

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 338: Ireland: Home Rule, Mutiny - and Civil War?

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The Dark Eleventh Hour draws on and sees us sold to every evil power we fought against of old. Rebellion, raping, hate, oppression, wrong and greed are loosed to rule our fate by England's act and deed.

We asked no more than leave to reap where we had sown, through good and ill, to cleave to our own flag and throne.

Now England's shot and steel beneath that flag must show how loyal heart should kneel to England's oldest foe.

We know the war prepared on every peaceful home. We know the hell's declared for such as serve not Rome.

The terror, threats and dread in market, hearth and field, we know when all is said, we perish if we yield.

Believe we dare not boast, believe we do not fear, we stand to pay the cost in all that men hold dear. What answer from the north? One law, one land, one throne, if England drive us forth, we shall not fall alone.

So Tom Holland, that blood-curdling poem Ulster was written by Rudyard Kipling and published in the Morning Post on the 9th of April, 1912.

And it's a call to arms, isn't it? By Kipling on behalf of what he sees as the guardians of the British flame, the people of Ulster,

or as we would now say, well what eventually becomes the state or statelet or province, whatever you'd like to call it, of Northern Ireland.

So here we are and the civil war is approaching.

It is Dominic and I think that listeners will be able to tell from that that we are now a long way from the GPO in Dublin,

where we were for our previous two episodes on the build-up to the Easter Rising.

Well, I probably wouldn't have read it in the GPO, to be honest. I'm brave but not that brave.

So to explain, to remind listeners, we've done two episodes in Dublin with Paul Rouse and now we're taking a break by magic.

We have left, we have spirited ourselves away from the GPO and we are now back, where are we?

We're back in England, we're back in Liverpool, we're back in Newcastle, we're back in the great cities of Britain.

Edwardian Britain.

Because this story that we have framed as a story about Ireland is of course also a story about the other constituent parts of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

And we shouldn't forget that.

No, we shouldn't Tom.

I mean, when we left last time, so those of you who listened to our first two episodes in this series will know that we left last time with Paul Rouse from University College Dublin,

saying very firmly that at the beginning of the 1910s, the United Kingdom was in his view heading for civil war and the Great War interrupts it.

And of course, we know there wasn't a civil war, but today's episode is about that civil war that

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never was.

And we're joined, Tom, by one of the great friends of the rest of history, aren't we?

We are.

So Dan Jackson, who has appeared on two episodes, he appeared on the episode we did on the North-South Divide.

He appeared on the episode we did on the beginnings of the railways.

He is probably best known for his wonderful, wonderful book, *The Northumbrians*, about the history and culture of the Northeast, which I know both of us kind of nominated as a history book of the year back when it was published.

But Dan has also published another book, and that book has the very, very promising title of popular opposition to Irish home rule in Edwardian Britain.

And Dan, this was your doctoral subject, so we are absolutely now on your home territory.

Thanks very much.

And thanks for the invitation again.

Yes.

And this is, you know, I was saying to Dominic before, historians go on about their period.

This is the best period.

This is so fantastic.

Such a gripping story.

And it has so much resonance for today, actually.

So I'm glad that my old thesis published in 2009 by Liverpool University Press, and it's still available. It's getting another airing.

So Dan, let's do the background.

Because in the previous episode, we were talking, we were talking a lot about 19th century Ireland and about the pressures, the sense of distinctiveness, the growing pressures, the demands for home rule that were embodied by the Irish Parliamentary Party under John Redmond.

The Liberals under Gladstone had floated home rule.

Gladstone had that split his own party about it in the 1880s.

Then they'd had another go in the 1890s, frustrated by the House of Lords.

But things all change at the end of the 1900s, don't they?

Can you give us a bit of a reminder of what's changed?

Yeah.

So before we get out of the politics, I think there's something to be said about our general impressions about the Edwardian period.

People look back kind of fondly to it.

I guess it's the *Downton Abbey* era for some people.

It's the Indian summer, Delhi Durbar, Henley Regatta.

It's Cricket at the Oval.

It's the Kaiser at Cowes.

Yeah, the Philip Larkin poem.

Yes.

It's all that sort of thing.

It's also an era when you cast the United are regularly champions of England.

So it's a golden age.

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A golden age.

In many respects.

But actually, once you delve into the period, you realize that the country is, certainly by 1914, the story we're going to tell, is having a nervous breakdown.

And you see traces of that in the debates that rage around the turn of the century.

That sense of full-boarding that people have.

You know, Kipling's poem, Recessional.

You know, we are masters of the universe, or are we?

Or are the threats looming over the horizon?

Are we as confident and prosperous and impregnable as we once were?

And that plays out in the political field through a slightly dry topic of tariff reform, which emerges as a conservative policy.

The idea pushed by Joseph Chamberlain, of course, the conservative politician at the time.

And it's the idea that basically we can adjust our tariff barriers to better protect our empire and encourage industrial growth in the empire and also prosperity at home.

But this is a massively controversial subject for a country that had set out its store politically for decades around free trade.

And that had driven much of Britain's prosperity.

And so, for although after the 1860s, when Gladstone has this unfortunate period of trying to get home rule through parliament and fails, the Tories capitalise on that.

In 1886, of course, Randolph Churchill, a leading conservative, is described as having played the orange card in his support for or opposition to Irish home rule.

There's about two decades of Tory hegemony until the 1906 general election, which is a liberal landslide.

And there's no sense of Irish home rule being on the liberal party's agenda in that period.

Because it doesn't need to be, because the Irish parliamentary party are not holding the balance of power.

They need to hold the balance of power to have any influence.

But also, even so, the liberals are associated with the home rule cause.

But one thing I hadn't really gazed until you and I, Tom, both read this book Fatal Path by a brilliant Irish historian, Ronan Fanning, was the extent to which, even in the liberal party, which is, as it were, the more sympathetic to Irish home rule,

the people running that party are fervently anti-Catholic and have an enormous dislike of Ireland and the Irish.

I mean, Lord George, non-conformist, he thinks Catholic priests are the devil incarnate.

He has no time for Ireland.

He thinks it's just a much worse Wales.

I hadn't gaged.

I always thought there'd been some sentimental fondness for Ireland in the liberal party, but no, they couldn't give a damn about Ireland.

