

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 336: Ireland: Celts, Conquest and Cromwell

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Publoch Neheron, the provisional government of the Irish Republic to the people of Ireland.

Irish men and Irish women, in the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood.

Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for freedom.

Having organised and trained her manhood through her secret revolutionary organisation, the Irish Republican Brotherhood,

and through her open military organisations, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, having patiently perfected her discipline, having resolutely waited for the right moment to reveal itself,

she now seizes that moment and supported by her exiled children in America and by gallant allies in Europe,

but relying in the first on her own strength, she strikes in full confidence of victory.

We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies to be sovereign and indefeasible.

The long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government has not extinguished the right, nor can it ever be extinguished,

except by the destruction of the Irish people. In every generation, the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty.

Six times during the past 300 years, they have asserted it in arms.

Standing on that fundamental right, and again asserting it in arms in the face of the world,

we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a sovereign independent state,

and we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades in arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare and of its exaltation among the nations.

The Irish Republic is entitled to and hereby claims the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman.

The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens,

and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and all of its parts,

cherishing all the children of the nation equally and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.

So that, ladies and gentlemen, is Professor Paul Rouse of University College Dublin, reading the proclamation of the Irish Republic delivered during the Easter Rising.

And Tom, two things strike me there. One is this is the earliest in rest is history history that we've ever had a guest in an episode.

Normally we leave them waiting for about 20 minutes before we bring them on.

And secondly, I think it's the most impassioned guest we've ever had, because Paul, as you got into that,

you've got going and going and going. I can see you kind of you were feeling it there at the end.

It's an amazing piece of writing, a seminal moment really in modern Irish history.

When Patrick Pierce walked out of the building we're in here, the general post office in the middle of

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Dublin and what was Sackville Street when he walked out on Easter Monday, 1916, through the doors and stood afternoon in the middle of the street and proclaimed an Irish Republic. Yeah. And we are actually in the GPO now being welcomed very warmly by Angus Lafferty. And it's amazing to be an incredible museum, kind of wonderful display and statue marking the very spot where Patrick Pierce stepped out.

And Dominic, today's subject is really the road to the Easter Rising.

So we are going to do an episode on the rising itself, but we are going to go all the way back to the beginnings of the Anglo-Irish.

And unusually for the rest of this history, we decided that as two English public schoolboys, we probably won the ideal people to...

So Paul, we're delighted to have you on the show. Welcome to the rest of this history.

I'm delighted to be here. I'm, as you know, a fan of the show and I've listened to...

You nearly broke me in the World Cup. I haven't caught up since then, but I'm a long-term listener. Oh, brilliant.

So Paul, you wanted to start with that because you want to use that as the jumping off point to look back at the long and tangled histories of Britain and Ireland.

And I suppose, I mean, one fascinating aspect of this is that this is obviously...

I mean, this is Irish history. Obviously, it's taught in Irish schools.

But we in Britain, I think it's fair to say, isn't it, Tom, that we are, by Irish standards, extraordinarily ignorant of this story.

What I knew, basically, of the Easter Rising and of the build-up to it, I got not from history, but from literature, from reading James Joyce, WB Yates, both of whose writings are kind of saturated with all this stuff.

But I don't think I was ever taught it in the history class.

No, me neither. We never studied Irish history at school at all. Not one Iota.

And I know Paul, you find that absolutely bizarre that the British people don't study this.

I find it extraordinary that the events of a particular period in time, if we just take the events of the Irish Revolution, of the years between 1912 and 1922, 1923,

they define the boundaries of the United Kingdom as currently they stand.

It is extraordinary to me that, presumably, you didn't study John Redmond then.

You don't know John Redmond's role in the people's budgets and in the parliament act and everything that came from that.

I think by the age of 18, I'd never heard the words John Redmond absent or seen them written down.

Incredibly, because obviously, I mean, it had a huge impact on recent British history first through the Troubles, but then more recently through all the kind of shenanigans around Brexit.

And a lot of the discussion about should there be a border on the island of Ireland is going back to the events and the issues and the tragedies that marked the Irish Revolution.

It was really interesting to be in Ireland and to look at the Irish reaction to English knowledge and British knowledge in general of Irish history at that time.

And there was quite a lot of commentary about, there was a famous Channel 4 clip, for example, where it was a Vox Pop.

And normally I hate Vox Pops, but this one was actually quite funny.

A reporter went out with a map of Ireland and asked sundry people to draw the border where the border was between north and south.

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And it was really comical.

But to me, it was run through with a smugness because the idea was, oh, the British don't know Irish history.

But I would seriously question what Irish people know about Irish history.

I think in Ireland, it's understood as propaganda, like history is painted in stripes of green and orange.

And there's a cartoon history almost created of goodies and baddies.

And of course, the beauty of history lies in its complexities and its contradictions and the absurdities of things that happens.

And, you know, I always think when you get somebody who presents you history neatly wrapped up in a box, it just makes me run with fright from it because it ordinarily is crafted in a way that is just simply wrong.

Yeah, but I mean, history is obviously incredibly important in the Irish Revolution.

It's the way that the revolutionaries understand Irish history and the history of Ireland's relationship to Britain that is a kind of absolutely fundamental motor in what happens.

And so the way that the kind of 800 years as its cast.

