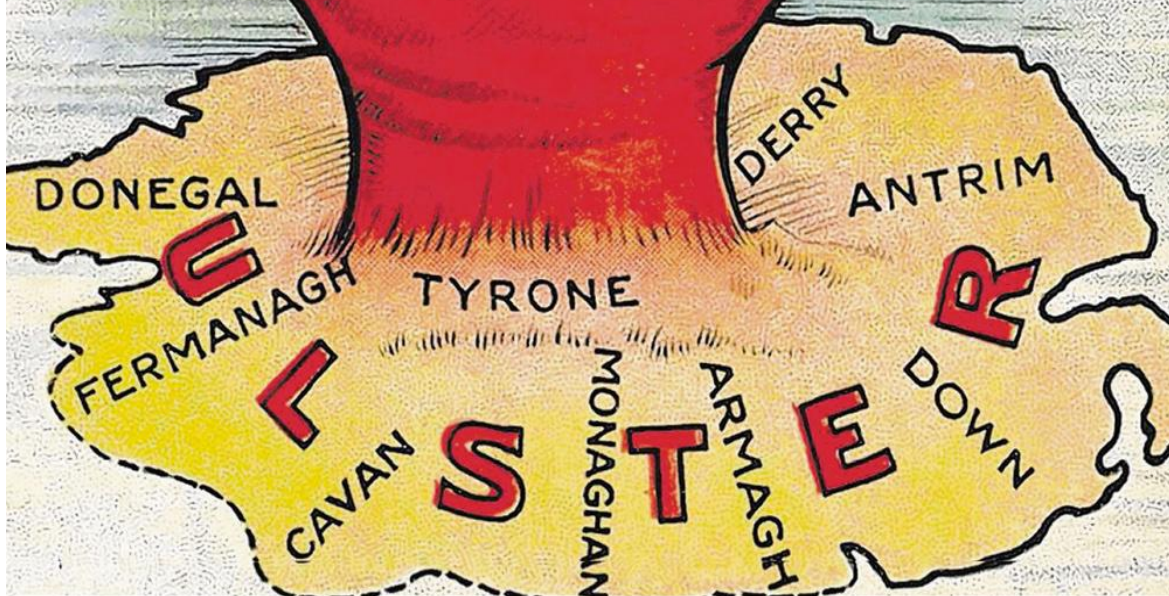


THE IRISH TIMES



1912

Home Rule and Ulster's Resistance



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Introduction

The drama of the Home Rule Bill was to be an extraordinary curtain raiser to a decade that changed the face of modern Ireland.

When the Third Home Rule Bill was introduced to the Commons 100 years ago in April 1912 it seemed a triumphant vindication of the tradition of parliamentary constitutional nationalism. Parliamentary arithmetic gave Home Rule supporters the casting whip hand over Asquith's Liberal government – the price, Home Rule.

“If I may say so reverently, I personally thank God that I have lived to see this day,” John Redmond, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party told fellow MPs. Within grasp, the dream...

But on the streets of Belfast and Dublin another story was being written that would eclipse democratic politics at its moment of supposed triumph. Carson rallied Ulster; it marched, protested, swore solemn oaths of defiance, and eventually armed itself to the teeth.

And in the founding of the Ulster Volunteers nationalists would see an excuse and legitimisation – though few doubt they would have done it anyway – for their own army, the Irish Volunteers.

In the Commons, debate would become a mere cipher, an echo, of the new contending forces on the ground in Ireland. The King became embroiled. The army mutinied. The Bill would eventually be passed, but its implementation be suspended because of world war and a rising that would change the whole picture. Home Rule would come, but, ironically only to part of Ulster; independence, to the rest of the country.

The drama of the Home Rule Bill was to be an extraordinary curtain raiser to a decade that changed the face of modern Ireland, ushering in new forces to the stage of Irish history, a new cast of characters, villains and heroes, while eclipsing old with all the tragic finality of Greek drama.

This eBook is an attempt to recapture the context and sweep of that drama, and its several conflicting narratives, an essential moment of our collective history. They are the first of many reports over a decade that will be brought together on a planned website, “Century”, with the contributions of many other groups, official and unofficial, North and South, to national commemorations

Patrick Smyth

Contrasting lives, new aspirations

Social and economic conditions were improving for large sections of Irish society during the early years of the 20th century and the increasing prosperity fuelled a growing desire for political independence

When he introduced the Irish Home Rule Bill to the House of Commons in 1912, British Prime Minister Herbert Asquith reminded his audience that it was 19 years since one of his predecessors, William Gladstone, had introduced his second and last Home Rule bill: “I take up the narrative” he said, “where Mr Gladstone was obliged to leave it”.

While Gladstone’s Home Rule initiative had been voted down by the House of Lords, in the intervening period, other initiatives had been taken by the British government that went a considerable way towards satisfying different sections of the population. Old-age pensions gave a weekly payment to those aged over 70, for example, and most Irish farmers owned their own land, some 11 million acres having been purchased as a result of the land acts of the late 19th and early 20th century.

The underlying strength of the farming community was reflected in the stability in the number of farms over 15 acres and a decline in agrarian unrest. By 1912, Irish agriculture was producing nearly 50 per cent more than it had in the 1840s, and this production was divided among a smaller group.

The National University of Ireland Act of 1908 seemed to reflect an increasingly confident Catholic Church that had succeeded in achieving some of its demands in the area of third-level education. There was much idealism and attachment to the notion that this generation of students needed to apply itself to the promotion of Irish nationalism and the building of a new, self-governed Irish state.

Such sentiments were displayed in the National Student magazine, which was first published in May 1910. Contributors argued that students in UCD needed to prize their status as university students and direct their energies towards the regeneration of the country; that they were, in effect, Home Rule leaders in waiting. They were, of course, an elite group; the total number of students in UCD in 1910/11 was 695.

Information gleaned from the Census returns of 1911 is a reminder of the extent of poverty and premature death at the other end of the social spectrum. Overall, the death rate in Dublin in 1911 per thousand people was 22.3. In London it was 15.6. In Dublin in 1912, 26,000 families, roughly one third of the city’s population, lived in one-room dwellings. The decay of the city was epitomised by Henrietta Street, on the north side of the city, where an astonishing 835 people lived in just 15 houses.

In 1911 there were 125,783 female indoor servants in Ireland, of whom 47 per cent were under the age of 25 and 92 per cent were unmarried; domestic servants comprised the largest group of employed women outside of the manufacturing sector. They usually worked 16-hour days with just one half day per week off. In rural areas, live-in farm labourers were generally

paid only twice a year and their wages were often given to parents who would give them a small amount of pocket money. A typical working-class diet in 1912 consisted of bread, rarely with butter, and stewed tea. Meat was a rarity, except for cheap bacon, and vegetables, with the exception of cabbage, were also rare. Fruit was a luxury seldom seen.

It is not as easy to get information on the lifestyles of the better off, as they were not the subject of official reports. There were in the region of 25,000 civil servants in 1912, the vast majority of them working in the post office and a career as a policeman was regarded as respectable employment for farmers' sons.

What was particularly striking in terms of career options was the big increase in the proportion of Catholics in the professions.

In 1861, for example, 28 per cent of barristers were Catholics; by 1911 the figure was 44 per cent. The greater prosperity of Catholic communities (who in 1912 comprised 89.6 per cent of the population of the 26 counties of what later constituted the republic) was also reflected in the increase in the number of priests; in 1840 there had been an estimated 2,200; by 1911 the figure was 4,000, despite a halving of the population.

Even more striking was the increase in the number of nuns, from 2,000 in 1861 to 8,800 in 1911. Catholicism was asserting itself vigorously and sometimes aggressively in the public and private spheres. Catholic associations, sodalities and publications were thriving and confident.

Energy and agitation were also apparent in other realms. The trade union movement was beginning to make its voice heard and there were lively debates about government and politics, law and order and health and welfare.

Trade unionist Louie Bennett of the Irish Women Workers Union inaugurated the Irish Women's Suffrage Federation in 1911 and in 1912 the first edition of the Irish Citizen, a weekly suffrage newspaper, appeared.

The commercial importance of towns had been enhanced by better communications and between 1891 and 1911, Belfast's population had risen by half, an indication of the success of the city's shipyards. There were 330 trams in Dublin, operating on lines that ran for 60 miles around the city; part of a public transport system that was one of the most impressive of any city in the world, and bicycles had become a very popular mode of transport. Social life was vibrant and varied, with a great interest in sport, music, dance, conversation, theatre and language. Fair days, race meetings and religious holidays were honoured traditions.

In rural areas house visiting was the most common form of social interaction and match-making was a priority in January and February as there was little work to be done in the fields during winter.

Then, as now, drunken brawling was a public order problem, as alcohol remained central to Irish social life. In 1910 there were 2,462 charges of drunkenness in the Dublin Metropolitan police district. The first Irish cinema, the Volta Electric Theatre, had opened in Dublin in

1909 and music hall comedy and pantomime were popular as was amateur sport. While hunting, shooting and fishing were more conspicuous displays of leisure for the better off, blood sports like cock fighting, though illegal, survived in working class areas.

Soccer was the most popular sport in Dublin and by 1912 there were 31 pitches in use in the Phoenix Park. Cricket was more popular in the wealthier Dublin suburbs. Extensive rail travel facilitated the development of national GAA competitions and the bedding down of the organisational structures of the association. It had also got stricter; in 1911 it made ineligible for membership “all who participate in dances or similar entertainments got up by or under the patronage of soldiers or policemen”.

While emigration from Ireland in the period 1901-1910 was a substantial 346,000, this was considerably less than the figure for 1891-1900, which was 434,000. There was widespread criticism of economic policies and nationalists often insisted that a Home Rule Ireland would strive to achieve a fairer distribution of the tax burden. British government expenditure on Ireland exceeded revenue, but taxation was higher in Ireland than Britain in relation to income, particularly as a result of indirect taxes on consumer goods such as tea, tobacco and whiskey.

As the poor consumed relatively large quantities of these, a contemporary observation, quoted by economic historian Louis Cullen, was that “Ireland was not poor because she was overtaxed but overtaxed because she was poor”.

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Starting out on the road to partition

The introduction by Prime Minister Herbert Asquith of a third effort to grant Home Rule led to an increasingly bitter debate in the House of Commons, with Unionist politicians hell bent on scuppering the proposal.

On April 11th, 1912, the House of Commons dealt briefly with the arrest of the Chief of Hoti, Khan Bahadur Khawaja Mohamed Khan, and his appearance before a court in Bombay.

However, on that day MPs had their eyes turned to an older part of empire: Ireland and the presentation by Prime Minister Herbert Asquith of a third effort to introduce Home Rule.

Rising, according to Hansard, at five minutes after three o'clock, Asquith, a Liberal politician who often preferred delay to decision, hasty or otherwise, offered the Government of Ireland Bill.

“It is 19 years since Mr Gladstone, in a memorable speech which is still fresh in the recollection of most of us who heard it, at this table moved for leave to introduce the second and last of his measures to provide for the better Government of Ireland.”

Under Gladstone, the Liberals, or most of them, had been enthusiastic about greater self-government for the Irish. Now, their actions were guided by the need to command a Commons majority.

In 1909, the so-called People's Budget from Liberal chancellor, David Lloyd George, had faced implacable opposition from the House of Lords, whose interests would have been hurt by it.

In 1910, voters went twice to the polls. In January, the Liberals, with 274 seats, had two seats more than the Conservatives. In December, the gap was just one. Neither could command a majority.

For John Redmond, the leader of the 84-seat Irish Parliamentary Party, the hour had come to deliver a lifetime's ambition. For the Liberals, the House of Lords' power had to be reduced. Redmond agreed to support a Parliament Act, in return for the Liberals moving on Home Rule.

In 1886, Gladstone had pleaded with MPs to agree in honour to Home Rule, rather than find themselves one day compelled to grant something more. Then, it was defeated in the Commons by a majority. In 1893, he tried once more, passing the Commons' hurdle, but failing in the House of Lords.

Asquith – uninterested in, if not hostile to – Home Rule, and Redmond reached a deal. Asquith would bring forward a third Bill if the Irish leader backed the Parliament Act 1911 and the Liberals' budget.

Redmond kept his end of the bargain. Reform of the House of Lords was passed, leaving peers with no powers over finance bills, while their unlimited veto over other legislation was curbed.

Just like Gladstone's 1893 effort, the Third Home Rule Bill continued to insist upon the supremacy of the Westminster parliament, but it allowed for only 42 Irish Westminster MPs, not 80. A bi-cameral chamber would be created in Dublin – a Senate with 40 members and a House of Commons with 164, while ministers in Dublin would have to be members of one or other chamber. The Lord Lieutenant would remain, but now he would not only have the power to approve, or veto legislation, but also the authority to delay action of any kind.

Some matters would not be in Dublin's gift to debate: the Crown, the making of peace or war, the military, foreign affairs, the law of treason, and foreign trade and navigation. Some issues were to be kept out of Dublin's hands for a time – tax collection, old age pensions, land purchase, national insurance, and even the post office.

It was intended to transfer most of these to Irish control after three years, though authority over the Royal Irish Constabulary would not happen for six, and only then if a deal was struck with London.