Could they, Dan?

Certainly not.

And even when Asquith eventually becomes Premier in 1908, Asquith's too busy drinking port, playing bridge,

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and basically texting his various girlfriends because he corresponded with them so frequently to care a damn about Ireland.

What changes?

First, I have the liberal landslide, but that majority is nibbled away in the course of the controversies around the people's budget and so on,

in 1909 in the Confrontational House of Lords.

There are two general elections in 1910 in which basically the liberals lose their majority.

They still want to push forward their social program.

And the price of that, the Irish Nationalist Party extract from them is, let's go back to Home Rule.

We want Home Rule in return for supporting the programme of the liberal government and getting it through Parliament.

And now there's a plausible chance that Home Rule can pass because as we were talking with Paul last time,

there's been this huge parliamentary reform which has removed the veto power of the House of Lords.

So now, instead of blocking something, the House of Lords can only delay it by two years.

You have to keep the legislation unchanged, don't you? Unamended.

And by the third time you introduce it, it will pass the House of Lords and it's through.

And the conservatives, am I right?

The conservatives see this as, I mean, they're going on all the time about the liberals as a revolutionary committee, aren't they?

I mean, they haven't coined the phrase bolster mix but they basically see the liberals as people who are blowing up the constitution just to stay in office.

Yeah, this is a vastly controversial move on behalf of the liberals but they had to do something because their legislative programme was consistently blocked in the Tory-dominated House of Lords.

This was the last era when the landed interests had a huge political influence still in Great Britain and they consistently did that and they confronted the House of Lords over it and they pushed

through the Parliament Act in 1911

which basically removed the veto of the House of Lords from legislation that came from the Commons.

And that opened the way to, because of course in the 1880s, Gladstone had the numbers to get home ruled through the House of Commons

but not through the House of Lords.

So this was a real game changer.

And you've got David Lloyd George famously in the speech in Newcastle saying, you know, but the Liberal government are trying to pay for the massive armament programme of building dreadnoughts and so on

and he says, you know, a duke costs as much as two dreadnoughts and lasts twice as long.

This is unheard of almost in British political history for there to be such ridicule and confrontation with the old aristocracy.

And so a lot of Tories lose their minds over this and some of them are called the ditches because they're prepared to die in a ditch over loads of reform.

But once the negotiations of the Irish Nationalist Party proceed after those two general elections, the way the path is clear, or maybe it isn't, but the path seems to be clear to reintroduce the Home

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Rule Bill.

So Dan, if the Tories see the Liberals as kind of dangerous, subversives, communists, whatever, that fear presumably starts to radicalise the Tories.

And they have two massive causes now that they're deeply upset about what's happened to the House of Lords,

the degradation of the ability of the Lords to block Liberal legislation.

So that's one thing they're very upset about.

But now hovering into view is the issue of what Irish Home Rule, which now seems a very, very practical possibility.

Indeed, it's been passed, hasn't it? It's been legislated for.

What are the implications of that for the British Empire?

Of course, absolutely.

And as we shall see, Ireland, especially the north of Ireland, is seen to represent the British Empire in microcosm.

Some people describe Ireland as England struck Britain's first colony.

And so this is the first kind of chink in the armour of the British Empire.

This comes hot on the heels, of course, of all these debates about how do we best shore up our global dominance.

So is tariff reform the answer?

And those debates are still actually playing out within the Tory party in this period.

Maybe we can have another go at tariff reform and then the Irish Home Rule issue is back on the agenda.

And does that serve as a kind of unifying issue?

I mean, is that part of why they pile in behind it?

It is, but I think the most decisive factor, particularly the Conservative Party's politics in this period, is a change of leadership.

Because, of course, in the years of Tory hegemony, it's Lord Salisbury, he passes on to his nephew Arthur Balfour,

hence the phrase Bob's your uncle, of course.

But Arthur Balfour is a very different character.

He's a man of the kind of salons of London.

He's a bachelor.

His nickname at Oxford University was Pretty Fanny.

Do you know my favourite Balfour aphorism, Dan?

You say nothing matters very much and few things matter at all.

Yes, so he wasn't exactly the dynamic leader that the Tories needed.

He's not going to die in a ditch, is he?

He's not going to die in a ditch.

So they cast around a bit and they have some internal debates.

And the man they come up with as their leader is Andrew Bonner Law,

who until Boris Johnson came along was the only British Prime Minister,

because he comes to the Prime Minister in the 1920s, to be born outside of the United Kingdom.

Because he was born in New Brunswick, the back of beyond New Brunswick to a Presbyterian minister.

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So we've got this Ulster and Scottish background.
And that's the key. That's the key factor here.
I was about to say, Dan, that's the key, isn't it?
Because I opened with that Kipling poem Ulster.
And we haven't, in all of this, Tom,
we haven't talked very much about the situation in the north of the island of Ireland.
Right. So that's the key thing, isn't it?
But Paul described the plantations.
So in the 16th and 17th century,
all these settlers arriving, including Cromwell's troops,
who are fervently Protestant, often of Scottish heritage.
And they, Dan, I mean, they are the...
This is where the issue becomes, as it were, incendiary,
sometimes literally incendiary,
because they are concentrated in the northeastern corner of the island of Ireland.
Some of them, many of them can trace their...
You know, they're not settlers now.
They can trace their lineage back centuries, can't they?
I mean, as far as they're concerned, they've built...
I mean, Kipling says in this poster to poem,
they want to reek where they had sown.
They had created this world.
And they are terrified of Irish home rule,
because they think they will be governed by a Catholic majority on the island of Ireland.
That's right, isn't it?
Completely.
And as I know you've discussed on many occasions,
on different topics on this podcast,
it's important for us to get back into the mindset of an era
when debates about how you did Christianity were still really important.
Because this is basically the last time that religion matters
in British political history, I would argue,
before the First World War,
because it coalesces around the cause of Ulster
and not being seen to betray these loyal Protestant subjects
and hand them over, as it's seen, to a disloyal and Roman Catholic.
And this is still an era when prejudice against Roman Catholics
is massive, widespread, and very often violent.
It dumb-founds people, it dumb-founds people in the Tory party,
but the guy who galvanises that anger into a political programme
is Andrew Bonneleau, who's known as Bonneleau,
he's his middle name, so he's known as Bonneleau.
He's described as law in the papers at the time,
it wasn't a double-barreled name.