So let me just read a 19th century Irish revolutionary called John O'Leary said if the English had not come to Ireland and if they had not stayed there and done all the evil so many of them now allow, they have been doing all along.

There would have been no Phenianism.

So Phenianism is Irish Republicanism.

Yeah, named after the Fiana Aaron.

Is that right?

The kind of the band of warriors in back in mythological time.

Tom Apsey hasn't been preparing that pronunciation, by the way.

I was rehearsing this before we start recording, ladies and gentlemen.

So that sense summed up in that this idea of there being a kind of mythical state where Ireland was free and everyone was kind of bands of warriors.

And then the English come and it's kind of associated with a Norman adventurer called Strongbow.

Is that right?

So who is Strongbow?

Yeah, so I'll come at that slightly differently, but I will get to Strongbow very quickly.

You have to think about when Pierce walked outside the GPO here, he had no popular support.

So he was one of fewer than 2000 people who rose in rebellion out of an island which had more than 4 million people living on it.

So if you don't have support of the people, where do you look for vindication of what you do?

So for Pierce and the people who went out in revolution, Ireland was not so much people.

It was an idea.

It was a place, but it was also a history.

And what they sought to do was to walk themselves into that history and to become part of the history.

They used it for their own ends, but they also now made themselves part of it.

They were the next generation to rise.

But Pierce is, I mean, his great enthusiasm is the Irish language.

And Irish mythology.

And Irish mythology.

And so essentially there's a sense that he doesn't just want to get rid of British rule.

He wants to get rid of British cultural influence as well.

Is that right?

What does he want?

Does he want to go back to a kind of, you know, this mythic state that existed before the English came?

What's the kind of the plan there?

I should revise what I say about Pierce there.

I think Pierce was first and foremost an educationalist.

He was a magnificent teacher who was modern in ways that are, I'd say in terms of bilingualism.

Pierce went to Belgium to see how they taught bilingually.

He was a French speaker.

He went and looked at all of that stuff.

So he was a very modern man in one way.

But in the words of Aide de Blacombe, a propagandist for Sinn Féin later,

that world which they sought to create through an independent Irish state was to be a medieval fragment in a modern world.

And that to me sums up some of the ideas.

So when they're creating this history, they're creating it at a time when the power and prestige of the British Empire is at its peak.

It's not just military power here.

And it's not just political power.

And it's not just economic power, but it's cultural power.

And their world is suffused with the English language, with English books, with English newspapers, English music culture, all here.

English sport.

English sport pushed all around cricket, the biggest game, Tom, in Ireland in the 1870s.

So that's the world that's there.

And so they look to history.

Wasn't there someone who said that the Irish revolutionaries were the most conservative revolutionaries of all time?

I'm paraphrasing this.

Yeah, it's absolutely true that that is said.

I find that a little bit of an unfortunate statement because I don't think those two words really go together.

And I think you can adopt a revolutionary position.

You can do a revolutionary act in support of a moderate position.

But the act of revolution is itself really, really important.

So let's get back to the sort of deep history.

So they talked about 800 years.

I mean, we're talking about their sense of history and their sense of Ireland.

They talk about 800 years in the proclamation and their sense of a long history of oppression,

which is, I'm guessing, the sense that most of our listeners will bring to this podcast.

This idea that the island has been under the English, I mean, specifically English.

But it's complicated.

Because when the barons are coming over, Strongbow and Coe, I mean, they're not actually English. So where should we kick off this culture?

Well, where you start, any history story, where you end, as you know, is exceptionally difficult.

Do we start it with the story of the first people who arrived in Ireland 10,000 years ago?

Or do we go to Trahulah, Dunigal with the rock that archaeologists have dated 17 million years ago?

Or do we come forward to the cage of fields that kind of old farm structure 6,000 years ago and down along the coast of Mayo?

Do we talk about the Vikings in the 1790s?

The founders of Dublin.

Exactly.

And so where do you start?

I mean, so just on that point, the Vikings, right?

If you want to, I mean, we're talking about that.

At that point, what are Ireland and England are quite closely intertwined, aren't they?

I mean, there are kingdoms across both islands.

So the king of Dublin is also the king of York.

Yes.

And for 300 years, Viking culture clearly makes modern towns in Ireland.

It has a huge press across the countryside.

There's intermarriage and there's interrelation with Irish people everywhere.

There's trade and commerce and language shared.

And the marks of that are still here in road structures that you can see from that period.

The forwarding of the Liffey, for example, and the way the roads come to it in Dublin is clearly a remnant of that period.

So the mark of Viking impress in some of the words and language and names are still visible in Dublin today.

Yeah.

But specifically this 800 years idea and this figure of strong bow.

Is he English?

Who is he?

What's he doing coming here?

Okay.

So 800 years is thrown around from 1969 to start the Troubles, which very conveniently is the 800 years back to 1169, which is the arrival of these lords, the Fitzsievens, the Fitzgeralds and the Deburgs, who come to Ireland in 1169.

They're followed the following year by strong bow, who's the Earl of Pembroke, Richard Fitzgillbert. And they're there, invited to come over by a local lord.

And I was really struck when Martin Johns was on here talking about Wales, about lords being invited into different places to be part of a local conflict.

But what matters here is the following year, 1171.

