

What is 'decolonisation'?

Enquiry: Who 'decolonised' in the twentieth century?

Ms Apps



‘Decolonising’ the British Empire

In the years from 1914 - 1947 the British government faced a series of protests and rebellions throughout the British Empire inspired largely by growing **nationalist** movements.

Ireland was one of the first areas to gain independence from Britain. Violence (both Irish and British) was significant to the process of gaining independence in Ireland.



Ireland in the British Empire

The English crown had attempted to control Ireland from the time of the Normans. Control of Ireland was consolidated in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries. The **Irish Gaelic** language was banned and a **Protestant Ascendancy** of Protestant settlers came to control the island at the expense of the largely Catholic population. Rebellions against British (but really English) rule were frequent. Throughout the nineteenth-century a strong campaign for **Home Rule** was established.



Home Rule

Home Rule was a campaign to establish a parliament in Ireland in Dublin to deal with Irish affairs. This would allow independence, without fully breaking with Britain.

Home Rule was opposed by the Protestant minority in the north of Ireland in Ulster who believed that '**Home Rule**' would become '**Rome Rule**'. In a nutshell, Home Rule would leave them voiceless in a country that was mainly Catholic. The British Government introduced a bill to make **Home Rule** a reality in 1912. In reaction the Ulster Volunteers were set up. These were men willing to fight to maintain their unity with Britain and the Empire.



The Easter Rising

In reaction to the creation of the **Ulster Volunteers** the **Irish Volunteers** were set up in 1915. The Irish Volunteers were a **nationalist** group who wished for **Home Rule** and then independence from Britain.

With the outbreak of WWI in 1914, Home Rule was delayed again. Frustrated, a group of nationalist leaders and nationalist organisations staged an armed rebellion against British rule in Ireland during the week of Easter in 1916. It became known as the 'Easter Rising'. They believed violence was the only way to achieve independence.



One of the leaders of the Rising was Padraig Pearse, a headmaster who had campaigned for the revival of the lost Irish language **Gaelic**.

During the Rising key points in Ireland's capital of Dublin were taken and fighting ensued between the Irish forces and the British Army. Ireland was declared by the rebels to be a **Republic**, free from British rule.

Proclamations of this were pasted outside of the rebel headquarters at the General Post Office.



Aftermath and Independence

Modern historians have argued that before 1916, many of the people of Ireland were quite happy to be within the British Empire. However the harsh treatment of Easter Rising leaders and mass imprisonments in the aftermath of the Rebellion changed this.

From 1919 onwards Irish **nationalists** fought a war of Independence against the British police, troops and spies in Ireland. The men involved became known as the Irish Republican Army (IRA). The fighting on both sides was brutal. The IRA killed men in their beds in early morning attacks and the British troops (the 'Black and Tans') became legendary for the torture of both IRA men and innocent Irish people.



After nearly two years of intermittent bloodshed in July 1921 a truce was called. Ireland was **partitioned**. In the south the Irish Free State was created, whilst Northern Ireland remained part of Britain.

A civil war would ensue between Republicans unhappy with the loss of Northern Ireland to the British. Today, Northern Ireland still remains part of Britain.



Glossary

Gaelic - The ancient Irish language. It had been banned by the English and was dying out by the nineteenth-century.

Home Rule - The campaign for a parliament in Dublin, Ireland.

Nationalist - A person strongly pro the rights of people of their country.

Protestant Ascendancy - The name given to the Protestants in Ireland who came to lead the island following the stripping of the rights of Irish Catholics.

Irish Volunteers - Volunteer soldiers pro-independence.

Partitioned - Divided.

Ulster Volunteers - Volunteer soldiers pro-remaining in Britain.



Comprehension Questions

1. What was Home Rule?

Sentence starter: Home Rule was...

2. Why did people in Ulster call Home Rule 'Rome Rule'?

3. What happened in Easter, 1916?

4. Did the Easter Rising end violence in Ireland?

5. Challenge: What did partition do to the island of Ireland?

