

The Empire Strikes Back: the Historiographies of Britain and Ireland

Steven Ellis

National University of Ireland, Galway / Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh



Is fiú ó am go chéile scrúdú a dhéanamh ar na tuairimí agus na smaointe a bhíos taobh thiar de scríbhinní staraíthe an lae inniú, agus cad iad na cinn ar tugadh neamhaird orthu? Cad iad na coincheapanna agus an tearmaíocht ar baineadh úsáid astu le hiad a léiriú? Díríonn staraíthe nua-aimseartha ar fhás an náisiúin-stáit ach go háirithe, mar gur an náisiúin-stáit an cineál stáit is coitianta i rith na nua-aoise; ach ní raibh sé seo fíor maidir le tréimhsí níos luaithe ina raibh an il-mhonarcacht nó an impireacht i bhfad níos coitianta. Dá réir sin, ní fás an náisiúin an cheist ba thábhachtaí go minic ó thaobh daoine comhaimseartha de. Agus i gcás na stáit nua-aimseartha úd a ndearnadh de bhua críoch-dhéighilt tír traidisiúnta an náisiúin, bíonn an pheirspictíocht seo go hán-amhrasach. San aiste ghairid seo, déantar comparáid idir an dá staireolaíocht, staireolaíocht na Breataine Móire agus staireolaíocht na hÉireann don tréimhse c.1300-1700, agus go háirithe ar an dóigh ar chuir críoch-dhéighilt na hÉireann i gcion ar scríbhneoireacht na staire i SaorStát na hÉireann i ndiaidh dó a neamhspleáchas a bhaint amach ón Bhreatain Mhór i 1922.

Professor Steven Ellis read History at Manchester University and also completed a MA thesis there before moving to Northern Ireland and working at the Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University, Belfast. He received his PhD there in 1979, and was awarded a DLitt by the National University of Ireland in 1988 for his research on Tudor Ireland. He joined the History Department at Galway in the Republic of Ireland in 1976 and was appointed to his present post in 1991. He teaches mainly British and Irish history c.1300-1700 in both English and Gaelic. More recently, his research has focused on British state formation and on frontier societies. His major publications include *Ireland in the age of the Tudors*, London 1998, and *Tudor frontiers and noble power: the making of the British state*, Oxford 1995.



An examination of the ideas and assumptions behind the depiction by modern historians of past societies can sometimes be both revealing and instructive. What changes and developments are singled out as important, and what are ignored? What comparisons or contrasts are made? What concepts or terminology are used to describe them? What is the context of explanation? Historians are of course especially concerned about how we get from the past to the present: a central focus of modern historiography is the rise of the nation-state because, supposedly, the nation-state is presently the normal form of political society. Even if this is now the case, it was certainly not true of earlier periods of history, in which empires and multiple monarchies predominated, and the coincidence of nation and state was very much the exception. And yet, as is argued in this chapter, the historian's preoccupation with charting the rise of the nation-

state continues to influence (and obscure) our understanding of past societies. Nowhere is this more so than in regard to the historiography of those nations and states which were the subject of modern political partitions. Rival states created by partition have been particularly concerned to invoke history to validate their own priorities and perceptions of the present, and also to promote a unifying sense of national identity among their citizens. This has led in turn to the development of very different historiographical schools. One obvious example is the quite distinctive *DDR-Geschichtswissenschaft*, which was promoted following the partition of Germany in 1945 in the German Democratic Republic, in opposition to the 'bourgeois/bürgerlich' traditions of West Germany. Another revealing example of this phenomenon, which forms the subject of the present chapter, stems from the partition of Ireland. As is argued below, many of the same assumptions underpin the historiographies of Britain and Ireland, which is hardly surprising given the historic ties between the two countries, but it is the differences rather than the similarities which their historians choose to stress.

From 1169 until the present, areas of Ireland have always been ruled from London as part of an English, later British, state of which lowland England was the political centre; and from 1603 to 1922 the whole of Ireland was likewise under British rule. In the later middle ages, the English lordship of Ireland shared a frontier with the Gaelic world, being part of a cross-channel English monarchy extending into parts of France; in the early modern period, the kingdom of Ireland was part of a multiple monarchy along with the kingdoms of England and Scotland; and from 1801 Ireland was a constituent part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, the heart of a far-flung British empire. Not surprisingly, seven or eight centuries of political association between the two countries – during which Ireland gradually moved from being a remote borderland to a core territory – created strong bonds of an historical character between England and Ireland.

In 1920, however, the British Government of Ireland Act partitioned Ireland and devolved power there on two separate administrations, North and South. The six counties in the north-east of the island were established as the partly self-governing state of Northern Ireland (part of what officially now became the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), with a new administrative centre at Stormont, to which power was gradually devolved during 1921. In regard to the second Irish state envisaged by the Act, the Anglo-Irish treaty of late 1921 established the remaining twenty-six counties as a largely-independent entity, the Irish Free State, administered from the existing centre of British administration in Dublin. This initially received Dominion status within the British Empire, was renamed 'Éire' (Ireland) in 1937, and became a separate Republic in 1948 (Fig. 1).