King Henry II came over because he could see the power that was developing through these lords

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who had come to Ireland and were now taking hold.
And he knew he was uncertain in his own position at the time.
So he came to Dublin, spent six months in Ireland with 4,000 foot soldiers and 500 knights, and basically took Dublin, Wexford, Watford as his royal domain.
And he let his English barons or Norman Barclays, whatever name you want to put them.
Yeah, because it's complex, isn't it?
Because it doesn't matter the idea that it's just continuously English.
They refer to themselves as English.
Tom Barclays really clear about this in his long history of Ireland, that they call themselves English at this period.
And they were giving lands around that area.
But there was another power in the land still there.
And this too matters.
It's Rurio Coher who's king of Connacht.
So the Gaelic lords are left in place, or the Gaelic chieftains are left in place in certain places.
This is an absolutely incomplete conquest.
In fact, to call it conquest at all is too much.
Right.
These are rival powers across the land.
And it changes over time.
So you see in 1204, King John comes back.
And he, 1204 is Dublin Castle, the seat of British inverted commas, British stroke, English rule in Ireland over the next 700 years and longer.
And Paul, just to clarify for some of our listeners, at this point, there is no, as it were, united Irish kingdom.
And there never has been.
Am I right?
Or it's been much more of a patchwork.
Yeah.
And this is where it gets complicated and it's interesting.
There is a high king and there's the place of Tara and there's all of that.
But these are moving.
This is moving parts.
And in the construction of a history in the 19th century, late 19th and early 20th century, there's this imagination that everything was peaceful and thriving and it was ideal.
And the Irish did things like, for example, it was said the Irish invented chess and gave to the world and that the 32 pieces of the chess set were actually modeled on the 32 counties of Ireland.
I'm a tiny bit skeptical about that.
And there is a book called How the Irish Invented Chess Exclamation Mark.
It may not be one to go with.
But on top of that, there's this idea that the Irish Talchon Games, which were a real event of athletics and horse racing and all that.
According to Irish Nationalists, T. H. Nally actually wrote this in a book called The Anarch Talchon.
T. H. Nally was a playwright who had a play about to be staged on the Abbey Theatre on Easter

Monday, 1916.

It was never staged.

How unlucky.

How unlucky was that man?

But he wrote a book on the Anarch Talchon, which said that these old games of the Irish were the inspiration of the Greek Olympics.

Right.

And so, but this is what people, these people weren't stupid.

They weren't stupid when they said these things.

They're creating a mythology and a history and a counterpoint to British imperial culture.

People are always doing that.

I mean, so we've talked about this actually in the episode we did on British coronations, that the stone of scone is supposed to have originally stood at Tara.

And the High Kings of Ireland be crowned on it and to have been brought by Scotter, who was variously the daughter of Pharaoh or the daughter of the King of Israel or whatever.

So this idea of constructing strange backstories has been a kind of continuous process.

I mean, not just your Irish history, through all the history, people are endlessly doing it.

It's the way it works.

And what the Irish Nationalists did have, though, is they had something different than any other nation had at that point.

They had an old vernacular literature written in early Irish, which was written between the 7th century and the 17th century.

Written in Irish monasteries, which were stories of the annals of Ireland, had the old laws included, had these stories, this kind of heroic literature written into it, written in a different language.

Yeah.

And that really matters because it spoke to the idea of an ancient civilization and antiquity which predates the arrival of Strongbow and King Henry II.

And indeed Christianity.

So it's a pre-Christian culture.

But then you have the overlay of Christian culture.

So the saints of early Ireland are incredibly powerful.

I mean, they go to England, they go to France, they...

Yeah, it's Iona.

It's St. Columba.

Yeah.

It's the Western Isles.

It's everything.

So hence, you know, how the Irish saved civilization.

Another book.

Yeah, another book.

So that idea as well.

And that becomes important.

So throughout the Middle Ages, there is an English outpost in Dublin, which sort of the pale...

Beyond the pale.

Beyond the pale.

The phrase is what it comes from.

The pale remains Irish.

And the English hold on.

And they, you know, occasionally they worry that they're going to be absorbed into Irish culture.

And so they kind of notorious statutes of Kilkenny, which tries to impose specifically English identity on the English colonists.

They have to speak English.

They ban Irish entertainers.

So Graham Norton would have been banned.

But the English are there.

But then what complicates the issue further is the fact that in the 16th century, the English and indeed the Scots turned Protestant.

Yes.

And the Irish don't.

So just before we come to that, Paul, just one last word on the Middle Ages, if I may.

At that point, is it reasonable to talk about English oppression?

So in other words, Strongbow and his descendants and the Norman Barons and then the English who were in Dublin and all that stuff is this genuinely part of a long history of the English boot, as it were.

Or at that point, is this just absolutely standard medieval stuff?

I mean, of course, the English are fighting the hundredies war and they're doing all these other things.

And, you know, Europe is a violent place.

Is this unusual at that point?

I don't think it's unusual.

I think it's part of a wider platform, but it is unique onto Ireland, what happens in Ireland.

And that's what how it is understood.

Now, we have to be clear about this.

There was a pale between what was the English lordship.

There were the Anglo-Norman or English or Norman or who had their lordships around the place who were their own power.

And then you had the Gaelic chiefs that we've said, but culture doesn't work in a way that there are silos between people.

The line of the pale was easily traversed.

There was Irish spoken on both sides of that pale.

So hence the statues of Kilkenny.

Exactly.

There were games played across the pale and that's why the statues are brought in.

