

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 339: Ireland: The Easter Rising, 1916

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What is it but nightfall? No, no, not night but death. Was it needless death after all?

For England may keep faith for all that is done and said. We know their dream enough to know they dreamed and are dead.

And what if excess of love bewildered them till they died?

I write it out in a verse, McDonner and McBride and Connolly and Pierce.

Now and in time to be, wherever green is worn, are changed, changed utterly, a terrible beauty is born.

So Dominic, those are the closing lines of William Butler Yates' great poem, Easter 1916, written about the Easter Rising.

Which we began this series, it seems a long time ago.

Several centuries ago.

With the proclamation read by Patrick Pierce outside the GPO where we are currently sitting as we reach the fourth and final episode in our great suite through the history of Ireland and its relations with Britain.

It's extraordinary to be doing this story of the Easter Rising 1916, surely the most discussed, celebrated moment in Irish history.

It's extraordinary to be recording that in the GPO, in the building that was the epicenter of the drama.

We're looking out over O'Connell Street, the buses, the trams.

So if you do hear a bit of banging and crashing outside and sirens and whatnot, that's all part of the exciting Irish local colour.

And we're back with the person who read that proclamation for us so brilliantly at the beginning of the first episode.

Paul Rouse, Professor of History at University College Dublin.

So Paul, the stage is set and off you go.

I mean, this is your story.

I don't think you want two British people to be telling the story of the Easter Rising, do you? Or do you?

Well, I think it is an extraordinary story.

It's a British story and an Irish story and Tommy Redd from WB8.

It's a story of poets and their poetry and its impact.

It's a story of poverty for another strand with James Connolly.

It's a story of language and education with Patrick Pierce.

And it's a story of those ardent revolutionaries who were there, who all walked in right under where we stand here at the GPO.

Just before noon on Easter Monday, 1916, 24th of April and declared an Irish Republic in this building.

And you read the bit about Pierce and Macdonald.

I come to the start of that poem, though, which Yates wrote several months after the Rising.

He's ambiguous in how he views the Rising, but he didn't publish it until 1920, which is really

interesting.

He held on to it because the world was changed and he says changed already, but it was changing with a rapidity after 1916, which emphasizes just what a pivotal moment in Irish history it is and by extension in the history of the United Kingdom.

But he opened that poem, Easter 1916, by saying, I have met them at close of day, coming with vivid faces.

And for those people who read deeply in Irish history, they'll know that vivid faces is a brilliant book written by Professor Roy Foster, who was just an outstanding historian in Oxford for very many years.

And that idea that I met them at close of day, these were people that were known to Yates and known to Dubliners, known to people all around the place.

And you must remember Dublin was a small city. Dublin felt and still sometimes feels like a country town because its centre is so small.

You can't walk the street to this city still without meeting someone who you know or running into them in different places.

And Ireland is a small country, so even people who move up to the place are known and there are connections and there are its networks of associations, but also of family and of schooling and of local loyalties remade in this city and they're all across this period.

So who are these people then? Who are the people who Yates is eulogising and who take this fateful step in Easter in 1916?

Well, we can go through them one after the next in terms of the groups of people that were there. Right at the core of the story is the Irish Republican Brotherhood, who we last met, back founded after the famine in America and in England.

They had flows of guns, flows of money coming from America, but the truth of it is they had done nothing about revolution since the age since 1867.

They had sought to enter into politics and to be part of organisation, but they could not be considered to be successful.

Indeed, they were mocked as a group of old people who really didn't do a whole pile.

And if you look at one of their number, it was reconstituted in 1906-1907 and it was a new generation took over the IRB and one of them.

And to give you an idea of what they were like, one of them is Dennis McCullough.

Dennis McCullough was brought into a pub in Belfast and sworn into the IRB.

He was brought to the pub by his father.

It's a kind of secret organisation.

Secret organisation, revolution, dedicated to the overture of Freemasons.

That's exactly it.

And they're dedicated to the overthrow of British rule in Ireland.

And by violent means, apparently.

And McCullough in this pub was disgusted by what he saw.

He saw a whole load of windbags who had no interest in doing anything.

So he shipped them out one after the next, including his own father.

His own father.

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So when his own generation came in, the one person from the older generation who was central to them was Tom Clark.

So Tom Clark had been involved in a dynamiting campaign in the 1880s in England, was arrested, spent a lot of time in English prisons.