Following partition, both states then set about promoting a unifying sense of national identity among their citizens. The Northern state, for its part, showed surprisingly little interest in the political possibilities of Irish history, at least before the imposition of 'direct rule' in 1972. One small difficulty which the unionist perspective now faced was its traditional premiss, the British traditions of the archipelago as a whole: from 1921 unionists needed to address more directly the problem of why 'Ulster' (meaning the six counties of Northern Ireland) had developed differently from the rest of Ireland. The eventual – and, perhaps rather surprising – solution was to refocus on Ulster particularism within an Irish context – a benign *Sonderweg* which saved them from Home Rule and Rome Rule. Ulster unionists



Fig. 1
 A modern map of Ireland showing the frontier between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, provincial

traced their history in Ireland, and also their strong ties to Scotland, back to the Ulster plantation beginning in 1607. They were now much less interested in the Norman invasion, or

even the Tudor conquest, which had earlier been portrayed as modernizing forces. Overall, however, history was not a priority for the Northern state because it was comfortable with its British identity, and so with British perspectives on the past.

By contrast, the promotion in the Free State of a sense of 'otherness' was a political imperative. Anxious to stress its revolutionary credentials, the Free State immediately showed itself keenly aware of the political possibilities of Irish history as a means of vindicating contemporary aspirations and values. The career of Eoin MacNeill, first Minister for Education in the Free State (1922-25), epitomised the close links which now developed between professional historians and the new political establishment: MacNeill had been professor of early and medieval Irish history at University College Dublin from 1909, was commander-in-chief of the Irish Volunteers at the time of the Easter Rising in 1916, and the author of *Phases of Irish history* (1919), a major work on Gaelic Ireland. The major difficulty for the Southern state, however, was that, despite the continuing rhetoric about its nationalist, Gaelic, Catholic, and republican values, by contrast with Northern Ireland's stress on its unionist, British, Protestant, and loyalist heritage, the historical continuities with a British past remained much more apparent. For instance, the Irish Free State/Éire/Ireland employs Gaelic terms for its officials and political institutions, so as to emphasize the link with a medieval Gaelic past; but these are little more than antiquarian window-dressing. *Taoiseach*, for instance, meant a Gaelic chief or lord, but in reality a prime minister; *Oireachtas* was an assembly, but really the houses of parliament; and *Dáil*, a meeting, is the house of commons. In reality, politically, both states are located firmly within the British tradition of parliamentary democracy. Both states are still governed by English administrative structures and by English common law, English is overwhelmingly the majority language, and even the land settlement remains unaltered.

Yet, what good is a revolution without substantial change? Naturally, it was the differences, rather than a common heritage, which the Free State chose to stress. From the 1920s in some respects Irish historiography developed in isolation from its English counterpart, with the result that from the Anglo-Norman period to 1603 what were often parallel developments have been made to look distinctively different. Essentially, the historical agenda was set by the state: historians are obliged to consider its political claims in explaining the making of modern Ireland – whether to uphold, to qualify, or to reject them as myths or propaganda. And these claims inevitably influenced the terminology and concepts which historians choose to use in order to explain the relationship between particular aspects of the past and the present – as we shall see. What makes the writing of Irish history so particularly difficult is that the persistence of civil unrest in the country and the polarization of political opinion have ensured that there is comparatively little shared historical sense of community between the island's different traditions. The competing claims represent mutually irreconcilable understandings of what were the major events of Irish history.

For instance, like the GDR, the Free State/Éire/Ireland lays claim to a tradition of popular resistance, apparent in the great dates most regularly commemorated by the state: 1798 (Wolfe Tone, and the attempt of Catholic and Presbyterian United Irishmen to establish a non-sectarian republic with Revolutionary French support), 1845-9 (the Great Famine), and 1916 (the Easter Rising which again attempted to establish an independent Irish Republic). By contrast, Northern Ireland's great dates are 1641 (the massacre of Protestants

at the start of the Ulster rising), 1690 (King William's victory at the battle of the Boyne over the Catholic King James) and 1912 (the signing of the Solemn League and Covenant against Irish Home Rule). In 1998, there was a controversial attempt, sponsored by the Republic's government, to include Ulster Presbyterians in a joint commemoration of the 200th anniversary of 1798. The following year, which was actually the 350th anniversary of the founding of the first Republic in Ireland, nothing happened at all – because this particular Republic had been established by Oliver Cromwell when he crushed the Catholic Confederation of Kilkenny in 1649, and so was not the right kind of republic. Nor was it a 'usable past' so far as the Northern tradition was concerned either, since it resulted in the abolition of the monarchy.

Behind these apparent differences, however, there remained striking similarities between the historiographies of Britain and Ireland. For instance, both groups of historians emphasize the vertical links over the horizontal: that is, they're much more concerned about how one gets from the past to (a version of) the present (what has been described as 'present-centred history') than about the contemporary concerns or preoccupations of England or Ireland in contemporary Europe c.1600. The English version of this was the rise of parliamentary democracy and the creation of empire – not because parliament was all that important in Tudor times, but because the English parliament was allegedly the mother of all representative institutions and the originator of western liberal values and democracy. And likewise, exploration and colonization were important, not because Tudor Englishmen had a particular penchant for them, but because they laid the foundations for the modern British empire – they helped the atlas to turn pink! Yet this version of English history is increasingly questioned now that the Empire is gone. The Irish version of the same thing is the rise of Catholic nationalism and heroic resistance to English rule from Silken Thomas to Wolfe Tone – again, very important in the context of post-Partition Ireland. Here, the Empire and imperialism were 'a bad thing'.