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But he's absolutely critical here, because he is so hardcore.
He's former Glasgow Iron Merchant,
he's been an MP in Glasgow and Liverpool,
and they're basically the two most sectarian cities in Britain.
So he knows the emotions that this issue can cause
on kind of Edwardian street politics.
And this is basically the issue that the Tory party
had been casting around for a substantive issue
to confront the Liberals with, a vote winner.
This is what they settle on,
and this is how it plays out for the next few years.
But for law, or, I mean, I know people are calling Bonneleau now,
by the time he said people called him law,
it's not just a cynical manoeuvre, is it?
I mean, he'd lost his father,
I think his father had moved back to Northern Ireland.
He had spent a lot of time travelling to see his father.
He was...
biographers sort of say when his father died,
he was prostrate with grief,
he swore to uphold his father's legacy, all of this stuff.
I mean, for Bonneleau, who, as you said, is a really hard man,
quite a doer man.
Oh, very much so.
This is really, really passionate kind of stuff, isn't it?
It is, completely.
I don't want to give the impression that it was just a cynical manoeuvre,
by any means, because this was important to people.
But Bonneleau spotted this in a way that someone like Arthur Balfour,
I would suggest, couldn't really see the passions that this could engender,
and did, but it did require someone to stoke the flames of anger.
And it was through the work of Bonneleau working hand and glove
with the leadership of the Ulster Unionists,
as we'll go on to discuss,
that really tip this country very closely towards a conflagration
on the outbreak of the First World War.
So, Dan, you mentioned there the leadership of the Ulster Unionists.
So, we've been hearing how the Irish Parliamentary Party
enthused us for home rule.
I mean, the whole point of them is that they are parliamentary.
They are working through constitutional means.
Yes.
Do the Ulster Unionists have a constitutional approach,
a possibility of blocking home rule,

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or are they absolutely set on pushing it even to the degree of violence of kind of setting up paramilitary opposition?

Basically, yes, because they can see the logic of the Parliament Act having been enacted, that there isn't the House of Lords' bulwark to protect them anymore after 1911.

So, when on 11th of April, 1912, Herbert Asquith introduces the Third Home Rule Bill to Parliament, they know that the writing's on the wall.

There are very limited parliamentary obstacles in its way now.

And so, they start to mobilize in every possible sense.

And one of the first things they do is that they select a man called Sir Edward Carson as their leader.

Now, Carson is an absolutely fascinating figure.

He's probably better known these days because he had a glittering career in the law.

He's probably one of the best-paid barristers in the country, millionaire in that period.

He took on a range of very famous cases.

Probably the most famous one, though, was when he defended the Marquess of Queensbury against Oscar Wilde's accusation of libel in 1895, I think it was.

Because they'd been at school together, hadn't they, in Dublin?

They'd gone to Trinity College, Dublin together.

They both came from that Anglo-Irish ascendancy, Dublin world.

And interestingly, Edward Carson is the Unionist MP for Dublin University.

Because this is still the era when the top universities sent members of MPs to Parliament.

So Oxford and Cambridge, the Scottish universities, UCL, and Dublin University sent two MPs, and Carson was one of them.

Because Dublin in this period, I mean, you explored it.

It's a Georgian city in many respects.

It's where Dublin Castle is located.

And it's still a pretty Unionist city in many respects.

And there's an Irish insult that's occasionally used for Dubliners to call them Jack-eens, which is said to come from the fact that they wave Union jacks around, or used to, at least.

If you look at the armistice pictures from Dublin in 1918, where there's just Union jacks all over the place.

But that history changed pretty quickly.

But that's where Carson comes from.

He comes from that world, and he's a brilliant public speaker.

And he's such a charismatic figure in contrast to much of the kind of Ulster Unionist leadership in this period.

Very photogenic.

He's got the lantern jaw, you know, the enormous bald head.

He's a very, he's a kind of dandified dress.

He's often got the carnation he's buttonholed, the Homburg hat.

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He's a very imposing figure, and he's brought in.

Carson remains, for the rest of his life, an Irish Unionist.

He's from Dublin.

In an ideal world for Carson, the whole of Ireland would have remained as part of the Union.

But there comes a realisation that that's just not possible.

And so most of the Unionists in Ireland are concentrated in Ulster.

Obviously, well, actually, the far northeast corner of Ulster, not the whole of the historic province.

And so that concentration around Ulster, which is had a very different developmental path in the 19th century,

you go to Belfast in 1900, it looks like Newcastle or Glasgow, or a city in the north of England.

It's industrial.

It's built around shipbuilding and linen and engineering and all the rest of it.

And it's got a very strong, prosperous, competent, Protestant working and middle class.

And they're horrified at the thought of being governed from Dublin.

Yeah, Bonne Law said something like that.

I came across it the other day that when he was travelling back and forth to visit his father, I think it was,

he was struck by how northern, you know, what like a northern English or Scottish city it was.

And he said, would you hand over, you know, Liverpool, Sheffield, Manchester to Rome?

No, of course you wouldn't.

And that clearly really matters to him.

But the other thing I was going to ask about was, so Carson is a great performer, is a barrister, he's a theatrical man.

And, I mean, the acme, the high points of his theatricality, which is only, what is it, six months maybe after Aswith has introduced the home rule bill,

is they stage the signing of the Ulster Covenant.

So this is in September 19.

I'm just looking at the figures here.

218,000 men and 229,000 women queue up to sign this pledge that they will use all means necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a home rule parliament in Ireland.

Right. So all means necessary.

What, what do they mean by all means necessary?

Yeah, at this period, it's still a bit ambiguous.

What exactly does that mean?

I mean, some people are signing, reputedly, assigning this Ulster Covenant in their own blood.

That's how strongly they feel about this.

And it's got deliberate echoes, of course, of the 17th century, the various covenants that were, that were subscribed to in Scotland to object to Charles I's religious reforms, introduction of new prayer books and all that sort of thing.

And many of these people could trace their ancestry back to 17th century Scotland and Northern England.

So this had enormous emotional resonance.

But at this point, it isn't until after the Covenant is signed amidst great ceremony in late 1912 that thoughts quickly turn to what practical steps are we going to take here to withstand this measure?