Came out around 1900, went to America for a few years,

but in 1906 was living around the corner from here where he ran a tobaccoist.

And that tobaccoist shop became a hub of revolution.

People coming in and out of it, passing notes.

He's reorganising the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

Who are ready to go on at the core of this revolution is the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

Who, it was Clark who held a meeting just after the outbreak of the Great War in September 1914, who said, we will strike before this war ends.

He was disgusted that there had been no rebellion during the Boer War, and he was determined not to miss this chance.

So Clark set on revolution.

And later in early 1915 set up a small military council to develop the plans.

So there at the core of everything that happens is the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

The second group who are involved are a group of socialists, essentially the Irish Citizen Army, headed by James Connolly.

Connolly was born in Scotland, born in Edinburgh, to Irish emigrant parents

who had come to Ireland as a labour organiser and had been involved in the 1913 lockout,

which was a really famous trade union conflict with businesses in Dublin,

which was a seminal moment again in Irish labour politics,

and it was a vivid illustration of the poverty of Dublin.

And the poverty of Dublin, there's all this nonsense spoken about Dublin as a second city of empire, of the second city of emperor.

What does that even mean?

What does it mean to be the second city of empire?

And the style of Birmingham as well, by the way, and Calcutta and Edinburgh.

It was one of those titles, but what Dublin did was was a deeply divided society where you had a crust of people with a lot of money in the beginning.

There's a rising middle class, but on the bottom there are people who are in the most appalling circumstances living around the place.

So you get 25,000 families living in one room, the accommodation.

Many of those families even took in lodgers into their one room.

They had no sanitation, no running water.

There were often cattle and sheep, or cattle kept out the back of the houses for milk and so on.

So this is a very poor, very poor city.

And it was out of this city that labor agitation began in 1913,

but the labor agitation happened at exactly the same time, of course,

as the Ulster volunteers had been founded by Carson.

So James Connelly had a simple idea.

We would protect our workers by setting up our own militia, the Irish citizen army, and they trained.

And Connelly was disillusioned by 1915 with progress,

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the war had got in on him.

He was himself a former British army soldier, by the way, but he set on revolution too.

The volunteers knew he was set on revolution, so they pulled him into his military council.

So that's the second group of people.

And just before you move on to the next groups, that shows, doesn't it, just how much Irish politics has been radicalised

and I suppose paramilitarised by the experience of 1912-14.

It is impossible to understand the 1916 rising without looking at the militarisation of Irish society, begun by Edward Carson and the Ulster volunteer force and their foundation.

Added to by the gunrunning at Larn, where the Ulster volunteer force brought in German and other guns,

with which to say that they will resist home rule at any cost in Ulster.

Radicalised also by the uncertain loyalty of the British army in Ireland through its current mutiny, essentially says we will not dispossess the Ulster volunteer force of those guns which they have brought in.

I mean, how extraordinary is it that the British army could not be relied on to do the will of the British government?

What a statement of the state of British politics that that is.

But the Irish volunteers, under Owen McNeill, a professor of medieval history and early Irish history at University College Dublin at the time, and a complete another rebuttal to the idea that academics are useless,

founded the Irish volunteer force after writing an article called The North Began.

And they too began to run in guns through 1914.

And you get this split then after the war when John Redmond asked those volunteers to join the British army

and fight for the empire, thereby guaranteeing home rule the volunteers.

I'll come back to explain that split more fully when we talk about more people in it.

But what it meant was that there was a standing army of 10 to 15,000 people who were in Ireland, a militia who were there to be tweaked towards the idea of revolution.

But that militarization of Ireland, you're right, like Dominic, it's fundamental to the context in which there are guns

and people operating in Dublin.

So the other groups that are involved.

So we've got the IRB, the Irish Republic and Brotherhood, the Irish Citizens Army, and there are other groups as well.

So there are poets, there are educators.

There are more ideas than groups.

So you've got a group of groups of kind of Catholic intellectuals, people like Thomas McDonough.

Again, these people are brilliantly described in vivid faces and their ideas are all over the place.

And they're part of a kind of an Irish Ireland movement, which is all around the idea that, you know, Ireland should have its own culture.

It's an awakening of ideas, using modern ideas.

And you know the way there was British press would tell a kind of biggles type stories for the late 19th century.

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You know that idea of magazines being put out.

There were Irish versions of those stories where the heroes of 1798 or of 1848 and of 1867 were recast.

Because one of the things that struck me reading about the Easter Rising is that a lot of the Irish nationalist organizations are definitely drawing on British models.