But this is a waxing and waning of English power.

Now, I think it really matters, though, that if you look at it, no English king came back to Ireland for more than 200 years.

So that tells you that Ireland didn't really matter.

So Richard II came back in 1394.

It didn't work out well for him.

It didn't work out great.

But if you go back before that, it's King John.

You go after Richard II, it is not till the end of the 17th century that James and William come to Ireland and Ireland becomes a theatre of European war.

So this is not central to what is happening in England.

And to people in Ireland at that point, would they have a consciousness of being oppressed?

I don't think it works like that.

I think it depends on who you are.

I think if you've lost, if you don't have power, it doesn't matter if your power, if you're not important, if your power is held by a Gaelic chieftain or if it's held by an English lord or an Anglo-Irish lord, you don't have power.

What does matter, however, is the manner in which the Irish six checker was plundered by English kings.

So for example, you have Henry III taking all the monies from the Irish six checker to fund his wars in France and in the Middle East.

So that matters.

So what's the constitutional arrangement then?

So is the English crown claiming the whole island of Ireland?

No, it claims its lordship.

It claims a lordship of Ireland.

So when does the English crown claim the whole of Ireland?

If you look at it, you get a transformation under Henry VIII in the 1540s when his royal title in 1541 was changed from Lord of Ireland to King of Ireland.

And so is this bundled in with the religious reformation that's going on?

It's part of the reformation.

And then we move from reformation into land, into conquest of land, and you get land and religion and identity.

So it's really under the Tudors.

The English crown claims the kingship of Ireland and also England becomes Protestant and so that therefore sharpens religious differences between Britain and Ireland.

Yes, and it's a product of a span of 150 years, the 1540s and the 1690s.

This increasing encroachment, its conquest, its colonization, and it's an attempt at reformation.

So you say an attempt at reformation.

So let's just go with that for a second, because that's the thing that kind of looms very large, obviously the religious issue.

Why no reformation in Ireland?

I mean, that's, you know, Scotland, Wales.

The one part of the Tudor lands where the reformation fails.

I was about to say what went wrong, but you wouldn't say it that way.

I'm an atheist, I can take it either ways.

Oh, but Catholic or Protestant?

The ultimate Irish question.

But in why the reformation failed in Ireland, you will not be surprised to know that there are long

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extensive and very detailed disputes between historians as to why precisely the reformation failed in Ireland.

There is an argument that the Irish church was not quite as venal as church is everywhere.

So therefore it didn't need to be reformed quite as well.

But to me, when you read the material from the period, when you go back and you look at everything, it's the manner in which religion is so tight.

It's so tight to identity, but it's then so tight to conquest.

And I think it is difficult.

And I know, Tom, that this is the point that you make repeatedly the extent to which people struggle to understand just quite how central religion was to identity in that period.

So land ownership is wealth.

Right.

If you put in a series of laws, ultimately which tie land ownership to religion.

Yeah.

If you have position like place and all around this, you have England at war with France at war with Spain at various junctures and trying to keep the back door shut.

Because of the view that Catholic France or Catholic Spain will ally with the Catholics in Ireland who are of not just uncertain loyalty, who are absolutely disloyal when it comes to religion.

Similarly, for the Irish, the fact that they suddenly find themselves constitutionally subordinate to a foreign crown and that that foreign crown is religiously different must sharpen their sense of being Catholic rather than Protestant.

And so the two kind of go together.

It works together.

And if you ask the question about that sense of oppression and that sense of exclusion, and you can see it through these years and you can see it through the exclusion from positions of privilege and of political power.

You can see it through the loss of economic power.

You can see it through a long dispossession of land.

Is it also that, am I right in thinking, now this may be my ignorance.

So absolutely correct me if I'm wrong.

Am I right in thinking that Protestantism in England, there are people with links with the continents.

There are traders, merchant, the book trade and so on.

You know, it spreads through mercantile, ambitious, aspirational kind of town people.

Am I right in thinking that in Ireland there will be fewer towns and that is also surely, you know, it's a much more rural economy.

And so for that reason, it's harder for Protestantism to spread.

There's maybe less of a book trade.

There are less of the urban environments in which ideas can be exchanged and so on.

Yes.

I think that really matters.

And the second point that I would title that is the idea of language and the Irish language spoken across a large swathe of the population, many of whom remain Catholic.

No preachers coming from England who are associated with the people who took the land from them.

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Unable to.

And the Book of Common Prayer is only belatedly translated into Irish, which matters too.

So you have language as well at issue.

So Paul, you mentioned colonization.

So that is also a part of what happens in the Tudor period and into the Stuart period.

I think we should take a break at this point.

When we come back, perhaps we could talk about specifically the settlement of Protestants in Ireland.

Because of course, this will have a seismic impact on subsequent Irish and indeed British history.

Welcome back to the rest of this history.

We are looking at 800 years of Irish history and specifically Ireland's relationship to England, but also Paul to Scotland.

So the Scots are also involved in the process of colonization, which happens towards the end of the 16th century.

And so therefore, because the part of Ireland that is closest to Scotland is Ulster, it's Ulster that is the particular focus for settlement and colonization by Protestants.

So just talk us through a bit about what happens there.

Okay, so this is where we get into the enduring divides of Ireland and how it extends beyond politics and political power, economic power.