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And they quickly move by the early months of 1913 by the formation of what was originally called the Ulster Volunteers, then became known as the Ulster Volunteer Force.

Maybe I'll be familiar with the UVF, which was the second founding.

The UVF was founded for a second time in the 1960s, late 60s during the Troubles period.

But this initial manifestation of the Ulster Volunteers was a different beast, really.

It had much more widespread middle class participation.

It was drawn from the militias of Northern Ireland that existed already, played into the very strong Anglo-Irish martial tradition.

If you think about Wellington and Montgomery and all them who came from Ireland, the formation of the Ulster Volunteers is almost unprecedented in British history to have such a large scale paramilitary force formed in opposition to a bill in parliament.

Right.

OK, so this isn't looking good for the stability of Ireland or indeed for the United Kingdom as a whole.

So I think we should take a break at this point.

And Dan, when we come back, perhaps we can talk about what effect the emergence of this paramilitary force has on British politics in the build-up to August 1914.

I have always wished the Catholics in Ireland to govern themselves, wrote Lord Isha to Margo Asquith.

We have shown ourselves unfit to govern a community of Catholics, this over centuries.

But we are not half as unfit to govern Catholics as they are to govern the Protestant community.

That is the whole ethical and political aspect of the situation.

Although such flagrantly anti-Catholic sentiments were rarely committed to paper, they coloured the mentality of government and opposition.

Isha, as the King's liaison with ministers, moreover, would scarcely have written in such terms to the Prime Minister's wife, were he not satisfied that she was of like mind.

The home rule crisis of 1912 to 14, as Daniel Jackson has observed, was the last time that religion and politics seriously intersected in British politics.

So that was Ronan Fanning, who, Dominic, you mentioned in the first half, author of Fatal Path.

He was Professor of Modern History at University College Dublin, which is Paul Rouse's university.

And the Daniel Jackson that he mentions there, Dan, is you.

Yes, well, delighted to hear that. And I met Ronan Fanning many years ago and he was in that book, Fatal Path, is fantastic.

But I think that Daniel Jackson's right.

He's brilliant, isn't he?

What a scholar.

And this is an era when people take seriously still the kind of Protestant ascendancy.

We just saw it in the coronation recently where the King had to pledge to uphold the Protestant reformed religion, the governance of the Church of Scotland and all this business, which seemed slightly jarring to us.

But back then, we're seeing it's incredibly important how religion intersected with politics.

I mean, at the same time as the Irish Home Rule Bill is going through, the Welsh Church

Disestablishment Bill is also being pushed through in the teeth of massively hostile opposition.

God, it's college.

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So let's get into this. So this is, you know, the early 1910s, Britain is, for all the jitteriness about the Burr War and national degeneracy and all this sort of carry on that you get in the Edwardian period. Britain is still very clearly the world's leading imperial power.

I mean, it's being challenged, but it's kind of just about still top nation.

People have, you know, electricity is coming in, gramophones, people are going to the cinema, all of these kinds of things.

What the astounding thing is that there are people all over the United Kingdom in Great Britain itself who are living in their kind of suburban villas,

reading the Daily Telegraph or the Daily Mail or whatever, or the Times, and they are saying to themselves, you know, Catholic rule would be awful for these poor people in Northern Ireland.

We can't, you know, obviously Rome is, I mean, this is what all the politicians, liberal as well as Tory think.

What is it about this issue that is so incendiary, that is so toxic and so threatening to people's sense of what Britain is and means?

Well, I think it combines a number of really interesting points.

Firstly, the centrality of the Union, the Empire and Protestant Christianity in the matrix of Edwardian British national identity is still really important.

I think this is still the end of a long 19th century.

I think the First World War is a watershed.

Things do change massively after the First World War, but they hadn't changed yet.

And the ordinary people in Britain and Ireland could still be motivated by these ancient grievances and fears and so on.

And it's still a period where there's widespread condescension and hostility towards Catholicism. Catholicism in general and Irish Catholics in particular.

Now I sometimes think that the story of Britain being a nation of immigrants is often overdone.

If anything, Britain's most often been a nation of immigrants.

It's been an exporter of people.

And sometimes the story we tell ourselves about immigration to Britain in particular misses out Irish migration, which was enormous.

And that added a kind of pecanycy to these questions that had been fundamental British national identity from the kind of late 1500s onwards when you had the arrival in huge numbers in the 19th century.

Not just in the famine period, although that massively expanded the numbers.

But throughout the 19th century and into the early 20th century, huge numbers of Irish Catholics into particularly urban Britain.

And there was such a thing as a backlash vote against them.

It's the typical story. We don't like your religion.

We don't like the fact you're coming here taking our jobs and reducing our wages.

And we don't like the fact you're disloyal either.

You cheered on the Boas during the Boas War.

So for many people, the idea that you'd be handing Ulster over to a government from Basin Dublin would be like handing over the Falkland Islands to Argentina or Gibraltar to Spain.

It would be that mind blowing to people.

What? This is how you're returning.

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This is how you're repaying the loyalty of these sober, industrious people who just live in a place that just looks like Middlesbrough or Sheffield or wherever.

This is just outrageous.

This is absolutely outrageous and we won't stand for it.

Those feelings still needed to be kindled though and exploited and fanned.

And that's exactly what the Tory Unionist Party, as they were widely known in that period, do.

And so isn't that the paradox that the people encouraging paramilitary displays in British cities and villages,

the people who are seriously proposing that the army rather than be sent to intervene should potentially mutiny,

the people doing this are the avowed defenders of the Constitution, the Tories, the Conservatives, the people who by definition opposed to kind of radical solutions.

But Tom, just to jump in for a second, I know what my answer to that would be,

which is that, I mean, that you see it in their speeches, the Andrew Bono Law speeches.

He would say, through a terrible stroke of misfortune, power has been seized by a cynical group of revolutionaries.

Ask with, Lloyd George, we are just taking up arms to defend,

he would say we're defending the Constitution, wouldn't he, Dan?

Yeah, he would.

And he makes a famous speech at Blenheim Palace in late 1912,

the gist of which is, I can think of no length of resistance that Ulster would go,

that they wouldn't either be justified in doing and that we won't support them in doing.