Second, the organizing principle of this nationalist history, we owe to a 19th-century German historian who is actually much better remembered for his other, more profitable, dictum about writing history 'wie es eigentlich gewesen ist' – Leopold von Ranke. He thought that history was about the rise of nations – each of which had its own appointed moment of destiny. Again, this is very much present-centred history, since those early modern developments which appeared to assist the unfolding of the present are presented as 'a good thing', and those people who hindered the happy outcome are dismissed as unenlightened reactionaries. Take, for instance, two early Tudor ruling magnates: the Percy earls of Northumberland are depicted as the archetypal 'overmighty subject' who resisted the extension of strong uniform and centralized Tudor government by harnessing the regionalism of the backward feudal north of England; and strong monarchical government was essential to the unity of the nation and the march of progress. By contrast, their contemporaries, the Fitzgerald, earls of Kildare [Plate 8], who were every bit as overmighty, allegedly helped to foster Irish senses of identity and to preserve Home Rule against the English. So their destruction three years earlier than Percy was 'a bad thing' in Irish historiography.

Yet we need to look much more carefully at what exactly historians have in mind by the rise of the nation and its national territory. First, the nation: in fact, it's the English or Irish nation of modern times which is meant, not the English or Irish of 1500. The

English of the history books are those who are born and raised in the historic kingdom of England, which is a modern definition. Likewise, the Irish are those born and raised in the island of Ireland, exactly in accordance with *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, the Irish constitution of 1937, which defines the national territory. Irish history is conventionally seen as the relationship between ‘the Irish people’ (which, in fact, means all those peoples, *Gaedhil*, English, Scots, and Vikings, whose descendants would later be classed as Irish because they lived in Ireland) and the island of Ireland. For the later middle ages, this involved the arbitrary relabelling of Ireland’s two medieval nations, Gaelic and English, as ‘Gaelic Irish’ and ‘Anglo-Irish’, a practice which perhaps reflects more the political imperatives of the Free State following partition – the need to consolidate a common front against the Unionists, by fashioning an Irish identity and ‘a usable past’ for the descendants of the medieval Englishry. This convention not only set those *Gaedhil* and *Gaill* living in Ireland apart from people of the same nation living outside ‘the national territory’, in Britain, but also misleadingly implied, in respect of the term ‘Gaelic Irish’ (which is tautological), that there were other Irish besides the *Gaedhil* in 1500. Further, it created space for a separate ‘Anglo-Irish’ or ‘middle nation’, distinct from the English of England, although in fact the term is both unhistorical and misleading – since a completely different population group of post-1534 English immigrants were described as ‘Anglo-Irish’ in the 18th century.

These conventions are, in fact, of little value in regard to identities c.1500. The English of c.1500 were the subjects of the crown of England, of free birth and English parentage (‘blood’), born in territories and regions under the allegiance of the English king: that included the English of Ireland, as well as those of England, Wales, and Calais. To call the English of Ireland ‘Irish’ was a serious insult because, apart from denying their national identity, it implied that they were uncivilized – savages living in mud huts in the mountains, like the Irish. Similarly, the ‘Irish’ of 1500 were the *Gaedhil*, a people distinguishable by language, law and culture living in Ireland and Scotland. The *Gaedhil* had a common origin myth and national history about the occupation and defence of Ireland, of which Scotland was an offshoot or ‘daughter’. The early modern period, however, saw medieval Gaeldom divided between separate Irish and Scottish polities and the *Gaedhil* of Ireland incorporated with the Old English into a newly-created kingdom of the Tudor-Stuart monarchy which was coextensive with the island of Ireland but English in law and culture. By 1670, the ‘Irish’ were the Catholic peoples of Ireland, whether of English or Gaelic speech and culture, the descendants of those medieval *Gaedhil* and *Gaill* inhabiting Ireland. Very significantly, however, these ‘Irish’ were called *Éireannaigh* (‘people of Ireland’, from the word *Éire*, meaning ‘Ireland’) in Gaelic, a quite different word, even though English retains the same word for both groups. Moreover, the Irish of Scotland were no longer Irish because they were neither Catholic nor lived in Ireland. In effect, what historians are doing here is studying Irishmen or Englishmen *in the making*, not Irishmen or Englishmen as they saw themselves at the time. Those ‘Irish’ who were not destined to remain Irish because they did not live in Ireland (the Irish of Scotland) are automatically excluded at the outset, and similarly the English of Ireland are excluded from English history. Thus, since the definitions of nations and national territories are modern ones, English and Irish nationalist histories inevitably make triumphant progress towards the present – the nations rise continuously until the tide of



Fig. 2

A 16th century map of Ireland: 'A new description of Eryn: Ireland, the British Isle', Antwerp 1573.

From: C. Moreland and D. Bannister, *Antique Maps* (3rd ed. London 1989), p. 191.

The use of language is an important political tool. In English, as in most other major languages of western Europe, "the British Isles" is an established geographical term denoting Britain, Ireland, and the smaller islands of the archipelago. As this map shows, its use with reference to Ireland also predated the Tudor conquest. In recent years, however, this usage has been contested in nationalist circles because of its unionist undertones.

history sweeps them into the present, even though this kind of nationalist history actually says very little about English or Irish identity c.1500.

