emotional cost of that strategy, deftly connecting it with a sense that political freedom was a ruse that would not feed her children.

Mrs Lalor's letter provides barely a hint of the violence and uncertainty swirling around her country for she represents the continuity of human experience, which does not always beat to the rhythm of historical periodisation. The challenge of feeding a family changed little for women like her. During her lifetime the structure and trajectory of social inequality remained largely unchanged: the children of the poor continued to be the parents of the disadvantaged. She wanted the Archbishop to use his influence to change a system that condemned people like her to live as she did.

### Questions for discussion:

- 1) What does this extract say about the reality of life in the new Free State?
- 2) What inequalities does this extract highlight?
- 3) According to this extract, were the revolutionaries' ideals for the Free State realised?
- 4) Does this extract provide different perspectives on women's roles and experiences during the revolutionary period?



## DISCUSSION TOPICS

In her letter, why does Mrs Lalor not refer to the violence and uncertainty in Ireland at the time?

How does Mrs Lalor's experience differ from that of revolutionary women such as Constance Markievicz?

To what extent did Free State social policies cater for women like Mrs Lalor?

Did national emancipation lead to women's emancipation?

Was feminism as a middle class movement centred more on winning the vote than social change?

## FURTHER READING

Listed below are relevant individuals whose biographies are available in the *Dictionary of Irish Biography* and suggested texts for further reading. This will also be of use for students working on their Research Study Report.

- Molony, Helena
- Byrne, Edward Joseph
- Markievicz, Constance Georgine
- O'Callaghan, Kate (Kathleen)
- Skeffington, (Johanna) Hanna Sheehy-

Linda Connolly (ed.), *Women and the Irish Revolution: feminism, activism, violence* (Dublin, 2020)

Mel Cousins, *The birth of Irish social welfare in Ireland, 1922–1952* (Dublin, 2013)

Mary E. Daly, 'Marriage, fertility and women's lives in twentieth-century Ireland', *Women's History Review*, 15 (2006), 571-585.

Lindsey Earner-Byrne, *Letters of the Catholic poor: poverty in independent Ireland, 1920–1940* (Cambridge, 2017)

Diarmaid Ferriter and Susannah Riordan (eds), *Years of turbulence: The Irish Revolution and its aftermath* (Dublin, 2015)

Sinéad McCoole, *No ordinary women: Irish female activists in the revolutionary years, 1900–1923* (Madison, WI, 2003)



# RESEARCH STUDY REPORT

Students are encouraged to read the *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (DIB) entries relevant to the topics in this resource and follow both the lists of further sources at the end of each entry and in-text references. By doing so, students might find something of interest and worth pursuing for the RSR topic.

Students are also encouraged to use *Ireland 1922* for topics and reading material for their RSR. Listed below are the other topics included in the book; themes include violent and non-violent experiences of the revolutionary period, the role of the diaspora, the experiences of women, and visual culture, literature and music. Each essay in the book also includes short reading lists and sources.

## **Diaspora**

- America and the Irish Revolution
- Global Ireland
- Irish–Australian networks
- Migration, partition and memory

## **Non-violent experiences of the revolutionary period**

- Administration, democracy and state-building (north and south)
- Catholic Church
- Monarchy and Empire
- Partition and the border
- Political thought
- Southern Loyalists

## **Violence in the Revolutionary period**

- Everyday civil war violence
- Land agitation and Big House destruction
- Military campaigns
- State terror
- The legacy of violence

## **Visual culture, literature, and music**

- Film censorship culture and state-building
- Music and nationalism
- Visual culture of partition
- John Lavery's state-building art
- W.B. Yeats and the Civil War
- Race and modernity

## **Women's experiences**

- Mary MacSwiney's hunger-strike
- Gendered violence against women
- Women activists during and after the Civil War

## FURTHER RESOURCES

Below are additional resources that are available online, which can be explored to reveal more about the period through subject, date, and keyword searches.

***History Ireland***. There are articles and reviews on the revolutionary period in the back catalogue of the magazine: <https://www.historyireland.com/>

**Irish Newspaper Archives**. The national and local papers available in this online archive can be explored for details of the period. It is available through public libraries and Scoilnet: <https://www.irishnewsarchive.com/>

**Military Archives**. Contain a wide range of documents and oral accounts of the period, including pension applications from veterans of the revolutionary period and witness statements: <http://www.militaryarchives.ie/home>

**Oireachtas**. The Dáil debates on the Anglo-Irish Treaty from December 1921 to January 1922 are easily accessible: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/>