This is still at this ambiguous phase I mentioned earlier.

But even when the Ulster volunteer forces inaugurated in early 1913,

around the time, by the way, that Carson, Edward Carson,

introduces in Parliament an amendment to the Home Rule Bill

to exclude all nine counties of the historic province of Ulster

that eventually become six counties after the First World War.

Because the Ulster Unionists don't want their three extras that have lots of Catholics, do they?

Because they think they won't be able to govern.

Exactly, they want to make sure that the portion of Ulster has an inbuilt Protestant majority to safeguard their position.

But that's a bit of a pill for Carson to swallow, of course,

because he could say that this will leave the Southern Unionists,

of which there are still quite a lot in place, like Dublin, even Cork, Galway and other places in urban island.

There are still quite a number of Unionists, but they don't have the numbers really, and they're too disparate.

It's all about Ulster from 1913.

But Dan, just to follow up on that idea of the Tories as being the radicals,

I mean, I hear what Dominic says, but just to quote you what Ronan Fanning says about Bonne Law, he describes Bonne Law leading the Conservative Unionist Party to embrace a policy of revolution without parallel in modern British history.

Do you think he's right about that?

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Completely. I think it's because the Tories, in this period, are completely boxed in. Their support for the Constitution, if I was being cynical, is entirely provisional on it conforming to their understanding what the Constitution should look like, and not up for amendment via the democratic process. And so they're quite willing, brazenly willing to support the Ulster Volunteer Force. And there are really prominent Conservative politicians, if I can introduce one name here, an absolutely massive lad called Effie Smith. Dan, you've made me so happy that you've mentioned Effie Smith. Effie Smith. I mean, he is quite, yet another barrister. And I always think this is bad news for a nation's polity when barristers are prominently involved in the political scene. But Effie Smith, another extraordinarily wealthy, dazzling Oxford scholar, but he's a Liverpool Tory MP, and he understands what all this means. And Liverpool, in this period, is absolutely central to this story. It's where Carson goes after signing the Covenant. He sails across the Irish Sea. Liverpool Courier has this enormous headline, Liverpool's sister of Belfast. And Liverpool is still this kind of sectarian cauldron. In 1910, the elections of 1910, nine out of the 11 Merseyside seats are held by Unionists. One by a Liberal, and the other one is held by an Irish nationalist, T.P. O'Connor. The only Irish nationalist MP outside of the island of Ireland. This is how unique this city is. And I often think that Liverpool's tradition as England's most Tory city, which it was until right until the 1970s, has been completely airbrushed out of that city's understanding. Yeah, they don't go on about that now. No, no, the idea that a crowd of Liverpool supporters would boo the national anthem as they were doing recently would be mind-boggling, even as recently as the 1950s. But Liverpool's political tradition was partly shaped by its economic base, which is largely landlordism in terms of dockside rather than productive industries like Manchester was. The presence nearby of the landed interests through the earls of Derby, who are still very influential in British politics, but chiefly the growth of a native orange tradition in Liverpool, which was massive and largely prompted by a kind of backlash vote. But anyway, I mentioned F.E. Smith. He gets the nickname Gallipur Smith because he acts as the sort of Carson's ADC, riding around on horseback at UVF parades and maneuvers and so on in Northern Ireland throughout 1913 and 14, quite brazenly supporting basically armed rebellion against the British government. Dan, I think you've actually sold F.E. Smith a tiny bit short by describing him as this incredibly charismatic and dashing barrister.

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Because he's actually probably the greatest wit, isn't he?

Or one of the two or three greatest wits.

So he was Churchill's great hero.

Tom, I'm going to read you some F.E. Smith quotes.

Is this the wit and wisdom of F.E. Smith?

Exactly, by Winston Churchill and his great contemporaries.

So when F.E. Smith was a young barrister, he was up in front of a man called Judge Willis.

And Judge Willis said to him, Mr. Smith, have you ever heard of a saying by Bacon, the great Bacon, that youth and discretion are ill-witted companions?

And F.E. Smith said, yes, I have.

And have you, sir, ever heard of a saying by Bacon, the great Bacon, that a much-talking judge is like an ill-tuned symbol?

And the judge at that said to him, you are extremely offensive young man.

And F.E. Smith said in open court, as a matter of fact, we both are, but I'm trying to be and you can't help it.

But even better than that is he was talking to a High Court judge who was presiding in a case of a man who'd been accused of sodomy.

The High Court judge said to F.E. Smith, could you tell me, what do you think one ought to give a man who allows himself to be buggered?

And F.E. Smith said, oh, 30 shillings or two pounds, whatever you happen to have on you.

But that's the kind of joke that if Carson had been listening to it, he'd got F.E. Smith sent to Reading Jail for 10 years or whatever.

And F.E. Smith plays up to his, he was Churchill's great drinking buddy, even though Churchill's a liberal in this period.

Smith Satori, he's making, F.E. is making a speech somewhere and he says it's about the liberal's kind of welfare program and he says something like, I see Mr. Churchill has stolen the socialist's clothes while they were bathing, if they do bathe, which I doubt.

So he's full of little quips like that.

But he's another charismatic figure.

I think, I remember discussing with the great professor Roy Foster once about, Diane of Irish historians in many ways, about Edward Carson and he said, Carson, you know, he had a certain sexual charisma that was well noted by not just female voters, I would imagine, but particularly female voters who were just kind of all of a quiver whenever he appeared.

And some people have seen a kind of a premonition of a sort of almost fascist vibe.

I don't think that it's quite right, but I think there is something in the strong man, the mass rallies, the arc lights.

The paramilitary is marching up and down.

So, I mean, this is the age of the Boy Scout movement, I suppose, and it's also the age when there's an absolute fascination.

I mean, Tom, we did that podcast about King Solomon's Mines, published what, 20 years earlier?

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Obsession with manliness, with brotherhood, with people in tight trousers, riding up and down, promising civil wars.

But specifically, this idea of Carson and Effie Smith as kind of charismatic, almost sexually charged leaders, these are not the kind of people I imagine that Asquith, for instance, would particularly understand, would particularly have a handle on.

So, if Asquith doesn't understand the emotions that are being stirred up in Ulster, the religious emotions, presumably also he's constitutionally incapable of understanding what the potential kind of power of people like Carson and Smith are as well.