Given Unionist fears about "Rome Rule", not just Home Rule, the legislation included controls to prevent Dublin from discriminating in favour of, or against, any religion.

In a departure from 1893, a Dublin parliament would be barred from legislating "to make any religious belief or religious ceremony a condition of the validity of any marriage" – a direct response to the Pope's *Ne Temere* decree.

Because Ireland cost the British exchequer more than was raised in local taxes, the legislation provided that £6m would be transferred annually from London.

Under earlier legislation, Irish tenants had been given loans to buy their own land, but London wanted to make sure that the annuities due continued to be paid. Arrears of such payments were to be deducted from the £6m grant, leaving Redmond to complain that "the whole revenue of Ireland is to be held in pawn" as security for land loans.

Introducing the legislation, Asquith told MPs: "These are the lines upon which we ask Parliament to proceed in taking the first, the most urgent and the most momentous, step towards the settlement of the controversy which, as between ourselves and Ireland, has lasted for more than a century."

If passed, he said, such "power carries with it a sense of responsibility that will give to the Irish people a free and ample field for the development of their own national life and, at the same time, bind them to us and the Empire by a sense of voluntary cooperation, and, as I believe, in sincere and loyal attachment".

Redmond campaigned strongly for the legislation, rejecting allegations that Irish Home Rule had been “smuggled” in “behind the backs of the British people” as “the most ridiculous of all” charges.

In a pamphlet, one of dozens that were issued, Unionist MP James Campbell complained: “It will actually increase the evils that it is designed to remedy.”

In the Commons on that day in April, 1912, Carson rose quickly to condemn Asquith’s actions, insisting that Home Rule had been twice rejected by the British electorate as a whole.

“The prime minister is angry at being charged with selling us to the Irish party. I ask him this question: is he going to allow this Bill to be submitted to the electorate?” he demanded.

Condemning the actions of Asquith’s predecessor Gladstone, Carson insisted that time had shown that Gladstone had been wrong and that it was his opponents who had been right.

“Our alternative then was to maintain the union and to do justice to Ireland. That has been done with results which, I venture to think, so great have they been in the direction of the prosperity of Ireland, could not have been contemplated by even the most optimistic member of this house of either party,” he declared.

Promising “restraint and good temper” on the part of the Irish Parliamentary Party, John Redmond said: “It may possibly be considered the interest of some people in this house to engender passion in debates and to endeavour to overwhelm the issue by personal attacks and by insulting and irritating references to the nationality and the cherished aspirations of the Irish people.”

Offering optimism that was shown in time to have been misjudged, Labour MP Ramsay MacDonald told the house that he would support the legislation “at every stage”.

“I am profoundly convinced that its effect upon the people of Ireland will be such that safeguards will really become unnecessary, that you will have a people, both in the north and the south, who will know each other so well that social co-operation will become as the very breath of their lives, and that to the differences that now unfortunately lie between them, this Bill will give a final and decisive answer,” he declared.

Viscount Castlereagh was more realistic, telling MacDonald that he had been “endeavouring to infer that there is no real fundamental opposition to the question of Home Rule in Ulster”.

“I hope he does not hold that opinion, because if he had had the opportunity, as I had of being in Belfast in the course of the last few days, he would have seen clearly and decisively how real, deep, and earnest is the feeling among the population of that city, and he would understand to the utmost their opposition to any attempt of the present Government to make inroads upon the Union which now exists between England and Ireland.”

From the off, some Liberals, perhaps including Asquith himself, favoured some form of partition for the Protestant-dominated counties in the northeast. Even Winston Churchill was

numbered amongst them, though his plan went further, proposing the division of the United Kingdom into 10 territories, each with its own legislature.

Chief Secretary for Ireland, Augustine Birrell, often seen as the mouthpiece for Irish nationalists at the British Cabinet table, favoured giving counties the right not to take part.

In a letter to Churchill in August, 1911, he argued the case for the so-called "county option", though then he assumed that only Antrim and Down would be likely to take it.

The county option was discussed by the Cabinet in February 1912 - before the bill was presented to the Commons, where Asquith tested the mood of his colleagues.

In the end, he decided to wait - though not because he favoured a fully-functioning Home Rule, but rather on the grounds of political pragmatism. Concessions would have to be made, but not yet.

In a letter to King George V, he outlined his thoughts more clearly, saying that the British government would make amendments if Ulster opposition was so strong that it could not be ignored. "In the meantime," he told the monarch, "careful and confidential inquiry is to be made as to the real extent and character of Ulster resistance."

Fanned by the interventions of Conservative Party leader, Andrew Bonar Law, who had family connections in Coleraine, Protestants in Ulster were, however, already in uproar. Unionist leader Edward Carson opposed the county option, describing it as "unworkable, if not ridiculous", believing it would divide Ulster Unionists from those elsewhere in Ireland.

The first formal proposal to partition Ireland in the Commons debate on the legislation came not from a Unionist, but from a Cornish MP, Thomas Agar-Robartes.

He proposed unsuccessfully that four counties be excluded: Antrim, Armagh, Down and Derry. Despite his views, Carson supported it, not because he agreed but because he then hoped that such an amendment would wreck the entire bill.

Senior figures in the Irish Parliamentary Party, such as John Dillon and Joseph Devlin, rejected demands for changes, insisting that there would be "no concessions for Ulster, Ulster will have to follow".

In the Commons, Asquith condemned Law for alleging in Ulster that the Liberals were acting with base motives, simply to hold onto their majority in the Commons.

Outlining the charge against him, Asquith told MPs: "Let us see exactly what it is: it is that I and my colleagues are selling our convictions."

Law replied: "You have not got any."

Emotions and tempers increased, leading to Ulster Day on September 28th, 1912, when under Carson's leadership more than 500,000 Unionists signed the Ulster Covenant.

With time, some nationalists became alarmed at the prospects of division, leading William O'Brien's All-for-Ireland League willing to consider reasonable concessions for Unionists. O'Brien was denounced not just by the Irish Parliamentary Party, but also by the Catholic Church. In the end, he and his eight fellow MPs abstained from voting.

Condemning Redmond's "Ulster must follow" strategy two years later, O'Brien proposed concessions in January 1914, declaring his willingness to pay "any price for an United Ireland, but never partition".

The Third Home Rule Bill was finally passed by the Commons, with a majority of 10, but rejected overwhelmingly by the House of Lords by 326 votes to 69. In 1913, it returned to the Commons floor, where it was again passed. But, again, the House of Lords said no, this time by 302 votes to 64.

In 1914, it came back to the Commons for a third time, succeeding by a majority of 77. Once more, it was rejected by the peers even though Asquith had by then offered the "temporary exclusion of Ulster", though whether the number was to be six or nine counties was left to another day.

This time, the British Government used the powers granted under the Parliament Act - an Act created with the help of Redmond - to override the Lords and sent the Bill to the king for royal assent.

The Government of Ireland Act was the first law ever passed by Westminster that proposed the establishment of a devolved government in a part of the United Kingdom. However, its implementation was postponed with the onset of the first World War. The increasing slaughter in the conflict led to further postponements.

Eventually, it was superseded by history.

Profile: Andrew Bonar Law

When the Conservative Party, then back in opposition, in 1911 elected a compromise candidate to succeed Arthur Balfour as leader, they picked a man who had Ulster in the blood and would be a formidable champion of the Unionist cause both in public mobilisation and in political manoeuvring in the Commons.

Andrew Bonar Law (1858-1923 - his family name was Law) though born in New Brunswick and largely educated in Scotland, was the son of an Ulster Presbyterian minister, and knew the province well. His support for Carson and the Unionists, who were part of his party, was unequivocal, swearing with the latter at the great Balmoral meeting in April 1912 that that never under any circumstances will we submit to Home Rule".

He had vigorously attacked the Liberals for having failed to make Home Rule a general election issue and at a Blenheim Palace rally in July made a speech widely interpreted as supporting a resort to armed resistance by the Unionists should the Bill go through: I said so to [the Liberals] and I say so now, with the full sense of the responsibility which attaches to

my position, that if the attempt be made under present conditions, I can imagine no length of resistance to which Ulster will go, in which I shall not be ready to support them, and in which they will not be supported by the overwhelming majority of the British people

He warned repeatedly that the British Army would not enforce Home Rule against a million Protestants, prophetic warnings that some would see as encouragement from the heart of the British establishment to the eventual “Curragh mutiny”.

During the debate on the Bill he would reluctantly support the exclusion of Ulster from its provisions, to the anger of southern Unionists. When that failed and the Bill passed he continued in 1913 to work against its implementation, successfully pressing King George V ahead of royal assent to suggest compromise, specifically that the issue be tested in a general election, and then that it should require all-party consensus.

Asquith demurred and subsequent talks between himself and Law around the latter’s demand for exclusion of Ulster failed to produce agreement. By 1914 Law had reverted to outright opposition to the whole Bill.

Law would lead the Conservative Party until 1915, serving in the wartime government, and would later be elected Prime Minister in October 1922, serving only 211 days before retiring because of ill-health.

Profile of John Dillon by Stephen Collins

John Dillon was a key figure in the Irish Party from 1900 until Redmond’s death in March, 1918, when he took over the leadership. During the Home Rule crisis he was at Redmond’s side for all the critical negotiations with the government and unionist politicians.

A much more truculent figure than Redmond, he opposed conciliation with southern unionists. He also rejected the great reform measures that saw most of the land of Ireland transferred to tenant farmers on very favourable terms on the basis that they might “kill Home Rule with kindness”.

Dillon was born in Blackrock, Co Dublin, in 1851, the son of the Young Ireland leader John Blake Dillon. A radical nationalist in early adulthood, he was characterised by the Chief Supt John Mallon of the Dublin Metropolitan Police in 1880 as “really a cool fenian”. He was elected to the Commons for Tipperary in the same year and became heavily involved in the land agitation that followed.

Dillon suffered from regular bouts of ill-health. Party colleague TP O’Connor wrote of him: “Tall, thin, fragile, his physique was that of a man who has periodically to seek flight from death in change of scene and air.”

Dillon carved out a reputation in the Commons as an aggressive performer. On one occasion he was removed from the House for refusing to let prime minister Gladstone speak. He took the anti-Parnell side after the split, and during the 1890s became the chairman of the majority

group of nationalist MPs. In 1900, following conflict with some of his own colleagues, he backed the election of Redmond as leader of a united party.

From 1907 onwards Dillon and Redmond had a significant say in how Ireland was governed. The achievement of Home Rule brought the two men together, but after the outbreak of the first World War in 1914 Dillon was suspicious of Redmond's enthusiasm for the war effort.

After the rising Dillon grew increasingly pessimistic about the prospects of the Irish Party. He took over the reins after Redmond's death but lost his own seat in the 1918 general election. He died in 1927.

Dillon's son, James, was elected to the Dáil as an Independent in 1932, and was subsequently minister for agriculture and leader of Fine Gael.

Profile of Augustine Birrell by *Stephen Collins*

Augustine Birrell was the chief secretary for Ireland in 1912, was probably the cabinet minister most sympathetic to the Irish cause ever sent by a British government to administer Ireland.

On his arrival in 1907, Birrell fondly imagined that he would go down in history as the last Irish secretary since the Act of Union. He saw his role as presiding over the transfer of power from Westminster to a Home Rule government in Dublin.

While he did not realise that objective, he achieved much in Ireland in the fields of housing, agriculture and education. The National University of Ireland would not have been established without his drive and enthusiasm.

One of the measures introduced by the reforming Liberal government, of which he was a member, was the old-age pension. With Irish birth records going back only as far as 1864, there was a flood of unsupported applications for the pension. Birrell was besieged as the ultimate arbiter on the issue and he applied a generous leeway in approving supplicants.

He recalled later how Conservative opponents in parliament had warned that the state payment would take away from people's dignity. "That the pension increased enormously the stock of Irish happiness cannot be doubted and I feel sure it degraded nobody, unless indeed it is a degradation to be willing to persuade yourself that you are two years older than you have any reason to believe you are."

Birrell loved travelling around Ireland, particularly the west. "I used to think during my many western tours, an Irish parish in Connaught, supplied with a pious and sensible priest, a devoted and skilled 'Dudley' nurse and a sober dispensary doctor, attained as nearly to paradise as it is possible for any place on earth to get. But that complete combination was sometimes hard to find."

Some of his observations may have been a little patronising, but were no less true for all that. "I soon discovered three things: one was that nothing in Ireland was explicable; another was

that everything of unimportance was known; and the third was what a small country Ireland is."

A Liberal ladies' man of letters

Herbert Asquith, British prime minister from 1908 until 1916, was at the height of his powers when he made a trip to Dublin in 1912 to counter the Conservative opposition's near-treasonous support for Ulster resistance

British Prime Minister Herbert Asquith walked onto the stage of the Theatre Royal in Dublin in July 1912 to a rapturous reception from a specially invited audience who had come to hear him speak in favour of Home Rule.

"A remarkable scene ensued," recorded the anti-Home Rule Irish Times the following day. "The entire audience rose to their feet and, waving hats, handkerchiefs and papers, cheered enthusiastically, with a growing rather than diminishing volume of sound. The prime minister, a quiet smile lighting up his features, stood facing the assembly for close on five minutes."