In reality, both the English state and its 17th-century successor, the British multiple monarchy, were multi-national states. The Tudor monarchy, for instance, ruled four different peoples (English, Irish, French, Welsh), but the intrusion of modern definitions of nations and national territories fundamentally distorts the context of Tudor monarchical government. The English state is envisaged not as a multi-national state and multiple monarchy, but as a nation-state (and a very precocious one at that!). Yet, it cannot properly be so described after the conquest of Anglo-Saxon England by the dukes of Normandy in 1066 – Wales was added by conquest in the 12th and 13th centuries; half of Ireland in the 13th century, and the rest in the 16th century. Moreover, the dynastic union with Scotland in 1603 fundamentally altered its character. Yet if England was a nation-state, then the logical inference is that Wales and Ireland were colonies of an English empire (and later on, Scotland's relationship with England is seen as colonial too). Of course, there is some truth in this depiction of 'the Celtic fringe' as colonies, because Wales and Ireland were colonized by the English (though

Scotland wasn't); but to view them simply as colonies misconstrues the relationship between 'centre' and 'periphery' (to coin a more useful description of the relationship). English Ireland, for instance, was a largely self-governing lordship of the English crown till 1534; from 1541 it was elevated to the status of a second Tudor kingdom; and throughout our period it had its own parliament. Occasionally, it paid its way financially, but usually not; London, however, was never able to exploit it effectively as a colony, even though individual English and Scots did well there and the native *Gaedhil* lost most of their land. Thus, a much more useful way of looking at the development of the British Isles is in terms of multiple kingdoms, with a dominant (or 'core') kingdom (England) and some other kingdoms (Ireland and Scotland) where the king rarely resided. Yet technically, this is more difficult for historians because they are trained in these separate national historiographies.

A brief consideration may be worthwhile here of some of the historiographical obstacles to alternative perspectives. Few British historians have any command of Celtic languages, even though over half the geographical area of the British Isles was still predominantly Celtic-speaking in the early 16th century. Thus, an existing evidential bias in favour of metropolitan perspectives is reinforced on linguistic grounds. Yet language is a basic political tool; and elsewhere in Europe, historians of small nation-states frequently chose to write in their own national language, rather than that of their larger neighbour. The same tendency may be discerned in the Irish Free State, in which an attempt was made to reconstruct a literary standard for what now became the 'national' or 'the first official language' on the basis of the Gaelic dialects still spoken in remote parts of western Ireland. The new authorities in Dublin castle soon procured the necessary legislation to underpin the language: for instance, my own university on the edge of the Gaelic-speaking district was designated, under the so-called 1929 Act, to offer courses through the medium of Irish. Yet, few Irish historians choose to write in that language. Even among historians of the majority nationalist tradition, linguistic skills do not normally stretch to a working knowledge of the so-called 'national' or 'first official language', despite compulsory Irish in the schools. This is not immediately apparent from the standard work on later medieval Ireland, *A New History of Ireland, II. Medieval Ireland, 1169-1534* (Oxford 1987), in which Gaelic personal names in the English text are painstakingly rendered into forms of classical common Gaelic (here called 'classical Modern Irish') which are unrecognizable to those without this schoolboy Irish: Turlough O'Connor, for instance, becomes *Toirdhealbhach Ó Conchobhair* and St Laurence O'Toole masquerades as *Lorcán Ó Tuathail*. Another way of appropriating the past was to develop a separate historical vocabulary in English. In some cases, the differences simply reflect an unwillingness to look beyond the frontiers of national historiography: provincial councils in England are the same as presidencies in Ireland, for instance, and *kerne* in Ireland are the same as *caterans* in Scotland. In other cases, however, the new terminology reflects an attempt to privilege a particular context of explanation which best accords with the national agenda – in order to promote, as one scholar has described it, '[t]he kind of history-writing which sustains, energises and bonds a nation' rather than 'the nationally useless and undermining histories or pseudo-histories of Ireland written by Englishmen'¹. One good example of this has already been noted, the relabelling of Ireland's two medieval nations, Gaelic and English, as 'Gaelic Irish' and 'Anglo-Irish', even though English historians have nothing to say about the crown's Anglo-French, Anglo-Scottish, or Anglo-Welsh subjects in the other English territories. Another is the alleged 15th-century 'Home Rule' movement, or 'Anglo-Irish sep-