I mean, does he just simply not appreciate the scale of the crisis that he's building?

I think he appreciates the crisis, but I just don't think he knows what to do about it.

You see a bit of that in the First World War, there's a famous line, because, you know, he was quite a laid-back figure to say the least,

when he meets some society aristocratic lady who says to him,

this is about 1915 or 16, he said, Mr. Asquith, do you take an interest in the war?

You know, because he's...

That's the dynamic leadership that Britain needs.

So, does he take an interest in Ulster?

I think he basically, Asquith basically wishes it would all just go away.

You know, he's not the charismatic stump speaker that Carson or Smith are even born alone who's quite a draw because he can fulminate and he's got that stern look about him as well.

No contemporary political campaign gets the numbers out on the streets like Carson's campaign, which he quickly realizes, it's no good just speaking to demonstrations in Belfast.

He needs to go and shift public opinion in Britain,

and that's what he spends his time doing throughout 1913 and the first half of 1914.

But are there two other things there? One, the Liberals are trapped.

They rely on the Irish parliamentary party, the Irish nationalists of John Redmond to whom they have promised home rule.

So, they can't welch out of it because then they're sunk, then they lose their majority.

That's number one.

But number two, because of this what seems like a very arcane procedural thing, which is the Parliament Act,

which means the House of Lords can't scrap your legislation, they can delay it for two years, can't they?

You have to introduce it three times.

Because of that, they're stuck on this, what's the expression?

It's not a treadmill, it's one of those things that...

Hamster wheel.

Hamster wheel, exactly. They're in a hamster wheel.

And it's very Brexit, isn't it?

Yeah, it is very Brexit. They're stuck.

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The sense of a ticking clock.

They're stuck, but it's a three-year ticking clock, right? 1912, 1913, 1914.

And that means that Carson has the best part of two to three years.

Exactly.

To go around the country whipping people up,

but also presumably to recruit his paramilitaries and to get guns.

But Dan, I mean, a thing that a government does when faced by an insurgent paramilitary force is to send the police or failing that, the army in, to suppress them.

So why don't they do that?

Well, that would be...

I think firstly that would be quite a big step.

And the Liberal government in this period are hoping that the Irish Home Rule can be enacted peacefully.

They'd rather not have any confrontations.

Because, of course, this is a period where there are troops on the streets more often than any, more or less any other time in the 20th century.

If you read George Dangerfield's famous book, *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, particularly confrontations over trade union disputes in 1911.

It's quite a fibrile atmosphere.

And the last thing you want is, you know, having to deal with, you know, striking railwomen in Liverpool or wherever

and then having to send troops to Northern Ireland.

But of course, as it will play out when we get to 1914, the loyalty of the army, particularly its Anglo-Irish officer caste are absolutely not on board

with the idea of enforcing Home Rule on basically their family and friends in the north of Ireland.

Or in fact in Dublin as well, of course,

given that many of those landed families were based in the south of Ireland too.

So they couldn't really rely on the army.

This is demonstrated by what's called the Kura Incident, the Kura Mutiny.

The Kura Mutiny, yeah.

Yeah. So this is how this whole story plays out.

The UVF forms in 1913.

It very rapidly professionalizes itself.

It brings in a retired Indian Army general to command it.

It's drilling regularly and so on, but it's short of arms.

So it manages through this kind of John Booker-esque gun-running episode

where a ship sails from, I think it's from Denmark,

eventually arrives at Lawn on the Northern Irish coast,

importing 24,000 rifles, which they purchased from Germany.

The Austro-Unionists had bought outright, but had to basically spuggle into the country.

This is a huge deal at the time.

And when the army get wind of this at the Kura camp,

which is the main British army base just outside Dublin,

many of them make their feelings known to their commanding officer to say,

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we'd rather resign our commissions than be forced to coerce the Unionists in the North into accepting Irish home rule.
What happens then? The government panic.
The army, some of them all kind of loyal.
If you want to put it that way, army top brass try and reign these officers in, but they're adamant.
Many of them are Anglo-Irish, as I mentioned.
And then there's an enormous demonstration in Hyde Park in London with about a quarter of a million people who turn out to hear Edward Carson speak in defence of the Kura mutineers, as they're called.
The popular opinion is, well, they're doing the exactly the right thing.
This is completely unjust to try and impose this on Northern Ireland.
When you say the popular opinion, Dan, this is an age before opinion polls.
Do we actually have a sense of what the British, maybe, I don't know, from by elections or whatever, of what the British public, which way they would have, the majority or plurality would have sided?
Well, this is basically the question that I tried to explore in my book on this topic, which was there aren't opinion polls.
The evidence from ordinary voters is usually sketchy.
You usually only ever get high political accounts of this period, which I thought was a major gap in the historiography.
So you try and discover how people were feeling, and one of the ways you can look at it is the huge demonstrations.
And Carson speaks everywhere in Britain.
He speaks in Venice, in Plymouth, in Norwich, in Mountain Ash, in the Ronda Valley, in Birmingham, or frequently in Liverpool and Glasgow, as you might expect, but in Wall's End, in Durham, at the Herne Hill, Velodrome, Tom, not far from Holland Towers.
He speaks to a mass demonstration in 1914.
So there's usually huge turnout for these events.
They're often highly stylized.
Have you ever watched the Mitchell and Kenyon archive of kind of Edwardian newsreels?
And you see how often processions were a big deal for the Edwardians and various different guys as religious, trade unions, whatever.
The usual deal would be there'd be a procession through the town, but like an orange march, almost, similar sort of thing.
Or Carson's carriage would be unhorsed, and loyal supporters would pull him through the town.
So he gets huge numbers out onto the street.
And at the same time, the Liberal government are losing by elections, left, right, and centre to Unionists who are campaigning on this platform.
Sir Dan, the army has...