Not until Tony Blair was welcomed at a State dinner in Dublin Castle in 1998, after the signing of the Belfast Agreement, did a British prime minister get such an enthusiastic reception from an Irish gathering.

Asquith, who served as prime minister from 1908 until 1916, was in the first rank of those who held that office. He presided with calm assurance over one of the most reforming governments in the history of the United Kingdom. Among his government's many reforms were the introduction of social insurance and the old-age pension, increased taxes on the rich, the reduction in the power of the House of Lords, and Home Rule for Ireland.

One glaring blind spot in Asquith's liberalism was his opposition to giving the vote to women. It provoked huge outrage and a suffragette attempted to assassinate him with a hatchet during his 1912 visit to Dublin.

A native of Morley in West Yorkshire, he was born in 1852 and was at the height of his powers when he made the trip to Dublin to counter the Conservative opposition's near-treasonous support for Ulster resistance. A successful barrister before he entered politics, Asquith was married twice. He had five children by his first marriage; his wife died of typhoid fever in 1891. Three years later he married Margo Tennant, a famous society beauty and wit, and the couple had two children.

Asquith enjoyed the good life and was reputed to drink at least a bottle of claret with dinner most evenings. That prompted his political opponents to nickname him "Squiffy". He also enjoyed the society of women and was on close personal terms with some of the best-known society figures of his day.

"His friends were numerous and attached, both men and women: and how ridiculous it would be to deny that he took peculiar pleasure in the society of the women he liked," his cabinet colleague and friend Augustine Birrell, who served for a decade as chief secretary for Ireland, remarked in his memoirs.

In 1910 Asquith met Venetia Stanley, a beautiful young woman of 23 and a friend of his daughter Violet. He quickly began a correspondence with Venetia, although at that stage she was just one of several women with whom he exchanged letters. However, in 1912 Venetia went on holiday to Sicily with Asquith, Violet and the young Liberal junior minister, Edwin Samuel Montagu, a protege of the prime minister.

It appears that both men fell in love with Venetia during this trip. Asquith began to write to Venetia every day and sometimes two and three times a day. Those letters, many of them written during cabinet meetings, give an extraordinary insight into the workings of his government, with detailed descriptions of the political business of the day, including the fluctuating fortunes of the Home Rule Bill. They are now a treasure trove of information for historians of the period.

It is doubtful if the relationship was sexually consummated, but there is no doubt that the prime minister became emotionally dependant on Venetia, in whom he confided completely, sharing military secrets that were often unknown to the Cabinet or to naval and military commanders. He described political intrigues and wrote openly of his colleagues, including Lloyd George, Churchill and Kitchener. Venetia preserved all Asquith's letters but never betrayed his confidence. He destroyed all her letters.

Venetia rejected a proposal of marriage from Montagu in 1913 but, in 1915, overwhelmed by Asquith's attentions and incapable of dealing with them any longer, she accepted the younger man and the pair were married. Asquith was devastated and Venetia's marriage proved to be an unhappy one.

The outbreak of war changed the dynamic in government and Asquith, the great reforming prime minister, did not prove the ideal war leader. Birrell summed it up thus: "When the hell-hounds of war began barking, he was easily out-yelped."

A growing lack of confidence in him as a war leader prompted a cabinet split in May 1915, and Asquith was forced to form a coalition with the Tories. The criticism of his war leadership continued in the first half of 1916. He was blamed for taking too soft a line in Ireland before the 1916 Rising and for the high casualties in the Battle of the Somme in the summer of that year in which his eldest son Raymond was killed.

His war minister, Lloyd George, orchestrated a conspiracy against him and Asquith was forced from office in December, 1916. Lloyd George succeeded as prime minister but the Liberal party was split as the two men led different factions of the party into the 1918 post-war general election.

Asquith remained a significant political figure in the Commons in the early 1920s and played a major role in putting Ramsey MacDonald into office to lead the first-ever Labour government in January 1924.

Asquith went to the House of Lords in 1925 and died three years later. Birrell recalled travelling through the English countryside to Asquith's funeral "in the company of two of his

friends, both ladies, who loved him,” and smiling at the thought of how much his old leader would have enjoyed making that journey in such company.

A number of Asquith’s descendants achieved prominence in Britain in various walks of life. His best-known descendant today is his great-granddaughter, the actor Helena Bonham Carter.

Sealed with a Prime Minister's kiss

More than 560 letters numbering over 300,000 words, written by Asquith to Venetia Stanley between 1910 and 1915, have survived. The bulk of the correspondence dates from 1914 and 1915. The prime minister confided all his political secrets in the letters, many of which were written during or immediately after cabinet meetings.

An excerpt from August 27th, 1914, shortly after the outbreak of the first World War, gives a flavour of the correspondence and the continuing importance of the Irish issue, even after the outbreak of war:

“My darling, I have just now (at the end of Cabinet) got your dear letter wh. came by the 2nd post. As I wired you there is no news yet of names (of those killed in the first days of the war). . .

“There was practically nothing else of much interest at the Cabinet today: a lot of details. Birrell tells me that Redmond Dillon are not greatly impressed by the King’s letters: they think he might very well see Carson put pressure on him but are not inclined to expose their own icy fronts to the thawing influence of Court sunshine. Birrell himself thinks that my ‘ultimatum’ goes too far in the way of concessions to Carson, McKenna, to whom I spoke of it today, tho. strongly of the opinion that Redmond ought wd. be well advised to accept it, is sure that if he demurs protests he will carry the bulk of the party with him. The War has not softened them and they look upon Nationalist Ireland its cause claims as a second Belgium . .

“A lot of whirligging we have seen – haven’t we darling? If only I can knock together the heads of those damned Irish politicians, I should. feel that we could go full steam ahead. Is this too long sweetest? I love you think of you treasure you all day every day.”

Stephen Collins

The day Ulster first said 'No'

In 1912, after it was announced that a Home Rule Bill would be introduced for Ireland, there was turmoil in the North. Unionists gathered in Belfast to protest, old hatreds welled up and the idea of partition loomed

FEBRUARY 8TH, 1912. Denied the use of the Ulster Hall in Belfast, Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty in HH Asquith's Liberal government, was forced to address a meeting in favour of Home Rule in a sodden marquee in Celtic Park. To avoid a hostile gathering of indignant loyalists in the city centre, he had no choice afterwards but to take a circuitous route back to get his sea ferry at Larne.

Churchill was experiencing how dangerously fractured society in Ulster had become. More clearly than ever, the inhabitants here seemed divided into two antagonistic ethnic groups with profoundly divergent aspirations. It took little to bring ancient hatreds welling alarmingly to the surface.

The government had announced that a Home Rule Bill would be introduced that session. Soon, however, it became clear that it would not happen until after the Easter recess. That gave opponents of Home Rule, led by Sir Edward Carson, time to organise an imposing display of Unionist strength. On Easter Tuesday, April 9th, at Balmoral in south Belfast, the new Conservative leader, Andrew Bonar Law, after reviewing 100,000 men marching past his platform, pledged his party's unflinching support. He assured them of the help of the British people "and when the crisis is over men will say to you . . . you have saved yourselves by your exertions, and you will save the empire by your example".

Two days later, on April 11th, Asquith introduced the Home Rule Bill in the Commons. In Ulster, feelings of nationalist elation were short-lived, however. In June 1912, an amendment was put forward to exclude from its terms of reference the four north-eastern counties. Though the amendment was defeated, the idea that all or part of Ulster would be excluded from the operation of Home Rule was clearly gaining favour in Westminster.

This was a matter of deep concern for Joseph Devlin, who had won West Belfast by a margin of 16 votes in 1906. The politics of his ghetto fiefdom in Belfast was narrow and tribal, its power base the Ancient Order of Hibernians, a Catholic mirror image of the Orange Order. But it was thanks to Devlin that northern Nationalists now displayed an impressive unity. Nevertheless, "Wee Joe" was already anxious that the Unionist campaign would eventually separate his northern followers from their southern brethren.

In July, Bonar Law threw caution to the wind by declaring: "I can imagine no length of resistance to which Ulster can go in which I should not be prepared to support them." Speculation about what form that resistance would take was already stirring up vicious intercommunal hostility.

On Thursday, June 27th, children from the Sacred Heart convent in Lisburn were attacked as they departed for an outing to Ardglass. Then, on Saturday, June 29th, the Sunday school

excursion from Whitehouse Presbyterian Church arrived in Castledawson. That evening, as they paraded back to the railway station with their flute band, holding aloft banners bearing texts from Scripture and a Union flag, they were assaulted by Hibernians returning from a meeting in Maghera.

Crying "Remember Castledawson!" loyalists drove thousands of Catholics out of the Belfast shipyards, engineering works and linen mills. Troop reinforcements had to be rushed to the city. On September 14th, during a soccer match at Celtic Park, between Linfield and Celtic, the ground was engulfed by rival hordes of supporters engaging each other with fists, bottles, knives and revolvers.

Meanwhile, Unionist leaders were planning "Ulster Day" with meticulous care. This was designed to demonstrate to the world, and to the people of Britain in particular, the determination of the majority in the north to oppose Home Rule. The climax was to be the signing of a covenant, a pact with God, pledging resistance to the setting up of a Dublin parliament. A rolling programme of public meetings began on September 17th when Carson addressed 40,000 at Enniskillen. More than a dozen meetings followed in provincial towns, Carson being joined by such Conservative dignitaries as Lord Salisbury, Lord Willoughby de Broke, FE Smith and Lord Charles Beresford.

Ulster Day, Saturday, September 28th, dawned bright and clear. At 9.15am, a guard of 2,500 men formed up at Belfast City Hall; at 10am, the first relief of 500 men, wearing bowler hats and white armbands and carrying white staves, began the daylong task of marshalling the crowds and protecting the flowerbeds. The Portland stone of the City Hall gleamed in the sun: formally opened six years before, this was one of the most sumptuous municipal centres in the United Kingdom, a fitting pivot of the resistance to Home Rule.

Just before 11am, Bedford Street was packed with spectators as Carson stepped into the Ulster Hall. This was a religious service: the congregation sang O God, Our Help in Ages Past, and after prayers and lessons had been read, the Rev Dr William McKean rose to deliver his sermon, taking as his text Timothy 6. 20: "Keep that which is committed to thy trust." "We are plain, blunt men who love peace and industry," the former Presbyterian moderator declared: "The Irish question is at bottom a war against Protestantism; it is an attempt to establish a Roman Catholic ascendancy in Ireland to begin the disintegration of the empire by securing a second parliament in Dublin." All over Ulster similar services were being held in Protestant churches.

From the Ulster Hall Sir Edward walked bareheaded to the City Hall where he was met by a guard of honour and city dignitaries. Then Carson entered the vestibule and walked towards a circular table directly under the dome that rose 173 feet above him. He took up the silver pen presented to him the evening before and signed the Solemn League and Covenant.

When Carson re-emerged the reverential hum in the vast crowd outside changed to tempestuous cheering as he made his way, bowing and waving, to the Ulster Reform Club in Royal Avenue for luncheon. Behind him the stewards struggled to regulate the flow of men eager to sign the Covenant in the City Hall. A double row of desks stretching right round the

building made it possible for 550 to sign simultaneously. Some signed in their own blood. All over Ulster men were making a pledge to use “all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland”.

At 2.30pm, a procession of bands converged on the City Hall. As each one arrived the bandsmen halted at a prearranged position, all continuing to play different tunes, creating, in the opinion of the Northern Whig, “a fine post-impressionist effect about it that should have pleased admirers of the new style of music”.

JL Garvin, reporting for the Pall Mall Gazette, wrote:

“Seen from the topmost mast outside gallery of the dome, the square below, and the streets striking away from it were black with people. Through the mass, with drums and fifes, sashes and banners, the clubs marched all day.”

It was 8pm when the last contingent entered the City Hall and signatures were still being affixed after 11pm.

Huge crowds sang Rule Britannia and God Save the King as the Unionist leaders walked round the corner from the Ulster Reform Club to the Ulster Club in Castle Place. At 8.30pm a brass band advanced towards the Ulster Club playing See the Conquering Hero Comes, its staff major and spear carriers almost having to carve a way through the surging mass. Deafening cheers greeted Carson when he came out and with 20 other dignitaries climbed into a waiting motor brake designed for 12 passengers. The vehicle was pulled down High Street by hundreds of willing hands. “With a roaring hurricane of cheers punctuated on every side by the steady rattle of revolver shots,” Garvin wrote, “onward swept this whole city in motion with a tumult that was mad.”

On Donegall Quay, Sir Edward was saluted by a fusillade of shots and prolonged cheering. Bonfires in Great Patrick Street sprang to life and a huge fire on the Cave Hill threw a brilliant glare over the sky. From the upper deck of the SS Patriotic, Carson shouted out:

“I have very little voice left. I ask you while I am away in England and Scotland and fighting your battle in the Imperial Parliament to keep the old flag flying. And ‘No Surrender!’”

All over Ulster men were still signing the Covenant and women separately signed their own declaration. Altogether 471,414 people signed. The ecstatic Unionists did not doubt the justice of their cause as they sang Come Back to Erin, and, as the Patriotic steamed into the Victoria Channel, salvoes of rockets shot up to the sky and 50 bonfires blazed from the hills and headlands.