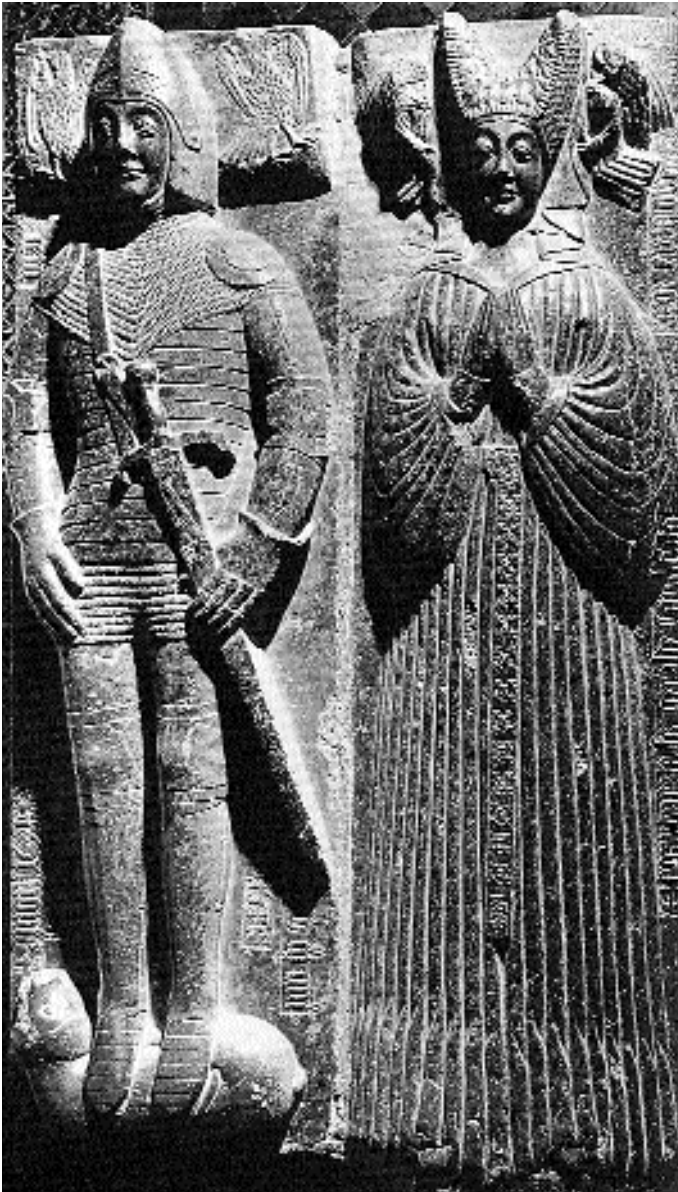


Fig. 3
The purported Unionist tradition: the tomb of Piers Butler, 8th earl of Ormond with his wife, Margaret Fitzgerald, in St Canice's Cathedral, Kilkenny. Her brother was the 9th earl of Kildare [Plate 8].

aratism', which in English historiography is known as 'self-government at the king's command'. Similarly, the preoccupation with what is described as 'gaelicisation' – what contemporary English officials described more generally as 'degeneracy' – particularizes to Ireland what was actually a commonplace of frontier societies, acculturation; and it also implies, quite wrongly, an increasing acceptance of the medieval English as *Gaedhil*. Discussions of medieval 'anglicisation' are, in marked contrast, terse or non-existent; and Scottish historians also have far less to say about 'gaelicisation', even though the same processes of acculturation occurred there. The fact is that many of these apparent differences are modern and

sa bliain 1444, 'u'roimhse an rí u'ídeanna... 1444, 'u'roimhse an rí u'ídeanna... 1444, 'u'roimhse an rí u'ídeanna...

Cathóin Mhara Niall

Cé gur cainteoir éirí n-éirí niall an Cathóin... Cé gur cainteoir éirí n-éirí niall an Cathóin... Cé gur cainteoir éirí n-éirí niall an Cathóin...

Di tairneastair an t-éireannach Home Rule... Di tairneastair an t-éireannach Home Rule... Di tairneastair an t-éireannach Home Rule...

oíro in tíre a éirí an rí, in éirí an rí... oíro in tíre a éirí an rí, in éirí an rí... oíro in tíre a éirí an rí, in éirí an rí...

Iarlaide Óuibinn

Mairtín is naclán is cainteoir, di cainteoir... Mairtín is naclán is cainteoir, di cainteoir... Mairtín is naclán is cainteoir, di cainteoir...

1 King's Connell, op. cit., II, 302-3. ... 1 King's Connell, op. cit., II, 302-3. ... 1 King's Connell, op. cit., II, 302-3. ...

2 Carr's Memoir, II, 302-4. ... 2 Carr's Memoir, II, 302-4. ... 2 Carr's Memoir, II, 302-4. ...

3 Phil. Lear. Butler, 'Lords of the Conquest', R.S.A.I. (1907-7). ... 3 Phil. Lear. Butler, 'Lords of the Conquest', R.S.A.I. (1907-7). ... 3 Phil. Lear. Butler, 'Lords of the Conquest', R.S.A.I. (1907-7). ...

Fig. 4 The Gaelic translation of Curtis's History of medieval Ireland. From: E. Cuirtéis, Stair na hÉireann sa mheánaois 1086-1513, Dublin 1956, p. 354. The Government Stationery Office published a Gaelic version of Curtis's History in 1956. Here is the page including the final paragraph of the extracts reproduced below in Source 2a, translated into Munster Irish and printed in Gaelic script. Unlike Scots Gaelic, Gaelic script was retained in Ireland until relatively recently, and a reform of the spelling system in 1948 further emphasized the difference between Ireland's "first national language" and other varieties of Gaelic outside "the national territory".

historiographical rather than contemporary and historical. They can be traced to the late 19th-century Irish devolution debate, the break-up of the Union, and the repudiation by Irish nationalists of British or unionist traditions in a bid to emphasize the uniqueness of Ireland's past.