Even the Irish volunteers are kind of doing drill like the British Army do.

Their officers are mimicking the style of British officers.

And that whole cult of kind of manliness, we did an episode on King Solomon's Mines just a few weeks ago.

This has been kind of gala-sized, I suppose you would say.

Yeah, they gala-sized it by turning it on its head.

So you have the English model of sport in Ireland.

You have rugby and soccer and cricket and formed in modern clubs around Ireland, but they fly the Union Jack.

They have the Lord Lieutenant as their patron.

So in the middle of the 1880s, a group of Irish nationalists, but people who were sports lovers, founded the Gaelic Athletic Association

and resurrected the game of hurling, made a game which they called Gaelic football, took control of athletics

and said, right, you choose English laws for sport or Irish laws for sport.

Now, of course the reality of people's lives are that people don't necessarily live like that.

They want a little bit of this and a little bit of everything really.

But that's there, those ideas are there in the background.

It's English popular culture is everywhere in Ireland in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The sort of Boy Scout aspect to this, isn't it?

Yeah, so Nafina Aaron is a remaking of the English Scout movement except soaked in the history of Irish republicanism

and the idea of Irish separatism and loads of those guys walk into this building with peers.

In 1916, and that really, really matters to the idea of a creation.

And this is the last thing, this idea, this last group of people who are influenced by the idea of Ireland, by this notion.

And there's a school not far from here, St Andrews National School.

And the rollbook for Easter week 1916 has no students in it because it says closed for the Poets Revolution.

And that tells you something.

So where does poetry come into the revolution?

I think poetry comes in in three different ways.

The first of it is this creation of the idea, the alternative to the British Empire.

And this idea, this world of ideas that there is an ancient Ireland remade through its history, that there is mythology through Cuckoo Cullen and Nafina, which can be put there.

And this our antiquity, we were there before the British Empire.

We were there before the Anglo-Saxons even pitched.

Yeah, we were here and we'll survive them.

We'll be fine.

We will go back to our ways.

So that idea is there.

So poetry matters for that and help create that.

It matters too because there were poets who fought and died in the rising or were executed after the rising.

Pierce wrote poetry.

McDonough was a really well regarded poet.

James Connolly wrote poetry and plays and so on.

This was a revolution of words and revolutionaries who used words all the time.

And the third may of matters is the words of Yates afterwards and the amount and the words that were written about it

and how they told a very particular story of the revolution.

And that can be seen in the accounts from the time and afterwards.

So again, reading about this again and again, scholars make this point.

So Peter Hart described the entire Easter Rising as a unique example of insurrectionary abstract art, which I thought was kind of brilliant.

What does he mean by that?

My favourite book on the idea of this, and I commend it to everybody, it was recommended to me when I took a course on the Irish Revolution in 1989 by Professor Michael Athens called *The Imagination of an Insurrection*, written by an American philosopher called William Irwin Thompson.

It is just the most magnificent exploration of the relationship between poetry and revolution and the human condition

and how those three things are not, you know, they're all related and all intertwined.

And there is a thing, there is a thing where people have taken selective writings from some of the people,

notably Patrick Pierce from *The Rising*, and see it only as bloodlust.

And they decontextualise it from the idea of war in Europe at the time

and the stuff that was being written by the poets of the Great War and what they saw.

And it was as if there was a death wish from some people that they saw it as theatre,

that they didn't understand that these were somehow woolly people who did not understand what war was.

And that is entirely wrong.

In my view, they went and planned this for a long time.

You may argue that the plans turned out to be terrible and impossible, and that it did indeed become bloody protest rather than coup d'état.

You may argue that.

But they fought, they struggled for a long time to plan for it.

But this is the idea that Patrick Pierce in particular is associated with it,

that they know that the revolution is going to be wiped out, that they will probably be killed,

and so that they are kind of offering themselves up the phrases as a blood sacrifice,

modelled on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

Yeah, it's kind of like the fact that it was Easter as well

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and that it's kind of insurrection as resurrection and that it's poetry and prayer and it's all rubbed in together.

But where I think that breaks down is the extent to which they sought to arm themselves from Germany.

They sought to go.

Why did Pierce go on speaking tours of America?

Why did they try and raise money?

Why did they import so many guns?

Why did they spend more than a year planning?

So they're planning from what point?

From the moment the war breaks out or from a few months into the war?