Calm largely prevailed in Ulster for the rest of the year. However, in December the UUC dropped opposition to Home Rule for all of Ireland and limited it to Ulster. For Devlin the nightmare of partition was looming.

Jonathan Bardon

Carson, the uncrowned King of Ulster

The Unionist leader sought to maintain all of Ireland in the UK and saw the severing of the 26 counties in 1921 as a British government betrayal

For unionists of his time – and for many unionists today – Edward Carson was the uncrowned King of Ulster, a Dubliner who saved them from Home Rule. Yet, his deeply held wish throughout his life was to maintain all of Ireland within the United Kingdom.

Carson was a powerful politician, a forceful lawyer, a leader who through the Ulster Volunteer Force was prepared to bring Ireland to the brink of civil war in his desire to save the Union. He was a man of great resilience and strength, yet prone to hypochondria and pessimism. He was a Queen's Counsel (QC) – fearsome but also theatrical at times, who could be belligerent or sensitive to witnesses, as the case demanded. He destroyed Oscar Wilde but saved the Winslow Boy.

He was born at 4 Harcourt Street in Dublin on February 9th, 1854, the son of an architect and from a family who were solid members of the Church of Ireland. His grandfather William Carson left Scotland in 1815 for the Irish capital, these Scottish roots perhaps contributing to his obdurate, resolute and combative character that was so at home in unionist Ulster.

Carson went to boarding school in Portarlinton on the Laois-Offaly border and, at the urgings of his father, also called Edward, completed a BA at Trinity College, Dublin, an experience he enjoyed and cherished, going on to achieve a brilliant law career. One of his contemporaries at Trinity – where he also played hurling – was Oscar Wilde, even then gifted and flamboyant in contrast to Carson, viewed as diligent but dull. They were not friends.

Aged 25, he married Annette Kirwan from Kingstown (Dún Laoghaire), against the wishes of his family. (She died in 1913 and he married again, this time to Ruby Frewen, in September 1914.) Carson and his first bride started off virtually penniless, but he gradually built up his practice, the briefs he earned in the 1880s during the Land War easing their financial worries. At first he worked for the tenants, but the landlords who spotted a legal talent had their solicitors instruct him.

It was a turbulent time, but Carson, by dint of his persuasive legal qualities and some high-profile cases that he won, progressed up the legal and social ladder. In 1889, aged 35, he became the youngest QC in Ireland. Three years later, he was appointed Solicitor-General for Ireland and the same year was returned for Trinity to the House of Commons as a Liberal Unionist.

With the demands of being Irish adviser to the then Conservative leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons and future British prime minister, Arthur Balfour, he moved his practice to England. There, he established himself as one of the top two or three lawyers of his day.

His most famous case was representing the Marquess of Queensberry against a charge of criminal libel by Oscar Wilde, whom Queensberry had described as “posing as a sodomite”.

The courtroom duel between Wilde and Carson was one of contrasting styles, Wilde with his eloquence and speedy wit getting the better of the initial exchanges, but Carson steadily and remorselessly wearing down the writer until he admitted defeat. It was a broken Wilde, not Queensberry, who ended up in prison.

Carson was also in several other celebrated cases, one of which was successfully defending 13-year-old Catholic naval cadet George Archer-Shee, who was accused of stealing a five-shilling postal order from another boy – a case dramatised by Terence Rattigan in the play, *The Winslow Boy*.

Throughout his political career, he maintained a concerned eye on attempts to introduce Home Rule for Ireland and, in 1910, as the star of John Redmond's Irish Parliamentary Party appeared to be rising, he accepted the invitation to become leader of the Irish Unionists, dedicating himself to their cause "whatever may happen".

He knew too that opposition to Home Rule was likely to involve him in decidedly extra-parliamentary activity, but his attitude was that as long as Unionist Ulster was prepared to resist he would lead it. He told 50,000 unionists and Orangemen at a monster rally at James Craig's home in Craigavon in September 1911 that the moment a Home Rule Bill would pass they must be prepared "to become responsible for the government of the Protestant province of Ulster".

The campaign was already rolling when, in April 1912, the British Liberal prime minister H H Asquith introduced the Home Rule or, as properly titled, the Government of Ireland Bill. With Craig as the chief organiser, Carson addressed mass unionist rallies against Home Rule throughout Northern Ireland, climaxing with Ulster Day in Belfast on September 28th, 1912. This was when 237,368 men signed – some in their own blood – the Ulster Covenant pledging to use "all means" to defeat Home Rule, and 234,046 women signed a similar solemn pledge.

Through the two previous failed attempts to achieve Home Rule in 1886 and in 1892-93 the "Orange Card" of military or paramilitary resistance was proposed – as in "Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right", as stated by Lord Randolph Churchill. This was brought a step further with the creation of the Ulster Volunteers in 1912 and the formal establishment of the Ulster Volunteer Force in early 1913. By the end of that year, the old UVF was strongly organised with more than 90,000 part-time members.

In January 1914, under the enthusiastic promptings of Craig, Carson supported the decision to import arms from Germany for the UVF, with some 25,000 guns landed at Larne in April 1914. Two months later, the Irish Volunteers responded by also importing German weapons. This was at a time when Britain and Ireland were in turmoil over Home Rule and the prospect of civil war seemed very real. But the threat receded when a much greater conflict started in July that year.

Both sets of volunteers ultimately ended up dying in their thousands, sometimes together, in the Battle of the Somme and other great battles of the first World War. That conflict brought

Carson to a different form of centre-stage British politics. He was Attorney-General in 1915 and 1916, First Lord of the Admiralty in 1917-1918 and a member of Lloyd George's War Cabinet in 1917-1918.

After the war, he was elected for Belfast Duncairn in the 1918 election, and thereafter apprehensively observed the convulsions that led to civil war and partition. He again rallied to the unionist cause, telling Orangemen on July 12th, 1920, that the UVF would be called out if there were any threat to the Union.

Carson could have lived with partition as long as Ireland remained within the United Kingdom. But he saw the severing of the 26 counties from the Union in December 1921 with the creation of the Irish Free State as a British government betrayal. Ulster Unionists, as the historian A T Q Stewart wrote in a brief biography of Carson, in achieving a government at Stormont "had won a victory of a kind". But Carson felt no such sense of achievement, as the "guiding star" of his political life was to save all of Ireland for the Union.

Stewart added: "It was no part of his intention to dismember Ireland, or to see unionism survive in the form of a Home Rule parliament in Belfast – rather the contrary was true – but having used the resistance of the Ulster loyalists as the trump card to defeat Home Rule, he became to some degree their prisoner. Paradoxically, the very success of the Ulster cause ensured the ruin of his own."

He politely declined the invitation to be first prime minister of Northern Ireland in 1921, leaving that job to James Craig. When he formally handed over leadership of the Ulster Unionist Council, ruling body for the Ulster Unionists, he offered them some final advice: "From the outset let us see that the Catholic minority have nothing to fear from Protestant majority. Let us take care to win all that is best among those who have been opposed to us in the past. While maintaining intact our own religion, let us give the same rights to the religion of our neighbours".

Gerry Moriarty

'Our time of threatened calamity ...'

The Ulster Covenant

September 28th, 1912

In the Protestant churches throughout Ulster they sang “O God, our help in ages past” in invocation of divine support for the Covenant of resistance to Home Rule (Above: men’s Covenant). Factories and shipyards closed to allow workers to participate in the hundreds of signing ceremonies. One man signed in his own blood, Frederick Hugh Crawford; he would later become the Ulster Volunteers’ Director of Ordnance. And, all told, 234,046 women, and 237,368 men signed their respective pledges.

In Dublin the Covenant was signed by 2,000 men who could prove that they were born in Ulster. And it was also signed in major cities in England and Scotland. At Belfast City Hall 2,500 members of Unionist Clubs of Ireland guarded the grounds. Carson signed first, followed by Lord Londonderry, representatives of the Protestant churches, and then James Craig.

Martin Ross (of Somerville and Ross fame) wrote “Four at a time the men stooped and fixed their signatures and were quickly replaced by the next batch. Down the street in a market house the women were signing, women who had come in flagged motors, and on bicycles and on foot . . .

“In the City Hall in Belfast the people were signing at the rate of about a 150 a minute; here there was no hypnotic force of dense masses, no whirlwind of emotion, only the unadorned and individual action of those who had left their fields, and taken their lives and liberties in their hands laying them forth in the open sunshine as the measure of their resolve.”

Did your family sign up?

Fully searchable digital versions of the men’s and women’s Covenants are available on the Northern Ireland Public Record Office site at <http://www.proni.gov.uk>

Battle lines drawn as Tories join fray

Ulster unionists and British Conservatives were now inseparably bonded together in their opposition to Home Rule.

Early in 1912, the Ulster Unionist Council prepared a great demonstration against the Third Home Rule Bill to be addressed by the new leader of the Conservative Party, Andrew Bonar Law. It was to be held at the agricultural show grounds at Balmoral, a south Belfast suburb, on Easter Tuesday, April 9th

Seventy trains brought in demonstrators from all over Ulster. Seventy English, Scottish and Welsh Conservative MPs crossed the Irish Sea to take part. More than 100,000 men marched in military formation past the platforms before separating into two streams passing on either side of the saluting base.

The proceedings opened with prayers and the singing of the 90th Psalm. Then, a resolution against Home Rule was passed with rousing acclamation; immediately afterwards, from a 90-foot flagstaff rising from a tower in the centre of the grounds, the largest Union Jack ever woven was broken and unfurled.

Law knew Ulster well. His father, a Presbyterian minister, was born in Coleraine, and his brother was the local doctor there. For the last five years of his father's life, he had visited Ulster every weekend. Now, as he stepped forward to speak, he knew that a reference to the Siege of Derry would strike a chord in the hearts of his listeners as he assured them that their cause was not Ulster's alone but that of the Empire.

"Once more you hold the pass, the pass for the Empire. You are a besieged city. The timid have left you: your Lundys have betrayed you; but you have closed the gates. The Government have erected by their Parliament Act a boom against you to shut you off from the help of the British people. You will burst that boom," he said.

This formidable display of loyalist strength was an outward and visible sign, an open declaration, that the Conservative Party had made a fateful decision – it had unequivocally committed itself to giving unswerving support to all that Ulster unionists intended to do to oppose Home Rule.

For the great majority of Ulster Protestants, Home Rule was a ghastly spectre. A Dublin parliament would be dominated by farmers neither competent to administer industrial Ulster nor concerned about its welfare. They were sure that nationalists would tax the north too heavily and damage its industries by protective tariffs, designed to promote southern self-sufficiency. The powers the government intended to devolve to Dublin were modest enough, but loyalists were certain that Home Rule would simply be a staging-post towards an independent republic, cutting them off from their British brethren.

Above all, Home Rule would be Rome Rule. International Catholicism was seen as an oppressive backward religion, a dark conspiracy, perpetually endangering Protestant liberties – a view reinforced by the *Ne Temere* papal decree in 1907, which laid down that Catholics

marrying Protestants must bring up their children as Catholics. Northern Protestants visualised a Dublin parliament putting education entirely in the hands of the church and reserving public employment exclusively for Catholics.

For most rank-and-file loyalists, concern for the fate of the Empire was lower down their list of priorities than it was for Tory grandees at Westminster. Nevertheless, in this great crusade, Ulster unionists and British Conservatives were now inseparably bonded together. This had not always been so.

Relations between northern unionists and Conservative ministers had been severely strained in the past. English Conservatives were shocked by the frank sectarianism of some Ulster MPs. One Irish Chief Secretary, George Wyndham, observed in 1904: "My contact with the Ulster members is like catching an 'itch' from park pests."

For most loyalists, the formation of the Ulster Unionist Council in 1905 did not come a moment too soon. Until then, a proper party organisation did not exist. Now the network of Unionist Clubs, founded by Lord Templetown, spread rapidly across the Ulster countryside. The Orange Order augmented its number of brethren impressively, Captain James Craig, MP for East Down, indefatigably addressing lodge after lodge.

Normally safe unionist seats continued to be lost on occasion. In part, this was due to poor leadership. Colonel Edward Saunderson, leader until his death in 1906, was described with much justification by a colleague as "absolutely devoid of business capacity". His successor, Walter Long, was hardly an improvement. "An amiable Wiltshire Orangemen", according to the Liberal David Lloyd George, he failed to appear at the annual meetings of the Ulster Unionist Council in 1908 and 1909.

Long, perhaps taking heed of a friend's warning against "sinking yourself in the Irish stew", got elected for a London seat in 1910. Sir Edward Carson took his place; he quickly proved the leader Ulster unionists had yearned for. In September 1911 at Craig's home he assured 50,000 men assembled there that "with the help of God you and I joined together . . . will yet defeat the most nefarious conspiracy that has ever been hatched against a free people". Home Rule was imminent. The opposition was ready.

Then, in November 1911, Bonar Law became leader of the Conservative Party. The bans of marriage between Tories and unionists were soon published abroad and the vows, pledging fidelity, were then duly exchanged at the Balmoral show grounds in April 1912. Banishing all doubts, Bonar Law declared in July: "I can imagine no length of resistance to which Ulster can go in which I should not be prepared to support them." But did he really know the extent to which he had committed his party?