If, however, English/British methods of state formation c.1300-1700 are considered, and also their presentation by historians, it is not difficult to see why state-centred perspectives are so unpopular among Irish historians. The English/British pattern of state formation exhibits strong centralizing tendencies: it included a highly visible and very ambitious programme to impose the norms and values of lowland England on the very different societies of the British upland zone. Yet, the traditional historiographical focus on the more 'progressive', better-documented, more easily-governed society in the south-east marginalizes developments elsewhere, particularly in the marcher societies of 'the Celtic fringe', so skewing the picture in favour of the peaceful assimilation of metropolitan values. In order

to understand the real nature of this programme of state formation, however, the traditional verdict of English/British historiography has to be balanced by the alternative verdict of Irish historians because, in Ireland, what was essentially the same programme of state formation led to disaster.

The key to the programme is the concept of 'English civility' – the idea that, because God was an Englishman, society in lowland England was automatically civilized. Thus, in so far as the other territories of the English crown fell short of these values, they were less civilized. Further, since peace, stability and society in lowland England reflected the excellence of English law and administrative structures, it followed that the imposition of English law and government on the benighted savages to the north and west would automatically promote English civility. In fact, what it did was to promote a wave of rebellions instead: it proved impossible to replicate lowland English society in Celtic pastoral uplands. Centralizing monarchy thus placed great strains on relations between centre and periphery, culminating in 1638 in what some contemporaries called The War of the Three Kingdoms (1638-52), of which the English Civil War (1642-49) was only a part. Overall, however, these changes created a highly centralized state with uniform structures, in which the outlying provinces were politically marginalized. Perhaps the main reason why the British state remained as stable as it did for as long as it did was the establishment of an empire, particularly from the late 17th century. After having been 'anglicized' and 'civilized', the nobles and gentry of 'the Celtic fringe' could be sent off to govern the colonies. Historiographically, however, there is a big difference between English and Irish presentations of the same developments: under the Tudors for instance, English plaudits for strong royal government after the 15th century civil war contrast with an Irish emphasis on native resistance to English expansion, in what is, essentially, history from the centre as opposed to history from the provinces.

Part of the reason for the present crisis of identity in the modern British state is the failure of historians and other political commentators to address adequately its multi-national, federal character. Very unusually, its official title – the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland – actually denies nationality. British passports say nothing about England, Scotland or Wales, although they do mention Ireland. It is only very recently, in the so-called New British History, that historians have begun to address the state's essential character as the product of a series of unions between different peoples and territories – 1536-43 between England and Wales, the 1603 Union of the Crowns between England and Scotland, the 1707 Anglo-Scottish union which created Great Britain, and the 1801 union between Britain and Ireland. Yet the New British History remains controversial and unpopular, and not only in Ireland: it is so much easier to divide the state up into its national components, and to chart the rise of the nation in separate Departments of Welsh History or Scottish History. The present crisis of British identity is thus hardly surprising when British historiography focuses on the distinctive features of each of four separate nations rather than on state formation and interaction between peoples and cultures in a multi-national state.

The importance of viewing developments holistically is underlined by a brief consideration of the nation and territory which was least well integrated into the British state. The modern Irish nation and the two Irish states are very clearly the product of British state formation. The national territory of the 1937 Irish Constitution, for instance, is that laid down by King Henry VIII for Ireland in 1541, not that of medieval Gaeldom extending into

Scotland; the same is true of his definition of the Irish as all the inhabitants of Ireland, *Gaedhil* and *Gaill* (but not the Irish of Scotland). King Henry envisaged a composite nation in a unitary kingdom of Ireland which was gradually realised by the Tudor conquest, and thereafter the kingdom of Ireland was an administrative unit of the British crown from 1603 to 1920 when, in a sense, partition restored the medieval two-nations division. After the Tudor conquest, in 1603, the instruments of British rule – counties and sheriffs, English law and juries – were accepted remarkably quickly. Latterly, even that quintessentially Irish body, The Gaelic Athletic Association, which attempted to cleanse Ireland of ‘foreign’ sports, was none the less organized on the basis of English counties; and politically, nationalist demands for an end to partition envisaged the return, not of Gaelic lordships, but of ‘the six counties’ established in the aftermath of the Tudor conquest. What was much less acceptable to nationalists was the constitutional relationship between Ireland and the other two kingdoms, and later the terms of Union imposed in 1801. Quite simply, the British state was too centralized, and Irish interests were marginalized. Having secured independence from Britain, however, the citizens of the Irish Free State and its successors continue to be governed by those same instruments of ‘British imperialism’ with which they had been oppressed for the previous 800 years.

NOTES

- ¹ D. Fennell, *Against revisionism*, in C. Brady (ed.), *Interpreting Irish history: the debate on historical revisionism 1938-1994*, Dublin 1994, p. 187.