It ties a political power and economic power into it, but it's also cultural power and ideas of identity with religion run through them.

It is about a reformation which fails, but it's also about land ownership at its core and it's about security.

What I mean by security is this idea that one of the ideas of planting Ireland, that is to say, taking land, dispossessing people who own it and giving it to settlers, is the idea of making Ireland safe, that it is no longer a threat to the Crown.

Because this will become the model for the settlement of plantations in the New World as well.

Yes, and it really matters that it began in the 1560s, 1570s, into the 1690s, two-thirds of the land of Ireland was taken from natives and given to settlers.

So this is dispossession on an epic scale and there are about 100,000 such settlers who come from England and Scotland.

Mainly Scotland or mainly?

No, a mix between the two, but there's also land given to soldiers who fight in the armies and there's land given to people who are in Ireland already

and who are given land, which is if they are of certain loyalty to the Crown.

In the course of this, the landscape of Ireland was fundamentally changed.

The language of Ireland began to significantly changed and the plantations ultimately were about two things, as well as religion.

They were about security and about profit and that matters.

And in their form, they began with the League's awfully plantation, awfully being the cradle of civilization,

enduringly, you may guess where I'm from, in the 1570s, which largely failed.

It was land taken from the O'Connor's on the O'mores, but it didn't really work.

There was then an attempt after a Desmond rebellion against English rule in the 1590s.

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There was an attempt to settle Munster, which itself largely failed.
But then we get the Ulster plantations, both private plantations where people came over and plantations by the Crown.
So you said about security.
So there's obviously no coincidence that this is the point.
What is it? You said 1560s, 1570s.
This is the point when, you know, Elizabeth I is extremely anxious about the threat from Catholic Spain.
And presumably that plays a huge part in the mentality of the authorities.
They think a Spanish landing or whatever it might be, a Spanish fermented rebellion in Ireland, might then spread to England.
And actually, now that I think about it, I mean, there is a history of people.
I mean, I don't know, your Lambert Simnals and your Perkin Warbecks and all these characters.
Something starts in Dublin and then it comes to, I mean, they must have the sort of Henry VII landing at Milford Haven in Wales
and then marching to England.
That must be on their minds the whole time, is it?
Oh, it's not for no reason that there are worries about security in all of this.
And you can see it later.
The Spanish Armada, 1588, it's coming up the west coast of Ireland.
You see it later, as late as the 1790s when the French are in the bay as the ballad goes.
Well, 1916.
1916 again, with Germans who don't send men, but send guns.
Yeah, so I think this is a reference to the gallant allies in Europe.
I mean, that's that he's talking about the Kaiser.
Yeah, and we do, we will talk about that.
We will talk about that later.
Yeah, yeah.
But it goes where you get disposition and settlement for security, but it then itself creates its own divides and creates its own war.
So you say, for example, in the 1640s in Ulster, because not all the Ulster people have been cleared, not all the Catholics and people of Gaelic identity have been cleared from Ulster.
They're left there in certain pockets.
And so in the 1640s, there is a great rebellion.
And there is 4,000 men, women and children slaughtered.
This, of course, has an enormous impact in Scotland and in England and plays a part in what is probably the most notorious episode in the history of Anglo-Irish relations, which is coming from Cromwell to Ireland.
Yeah, very much a friend of the rest is history.
So Dominic is saying this in the GPO on O'Connell Street.
I did hesitate a moment before saying that, and I thought, sod I'd just go for it.
I'm looking at this as a hostage situation here.
So I guess, I mean, in Ireland, Cromwell's reputation is seen through the prism of Irish history entirely understandably.

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The reason that Dominic can say, you know, Cromwell is a remarkable and great man is that for us, he exists in the context of the civil wars in England and the aftermath of that.

And the two are actually completely snulled because people now call the civil wars the war of the three kingdoms, the three kingdoms being England, Scotland and Ireland.

So to what extent do you see the kind of the story of Cromwell and the aftermath of Cromwell's invasion in Ireland as part of the kind of the broader story of what's going on in Britain and Ireland as a whole?

Oh, they're entirely intertwined and I don't think I properly understood this at all or even had a reasonable understanding of it until I read Anna Kay's book, *Wrestling Republic*, which is just an outstanding piece of work.

Oh, we've had her on the broadcast.

So yeah.

Oh, yeah.

A couple of weeks ago, I think.

Yeah, a few weeks ago.

And well, I look forward to listening to that.

The book itself is, it's one of those books that you can recommend to anybody to read, whether you're a specialist or non-specialist, and I'm absolutely not a specialist in Cromwell in Ireland or in that whole idea.

It was fascinating to read it and to look at the place of Ireland in the Cromwellian story.

And she's something really interesting in it that I hadn't thought about at all.

And it's the reportage in the English press of what happened in 1641 in the massacre.

And she points out that yes, there was a massacre and there was no denying that and under no circumstances trying to minimize that.

But she talks about how the stories were embellished.

Yes, of course.

And made to be more than they actually were.

And you can understand better than the nature of the arrival.

Because it's not just politics, is it?

It's religion.

And Cromwell and his troopers are terrified of Antichrist and, you know, they see themselves engaged in a war of good against evil.

So they are doing it by their lights for the best reasons.

Yeah, and they're seized with that zealotry of the position in which they find themselves and wrapped into what they believe,

wrapped into trying to maintain and develop something that they fought for and that people have died for.