In making preparations for the signing of Ulster's Solemn League and Covenant, unionist leaders went to extraordinary lengths to ensure that the occasion would well-ordered and dignified. That day, September 28th, was a propaganda triumph: across the Irish Sea, these northern Irish loyalists could be viewed as staunch, well-behaved patriots, striving to ensure that the pillars of the British Constitution would remain standing.

Of course, Bonar Law was aware that tens of thousands of loyalists in Ulster were marching and drilling. He cannot have known, however, that steps had already been taken to equip them with guns and live ammunition. As early as November 1910, the UUC formed a secret committee to approach arms dealers. Its agent, Major Fred Crawford, wrote on November 22nd to five munitions works in England, Austria and Germany, inviting a quotation for 20,000 rifles and one million rounds of ammunition: “The rifles need not be the very latest pattern – second-hand ones in good order preferred.”

After further approaches, the committee decided that Benny Spiro of Hamburg should be the UUC’s arms supplier. The council voted its first major cash allocation in March 1911 and by that summer the first consignment of 2,000 weapons had been imported. Carson was privy to these secrets. At the end of July 1911, he had confided in Craig: “I am not for a game of bluff, and unless men are prepared to make great sacrifices which they clearly understand, the talk of resistance is no use.”

Between 1910 and 1912, Ulster unionists were tacitly rejecting the British parliamentary process and, as they laid plans for a provisional government in Ulster and began the secret purchase of German arms, they were preparing for open militancy and making a commitment to lead their devoted followers into a bloody civil war.

Jonathan Bardon

James Craig - backbone of revolt, 'the soul of intransigence'

“He came to symbolise the very soul of Ulster intransigence” – FSL Lyons

If Edward Carson was the charismatic voice of Ulster resistance to Home Rule, James Craig, later the Six Counties' first prime minister, was its heart and organising genius. As Carson would admit in later years, “it was Craig who did most of the work and I got most of the credit.”

Working closely with Carson, he masterminded the mobilisation and rallies in Ulster, stage-managed Covenant Day on September 28th, 1912, and supported and helped found and organise the Ulster Volunteers.

He chaired a committee set up by unionists to draft a constitution for a provisional government to rule Ulster in the event of Home Rule being passed.

Craig recognised early and sought to persuade colleagues of the need for Unionists to build an army and to arm themselves, writing to Major Fred Crawford in April 1911 about the supply of rifles: “I am convinced that unless a steady supply is started, we will be caught like rats in a trap.” He would be a strong backer of the successful 1914 Larne gun-running adventure.

Born in Belfast in January 1871 to the wealthy director of Dunville and Company, the distillers, Craig was educated in Scotland, then trained as a stockbroker. He joined up to fight in the second Boer War, rising to captain, and was captured by the Boers, then released because of a fractured eardrum. In the Great War, having urged unionists to enlist, he would to his chagrin repeatedly fail his army medical.

Returning from South Africa in 1906 to Belfast and an inheritance of £100,000, he plunged into politics and was elected to the Commons to represent South Down. Throughout, his overriding concern was to keep Ulster within the Union but, unlike Carson, by 1914 he had embraced partition with enthusiasm rather than resignation, and played a key role in the decision that the province would be six counties rather than four or nine.

From 1921 until his death in 1940, by which time he had become 1st Viscount Craigavon, he led Northern Ireland, ironically, as the first prime minister of the only Home Rule parliament to emerge.

Throwing a Punch in Ireland's direction

By 1914, the influential political magazine 'Punch' was running half of its cartoons on Irish political themes – but it had developed a grudging acceptance of the inevitability of Home Rule

The appointment of Conservative supporter Sir Owen Seaman as editor of the influential political magazine Punch in 1906 saw its editorial line shift gradually to the right, although he insisted he hoped it would remain non-partisan.

But Punch, which by 1914 was running a quarter of its cartoons on Irish political themes, was also to move to a grudging acceptance of the inevitability of Home Rule, tempered by its particular concern for the rights of unionists, and, of course, flavoured by a continuing patronising condescension in its cartoons to all things Irish that was earlier, in Victorian times, virulently racist.

Although not inclined any more to portray the Irish with simian-like features, the depiction of John Redmond in the 1910s was largely of a stupid, bloated and feckless gombeen man, often with a pig in tow.

Edward Carson would get altogether more sympathetic treatment, as a personification of the Ulster resistance, although the magazine worried about his exhortations to violence. It would depict the mass signing of the Covenant in September with a cartoon captioned "Ulster will write!"

In the collection of cartoons in these pages we see, in a parody of the well-known Velasquez painting, featuring Redmond as Cupid, Tory leader Bonar Law cautioned to tone down his vehement opposition to Home Rule with the reminder that he has two general elections in which to make it an issue before Home Rule is implemented. Prime Minister Asquith is encouraged to embrace the "exclusion" from the Bill of Ulster; while in 1905 the ghost of two previous Home Rule Bills haunts then Tory PM Arthur Balfour and Liberal leader Henry Campbell-Bannerman, soon to be his successor in No 10.

Patrick Smyth

A shifting political leadership

Ireland before the first World War was a stage set for revolution – nationalism's growing, evolving appeal complemented by the emergence of the labour and women's movements

Ireland before the first World War really does seem like a foreign country from this remove – a place of land war, few rights for workers, no votes for women and a struggle for a type of independence that kept Ireland within the empire.

Yet the political landscape changed so quickly that, even by the end of that war, Ireland was in many ways unrecognisable from how it had been only years earlier. There were new ambitions, expectations and heroes.

John Redmond, and those who followed him, became the most literal examples of that, and arguably remain so. They emerged from that period on the wrong side of history. The Ireland that emerged from that period had little time for Redmond, or the men who had gone to the Western Front at his instigation. They left for foreign fields and those who returned arrived to a different homeland.

And yet, even after the introduction of the third Home Rule Bill in 1912, they represented the mainstream of Irish opinion. Under Redmond, the political power of Irish politicians had gained unprecedented strength. He could not have known that his Irish Parliamentary Party was about to be swept away, just at the moment it seemed to have achieved much of what it had spent four decades working towards.

Those years, from 1870 onwards, formed the backdrop against which Irish nationalism grew in political influence. Ireland in the 19th century was one fully embedded within the United Kingdom, as defined by the Act of Union of 1801. Until the latter part of the 19th century, the Irish political landscape had been based on the traditional conservative and liberal lines seen in the rest of the United Kingdom.

The major social and political concerns of the time were centred around land rights, another issue that would eventually reach its end point when, into the first decade of the 20th century, several acts were introduced which offered greater rights to tenants. However, for much of the 1800s, the tension between tenants and landlords was the source of regular protest and violence.

It was along the dual track of land reform and Home Rule that the Irish political landscape developed during this time. In 1870, the Home Rule League was established under the leadership of Isaac Butt and grew into a significant political party that would alter voting patterns for good. Nevertheless, Home Rule was not aimed at winning full independence, but an Irish parliament within the British empire.

Under Charles Stewart Parnell the Home Rule party – which changed its name to the Irish Parliamentary Party – truly gained ground, winning seats and political clout. Parnell also absorbed the Irish Republican Brotherhood into the political campaign, despite its advocating violence as a means of winning tenants rights and furthering the republican cause.

With the support of British Prime Minister William Gladstone there were two unsuccessful Home Rule Bills (1886 and 1893). However, the IPP then went through a period of upheaval, splitting over Parnell's relationship with divorcee Katharine O'Shea. His death in 1891 led to John Redmond taking over the party at a time when nationalist politics was rife with rivalries and division. However, while there were further splits – such as the formation of a breakaway All-For-Ireland-League – under Redmond it earned a substantial number of MPs in the second general election of 1910 and Irish nationalists now found themselves holding the balance of power. It was this that led to the introduction of Home Rule bill in 1912.

Of course, the story of Ireland is not simply a nationalist one. For Unionists, Home Rule threatened them with a Dublin-based government that, they believed, would be wrong for a range of reasons: economic and constitutional being obvious ones, but the threat to their identity, and the vista of “Rome rule” being key factors too.

While opposition to the first Home Rule Bill was led by southern Unionists, many of them landlords, that movement gradually became focused on Ulster and the commercial and industrial middle classes that would form the next generation of leaders.

Ultimately, opposition to Home Rule was formed by a broad coalition, crossing denominational and social boundaries. Opposition to the third Home Rule bill was led by Dublin-born barrister Edward Carson, who in February 1910 became leader of the Unionist MPs in Westminster. Apart from Trinity and south Dublin representatives, these were Ulster-based. Carson's strategy was to insist that Home Rule could not be introduced so long as such a significant size of the Irish population – numbering almost one million – were opposed to it.

During this time, Belfast had become a prosperous and industrial city, and this wealth became an argument for those in favour of maintaining the Union. But this wealth also brought migration to the city and was a trigger for occasional sectarian rioting as the population became increasingly polarised. This division also manifested itself increasingly in voting patterns.

However, Ireland at the time was not interested solely in the fight for, or against, Home Rule. There were a great many social issues at play, not least the extraordinary level of poverty. Dublin was a city of slums, with a stench that was noted by many visitors. Against this backdrop, a workers' movement began to grow that would prove a significant force in Irish politics.

This was led by two men who would become vital characters in Irish lore, but had been born in Britain, of Irish parents. James Larkin was born in Liverpool and had been active in trade unionism since the Liverpool dockers' strike of 1905, and then in a major strike by Belfast dockers in 1907. Here, he used the tactic of not handling the goods of strike-breakers. Moving to Dublin in 1908, he became noted for “messianic” qualities that attracted both adulation and loathing. Nevertheless, in Cork, Belfast and Dublin he proved a pivotal figure in the organisation of strikes – and would become a major figure in Irish history in the years to come.

So too would Edinburgh-born James Connolly, who founded the short-lived Irish Socialist Republican Party after his arrival in Ireland in 1896. He believed Irish socialism was bound up with national liberation, even though he denounced the Home Rule Party as an enemy of the working classes.

The Home Rule Bill arrived at a time of burgeoning trade unionism in Ireland, in a Dublin that was still fat with tenements and filled with unskilled workers who were paid poorly for long hours. The opportunity for militancy – especially against a backdrop of growing nationalist militancy – was obvious and Connolly would later take advantage of this.

However, in 1912, with William X O'Brien, Connolly and Larkin set up the Irish Labour Party as a direct response to the forthcoming Home Rule Bill. This political wing of the Irish Trade Union Congress was intended to give the workers a voice in any future Dublin parliament.

At the time, though, there were many without a significant voice in Irish politics, and the most significant group of all was women. They could not yet vote, and in an Ireland of Home Rule there was no sense that they would earn that.

For Ireland's suffrage movement, a disparate group since developing in the late 19th century, Home Rule was not seen as a potential answer to their demands. Instead, nationalist women in particular found themselves quite torn by the vista presented to them.

On the one hand, they had the option of remaining within the British empire and awaiting the vote that was still denied women at this time. Or, they could wait for Home Rule to be enacted in Ireland, without any great hope of achieving their aims there. In fact, Redmond's Irish Parliamentary Party was opposed to universal suffrage as it was argued it would lead to the redrawing of electoral boundaries.

The Irish Women's Franchise League, led by Francis and Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, developed as the main voice on the matter, even welcomed Redmond to address them in 1912, only for him to tell them that he would not advocate women's suffrage either before or after Home Rule. In public, he stated that it was a matter for a future Irish parliament, although two years of confrontations with suffragettes at the annual convention saw all women banned from there in 1912.

The suffrage movement also faced more straight-talking opponents. such as the National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage, which held meetings at which speakers (often female) would argue against suffrage on such grounds as the "injurious effect on themselves by placing on them new responsibilities" and the "depreciation in the validity of the law" likely to follow from female legislation.

Going into 1912, then, many Irish movements found themselves at a crossroads – most obviously nationalists, unionists, workers and women. None could have known that the path ahead would prove advantageous for some and disastrous for others – nor the extraordinary manner in which the chips would fall.

Shane Hegarty

Triumph soon turns to failure

By delivering the promise of Home Rule, John Redmond achieved what O'Connell and Parnell had failed to do, but died early disappointed, on the wrong side of history

In April 1912, John Redmond had arrived at the summit of his political life. With the publication of the Third Home Rule Bill, he had achieved what O'Connell and Parnell had failed to do: he was about to deliver Home Rule for Ireland.

A vast throng, numbering up to half a million by some estimates, gathered in O'Connell Street on March 31st, 1912, to acclaim his triumph a few days before the publication of the Bill. Addressing the crowd, Redmond referred to it as "a great treaty of peace between Ireland, England and the Empire".

Just six years later, in March, 1918, Redmond died a political failure and a broken man. In the years after his death, the tolerant values of parliamentary politics he epitomised were pushed aside by rivals committed to revolutionary violence.

In the years since then Redmond, as his modern biographer Dermot Meleady points out, has managed "the difficult feat of becoming at once a neglected and controversial figure".