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SOURCES

1. The character of Irish national history.

[Here are contrasting passages from two surveys of Irish history, both written by professional historians in 1921, in which they set out its aims. Dunlop's *Ireland* enjoyed modest success, but Hayden and Moonan's *Short history of the Irish people* was for over forty years a standard textbook in the Irish Free State and later the Republic. Mary Hayden was professor of modern Irish history at University College Dublin; Robert Dunlop was lecturer in Irish history at the University of Manchester. Here are the openings to the Preface of each work].

a) This work embodies the results of a varied experience in assisting students to acquire a clear view of the history of the development of the Irish People. Its only claim to originality is with regard to the manner of presentation, the method of arrangement, and the general treatment. It endeavours to unfold the story of a never-ceasing movement of living forces in which remote causes produce ultimate results, rather than to present a series of unconnected historical sketches. The study of our history is regarded as one of *dynamics* and not of *statics*.

While writing from a frankly national stand-point, the authors have made every effort to attain accuracy and avoid prejudice. Events are dealt with, as far as possible, in the spirit and atmosphere of their own times, but are judged by their final effects upon the destinies of the nation.

The leading events of contemporary history, especially such as exercised an influence on Irish affairs, have been, from time to time, touched on. The dates of some of the most important are given, distinguished from those of Irish history by the use of brackets, at the end of the various chapters.

A section in each period is devoted to the Literature of the time. While thus giving a synopsis in chronological order of the history of Irish Literature it is presented as one which was as fluctuating yet as continuous as that of the nation itself. Our literature is thus shown as the product, not of an isolated age or period, but of successive generations from the remote past down to the present day.

Extract from M. Hayden, G.A. Moonan, *A short history of the Irish people*, 2 vols., Dublin 1921, I, iii.

b) In his essay on "How History should be written" Lucian, after remarking that brevity, provided it be not due to insufficient information, is essential, proceeds, "but there is a brevity of matter as well as of expression. Some events require less extended treatment than others, while some may well be omitted altogether". It is in the spirit of Lucian's advice that I have written this little history. The book is primarily intended that they who run may read. But whether I have been successful in distinguishing between what is essential and what is not essential is of course open to question. Facts may be manipulated as easily as figures, and some writers are great adepts at extracting only those facts which tell for their theory. Fortunately, I have no theory to serve. Historically, Ireland is as remote to me as ancient Egypt. My only concern is to get at the truth. Every history must bear a personal tinge, and all that can reasonably be demanded from an his-

torian is that he should make himself as fully acquainted as possible with the facts and that he should be scrupulously honest in his use of them. I have endeavoured to satisfy both these canons; but if in anything I have written I have unconsciously erred I trust I may be forgiven. Particularly I hope no one will consider me to be wanting in sympathy for those who have fought to secure national independence. My use of such words as "rebel" and "rebellion" is not intended to convey either praise or blame, but merely to express opposition to constituted authority.

Extract from R. Dunlop, *Ireland from the earliest times to the present day*, Oxford 1922, pp. 3-4.

2. Appropriating the past for the Irish Free State: the Talbot-Ormond feud.

[Edmund Curtis was professor of modern history at Trinity College, Dublin. The 1st edition of his *History of Medieval Ireland* appeared in 1923, soon after the foundation of the Irish Free State. Here, he transposes the late 19th-century devolution debate back into the early 15th century, charting the triumph of the Anglo-Irish Home Rule Party over the Unionist Party. Despite occasional flashes of historical accuracy, Curtis's account of parliamentary parties, a Home Rule movement, Unionist opposition, and the 15th-century Anglo-Irish actually tells us far more about the political preoccupations of his own day. By way of comparison, Dunlop's summary account of the same dispute is appended from his short *History*. Dunlop was the last scholar to write a history of Ireland before the establishment of the Irish Free State: his book, dated Manchester 31 December 1921, appeared in 1922. An equally prolific scholar, he never achieved the recognition which Curtis enjoyed.]

a) Lancastrian constitutionalism, based on the Revolution of 1399 which overthrew Richard II and his absolutism, was now imitated by the Anglo-Irish. Like that of England it was in no sense democratic but based on the aristocracy and the gentry, the Church and the upper middle-class who sought to control the Government through Parliament. The Anglo-Irish secured the principle without much of the advantage, and it coincided with an ever-growing spirit of colonial or "Old English" patriotism which had arisen in the previous century. The smaller the Pale grew the greater was the Home Rule which it enjoyed ...

JOHN TALBOT, VICEROY, 1414-1419

Again a great viceroy was found in John Talbot, Lord Furnival, who landed at Dalkey on November 10th 1414, as King's lieutenant for six years with a yearly salary of four thousand marks paid from the English Exchequer. This "ancient fox and politique captain" as Hall calls him, made later Earl of Shrewsbury, was now thirty-six years of age, and was the born soldier to the end till he fell at Castillon forty years later.

A man of action, he set himself to crush the "degenerate English" and to clear the frontiers of the English land, and carried the royal banner far into Meath, Ossory, and Munster, so severely handling Irish and Normans in his expeditions that the annals of Ulster say, "from the time of Herod there came not anyone so wicked".

But most of Talbot's energies went into a long feud with the Anglo-Irish. He was a returned absentee on a large scale, his wife Maud Neville, who was descended from Theobald (II) de Verdun, being claimant to part of the Verdun lordship of Westmeath, and himself by descent from De Valence a claimant to the honour of Wexford. Returned absentees were never popular, and the Earl of Ormond headed a Patriot Party which asserted against this domineering viceroy the rule of Ireland by the Irish ...

