

History

Lesson 4 of an enquiry of 4 lessons

Internal colonialism in Ireland

Enquiry: What did British colonialism look like in the nineteenth century?

Mr Bengier



The colonisation of Ireland

The English had had some involvement in Ireland since the 11th century. However, it was under the Tudors in the 16th century, starting with Henry VIII, that significant English efforts began to impose direct rule and influence over Ireland. Even though the Irish people were almost all Catholic, the Tudors made Protestantism the official religion of the country. They encouraged thousands of Protestants to move to Ireland from England and Scotland and settle there, taking land away from Irish Catholics. Over the next two centuries, through wars and violence, Protestants secured control over more and more land. By the eighteenth century, Ireland was controlled by what was known as the 'Protestant **Ascendancy**'. Even though most people in Ireland were Catholic, Protestants dominated Irish politics and owned most of Ireland's land. Laws were passed that prevented Catholic people from holding much political power in the Irish government.



Union and exclusion

After an Irish rebellion in 1798, Britain decided that a new solution was required in Ireland. In 1801, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland was formed. Ireland was now officially part of the United Kingdom. Irish people could vote for Irish Members of Parliament (MPs) who would sit in Parliament as equals with British MPs. However, it was not as simple with this. Most Irish people were still not treated as equals. Firstly, until 1828, Irish Catholics were banned from being MPs. Even after 1828, when Catholics were allowed to be MPs, there were still far more Protestant Irish MPs, even though most Irish people were Catholic. Secondly, Ireland was still treated like a colony in important ways. For example, there was a colonial-style Viceroy who had power in Ireland (remember, India also had Viceroy). As a result, many Irish people wanted Home Rule - to be able to rule themselves, rather than being part of the United Kingdom.



Famine and opportunity

Between 1845 and 1850, Ireland suffered a devastating famine. Around 1 million people died and another 2 million people left Ireland. The famine was to a large extent the product of extreme inequalities in Irish society. A small number of wealthy, mostly Protestant, landowners owned most of the land; while Ireland's lower classes of mainly Catholic peasants lived in poverty. The famine was made worse by the response of the British government. One of the main forms of help offered was work relief - a strategy that we have already encountered being used by the British government in India in response to famines there in the late nineteenth century. Many starving Irish people died while working out in the cold of winter in return for small amounts of money. The British government's poor response to the famine seemed to suggest that Britain did not view Ireland as an equal part of the UK. Nevertheless, some Irish people took advantage of opportunities that came from being part of the United Kingdom and the British Empire. Members of Ireland's growing middle classes, for example, pursued careers as colonial civil servants and officials. Others settled in British colonies, such as Australia, in search of opportunities.



Colonised and coloniser

Many in Britain did not show much respect towards Irish culture and Irish people. They believed that Irish society was 'backward', and needed to be 'civilised' by British influence. One interesting example of British attempts to 'civilise' Irish people was the introduction of British sports. The British believed that sports like cricket, football, tennis and rugby taught colonised peoples 'British values' of fair play, team spirit and following a clear set of rules. Irish people enjoyed these new sports. However, they also promoted traditional Irish sports, such as Gaelic football, as a form of resistance to British colonial influence. And yet, many Irish people also played a large role in forcing British colonialism upon peoples throughout the British Empire, as colonial officials and as settlers in colonies like Australia. The Irish place in British colonialism was therefore complex, with different Irish people - or even the same individual - both supporting and opposing, feeling a part of and separate from British colonialism. John Pope-Hennessy, Governor of Mauritius, is perhaps one example of such contradictions.



Comprehension Questions

1. What religion was followed by Governor John Pope-Hennessy?
2. Which English monarchs first started to introduce Protestant power and influence in Ireland?
3. What is meant by Irish Home Rule?
4. What devastating event occurred in Ireland between 1845 and 1850?
5. In what ways were Irish people involved in British colonialism throughout the British Empire?



Enquiry: What did British colonialism look like in the nineteenth century?

	Political dominance	Economic exploitation	Culturalism and racism	Resistance
India				
Australia				
Ireland				

- Viceroy/Governors
- Famine
- Reserves
- Distant rule
- Indigo riots
- Home Rule
- UK Parliament
- Frontier wars
- Gaelic football
- Protestant Ascendancy
- Tea plantations
- Darul Uloom
- Punjab National Bank
- Self-government



Glossary

Ascendancy - being in a position of dominant power