John Redmond was born in south Wexford at Ballytrent House near Carne on September 1st, 1856, the eldest son of William Archer Redmond, a nationalist MP. He was educated at Clongowes and Trinity College Dublin before going to London to assist his father and, for a time, becoming a clerk in the Commons.

At the age of 24, he was selected as a candidate for New Ross and elected to the Commons in 1881. An able speaker, he quickly established a reputation for himself as a solid performer, but was not immediately admitted to the front rank of a very talented party.

He made his reputation during a successful fundraising trip to Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand during which he spelled out a compelling argument for constitutional nationalism and raised a considerable sum for the Irish party. It was also a success on a personal level as it was in Australia that he met his first wife, Johanna Dalton.

While he took part in the Land War and Plan of Campaign and was briefly imprisoned in 1888 for incitement, Redmond always opposed the use of violence to achieve political ends. He had a deep respect for the House of Commons and its traditions and was naturally an enthusiastic supporter of Gladstone's First Home Rule Bill.

"He did not easily adopt the role of the rebel or fanatic; his natural pose was that of the 18th-century patriot, a Grattan or a Flood," according to his obituary in the London Times. His ambition at all stages of his political career was Irish self-government as part of the British Empire, with acceptance of the Crown as head of state. The heady sensations generated by Gladstone's First Home Rule Bill in 1886 gave Redmond the conviction that his goal was achievable and it sustained him though the barren years that followed.

After the bitter Parnell split and the death of “the Chief”, Redmond emerged as the leader of the minority Parnellite wing of the Irish Party. While he was widely regarded as a fine speaker, his reserved personality meant that he remained aloof from the squabbles that divided the Irish MPs in the 1890s.

When the Irish Party was reunited in 1900, Redmond, with the grudging support of the more truculent John Dillon, the leading figure in the anti-Parnellite wing, became leader. The very qualities that made him remote from many of his colleagues were the ones that also made him into a leader all of them could accept. A heavyset man of imposing appearance, described by an English contemporary as “a dignified, handsome man with the nose of a Roman senator”, Redmond generally divided his time between London and his home in Aughavanagh, Co Wicklow, where he lived in Parnell’s old hunting lodge. In winter, the building was often cut off by snowdrifts, but he enjoyed the country life taking long walks through the Wicklow hills and shooting grouse.

His first wife died tragically young in 1889, leaving him with three children. A decade later Ada Beelsey from Warwickshire became his second wife.

When the Liberals came to power in the general election of 1906, Redmond and his party were able to exercise a considerable influence over policy for Ireland. It was widely said that the country was effectively ruled for the following decade by the Chief Secretary Augustine Birrell in conjunction with Redmond.

Despite his gentlemanly reputation, in the Commons when the Irish Party achieved the balance of power in 1910, he used his position of strength ruthlessly to insist that the Liberal Government deliver on Home Rule.

The introduction of the Third Home Rule Bill marked the high point of his career, but having achieved his goal he totally underestimated the strength of Ulster resistance.

The outbreak of war in 1914 changed everything. Redmond backed the war effort in the belief that it would help deliver a united Home Rule Ireland when hostilities ceased. Like most people, he believed the war would be over by Christmas. It was a major miscalculation that destroyed his political strategy.

In 1915, the political situation changed dramatically and the Conservatives joined the Liberals in a coalition government. Redmond was offered a cabinet post but declined, while Ulster Unionist leader, Edward Carson, joined the cabinet and became an influential member.

With his influence already declining, Redmond was shattered by the 1916 Rising, which came as much of a surprise to him as to the British Government. As the London Times noted, the Sinn Féin movement “from the first was directed as much against Mr Redmond and the nationalist Party as against Great Britain”.

The byelections that followed in 1917 revealed that Sinn Féin was getting the upper hand and Redmond realised that his party was doomed. His brother Major Willie Redmond, an MP for

Clare, was killed on the Western front and, to make matters worse, the resultant byelection was won by Eamon de Valera, the senior surviving commandant from the Rising.

By the time he died prematurely at the age of 61 in March 1918, Redmond had no illusions that everything he stood for was about to be swept away. Speaking to Lady Fingall not long before his death, he advised her: “Do not give your heart to Ireland, for if you do you will die of a broken heart.”

On the face of it, Redmond exemplifies the dictum that all political careers end in failure. Yet for all that it is arguable that modern democratic Ireland is far closer to his political dream than it is to the messianic visions of the 1916 leaders. As his old ally Birrell wrote in the 1920s. “These young men entered into their inheritance by the efforts and great personal sacrifice of that Irish Parliamentary Party they have since flung upon the scrap heap. Politicians seldom deserve gratitude and never get it.”

Stephen Collins

Journalist, founder of Sinn Féin

Though his opinions were often controversial, Arthur Griffith, the founder of Sinn Féin who would head the Treaty negotiations in 1921, was a major figure in the fight for Irish independence

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Shane Hegarty

Constitutionalism - eclipsed and reborn

After Independence, the moderate Home Rule party was effectively airbrushed out of official Irish history, but it left its mark on politics – North and South

When the third Home Rule Bill was introduced in parliament in April 1912 Irish nationalists were triumphant. The Liberal government could rely on a comfortable majority in the House of Commons and it had recently abolished the veto power of the House of Lords. It seemed that the frustrating decades of waiting would soon come to an end.

The details of the bill were disappointing, and far more powers would be retained by Westminster than had been expected. These included not merely obvious responsibilities such as defence and foreign affairs, but also improbable areas such as lighthouses and trademarks. Nonetheless there was a general confidence that within two or three years a Home Rule parliament and government would meet in Dublin and would then exercise a degree of control over Irish domestic affairs. Both supporters and opponents of the measure believed that over time the powers of the new Irish government would expand.

These hopes were soon disappointed. As the Ulster unionists threatened and planned rebellion, and as their methods forced the Liberals to make one concession after another, constitutional politics and politicians were discredited. Many nationalists decided to follow the unionist example by resorting to paramilitary measures.

At the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 Home Rule was postponed for the duration of the conflict. The Easter Rising undermined moderate nationalists, and the violence that took place between 1916 and 1921 resulted in a far greater degree of independence for most of Ireland than had been envisaged in the 1912 bill. The Home Rule party was annihilated in the 1918 election, and even though it gained nearly 22 per cent of the votes it won only six seats to Sinn Féin's 73. For many decades afterwards, the party, its aims and its tactics were associated with failure, and they were air-brushed out of the official "memory" of independent Ireland.

The reality was more complex. Home Rule, more or less along the lines that had been envisaged in 1912, was implemented subsequently – but only in the unionist-dominated North-East. It benefited those who had fought passionately against devolution for all Ireland, but who were perfectly happy to accept and operate devolution for an area that they could control. This pattern endured for half a century, until "Stormont" was abolished in 1972.

The Home Rule party of John Redmond survived for almost as long – but again, only in Northern Ireland. For many years it was led by one of Redmond's chief lieutenants, Joe Devlin, and it remained the principal expression of Northern Irish nationalists until it was replaced by the SDLP in 1970.

However the Home Rule legacy also persisted in what became the Free State and the Republic, although in a very different form. Over several decades, Parnell and his successors had accustomed most Irish nationalists to the principles and practices of democracy. Electors

came to take for granted that they could achieve results through the speeches and votes of their MPs, they became acquainted with parliamentary procedures, and in some respects (but not in others) they developed a sophisticated political culture.

This was a paradoxical development. In terms of electoral politics most of Ireland consisted of two rival one-party “nations”. Many constituencies were so firmly dominated by nationalists or unionists that each party respected the other’s territory and refrained from engaging in hopeless contests. On both sides, candidates were usually returned unopposed. For example, in the 1906 general election 82 of the 103 Irish MPs faced no challenger, and once they had been nominated they were returned automatically to parliament. In this sense Irish democracy was more theoretical than real.

In another important respect Ireland was not a normal democracy. Since the 1870s a large majority had voted in favour of Home Rule, yet until Redmond succeeded in holding the balance of power in Westminster in 1910 their cause had made virtually no progress. The wishes of the Irish electorate were consistently ignored.

Despite these limitations, Ireland shared in the gradual democratisation of the United Kingdom, and it was clear that in many areas politics could and did achieve results. The Land Acts, which brought about an Irish social revolution, were influenced by pressure from Home Rulers – as well as by several other factors. London governments and Dublin Castle administrators responded to the demands of Irish pressure groups. The Local Government Act of 1898 gave a generation of Irish nationalists experience in local politics and administration.

In the short term the Home Rule crisis of 1912-14 radicalised Irish nationalists and undermined those who believed in constitutionalism, but before the Easter Rising few Irish people (apart from Ulster unionists) were committed to extreme aims or methods. The new Sinn Féin party that emerged in 1917 was heavily influenced by its Home Rule predecessor and by British democratic values. Inevitably, and perhaps almost unconsciously, Sinn Féiners adopted and adapted the tactics of their Home Rule enemies – who provided the only available model.

They soon beat the Redmondites at their own game. Many of the former rebels had despised politics, but their electoral victories converted most of the sceptics to this unexpectedly successful manner of advancing their aims. They soon came to represent and cherish old customs associated with the Home Rule party, such as localism and patronage. Not only were the habits and skills of the Home Rulers absorbed by Sinn Féin, but ultimately they were passed on in turn to its successors, Cumann na nGaedheal/Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil.

Similarly, when the First Dáil met in 1919 it followed British conventions; Irish republican MPs might have abstained from Westminster but they nonetheless imitated the familiar procedures of “the mother of parliaments”. Once more, it was the obvious model to adopt. (Even the system of proportional representation that has been used in all Dáil elections since 1921 was introduced by the British, as a cynical and unsuccessful attempt to limit the success of the Sinn Féin party.) Crucially, the Dáil government retained theoretical control over its

army, and it was a civilian rather than a military delegation that negotiated the Treaty in 1921.

When Michael Collins took control of Dublin Castle he did so as the head of a government that enjoyed vastly greater powers than would have been available under the Home Rule bill. Violence had worked. But he assumed power not merely as the successor of revolutionaries such as Tom Clarke and PH Pearse. He also embodied a democratic legacy that had been represented by Parnell and Redmond, and that in recent years had been continued by the Dáil and its government. In the Civil War he and his successors soon showed that they were determined to maintain the sovereignty of the people and of parliamentary majorities. To do this they were prepared, in WT Cosgrave's words, to meet terror with terror.

Constitutional Irish nationalism was apparently triumphant in 1912, it seemed to have been destroyed in 1916, but it revived and – ironically – was consolidated under the leadership of former republican rebels who had rejected moderate political methods only a few years earlier. The Home Rule bill of 1912 was not simply a dead end; it also formed part of a democratic tradition that prevailed a decade later, and that since then has dominated Irish public life for almost a century.

Michael Laffan

The year of living anxiously

As James Joyce's writings reflect, 1912 was a time of unease, with Unionists flocking to sign their anti-Home Rule Covenant in blood and some republicans looking back to an ancient, common Celtic past for inspiration

The fear of a contract broken hung heavy in the air throughout the year 1912. Over 200,000 loyalists pledged themselves, "in solemn Covenant throughout this our time of threatened calamity", to oppose a Home Rule parliament in Ireland.

Many of the signatories saw themselves as members of a blood brotherhood. Some, indeed, signed in blood. It was in the name of such a bond that thousands of them would sacrifice their lives four years later at the Somme.

A similar anxiety haunts James Joyce's play *Exiles*, set in the suburban Dublin of that year. It concerns the fear of a returned exile, Richard Rowan, that his best friend is having a clandestine sexual relationship with Richard's own partner, Bertha. The play would only be published in 1918 but a warrior language of swords, wounds and ultimate reconstruction is shown to have been latent in the world of 1912. "In the very core of my ignoble heart," says Richard to his friend, "I longed to be betrayed by you and by her . . . To be for ever a shameful creature and build up my soul again out of the ruins of its shame."

The world just prior to the first World War was felt by many to have become shallow, meaningless, enervated; and the search for extreme situations, which would ultimately lead millions of young men to trenches and barricades, had caused others in the pre-war period to join expeditions to the Antarctic, to climb mountains or to trek into the wilds. On such journeys, men often released an unexpected tenderness in one another; and such bonding is also the main subject of *Exiles*. Richard tells his friend, despite the fear of betrayal, that "I longed to put my arm around your neck".

Richard speaks of Ireland in 1912 as being "on the eve of her long-awaited victory". That victory was the nightmare which terrified the Ulster Volunteers: but James Joyce was not impressed by the Third Home Rule Bill. It would only, he told readers of *Il Piccolo della Sera*, compel the new Irish government to pay for deficits created by the British treasury. It would be a betrayal haunted by "the shade of Parnell", whose fate was a proof that no English person ever betrayed Ireland: the Irish could always be relied upon to betray one another first.

Joyce had reason for his bitterness. In July 1912, on a return visit to Dublin, he discovered that a printer was refusing to work on his short story collection *Dubliners* (the printer objected, among other things, to the use of the word "bloody"). In response, Joyce wrote on the back of his now-broken contract *Gas from a Burner*, a lampoon against "This lovely land that always sent/Her writers and artists to banishment/And in a spirit of Irish fun/Betrayed her leaders one by one". In Joyce's judgement the sell-out that was the Act of Union at the start of the 19th century was now to be compounded by the fake electoralism of a Home Rule parliament, which would reflect only the interest of a nationalist elite of professional men, priests and publicans.