ORMOND *versus* THE TALBOT PARTY

An undistinguished Leo or Lionel, Lord Welles, was Lieutenant from 1438 to 1442; then the Earl of Ormond, having been Deputy in 1441, became Lieutenant from that to 1444. A fresh attempt was made against the Earl, who was the acknowledged leader of the Anglo-Irish. Archbishop Talbot and Richard Wogan, the Chancellor, induced the parliament of Martinmas

1441 to transmit charges against him by Giles Thorndon, Treasurer of Ireland ...

Ormond, having been appointed Lieutenant in February 1442, the charges, returned under the Privy Seal, were tried before the Irish Council at Trim on June 5th 1442.

The Home Rule aristocracy was too strong for Talbot's Unionist faction. The Council repudiated the charges and denied that the Martinmas parliament ever desired them to be drawn up ...

THE HOME RULE TRIUMPH

Although the Talbot party was reinstated for a time during the years 1444-7 with the Archbishop as Justiciar, and then Furnival, made Earl of Shrewsbury in 1442, as Lieutenant, the Anglo-Irish nobles henceforth ruled Ireland, dominated Parliament, divided offices of state among them, and took into their hands the prerogatives of the absentee monarchy. From this time the dislike of the common Englishry for the "great chieftains of lineage" disappeared, and the mass of the Anglo-Irish accepted, or dared not oppose, the leadership of the great earls who, with an aristocracy behind them in which the Gaelic chiefs played no small part, built up a rampart of native rule which till 1534 no English government was able to break'.

Extracts from E. Curtis, *A history of medieval Ireland from 1086 to 1513*, 2nd ed., London 1938, pp. 288-9, 291-2, 301-2, 303.

b) *Discontent of the Colonists*. With the departure of Richard the colonists were once more left to their own devices. Richard's efforts to improve their condition had greatly won on their affections, and their feelings towards the new dynasty were consequently not over friendly. Neither Henry IV nor Henry V displayed much interest in Ireland. The government of the country was naturally entrusted to some member of their party. The Earl of Ormond, as a large Irish proprietor himself, was personally concerned in checking disorder, but neither the Scopes, nor Stanleys, nor Talbots were greatly interested in promoting the welfare of the country. As a rule their inability to maintain an adequate force for the repression of the Irish without resorting to the pernicious custom of quartering their soldiers on the country was continually bringing them into conflict with the Irish Parliament. Talbot in particular was a principal offender in this respect, and his resentment at the attitude taken up by the Earl of Ormond in the matter led to a fierce quarrel between them. To allay it the government was in 1423 transferred to the Earl of March. March's appointment was no doubt a contrivance by his enemies to remove him from the immediate vicinity of Henry VI; but it was hailed with satisfaction by the colonists, and the submission of O'Neill and other Irish chieftains seemed to promise a return to a better state of affairs. Unfortunately, March died suddenly of the plague, and with the reappointment of Talbot things reverted to their former condition. Of the period immediately following Talbot's reappointment (1427-49) it is sufficient to say that no matter to whom the government was entrusted we are confronted with the same tale of predatory raids of the Irish into the English districts, of futile punitive expeditions, of "black-rents" more willingly paid by the English farmers in the Marches to the Irish than the coyne and livery exacted from them for their defence by Government, of years of famine and recurrent visitations of the plague, leading to increased poverty, emigration, absenteeism, and the accelerated decline of the colony.

Extract from R. Dunlop, *Ireland from the earliest times to the present day*, Oxford 1922, pp. 51-2.

3. An Act for laws and justice to be administered in Wales, 1536 [usually known as The Welsh Act of Union].

Albeit the Dominion, Principality and Country of Wales justly and righteously is and ever hath been incorporated, annexed, united and subject to and under the Imperial Crown of this realm as a very member and joint of the same whereof the King's most Royal Majesty of Meer Droit

and very right is very Head, King, Lord and Ruler; yet, notwithstanding, because that in the same country, Principality and Dominion diverse Rights, Usages, Laws and Customs be far discrepant from the laws and customs of this realm, and also because that a people of the same dominion have and do daily use a speech nothing like nor consonant to the natural mother tongue used within this realm, some rude and ignorant people have made a distinction and diversity between the King's subjects of this realm and his subjects of the said Dominion and Principality of Wales whereby great discord, variance, debate, division, murmur and sedition hath grown between his said subjects; His Highness, therefore, of a singular zeal, love and favour that he beareth towards his subjects of his said dominion of Wales, minding and intending to reduce them to the perfect order, notice, and knowledge of his laws of this his realm, and utterly to extirp all and singular the sinister Usages and Customs differing from the same, and to bring the said subjects of this his realm, and of his said Dominion of Wales to an amicable concord and unity, hath by the deliberate advice, consent and agreement of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal and the Commons in this present parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, ordained, enacted and established. That his said country or Dominion of Wales shall be, stand and continue for ever from henceforth incorporated, united and annexed to and with this his realm of England; and that all and singular person and persons, born or to be born in the said Principality, country or Dominion of Wales, shall have, enjoy and inherit all and singular freedoms, liberties, rights, privileges and laws within this his realm and other the King's Dominions, as other the King's subjects naturally born within the same have, enjoy and inherit.

Printed from J.G. Jones, *Wales and the Tudor state: government, religious change and the social*



SEE PLATE 8