And they're fighting for an existence, really.

But none of that excuses or can properly explain the scale of the violence that was visited on Ireland.

But it's not one other element, which is something we've talked about, which is the security issue.

So all the way through the 1640s, I mean, the lead up to the Civil War in 1642.

And during the Civil War, among the parliamentarians and among kind of godly English opinion, there was this absolute paranoia that Charles I is going to rock up with a massive Irish Catholic army.

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I mean, we've often joked in the rest of his history about the Ladybird Book, about Oliver Cromwell. And there are pictures of...

A good man.

But a good man.

A good man except for what he did in Ireland.

No, no, no, it's a good man.

The conclusion is a good man and not except an island.

Cruel.

And the except an island is the one three word kind of caveats.

But in that, there is a pic that's always stayed in my mind.

There's a picture of the Irish rebellion of 1641.

And there's the sort of the picture.

I mean, this is a 1950s illustration is of kind of wild eyed, hairy sort of Catholic men rampaging around with clubs and this sort of image.

Now, that image was absolutely what a lot of English people would have subscribed to in the 1640s and 50s, isn't it?

I mean, that's the image that Cromwell's troopers take when they cross the...

They have this absolute paranoia almost about Catholic Ireland.

That's a brilliant point.

And it's really, really important to remember this.

The depiction of the Irish.

Not just by the 1640s, but from Gerardus Cabrentis finds Morrison all the way through to the newspapers that are now emerging.

This idea that the Irish are in somehow almost subhuman, that they're uncivilized, that they're uncouth, that they're not fit really...

The wild Irish.

The wild, they're wild and they're not just rebellious, but they're not really civilized in...

They're barbarous, basically.

Yeah.

And so that also feeds into it.

Barbarous and papist.

And which is a very potent mix if you're sending an army across the seas.

And it does help explain the context of what happened.

But again, the scale of the campaign, Cromwell arriving in 1649 into the port here with 12,000 troops.

And what he did particularly in Drahada and in Wexford was particularly brutal.

So just give us a sense of that for those people who don't know the story.

So just very roughly.

A slaughter on an epic scale to the point where one-fifth of the population is dead by the time he's finished.

Yeah.

But it's not just Cromwell, is it?

I mean, he's not there for very long.

And then it's handed over to his left turn, Henry Ayrton, and then Cromwell's son.

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And we talked about this with Anna Kay, that there's also kind of almost Nazi level of population transfer of dispossession.

People are rounded up and transported to the Caribbean to work as slaves there.

It's a terrible process.

But that again, I mean, that's the combination of the obsession with security and the religious dimension, right?

Yeah.

And the two worst paranoias you could have really.

If you don't do something about it, then this is the back door to invasion.

But secondly, as you said, Tom, it's turbocharged by this idea that these aren't just your enemies.

These are the forces of Antichrist.

I mean, that's what Cromwell and his troopers believe.

And I think if you feel that and if you believe that, it opens the door to any manner of action.

It creates the environment for a form of zealotry which allows you murder.

It allows you dispossess, and it justifies it in the name of a good cause.

Right.

And what you see then, it's not just what happens while he was here.

It's not just a slaughter.

It's the continuation of the conquest and the dispossession where you get Catholics and Gaelic Irish pushed the far side of the Shalom into Connacht and into Clare.

But when we talked to Anna Kay about this, she said, as we said, you know, it's Cromwell responsible for all the ills of English oppression in Ireland and whatnot.

She said, do you remember Tom?

She said, I wouldn't actually point the finger specifically at Cromwell.

I would point the finger even more at Elizabeth I.

So in other words, has Cromwell become an avatar of a much longer and very complicated story that predated him and post-dated?

Oh, absolutely.

Cromwell is the epitome of what is the process that's 150 years of conquest and colonization.

And it's understood through him.

And he has become that lightning rod for everything.

I have to say it's understandable that that is the case given what he's done.

But it simplifies the history dramatically.

And it's much more complex than I understood Cromwell much better having read Anna Kay's book. Joyce's famous line about history being a nightmare that, you know, people struggle to wake up from.

Cromwell is a kind of nightmarish figure for the Irish.

Well, say for the Catholic Irish.

But there's another kind of episode in the 17th century that has a kind of mythic resonance for Protestant Irish, which is the Battle of the Boine.

So that's a few decades after Cromwell's invasion.

Charles II has come back.

The monarchy has been re-established.

Charles II dies, is succeeded by his brother James II, who is Catholic.

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Protestant England is not prepared to put up with that.

James II gets driven out and gets replaced as king by William III, who is of the House of Orange.

An orange man.

An orange man.

And he comes over and Ireland becomes the scene of the climactic battle between William III, the House of Orange, the Protestant cause against James II and his kind of Catholic cause.

And it's the Battle of the Boine that is kind of the decisive battle in that conflict.

I know that later in this series, Dan Jackson is going to talk about Unionist culture and the importance of Unionist culture and write within that idea of orange being the colour and William of orange arrival and the siege of Derry.

Or London Derry, depending on which side of the divide you are.

You're very brave in saying that.

That's quite the move.

Well, we're batting for both sides there.

Derry.

I go with the siege of Derry.

So Derry in Irish.

So there is so much of Unionist culture and loyalist culture looks to that moment.

And the safeguarding.