Joyce wrote from the viewpoint of a staunch republican: but there were some in the ranks of cultural nationalism whose distrust of parliamentarianism led them to pine for a lost Gaelic kingship. If the Ulster Covenanters ended their declaration with “God Save the King”, some Gaelic revivalists yearned for the return of their broken aristocracy. Many spoke of ancestors “raised in the raths of kings” – the fetish for aristocracy still rampant in England had its parallels among Irish nationalists.

The great Celtic scholar Osborn Bergin spent much of 1912 editing a bizarre and brilliant text called *Pairlement Chlainne Tomais* (The Parliament of Clan Thomas). It was an attack by ruined Gaelic bards of the 1600s on the new planters who had not only freed the serfs but also encouraged vulgarians to express uncouth opinions in upstart parliaments. The new men in the text, Clan Thomas, are slothful dolts, skilled only in one art: betrayal of covenants – “whoever offered kindness was discounted by them, and whoever attacked or denounced them was closest to them above all men in the world”. Had either James Joyce or Edward Carson been in a position to read this text, they might have been forgiven a chilly smile.

Not all radicals were averse to the idea of Home Rule. Patrick Pearse was still an enthusiast for it in 1912, but in a speech at the Mansion House in December, he began his critique of “the murder machine” that was the colonial education system. Its cramming for a results-oriented examination method led him to call for a more inspirational teaching dedicated to the development of the individuality in each child.

Pearse believed that education should inculcate a sense of the nation, its culture and history. This was a view endorsed by Tom Kettle in a lecture on *The Economics of Nationalism* given at Maynooth in the same month. Denouncing a rootless cosmopolitanism as too vague to win loyal support, Kettle admitted that there might be no such thing as a National Trigonometry but asserted that there was a National Economics. International movements like socialism, he said, would succeed only if earthed in a national experience. The Irish Question was essentially political as well as economic in nature. Kettle, a charismatic Home Ruler and MP, would die in the first World War.

Most Irish literary works of 1912 have a rather “Edwardian” feel to them. The god Pan, who had already featured in such English classics as *The Wind in the Willows*, paid a visit to Ireland (in order to abduct a shepherdess) in James Stephens’s *The Crock of Gold*. In the same year, George Moore recorded in *Salve* (the second volume of his autobiography) how he toured ancient Celtic sites listening to the mystic poet George Russell expostulate on the return of the gods.

Russell, a Portadown Protestant aghast at the sectarian divisions now threatening to tear Ireland asunder, sought to go back to a common Celtic bedrock. Moore recalls how he was at once moved by such idealism and yet amused at his friend’s attempt, over a dinner in a Dundalk inn, to convert solid Northern Presbyterians to the superior truths to be found in a pagan scheme of things.

All of the ideals explored in all of these texts would be put to a ferocious test in the years after 1914. Seen in retrospect, 1912 appears as a year of “latency”, one in which an old world was still dying even as a new one struggled to be born.

It was also the year of Mann’s *Death in Venice* and Jung’s *Psychology of the Unconscious*. Perhaps the more shrewd analysis of the Irish situation was offered by George Bernard Shaw in an address on what it meant to him to be an Irish Protestant.

For him Protestantism was a great historic movement of reformation and self-assertion against spiritual tyranny: and it was consistent for those who believed in self-election in theology to support self-determination in nationhood. He would, he averred, prefer to be burnt at the stake by Irish Catholics than protected by the English garrison.

Shaw was a sardonic optimist. To the jibe that Home Rule would cause the Irish to cut one another’s throats, he said: “Who has a better right to cut them? The English are very glad to get us to cut the throats of their enemies. Why should we not have the same privilege among ourselves? What will prevent it?”

Shaw’s answer was: “The natural resistance of the other Irishmen.” If only he had been right. In 1912 Bram Stoker, creator of *Dracula*, died: but the real blood-suckers – war, militarism, aggressive imperialism and narrow nationalism – would soon sweep all sardonic optimism away.

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Imagination is mother of the nation

The distinctive Irish ideology of “nationalism” evolved as an expression of our desire and increasing capacity to rule ourselves, but, like elsewhere, wrapped in all the supposed trappings of nationhood.

Our ancestors the Firbolgs, wrote Lady Jane Francesca Wilde, Oscar’s mother, were “a small, straight-haired, swarthy race . . . dark-haired, talkative, guileful”, combative, sometimes nomadic, litigious, spendthrift and, “when their immediate wants are supplied, lazy, especially during the winter” – much indeed like their 19th century descendants, as seen at least by their English or Anglo-Irish betters.

It is one of the paradoxes of nationalism that while it can scarcely be said to have existed anywhere before the later 18th century – indeed the word itself is not found in English until the middle of the 19th – one of its first instincts has always been to establish the origins of the nation whose existence it is celebrating in the furthest recesses of time. Thus we find 19th century writers treating the mythological gods and heroes of pre-Christian Irish tradition (Fir Bolg, Tuatha Dé Danann, Fomorians) as actual peoples, thereby bestowing on the nation a long and distinguished pedigree – longer perhaps than that of our neighbours and masters.

The Irish were not the only ones at this game. For many centuries the French flattered themselves with a Trojan origin: their ancestors, it seems, having escaped the burning city, founded a new settlement on the Danube and eventually migrated to the Rhine, where they became the people known to history as the Franks. After the publication of Amédée Thierry’s *Histoire des Gaulois* in 1828, however, the French found it more congenial to believe they were descended from Gauls rather than Franks, who were, after all, a bit German. The phrase “nos ancêtres les Gaulois” (our ancestors the Gauls) became part of the heritage of every French schoolchild and was in due course reinforced by the appealing images of Astérix and Obélix.

The concept of nationalism is a compendious one and the word is arguably used to denote a number of quite different phenomena. There is the nationalism, or chauvinism, of the “great nation”, which sees itself as endowed with a manifest destiny, a civilising mission, a duty, even a burden (America, France, England) to bring its power and values to bear on lesser peoples.

There is the virulent nationalism of blood and race, which seeks to assimilate or expunge impure elements within the state and expand its territory by making war on its neighbours. And there is the reactive, assertive nationalism of subject peoples, ruled by more powerful neighbours and deemed by them not to be sufficiently mature, strong or united to run their own affairs.

The political theorist Benedict Anderson believed nationalism depended on the existence of an “imagined community”, a group that is not an actual community, in that its members do not know or meet each other, but which nevertheless believes itself to be a community, a group which has, in the splendid German word, *Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl*, the feeling of

belonging together. Of course there are other types of imagined community apart from the national one: in 19th century Ireland one might feel oneself to be primarily a Catholic or a Protestant, or, towards the end of the century at least, a worker, or a subject of the Queen.

But by the late 19th and early 20th century the identity feeling that was demonstrably growing was that of nationality, and not just in Ireland but in many of the European territories long incorporated in the declining Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires.

It is another paradox of nationalism that while the notion of distinction is pivotal (this people or nation is essentially different from that one and therefore should run its own affairs), there is nothing more international than the process of forming national identities.

The French historian Anne-Marie Thiesse has written of “the IKEA system”, a kind of kit of essential or desirable items that furnishes national ideologues with everything they need to build their own, of course distinct, identities. Thus we should have a history that establishes a connection with great ancestors, a language, epic poems, national monuments, a folklore, a landscape deemed typical, particular national character traits, a peasant “costume”, music, games, a flag, an anthem and certain official institutions that celebrate the nation’s history and achievements and help mould and comfort its cultural elites – a national gallery, museum, library, university. An agreed historical narrative, in which national feeling was continually suppressed yet never quite died out in the hearts of the people, can also help.

Looking around European history, it can be observed that short cuts were sometimes taken in the process of assembling the necessary attributes of nationality. The Bohemians and Moravians did indeed succeed during the nineteenth century in reversing a near fatal decline and re-establishing Czech as a national language, yet the poet Václav Hanka still felt the need to concoct a fake epic centring on Princess Libuse, the mythical founder of the Czech nation. Similarly the 19th century Greeks were concerned to establish the continuity of their culture and language from the classical period – a rather unlikely continuity given the population movements that had occurred over the intervening 2,500 years.

The modern Romanians, who achieved independence in 1881, insisted they were essentially the same people as the ancient Dacians, who had retained their Latin culture and language, in spite of successive Slav invasions, ever since the Romans left in 271.

If the ideological construction of the nation in Europe was often attended with considerable anxiety – and an over-eager desire to tick every box – this is not to say that the process was necessarily either bogus or illegitimate. The anxiety may have derived from a fear that, after all, the new nation was not sufficiently different and that therefore its distinctiveness had to be constantly underlined, a process that could involve some ideological straining.

Yet if the spiritual attributes of nationality were sometimes overcooked, in most of the emerging nations of Europe, and perhaps nowhere more so than in Ireland, there existed a sound material basis for legislative independence in the emergence of a native class that was quite capable of assuming the burden of administration formerly borne by the imperial power.

By 1912, Ireland's desire and capacity to rule itself had been in evidence for more than half a century. It was not going to be smothered for very much longer.

Enda O'Doherty

'Trust in the healing power of time and experience ...'

Debate on Establishment of an Irish Parliament - House of Commons, 13th June 1912 (Hansard)

Amendment proposed: In Sub-section (1) after the word "shall" ["there shall be in Ireland"], to insert the words "subject to the counties of Antrim, Armagh, Down, and Londonderry being excluded from the provisions of this Act." - [Mr Agar-Robartes]. Amendment defeated. Bill passed, but its operation suspended and ultimately never implemented because of first World War.

Sir Edward Carson

. . . I think it is natural that I should ask leave to say something on an Amendment which to me, at all events, appears to be the most vital Amendment which probably can be moved during the whole of the discussions in Committee on the Bill.

The hon. Member for East Aberdeenshire (Mr. Cowan), who spoke the other day, said that if the Unionist Members from Ireland would accept this Amendment as a settlement of this question – as a compromise of this question – and help us to proceed with this Bill, then I will vote for it. Let him not give any vote under any misapprehension. We do not accept this Amendment as a compromise of the question. There is no compromise possible. We believe that Home Rule would be disastrous for the rest of Ireland, and – because he offers what would be merely a simple act of justice to a portion of Ulster – why should we on that ground abandon our position in regard to a policy which we believe harmful to Ireland?...

To those who tell me that the Union has failed in Ireland I say look to Belfast and the North-East corner of Ulster. They are a product of the Union. It is under the Union that they have grown and flourished, and it is no wonder when you come to analyse what has happened in that not at all most favoured part, by nature, of Ireland that the people are wedded to the system which has developed their liberty and their prosperity to the extent which it has done
....

Then they say: – Why should we be driven by force to abandon the conditions which have led to that success? We can imagine no conceivable reason – no fault that we have committed – which will justify the treatment which this Bill prepares for us. We are to be driven out of our present close connection with England and Scotland; we are to be deprived of the power to control our own future; and we are to be handed over to the government and guidance of men of whose principles we disapprove, and whose capacity has never been applied towards the practical advancement of the material interests of the country...

Have not we a right to ask, where is your precedent? Where is the precedent for driving out of a community against their will people who are satisfied with it? You are always referring to Colonial examples. I happened to be Solicitor-General at the time when the Australian Commonwealth Bill was passed. You never would have passed that Bill if every single Clause had not been agreed to by every single one of the communities concerned....

Take the Transvaal, about which people are always talking. If the Transvaal had refused to give up its autonomous position, and to come into the Union which created the Union Parliament, and took away part of the privileges of that autonomous position, would you have forced the Transvaal, would you have forced Natal, would you have forced the Cape?

I do not want to say one word by way of threat..... I shall assume, for the purpose of my argument, that you coerce Ulster. The hon. Gentleman the Member for North Tyrone (Mr. T. W. Russell) says, Are you going to fight the Navy and the Army? That is an absurd suggestion. I shall assume that the Navy and the Army are going to put Ulster down.

What then? Do you think that people with this burning passion in relation to the Government under which they are to live will be good citizens? Do you really think that the Ulster Scot is the kind of man you can trample underfoot?

Let me examine for the moment the argument which has been put forward. The Chief Secretary said, After all, the people of Ireland, Catholics and Protestants, are not such bad friends as you might imagine. I quite agree with him. I should be sorry if they were. I hope they will be greater friends; if you will only let them alone they would be. But there are deep-rooted historical questions, traditions, ideas, and race, too, which you cannot get rid of by an Act of Parliament, but which you can aggravate by an Act of Parliament.

The Chief Secretary says there is a great deal of trade between the North and South of Ireland. He says there are bankers in the North who have branch banks in the South; and there are men in the North of Ireland who sell seeds to men in the South. What has that got to do with it? Does he mean to say – this is a hopeful outlook – that if Ulster is allowed to remain with the Imperial Parliament here they would never again be allowed to do business in the South of Ireland? That is not a happy augury for the Irish Parliament you are going to set up....

I now come to the Prime Minister, who gave us a very severe lecture on our daring to desert those who, according to us, were placed in peril in other parts of Ireland.... The people in Ireland will not in the least misconstrue what we are doing on this occasion, whatever the lectures of the Prime Minister may be. They know perfectly well that that is all nonsense so far as they are concerned.