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Elements of the army seem to have mutinied.
There are all these processions.
There are people drilling.
So there's not just the volunteers in Ulster.
There's been a rival group of Irish volunteers
that has been formed, I think, in 1913.
There's also talk of people recruiting in Britain,
people signing covenants in Britain.
And the question is, what's George...
So George V, very much a friend of the rest, is history.
Top King, what's he doing?
I mean, he must be thinking, geez, my United Kingdom is, you know,
heading for the knackers yard.
The King is massively spooked by this.
And of course, he's had a tough early period of his reign
because he was going to be forced to flood the House of Lords with Liberal peers,
of course, at the height of the people's budget debate,
which I think you've touched on already.
But George V intervenes in politics.
He calls the Buckingham Palace Conference in July 1914
to try and get the key players around the table
to try and thrash out some sort of compromise.
But of course, the Irish nationalists are not willing to compromise,
and they still see the island of Ireland as a single political unit,
and they're not prepared.
But Dan, this is happening in July 1914,
and they're having to have a conference to discuss what to do about Ireland.
But I thought the Home Rule Bill has already passed, hasn't it?
So why are they still discussing it?
Tom, I don't want to terrify the listeners,
but we've actually given them a very, very simplified version of the story.
It's even more complex.
Well, because the bill had passed in May 1914,
I think that's right, isn't it, Dan?
The bill had passed in May,
but even at that point, the Ashworth government
are still dithering about what to do with it.
They are talking about excluding part of Ulster.
But the question now is, are they going to exclude a bit of it?
Are they going to exclude the whole province?
Are they going to exclude nine counties?
Six, maybe even three counties?
And does that mean they're going to sell out in Carstens' view
or the Unionists?

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I mean, he's still holding out for no Home Rule at all.
OK, but what do the Irish Parliamentary Party think about this?
Because they've been promised Home Rule, the bill has passed,
and it's still not being instituted.
So what's their take on this?
The leadership under John Redmond,
at the time the Irish Nationalist Party leader,
he's adamant, understandably, I think,
from his perspective that Ireland is a political unit
that can't be dismembered, as he would describe it,
and needs to be granted Home Rule on a 32-county basis.
And he's not prepared to concede ground to the Ulster Unionists,
no matter how much they're recruiting to the UVF.
Maybe there's a sense that John Redmond underestimates
the vehemence of their opposition,
kind of expects that once it's passed through Parliament,
then it will happen,
the Liberal government will ensure it will happen.
But it just doesn't, though, because it stands on a knife edge.
There's kind of real brinkmanship in this period
about how is this going to play out,
because, as Dominic touched on before,
not only have we had the Ulster Covenant,
we've had the British Covenant as well.
And it's claimed in some circles
that two million people signed the British Covenant in Britain.
This is outside of Ireland.
People are openly joining UVF-style groups in Glasgow,
in London, in Liverpool,
and are willing to go and defend Ulster in the event of violence.
Is it fair to say that by July 1914,
the government is faced with large numbers of people in Ulster
and across Britain who are prepared to resort to violence
in defence certainly of Ulster staying British,
not being subjected to home rule as they would see it.
And at the same time, presumably this is radicalising
nationalist opinion in Catholic Ireland too.
Completely.
So just as the Ulster volunteers
had illegally smuggled guns into the north of Ireland,
in many respects the Ulster volunteers
are sort of admired by the Irish volunteers.
They kind of admire their pluck and, you know,
the action they're taking.

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And they likewise import guns via the yacht that belongs to the novelist Erskine Childers who'd written that novel, The Riddle of the Sands in 1903. Fascinating character. But they import arms via Hotha, which is a town outside Dublin. And this leads to a bit of a confrontation afterwards in the city of Dublin between British troops and sympathisers with the gun runners as they're seen. And some Irish people are killed. So this adds to the sense of kind of this febrile stuff that's going on in the summer of 1914. But also the one-sidedness, right, that the British troops refuse to do anything against the Unionist gun runners. And indeed, there was the Kara Mutiny, but they've opened fire on a crowd of Irish Catholic supporters of the Irish volunteer gun runners. So it's as though they're party-pre. Well, they are party-pre, I suppose. Completely. And the injustice seems obvious to people. And this adds to the sense of, well, neither side want to back down. And this is where Britain is poised in the summer months of 1914. All attention is on Ireland. There's an editorial written in the Liverpool Courier that says, you know, if a spark happens in Belfast, say, the first blood spilled in Ulster would raise a storm in the large towns of England and Scotland. The problem of the working classes of Liverpool, Glasgow, Barrow, Manchester and Newcastle would be difficult to handle and would be even worse than in Belfast. Now, that might be an exaggeration because the Liverpool Courier was a Tory paper. But still, that sense of where it would drift, there's no sense of a resolution to this problem, and then something happens. But Dan, before the thing happens, so in other words, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand is assassinated on the 28th of June. Austria declares war on Serbia on the 28th of July. That crisis could have played out differently.

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You know, the Austrians could not have made the decision they did or whatever.

Had that not happened, I mean, I know Tom and I are always rubbishing what ifs to say one of our specialties, but had that not happened, do you think civil war would have happened before the end of the year? I think if violence had broken out in Ireland, that would have affected the whole of the United Kingdom in 1914. But it's hard to see, I guess, how the violence might have happened given that, in effect, we're in this stalemate position in 1914. The bill had passed, but there was no real prospect of enforcing an Ulster given the position of the army, the relative weakness of the Liberal government, the fact that neither the Irish Nationalists, or the Ulster Unionists, or the British Tory Party, Tory Unionist Party, wanted to give any ground here. So the kind of trenches were dug as it were. It's hard to see how this could have been resolved peacefully, but we were awaiting a spark.

So Dan, the Irish historian Michael Laffen says of this period that it is the greatest crisis to confront a British government since the Civil Wars of the 17th century. So presumably you would agree with that. I do agree, and as I said at the start of this discussion, this is the last time that religion really seriously mattered, but it's also the last time that Ireland really mattered in British politics, because I think that even at the height of the Troubles, what was happening in Northern Ireland didn't really affect the outcome of British general elections. No, not at all. It was a serious issue, but it didn't really change how people voted, I wouldn't say. Maybe it contributed to people rewarding the Labour government after the Good Friday Agreement or whatever, but it never really mattered again. Arguably until 2014 in the Scottish independence referendum, the Union had been a dead issue for a long time, but it goes back to my original point that the First World War changed everything. Everything was changed utterly. As soon as war is declared, the British government introduces what's called a Suspensory Act, which is to say we won't enact the Home Rule for Ireland until at least one year after the cessation of hostilities. They had no idea how long the war was going to end,

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so the Irish issues effectively parked.