Not just for what it is in the fact that Ireland was a theatre of what was essentially a major European war, Battle of the Boine and epic moments.

Because William III is also embroiled in a war against France and Louis XIV.

And so that is also a crucial part of what is going on.

It's not just about Britain and Ireland.

Exactly.

And it really matters bullets' implications for what happened in Ireland and has happened in Ireland since our profound.

And that sense of identity which it has created and fostered in the idea of loyalism in Ireland and the triumph, let's face it, the triumph of a Protestant ascendancy in Ireland which flowed from 1690 and which endured through and past the active union through all of that.

And it led to, for example, a series of laws, penal laws in Ireland which limited Catholic ownership of weapons and of horses valued over five pounds,

restricted land ownership still further, allowed you not to take land leases for very many times, deprived Catholics of the vote from 1728 onwards.

And this is across Ireland.

And it endured through a Protestant ascendancy of political power, of economic power and of cultural power which resided during the years where this city was really made in the 1700s.

And there was a parliament here.

Yeah.

When we walk later on, I'll bring you to the House of Lords which came from that parliament later, which is still open, now controlled by college green beside the Bank of Ireland.

And it was a city that was absolutely run on a Protestant ascendancy with Dublin Castle at its core, both culturally, economically, politically and legally.

So Trinity College?

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Trinity College there is as bastion of Protestant education from which Catholics were banned. So the 18th century, I mean, this is when the Georgian architecture for which Dublin is famous is constructed.

So that is presumably an expression of wealth and Dublin is the home of Swift, of Burke.

So very, very kind of significant players.

But at the same time, you have this kind of systematic oppression.

Oh, you have the sectarianism of England remade in Ireland with a Protestant ascendancy in which the, not the absolute, but the large scale exclusion of Catholics from all positions of significance in the army, in the political world,

In the judiciary.

In the judiciary.

Yeah.

And of course, in Dublin Castle, you have a country, an island where the majority of the people are Catholic and are excluded from all positions of power or almost all positions.

When does that change?

That begins to change in the 1780s and into the 1790s with kind of inspired by ideas around the French Revolution and the American Revolution.

There's the making of an idea.

Yes.

But is it enlightenment ideas or is it a fear, particularly the French Revolution, that revolutionary ideas may spread to Ireland?

And so, you know, you need to compromise rather than just a press.

Well, revolutionary ideas did spread to Ireland.

They spread in two forms because it was the inspiration taken from the American volunteers and what they did in the construction of Grattan's volunteers and the idea that, you know, there was a parliament sitting in Dublin at the time, which had been going for several hundred years.

And it was a Protestant parliament.

And the idea was that maybe there was an opportunity here to put all power to itself and that it would stand.

Just to backtrack a tiny bit before we get into the 1790s and the rising and then the act of union.

So, I mean, Tom had that line about, you quoted that famous line about history as a nightmare from which we're struggling to awake or whatever.

And I'm also, I was also thinking about that joke about the people who were lost on an Irish country road and they stopped somebody and he says, they say, what's the way to whatever?

And he says, well, to start with, I wouldn't start from here.

I mean, this is a massive question.

And if it's too simplistic a question, then just say so.

But at what point is it possible to say this is where future bloodsheds, deep conflict, all of this stuff becomes inevitable as it were?

So in other words, you know, the point at which you've got the massive exclusion of Catholics or is it an earlier point, the point at which you have the land dispossession?

At what point is it? Does the history take a turn in which terrible things are always coming?

Or is that just the wrong way to think about this story?

And actually, is it not?

And is it never inevitable?

And is it always contingent that there will be, you know, the famine, the violence of the early 20th century or the troubles or whatever?

So I'm not going to shirk the question.

But what I will say is that it was not inevitable, but it was made particularly likely from the manner in which religion was tied to land and wealth and position and how that then tied into ideas of identity.

So that 16th century, you would say?

I'll say the 17th century.

I'll say you're looking by the continuation of land settlement through the 16th century.

And if you look at Belfast and what happened with the expansion of Belfast in the 19th century, and I appreciate.

I'm jumping a long way forward here, but Belfast grew in the 19th century from about 25,000 people at the beginning of the century.

It expanded massively.

As Billy Bragg said, it became an order in industrial town like Leeds or Liverpool or Manchester and these Redbrook houses right on the fronting out onto the streets built around linen industry and built around the shipyards.

And it grew from 25,000 people, as I say, at the beginning of the century to 350,000 at the end of the century.

But the divides of Mid Ulster were remade on the streets of Belfast and they are lived on through that by that tying together of identity and religion and the creation of a Protestant ascendancy.

Confirm that in the 1700s.

But to go back to the 1790s, there is a kind of whether it's anxiety on the part of the British government that Ireland once again might provide a kind of backdoor for revolutionary France, or whether it's a kind of acceptance of the fact that wrongs have been done.

But there is a kind of a start of a process by which the penal laws come to be reformed.

And then there is a rebellion. And as so often happens, it's when repressive regimes slightly relax the repression that you start to get the upheavals.

Oh, the regime got afraid because they saw the radicalization of a society which had been founded in the early 1790s, which was basically the United Irishmen.

And what the United Irishmen did was they looked for parliamentary reform.

They looked for emancipation of Catholics fully and they looked for a parliament in Dublin and they were denied.

And when they were denied and they were suppressed, they re-emerged in 1795.