They're talking about it from the moment, they decide the moment the war breaks out but the military council really gets going in the spring of 1915.

So Home Rule has been passed but has been constantly pushed back, delayed.

And is that because, is the reason they want to do an uprising because they think actually the British will always find a way not to give us Home Rule

or because they think Home Rule is just nowhere near enough, we want to push for more.

So the view is that Home Rule is not enough.

That because of the limitations to do with finance and on defence

that really it's anemic and it doesn't amount to anything approaching independence.

Number one, number two, the Home Rule was on the statute books, had been passed, signed off by the king but it was now clear that there was going to be exclusion

for at least six counties for a period of time and clearly indefinitely because the Tory government would come back in and things will be changed

and things will be moved on.

And there was that old adage of Irish republicanism which ties in with the idea of Ireland being dangerous because of its links with France and Spain

but this is it recast in a different way, the gallant allies in Europe.

We can use these people to get ourselves the guns that we need.

We can't get enough through America but we can use the Germans to help us be freed and that old adage of England's difficulty being Ireland's opportunity.

It's such a cliché, but it's a cliché for a reason.

But why are the British not aware of what's going on?

Because if all these guns are being collected and poets are writing manifestos and yet it seems to take the British completely by surprise.

John Dylan makes a speech in the spring of 1915 in Scotland.

So John Dylan is the...

Sorry, I shouldn't have explained that yet.

So back in the spring of 1915, John Dylan, who's John Redmond's number two in the Irish parliamentary party, is making a speech in Scotland

and he says, listen, there's a lot of talk at the moment about there's going to be a rising in Ireland in the next while.

He says, they're not going to do that.

Like Michael Fish with the...

But they know people are talking about it, Patrick Pearson or not.

But they think these are just, you know...

It's like students in the pub talking about revolution.

I mean, this will never happen.

Is that basically the sort of condescending attitude almost?

It is, but it's understandable in very many respects and not least because of the militarisation that we spoke about because these Irish volunteers are actually up and down parading and have been for a couple of years, they're out on the streets.

Right.

And it's a familiar thing to see militias of men in military formation marching up and down the streets and being called and going on manoeuvres.

So it's easy to understand and to convince yourself that it's going to be fine.

Another reason, of course, is that Redmond, John Redmond, was telling Augustine Burrell, the chief secretary for Ireland and telling Dublin Castle and telling Wimbledon, they're all new.

Oh, no.

The worst thing you can do here is to move against these guys.

Then you will cause revolution.

Yeah, of course.

I mean, that so often happens, right?

Yes.

So move against them, try to suppress them and you will give them a cause.

Yeah.

And essentially, you can understand a lot of 1798 by understanding that approach.

So it became British.

It was the commission of inquiry after the rising.

Blamed Burrell, Augustine Burrell and blamed Dublin Castle for their failures before the rising.

I think it's much more, it's not as clear as that.

I think that's easy.

It's an easy way to do it, but it doesn't hold water.

So before we go to the break, Paul, and get into the actual story, the narrative, that the character who more than anybody else embodies the spirit of the Easter Rising,

we've mentioned him a couple of times, but we've never really explained him, is this guy, Patrick Pierce.

So he's actually been missing.

You know, when we did the Home Rule Crisis and all that, his name never featured at all.

I mean, I don't know.

You said that everybody knew everybody in Dublin.

But who is he?

Is he a big figure?

And how is it that he more than anybody else becomes the, you know, the walking embodiment of this kind of the spirit of this extraordinary year?

In a revolution, people everywhere by extraordinary characters, there is nobody quite like Patrick Pierce.

He has his demonizers and he has his idolaters who have sought to position him in a certain way and cast him in a certain light.

And almost always they do the service to the scale of the intellect that were there, the scale of achievements that were there outside the revolutionary sphere.

So he was born into an English father who was a...

He was a Brahmi, wasn't he?

Yeah, and Stolmes and he went to university, studied English and Irish and French, qualified as a lawyer, went to the bar, but he was motivated most of all by Irish language revival and by involvement in the Gaelic League.

He became editor of a newspaper called Unclive Sullish, which was the most important Irish language publication there.

And he sought always to expand the boundaries.

But it was education which motivated him more than anything else.

He set up his own boys' school, St. Endes, on the south side of Dublin and added a girls' school to it because he was an absolute believer in equality between men and women.

So he set up St. Edes which only lasted a while.

The education in St. Endes was Gaelic.