But I think there are bigger issues that happen in the course of the First World War.

You know, the extension of the franchise in 1918,

the exhaustion of the First World War,

no one wants to go back to what Churchill called the dreary steeples for Manor and Tyrone.

Irish issues were the last thing on Britain's mind,

even in the teeth of an Irish war of independence and then civil war.

People just weren't as bothered as they once were.

And I've got this hunch that for a lot of people,

the social mixing and the trenches of the First World War was another decisive factor,

because people didn't used to mix across religious lines.

People have been taught for centuries that Catholics were this disloyal fifth column in Britain,

and then they served alongside them in the trenches,

and they saw how brave they were.

They saw how gallant their Irish Roman Catholic chaplains were,

but do you know what? They're actually alright this lot.

It was all nonsense what we were told.

Isn't there a more cynical explanation, though?

I mean, in Ronan Fanning's book that we've mentioned a few times, Fatal Path,

one of the reasons he says in his preface that he wrote that book was because

he wants to show, to some degree, the violence worked.

The violence radicalization won, that it got results.

He doesn't necessarily like it, but that's how he sees it.

Couldn't you say that the reason the issue fades for people in Britain

is that the Ulster Unists won.

They got what they wanted, by arming, by marching,

by making the great hullabaloo with their Tory allies.

They were excluded from home rule.

They eventually get their own parliament.

I mean, they didn't necessarily want their own parliament to begin with,

but they get their own parliament.

They get the six counties state that they wanted,

but they get their own, they get their way,

as in fact, of course, to the Catholic Irish Nashas.

Both sides get their way, and so that's why it settled to some degree, isn't it?

I mean, there are people who lose out, obviously,

which are the kind of minorities either side of the border,

especially in the north,

but those two majorities, if you like, both win.

And so people in Britain say, great, they've won, let them crack on.

Do you think?

Yeah, I think that's right.

I've got a lot of sympathy for Ronan Fanning's view on that question.

Even Carson actually looks back on that period and writes in the early 1920s to say

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we were just a pawn in a political game.

We were used, our campaign was used by the Tories to get back in power.

I don't quite believe, I align more with your take on this, and Ronan Fanning's take, that to a lot of British people it was, this seems like a sensible solution.

It's not ideal, you know, it's settled.

We're not going to impose anything on the Protestants of Northern Ireland as it became.

So just let's just leave it.

But do you think also, Dan, that the reason that people in Britain don't remember this is because they have chosen not to remember it?

Because actually it threatens the idea of British politics as always having been Pacific, constitutional, law-based.

We don't want to remember how effective violence actually was in an immense constitutional issue.

I mean, one that ends up ripping a chunk of the United Kingdom away.

Yes, I think that's a really good point.

I think that this whole period, that's why I mentioned at the start that people's slightly CPA-tinged view of the Edwardian period as this Indian summer, as I mentioned, is completely false.

And I don't know where that comes from.

Maybe it was a deliberate thing because people could remember how febrile, how potentially violent it could have easily become in Britain, if not in Ireland itself.

And so this story has been largely buried for decades.

But surely the answer to both of those things is, it goes back to the thing you said right at the beginning, Dan, about the Great War changing everything.

The Great War eclipses this in the national imagination.

Of course, people are always going to remember the Somme, Pashtundale, Ypres, rather than constitutional wranglings about the Home Rule Act.

And then a lot of paramilitary violence that kind of doesn't quite happen.

So it's a bigger story.

But also it's because of the Great War that people construct this fantasy image of what life was like before the war, don't you think?

Because they're dreaming of a lost golden age, you know, before these hundreds of thousands of people were killed.

Never such innocence.

Yeah, I completely agree.

And actually there's a potentially other angle as well, which was the places that were so important in that story before the First World War, if I take Liverpool, for example,

they were never as prominent again in the national conversation.

You know, leading politicians, Harold Wilson, of course, in the 1960s, the cities like Liverpool, the North, Scotland,

were never as quite as important as they once were in the national conversation

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as they were before 1914.

So the prospect of violence in Liverpool and Glasgow is a very definite proposition in 1914, as it would have been in the 1980s.

Right, so the United Kingdom in 1914 does not erupt into violence,

but we have a sense that in some way,

paramilitaries in Ulster have kind of won.

Home rule has not been given to Ireland.

And of course, the knock-on effect of that is that it influences paramilitaries in nationalist Ireland to play the card of violence.

And that, Dominic, is really the subject of our next and final episode in this,

because two years after the beginning of the war,

violence comes to the streets of Dublin.

It does indeed in Easter Rising.

So for that episode, which, of course, you can listen to

if you're a member of the Rest is History Club.

So if you're a member of the Rest is History Club, you can listen to that right now.

But if not, you'll have to wait until Thursday,

because that is when we will be returning down to his box.

And we will be taking out again, but we will be returning, won't we,

to the GPO in Dublin, Tom?

Taking wing back to Dublin.

We'll be back in Dublin at the GPO at the epicenter of the Irish Revolution

in 1916 for the Easter Rising with Professor Paul Rouse.

But we can talk about Paul Rouse next time, because Dan, that was...

Somebody once sometimes says that people on this podcast are responsible for these great tour de force.

Have you ever heard anybody say that, Dan?

Once or twice, I think, maybe.

Once or twice.

So at this time, instead of him saying it, I will say it,

that was an absolutely splendid tour de force.

So your book, your PhD, which I heartily...

It's a tremendous page, Turner.

It's called Popular Opposition to Irish Home Rule in Edwardian Britain.

It's still available in all good bookshops, isn't it, Dan,

from Liverpool University Press.

Maybe not W. H. Smith's, but...

No, it's available at a fairly discounted price of £23.99, I'm told.

That's insane value.

Insane value.

Rush out and buy it now.

That's actually remarkably good value for a PhD thesis.

That's not bad.

Of course, the other book of Dan's that you can absolutely get very readily

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is The Northumbrians on a very different topic,
but absolutely wonderful, wonderful book.
So, Dan, thank you so much.
Thank you, everyone, for listening.
And we will be back on Thursday with the Easter Rising.
Bye-bye.
Bye.
Goodbye.
Thanks for listening to The Rest is History.
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and access to our chat community,
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