Mr John Redmond

On Tuesday last the late Leader of the Opposition complained of the silence of Irish Members on these benches on the question of this Amendment, and he called for an explanation from us as to our position on this question of the separate treatment of Ulster. I remained silent on Tuesday last because I felt I was entitled to know before I spoke the attitude of the right hon. and learned Gentleman (Sir E. Carson) and his Friends, and until the speech which he has delivered this afternoon was made I honestly did not know what his attitude was going to be. We all remember that in his speech in Belfast he called, as we thought, for separate treatment for Ulster, and we know that the very moment he made that

declaration that the idea of separate treatment for Ulster was loudly denounced by the organ of opinion of the Unionists of the South and West of Ireland

Then, subsequently to the denunciation in the name of the Unionists of the South and West of Ireland to the idea of separate treatment for any part of Ulster, the right hon. and learned Gentleman spoke, as has been said, in Dublin and there, as we understood, he repudiated the idea of the separate treatment for Ulster. This afternoon he says he is going to vote for it; but he has made, I am bound to say, his position perfectly clear. He has been perfectly candid. He has not said he is going to vote for separate treatment for a portion of Ulster for the purpose of improving this Bill, or as a compromise on which this matter could be settled, because he has told us that even if this Amendment were carried the opposition of himself and his party to the Home Rule Bill would be as vehement as ever.

I was entitled to know, before I rose to speak upon this matter, did the Unionist party, and especially the Ulster Unionist party, put this forward as their demand for a settlement of this question, or did they not? It is now evident, of course, that they do not, and that they do not treat it as any approach to a settlement of the question. I assert that there is at this moment no single section of Unionist opinion in Ireland in favour of the Amendment. ..

I could quite understand some Friends of ours on the other side of the House giving very serious and anxious consideration to this proposal if it were put forward as the price to be paid for a settlement of this question; that is to say, If the Ulster Unionist Members declared that if this Amendment were carried they would accept the Bill. Even then, I am bound to say, it would not have received the approval or sanction of my colleagues or myself.... It is put entirely on one side as a means of bringing about a compromise, and it is supported frankly as a wrecking Amendment. .. I appeal to any genuine friends of Home Rule in Ireland how, in these circumstances, they can possibly give a vote in favour of the Amendment?

Consider for a moment what this Amendment is. It proposes to exempt from the operation of the Home Rule Bill four Ulster counties out of the nine which comprise the province, namely, Antrim, Down, Derry, and Armagh. Mark you, it does not propose to exempt Ulster. That would be too absurd, because, as is well known, in Ulster, taking the whole province, the population is very evenly balanced indeed, even between Catholic and Protestant, and if allowance were made, as I think it ought to be, for at any rate a margin of Protestant Home Rulers, you would have the result that a majority of the people of Ulster were in favour of Home Rule.

The hon. and learned Gentleman who has just spoken (Sir E. Carson) asked: Could you have passed your Commonwealth Bill for Australia if one of the Australian Colonies had objected? I do not suppose you could. These Australian Colonies were separate entities. Will anyone say that four counties in Ireland are a separate entity... When you were passing the Commonwealth Bill in Australia if you had found, say, in the Colony of New South Wales one small section of the population, a very small minority as compared with the whole, had objected, of course your Commonwealth Bill would have gone through all the same.

But that argument cannot hold good against Ireland, unless indeed you are prepared to say that these four counties in themselves form a separate nationality.

If you want to be logical in exemption you ought to exempt simply Belfast, and if you start in exempting Belfast what are you going to do about the 100,000 Nationalists in Belfast, and about the Protestants who returned my hon. Friend for West Belfast? Are they to have separate treatment inside Belfast? Why, that question, I submit, reduces the whole argument to an absurdity

We put forward our claim for Home Rule for Ireland as a national demand. That is its essence. The national demand, the national spirit, has been the soul of the movement ever since the Union was carried. We say that Ireland is a nation, whose rights and liberties have no doubt often been invaded, but a nation, a national unit to-day, just as much as is England, or Scotland or Wales! We are not dealing with the case of a few counties of Britain that happen to be separated from this island by a few miles of water. We are putting our case forward as a case of a nation, and it is on that ground that our claim rests, and from that claim it will never be divorced.

The idea of two nations in Ireland is to us revolting and hateful. The idea of our agreeing to the partition of our nation is unthinkable. We want the union in Ireland of all creeds, of all classes, of all races, and we would resist most violently as far as it is within our power to do so - [An HON. MEMBER: "Oh!"] -Yes, so far as we have the power to do so-the setting up of permanent dividing lines between one creed and another and one race and another.

Men will say that the dream of a union complete and lasting between all creeds and classes in Ireland will never be realised. It is our hope, our ambition, our belief, that it will be. To attempt to cut off the Protestants under the two-nation theory from the national traditions and aspirations of the Irish race sounds to many of us something like sacrilege. Yes, many of the most revered of our national saints and martyrs in the national struggle have been Protestants. Many of the greatest and most honoured leaders of the Irish race in their struggles, both on the field and in the constitutional region, have been Protestants.

Grattan's Parliament, which possesses today the enthusiastic and affectionate remembrance of the Irish people, was a Parliament in which no Catholic could sit; for election to it no Catholic was allowed to vote. I say to you here that most of the Catholics of Ireland would prefer tomorrow to take back Grattan's Parliament with all those disqualifications than to continue to be governed under the Union or consent to the partition of the Irish nation.

Why, let me ask before I sit down, is Ireland to be the only country in the whole world where religious animosity is to permanently divide the people? We demand that under Home Rule we in Ireland shall be given the same chance as was given to the Catholics and Protestants in Canada; to the Boers and Britains in South Africa; the same chance to sit down side by side and to endeavour to administer jointly "the affairs of our common country so that we may be able to bury the memories of the past and open a new chapter of unity. That is our ambition-at any rate that is the ambition which we will never surrender.

I am faced with this proposition: We are told that in any case a section of the population of Ulster will not agree, and if we object to the idea of separate treatment for Ulster, what, we are asked, is our alternative? I say that our alternative is to trust the healing process of time and experience. Trust the people of Ireland, as the people of all colours, of all races, and of all creeds have been trusted elsewhere in your Empire, and you will most undoubtedly find as a result what has happened everywhere else will happen in Ireland: that men will come together; they will forget the past; they will sit down at the same table, and endeavour to do all they can for the welfare and freedom of their common country.

We say this Amendment is absurd; we say it is illogical and unworkable; that it is not asked for by any section of Unionists in Ireland. We say it can only be supported by intelligent men as a wrecking Amendment. Above all, we oppose it, because it would destroy for ever our most cherished ambition, namely, to see the Irish nation in the near future made up of every race and every creed and every class working unitedly for the well-being and freedom of the Irish race and doing so through the instrumentality of a native Government which, in the words of Thomas Davis, "Shall rule by the right and might of all, Yet yield to the arrogance of none."

John Redmond in the House of Commons, 11 April 1912, when the 3rd Home Rule Bill was introduced: "If I may say so reverently, I personally thank God that I have lived to see this day."

Prime Minister HH Asquith to Carson in the Commons, April 11th 1912: "It was impossible to concede the demand of a small minority to veto the verdict of the Irish Nation."

TC Agar-Robartes, Liberal MP, putting forward a motion on 11 June 1912 to exclude the four north-eastern counties from the operation of the Home Rule Bill: "I have never heard that orange bitters will mix with Irish whiskey."

Ulster 1912 by Rudyard Kipling

Published by the Morning Post in April 1912

The dark eleventh hour
Draws on and sees us sold
To every evil power
We fought against of old.
Rebellion, rapine hate,
Oppression, wrong and greed
Are loosed to rule our fate,

By England's act and deed . . .

. . . What answer from the North?

One Law, one Land, one Throne.

If England drive us forth

We shall not fall alone.

'The Irish Times' and Home Rule

For a newspaper which largely represented the views of Protestants in southern Ireland, the move to introduce Home Rule was 'a conspiracy to interrupt and destroy the peace and prosperity of Ireland'

The Irish Times contemplated the introduction of a third Home Rule Bill in early 1912 with apprehension. "Home Rule is again disturbing the country, throwing Irishmen, who generally live together in harmony, into opposite political camps," the newspaper commented editorially on the first day of a fateful year.

It was especially bitter against the Liberal Party under the Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, which had pledged never to accept a position dependent on the Irish nationalist votes. Now Asquith was promising Home Rule to the nationalists on whom he depended for a parliamentary majority. This was "a conspiracy to interrupt and destroy the peace and prosperity of Ireland", The Irish Times complained.

For a newspaper which largely represented the views of Protestants in southern Ireland, the prospect of Home Rule was an appalling vista. From being a privileged part of a majority in a United Kingdom, these unionists would become a minority in a Catholic-dominated local parliament which would be influenced by the powerful Catholic Church. There was still hope, however, that Ulster intransigence would halt the Home Rule bandwagon now rolling under the joint management of Asquith and John Redmond, leader of the Irish nationalist MPs in Westminster.

"The Unionist party which will fight it tooth and nail in the House of Commons has great allies . . . We believe the Unionist party to be on the eve of a great and fruitful victory," the paper predicted. But by April, there was a less optimistic note. "We are on the eve of a prolonged and probably bitter conflict during which we will be fighting for the essential things of life and citizenship." Irish unionists desire "to live in peace and harmony with their Nationalist fellow countrymen. But they will not shirk the challenge . . . They will go into the fight with the grim resolution of quiet men who have been wantonly assailed".

The Irish Times had at this stage no time for a two-nation Ireland. "We do not agree with some leaders of English Unionist opinion that there are two nations in Ireland. There is only one Irish nation: Ulster and the other three provinces contribute everyone its own qualities, good or bad, its own achievements, great or small, to the sum of nationality. But on the question of Home Rule the nation is divided against itself."

Reluctantly, the newspaper and its readers were being forced to envisage a split in the "one Irish nation" under the pressure of the Home Rule Bill. As published, there was no provision for a let-out for Ulster, but special treatment was now a feature of the debate. In June, an amendment was tabled by a Liberal MP, T G Agar-Robartes, to exclude "four Protestant counties", Antrim, Armagh, Down and Londonderry.

The newspaper saw this move as “a trap designed to secure an admission that Northern Unionists were willing to abandon the Unionists of the rest of Ireland to their fate”. The fact that the amendment was later to be supported by both the Ulster Unionist leader, Sir Edward Carson, and the Conservative party leader, Andrew Bonar Law, posed problems for the newspaper’s leader writer, but he found a way around them. He approved Law’s principle that, while he hated the Bill, he would support in committee stage any amendment which seemed likely to make it less bad. “This is a sane and sensible intention,” commented the editorial.

Carson explained that although he voted for the amendment, “we do not accept it as a compromise on the Bill. There is no compromise possible”.

John Redmond seized on what he saw as the inconsistencies in the editorial squirming of The Irish Times which, he explained to the Commons, was “the organ of the Unionists of the South and West of Ireland”.

This was a reference to the newspaper denouncing the idea of “separate treatment for Ulster”, which Carson had raised in a speech in Belfast the day before.

The newspaper was trying hard to keep up with the twists and turns of “separate treatment for Ulster”. It clearly approved of the position of “the average Unionist elector of Great Britain . . . strong in the assurance that a hated form of government cannot be thrust by force upon more than a million of the Irish people”. This rather weakened the “one nation” argument.

The average British Unionist, the newspaper cited approvingly, is convinced “that even if the Home Rule Bill becomes law, it will shatter itself on the rock of Ulster”. But the editorial went on to insist that it is the duty of Unionists to make the Bill “less bad” by amendments while “refusing to accept it in any shape or form”.

The Irish Times was in a difficult position as were its southern Unionist readers. The Home Rule Bill seemed likely to become law after approval by the Commons and the two-year delay by the House of Lords. A special deal for Ulster, if accepted by the Northern unionists, could be seen as a betrayal of their southern brethren, but for the moment the newspaper continued to assert with Carson that Ulster resistance would mean no Home Rule for the whole of Ireland.

As Ulster unionists moved towards a mass signing of a Covenant to resist an Irish parliament “using all means which may be found necessary”, the newspaper also moved to support them. “There is not the slightest doubt that Ulster will resist the attempt by force of arms. We need not discuss the wisdom or legality of this attitude – it would be a mere waste of time”, an editorial on June 19th asserted.

“No moralising can get rid of the fact that Ulster’s last doubt as to the justice of overt resistance has been removed by the Government’s refusal to submit the Home Rule issue to the electors of the United Kingdom.”

At the signing of the Covenant by hundreds of thousands of Unionist men and women, including some in southern Ireland, the newspaper editorialised that Ulster was not fighting her own battle alone, but “she is saving Nationalist Ireland from the criminal folly of its leaders”. It concluded on an apocalyptic note: “The Government and its allies dare not admit what they know to be true – that the Home Rule Bill can only be imposed on Ulster at the cost of civil war and that the Bill therefore is already dead.”

In fact, the Bill was finally declared law just two years later on September 18th, 1914, but suspended until the end of the second World War. And there could be special provision for Ulster which was not spelled out.

Joe Carroll