The idea was that there should be education through bilingualism and he went to Belgium and studied the methods that were used.

They brought them back to Ireland and sought to kind of build a citizenship and an idea of intellectual journey which was around this.

Was he involved in politics?

Yes, he began to be pulled into politics.

He stood in favour of home rule in 1912 and 1913.

He believed in the idea of home rule.

He didn't think it was enough, but he thought it was a decent thing to be going on with.

It was only later into 1914 that he really became radicalised onto the idea that there should be a revolution.

Now some people say it's because his school was failing and that he needed money and his life was kind of unraveling on him and he had painted himself into the corner where he needed to make a dramatic statement.

I disagree with that.

I think that's denying him his own agency

and he showed a clear pattern through his life of evolving his thought in a whole load of ways. I should say, by the way, in passing, if anyone wants to read a brilliant exploration of the education system in Britain and Ireland, read *The Murder Machine* which is a book he wrote about how rote learning was destroying education at the time and he called for creativity and innovation and a child-centred approach to education way, way, way ahead of his time. Anyway, he was on the Military Council, appointed as the Military Council of the IRB in 1915 and he was then set on revolution. He was inspirational or driving the idea that there should be guns imported, that there would be training and that Ireland would rise and the date set for this rebellion was Easter 1916. Right. I think at this point we should take a break and then, Paul, when we come back, you could take us through the events of Easter 1916. Welcome back to *The Restless History*. We are entering the final lap of this mighty Irish marathon. Paul Rouse, who has been doing a herculean job, but Paul, the end is finally in sight for you. Take us through the story of Easter 1916. Sir Roger Casement, who would have been known across Britain and Ireland in the first two decades of the 20th century as the man who had investigated the imperial outrages in the Congo, who'd repeated in the Amazon, who had then become a devotee of the idea of home rule and then became a gun runner for the Irish volunteers. He went to Berlin at the beginning of the Great War and he sought to raise an army of Irish prisoners who'd been taken by the Germans to form a brigade to come over. He had sought also to convince the Germans to send 20,000 men or 15,000 or whatever they would give to the cause and land them in Limerick and they would march and take the land and failing that he wanted guns, he wanted rifles. Well, finally before Easter, 1916 the Germans sent on a ship 20,000 guns and Casement came by submarine to the south coast of Ireland.

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This was seen as what would make the revolution possible.
There would be an uprising if there were guns,
even if there weren't German soldiers themselves
but the volunteers would now have the weaponry with which to rise.
Casement, everything went wrong.
Casement ended up staggering onto the shore at Bannestrand
in County Kerry where he'd capsized on the boat
an inflatable coming in.
The ship on which the arms were being brought from Germany
was intercepted and the captain of it scuttled it
before it went into Queenstown in Cork.
The question was what would the rebels do
who had said they were going to rise.
That's part of the story ended with Roger Casement
being arrested and ultimately being imprisoned in the Tower of London
and after the rising as we will see
he was hung in Pentonville Prison in August 1916.
By then the whole situation in Ireland had been fundamentally changed
so he could at least say that he had played a part
in the transformation of Ireland though not in the manner
in which he might have expected
but he stepped off that submarine in April 1916.
So that's all gone wrong.
The question for the rebels for Pearson, his pals who have been planning this
is do they go ahead anyway?
And they do go ahead anyway, it's the amazing thing isn't it?
They go ahead anyway and they can go ahead
because what happened was immediately after the war began
John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party
called for the Irish volunteers to join the British Army
to fight in France.
That led to a split in the Irish volunteers in which 15,000 or so
between 10 and 15,000 went with people under the charge of own McNeill
and they began to drift towards the idea of revolution
but McNeill would only go if there was two things happening
if the volunteers were going to be suppressed by the state
and if there were arms coming from Germany
a genuine prospect of success.
So in the week before Easter 1916
those guys who were set on revolution from the IRB
took a document that was in Dublin Castle
and I think the phrase in English politics is sexed it up
and made it that the volunteers were about to be suppressed
and convinced McNeill of that