I don't know if you can say you re-emerged as a secret revolutionary organization, but they re-emerged as a secret revolutionary organization.

And in 1795, and they went to France, they went to Paris.

Wolf Tone, one of the great saints of Irish republicanism, went to Paris and tried to get support from the French government and get troops sent.

And he got troops. First of all, an expedition set sail in 1796 and only bad weather stopped at landing.

So there was a rising, a rebellion aborted there.

And they took the decision to go again for 1798 and there's 50,000 rebels involved in the uprising.

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Four main centres of violence in Ulster, in County Wexford, in Connacht and in Central Leinster. And a small French expedition. The Year of the French was a brilliant book by Thomas Fanning in the Year of the French. 1798 is the Year of the French. They landed in Calais-Le-Baye, beautiful place in County Imao in late August and there's a rebellion. And the rebellion is bloody and it's brutal. And there's sectarian violence undertaken in certain parts by those rebels. And ultimately, there are 30,000 people dead by the end of... Including Wolf Tone. Including Wolf Tone, who was captured and committed suicide. And indeed, Lord Edward Fitzgerald, who, very aristocratic background, who is the last person to be tainted in English history. So that means that not only is he put to death, but his family, who's all their lands. But one of the many tragedies of Irish history, right, is that to try and break out of the sort of the cycle of oppression or whatever, they are doing the very thing the British are most afraid of and will most fuel for the repression. Because getting help from the French. I mean, that's the one thing that terrifies the British and it makes the British think, oh, this is why the Irish, you know, we can't trust them. They'll always make a deal with the French or the Germans or the Spanish or whoever. So that's the kind of tragedy that the only way they feel they can break out of this is by doing the very thing that will most provoke their oppressors, as it were. Absolutely. And by the time we get to 1798 and the end of the rebellion, religion is tied to ideas of identity. So it's Catholic nationalist. It's Protestant unionist. And there are exceptions. And there are people who are denigrated thereafter as Castle Catholics. That is to say that they gave their religions to Britain. Right. And then there are these Protestant dissenters, including, as we will talk about soon, Charles Stuart Parnell, and indeed the first three leaders of the Home Rule movement from the 1870s almost were Protestant. And there are exceptions. The whole way through, there's Thomas Davis. But also there's two new things, isn't there, that's coming part of the mix. So one is the idea of republicanism, which is coming from France. The idea that, you know, France is a republic, Britain is a monarchy. And coming from America, too. And coming from America, so republicanism is now starting to be associated with the ambition to throw off the British yoke. And the other thing is a kind of romantic sense of the distant past, which is what we began this episode with.

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And so that also becomes a part of the nationalist mix in Ireland.

The heyday of romanticism, right?

Yeah.

You know, the invention really of a kind of mythic past is also part of this cocktail that is starting to be brewed up in the 1790s.

And through the murk of these centuries of history, you can see the modern conflict emerging.

And you're right.

The Irish republicanism was really interesting.

And we'll talk about this again when we talk about Arthur Griffith, because Irish republicanism is not doctrinaire.

It's just that it's not monarchist.

Right.

But the sense of Irish nationalism now as being simultaneously romantic and republican, this is a fruit basically of the 1790s.

It's romantic, it's republican, and it's revolutionary.

Right.

And it's religious.

You know, as usual, we're going to have to do far more episodes on this than we'd been planning to.

So let's get to the active union, which is the attempt.

I mean, it's the response of the British government to what has happened in 1798.

Is that right?

It is.

And it's the idea that the only way that we can stop this ever happening again is to take the parliament out of Dublin,

to run Ireland from Westminster through Dublin Castle, where we'll put officials in and build what is supposed to be a unitary state.

Yeah.

Based, run from London.

And that in that process, it will do two things.

It will confirm the security of Ireland and it will civilize the Irish and draw them in to a modern way and get them to understand that belonging will be fine.

But that also, I mean, to a degree, that then gives people in Ireland a stake in and a say in the government of Britain and Ireland as an entirety.

Provided they're Protestant still.

Is that right?

No, yes.

So Catholic emancipation still hasn't happened.

So the active union was passed.

The first vote failed.

There was a vote in the Irish parliament on whether to accept an active union or not.

The first vote failed.

Despite fairly outstanding attempts at corruption, bribery, patronage, which we understand are normal in all of these things.

The scale of the patronage on offer is revealed in files in the public records.

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That's the weird thing.

It's the Protestants who actually, who were rather against it, Catholics are slightly more enthusiastic.

Yeah, they feel they're going to lose their power to Westminster and they fear Catholic emancipation in some instances and they fear that they will be abandoned.

So actually a lot of educated Catholics are quite keen on the active union.

In the beginning, they absolutely are.

And two things happen afterwards.

There was a huge blow to the active union afterwards.

And that is the Catholic emancipation, which is promised to the active union, didn't happen.

Okay.

So yet again, England disappoints.

Very sad, isn't it, Dominic?

Why does Tom Hey, Britain?

Paul, that was absolutely so many fascinating things.

That's absolutely brilliant.

And we will be returning next time when we, with the story after the active union.

So after the 19th century, home rule, and then charging onwards towards.

So we started with the proclamation and we will get back to the proclamation eventually.

But we'll be doing that next time.

So we'll see you then.

Bye-bye.

Bye-bye.

Thanks for listening to the Rest is History.