and then they told McNeill there were guns coming from Germany. So McNeill agreed, everyone would rise on Easter Sunday morning we would call for manoeuvres and we would use those manoeuvres to take various strategic places around Dublin and that the country would be sized with limerick as a base and everything would manoeuvre there and then everything would rise and the British would be overthrown. Now, the problem was when McNeill heard that the casement had been captured and there were no guns coming he balked at the idea. Number two, he began to believe that the castle document was a forgery this document that said there was oppression. Well, it was the makings of a forgery which had a basis in a real document that appears but it was ultimately a forgery if you change the document it's forgery. So yes, it's a long answer to a simple question. So McNeill issued countermanding orders said that on Easter Sunday there would now be no manoeuvres. He published a notice on the front page of the Sunday Independent which bestselling paper in the country to cancel everything. So now the rebels with Pierce and Tom Clark they're in Connolly, they're in a quandary, what do they do? They fear, they made a fateful decision they said we won't go on Sunday, we'll go on the Monday instead. The problem was they mobilized on Easter Monday morning and there was confusion in the ranks of all the volunteers so the work in 15,000 came out. In the course of the whole week fewer than 2,000 came out and in the morning themselves there were probably fewer than 1,000. So into this building here, just after noon they gathered in Liberty Hall just down along the river from us here which was the headquarters which had a sign hanging outside it we serve neither King nor Kaiser. They walked out through the doors of there and they headed to various parts around the city in their mobilization. They walked through these doors here, there were five soldiers on duty they shot a sergeant in the face and they took over the general post office. And wasn't there was one very unfortunate British soldier who was here buying stamps? Incredibly bad timing.

His timing was not ideal
and apparently he got access to a bottle of brandy later in the week
and he took a lot of minding I think is the phrase that was bandied.
So they walk in, a small group of them
ultimately compared with the 15,000 they were hoping for.
What's the reaction of the people of Dublin
when these guys pitch up and they say
this isn't everybody, it's a revolution, a republic.
I mean the people who are buying stamps, going for lunch,
going about their daily business,
I'm guessing they're not swept,
I mean knowing crowds as I do in history
they're probably not swept up instantly by revolution enthusiasm, are they?
No, because they're used to people parading on the streets
and now Pierce is outside in his uniform
reading a proclamation of a republic which they can't conceive of.
And there are people there who are mocking,
there are people who've got family
or are fighting in the British army in the front
or people looking at them in bemusement
and of course there were others of course who were happy.
You see it as revolution.
But it's what happens next is really important.
The rebels then began to pull up barricades around the city
so they begin to stop life in the city
and they attack Dublin Castle.
And it is at Dublin Castle that the first shots of the revolution
are fired and a policeman is killed going in.
Now we know in hindsight and everybody says
this military plan was terrible.
Why didn't you take Dublin Castle?
Why didn't you take Trinity College?
Why did you take the list of buildings that you took?
Why did you go to the GPO?
Yes, it's a grand building on the best street in the city.
The post office isn't the obvious place you would seize first.
No, Norris Stevens Green,
they built a trench in the middle of the green.
Norris the forecourt, not a bad building.
Along the leaf he has some...
But the thing about Dublin Castle,
the policeman who gets shot is unarmed.
And I think there's one armed soldier in there.
The sense of Dublin Castle is this powerful nerve centre

of imperial control.
And actually it seems to have been completely hopeless.
Burrell was in London for the weekend.
Other officials were away as well.
The officers were off at the races.
They were at the Irish Grand National,
which was down in Ferry House,
but it tells you how little they expected to be a revolution.
They may have been worried on the Sunday,
but after all they got casement.
They got the guns.
They'd seen the countermanding order.
There's no evidence that these guys are going to go out
on the Monday and stage a revolution.
So why won't I enjoy my Easter Monday?
Why wouldn't I go to the races?
And the rebels didn't know.
It's easy to say now, well, there were no guns there.
There weren't 200 soldiers.
Why didn't you take Dublin Castle and hold it?
They might have considered it to be just too difficult to do it.
But they took City Hall,
which is right beside Dublin Castle,
a formidable building.
And actually if anybody wants to read an account of that,
have a look online at the Bureau of Military History
account of Harry Colley,
who was a C-O-L-L-E-Y who fought in that revolution.
And he tells a really dramatic, vivid story of it.
My favourite thing they take is the Jacobs Biscuit Factory.
That was what I was going to ask.
Why on earth do they take the Jacobs Biscuit Factory?
There is no obvious reason why that was the case.
They also took a mill, Bollins Mills,
and they took the South Dublin Union,
which is the site of anyone who's been in Dublin
will know James is hospital.
Not Trinity College, which is great.
I mean, that would be a very strong place to hold, wouldn't it?
Yes, and if you've got significant numbers with you,
you might take Trinity College,
but the plan for the rising has been lost.
So they say there were three copies made of the plan for the rising.
They were so worried about informers.

They didn't make loads of copies.
They didn't disperse them and the plans were lost.
We don't know exactly what they intended to do
before the mobilisation ended up the way it is.
And probably the most bizarre decision was actually
to go into Stephen's Green,
which visitors to Dublin will know is a beautiful public space
at the top of Bradford Street,
where they dug a trench in the manner of modern warfare.
Well, isn't that because they thought, you know,
they think modern warfare is all about trenches.
The Great War, France and Flanders said,
obviously what you need to do is you try to capture a city,
dig a massive big trench in the middle
and prepare for, you know, to repel attackers.
Disappointingly, though, there are high buildings all around us,
where which leaves you open.
And it was an unmitigated disaster.
And they went through it across Stephen's Green
to the Royal College of Surgeons,
where they stayed the rest of the week there.
And my favourite detail almost from these rising
is that when the British Julie arrive,
and there's kind of fighting over St Stephen's Green,
that there's a kind of twice daily truce,
where the parkkeeper is allowed to go in and feed the ducks,
which I think reflects very well on both sides.
I think I think that's true. I think that's true.
I think it's matched only as a piece of trivia
from the rising by the fact that two people who fought
in the rising, John Lauder and Arthur Shields,
ended up starring in a Hollywood film,
which won five Oscars in the 1950s at John Ford film.
So that's, I think, the only thing that may match.
But isn't there a bloke as well, his mum comes to take him home?
Yeah, his mum, his mum, he called to the GPO
and told him to stop that mess and then go home.
Everybody came back the next day.
And the next day there was no, he didn't leave after that.
So to go back to the Monday.
By Monday afternoon, the city has not risen.
And many of the people in the city, when they find out,
am I right in this, that many of the people
when they find out what's going on are furious, appalled.

They think it's a, I mean, not everybody, of course,
there is a whole, you can't generalize,
but they haven't had the reaction,
the unbridled enthusiasm that they were hoping for.
They might have hoped for, yeah.

No, that's absolutely clear.

I think it sometimes overplayed the extent to which people
opposed what they did because the turn came so quickly
afterwards and after the executions,
that it feels to me too much to say that,
oh, the city was appalled, the city was disgusted.
There were definitely people who were disgusted
and appalled by it, but I would be slow to say
how general that was.

There were people amazed.

But people often seem to say that it's women in particular
who are hostile to it.

And there are comparisons to the tricketers,
the women who would knit in front of the guillotine
in the French Revolution, that women are so hostile
that the volunteers are often kind of quite nervous
about the violence that they might inflict on them.

Yes.

And again, that is said, but again,
probably the best contemporary account of The Rising
is a beautiful book by James Stevens,
which is called The Insurrection in Dublin.

And he talks about that idea of resentment at the rebels
from particularly women on the streets.

So we can't deny that that's the case.

It's the extent of it and how quickly it changed,
I think, is that issue.

Number one, number two, he has a brilliant line in it
when he talks about the rumors that were sweeping Dublin
when this happened.

Park had been taken.

Monster was in rebel hands.

The English were surrounded and in their barracks
and couldn't leave.

The country had risen.

As he said himself, rumors were created and winged
in the course of that week and they spread through the city.

But the British are not surrounded
and presumably troops are starting to be mobilized

and brought in to try and pacify The Rising.
So what's the process by which the British come into Dublin?
They come in without any difficulty at all
because the rebels have not cut off the strategic ways
into the city from Kildare from the core camps.
So they come in easily.
They stabilize the situation in Dublin Castle.
It's clear by Monday evening that it's fine.
By Tuesday, martial law has been declared.
They bring four 18-pound artillery guns up from a lawn
and they're set up near Trinity College there
on Westmoreland Street.
And they begin to send troops over from Wales.
They put troops on the ships.
And when those troops arrive on the Wednesday,
they cannot believe how eloquent the English
being spoken by the people they meet are
because they thought they were going to France.
Yeah, of course.
But even, I mean, extraordinary things.
So within arguably less than a day,
the final outcome is decided, right?
Because it's pretty obvious probably by nightfall on the Monday
that this isn't going to be a successful revolution,
that Dublin Castle still stands.
The British are on their way.
This is going to be snuffed out.
Oh, yeah.
And there are above us here the Irish Republic flag,
the green flag with the harp on it is flying at one end.
The tricolor, the green, white, and orange is flying
at the other end.
But the rebel headquarters,
how does it communicate with everybody else?
There are barricades at the end of each end of the street
with British soldiers at each end of them.
There's a smell and sound of revolution.
Yeah.
There's gunshots everywhere.
James Stevens writes, he talks about writing this
as he hears shots in the streets.
There are horses dying on the street.
And later there are wild horses running up and down the street.
And then there's looting everywhere around the city.

And they looted cricket bats, don't they?

They looted, looted.

I think there are some incredible scenes.

So there's the scene of five people pushing through
with Dublin Street, carrying a grand piano.

Five of them, which has been looted.

And there are people who loot cricket bats and balls.

And they play cricket on the bottom of the street.

And there's a beautiful phrase and poignant
and desperately sad one about which James Stevens writes
about a group of children who've looted a sweet shop
and they get to taste things that they most likely
have never tasted before and may never again.

Wow.

In the rest of their lives.

Almost all the people we've talked about, apart from
Thomas talking about the crowds, have been men.

But there are women involved in this,
in the Easter Rising too, aren't there?

Yes.

And they're extremely important to the Rising
and to the idea of the Rising as well.

And they run from somebody like Constance Markovich,
who was from the Gore Booth family,
very listed L House, very familiar to Yates.

And she is a figure who was in Stephen's Green,
who was involved in the Irish Citizen Army.

I knew, saw herself and was seen by others as the leader
of that group who were up there and who were treated to
Dominic Acid.

She fired apparent claims to have killed somebody
or other claims that she shot one person there.

There are others such as Margaret Skinner,
who came from Scotland to come over and fight.

And Constance Markovich has a tremendous costume, doesn't she?

And this also seems to be part of the Easter Rising,
where people want to look good for it.

The imagery of the Rising matters and it certainly,
she was wearing a hat with ostrich feathers
and it was quite the statement.

I think when it was out there and it has led,

I think to an unfortunate image of her as being excessively vain
and there is no doubt she had a certain vanity and do that.

But she was also famous for her diligence

and her committee work and her willingness to do all the hard work as well as she wasn't there for the glamour of revolution. It was exceptionally hard to create that revolution. And if you look at the women who were in the Rising, they span people from that elite of Irish society, right down to people who came from the very poorest circumstances and found a sense of liberation from being treated as equals within the Irish Citizen Army. Now, we can't dress this up. We cannot pretend that all the men who were out in 1916 reviewed women as their equals. It's obvious that they didn't and they certainly didn't. Some people didn't want them there at all, some men didn't want them there at all when they were in guns and they were seen as being there to do the catering or the medical work. So it's not, we have to be careful here in how that is presented. And what about the British? When these soldiers arrive, they think they're going to France and they find that they're in a city within the United Kingdom. What is their take on what is happening? Well, first of all, you look at the soldiers who walk in from Kingston, now Dunlaire, in the south side of Dublin. A group of them goes on the wider road in Trudonebrook and they're fine. They make it to Stevens Green in that area without problems. But there's a group come in along Northumberland Street and they've been set up by an outpost from Avon de Valera's crowd who are in Bolum Mills and they run into an ambush. And there are the guts of 250 British soldiers who are killed or wounded, being caught in the crossfire between about 17 or 18 rebels. One rebel talks about how the gun was too hot to handle. He'd been firing it that often. And that was almost like it was charged at the Light Brigade idea that we will go through this road and we will take... Oh, I guess Battle of the Somme comes out of a trench and it's charging. Which comes in very quickly afterwards, of course. And again, by the way, it's a formidable foundation stone

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for Ulster Unionism and central to Ulster Unionist identity.
But in that, it is clear on Wednesday
that there is only going to be one result.
If there were any doubt, because the Helga, a gunboat,
comes up the Liffey and stops, first of all,
beside Liberty Hall, which is along beside the Customs House.
There's nobody in Liberty Hall, but it's a statement.
This is where the rebels left from.
This is the home of anti-capitalism in Dublin
and they blew the pieces.
Meanwhile, by Thursday, this building here
has been subjected to a barrage of artillery shells
and incendiary shells coming from across the river.
They're not like attempting to storm the building.
Storming buildings in urban warfare would have been
an incredibly difficult lot of loss of life,
so they just take this place and they essentially burn it.
So there is an incredible description of that.
So this is Louisa Norway.
Who is Louisa Norway?
She is the wife of the head of the post office after Norway.
Right.
And so she wrote,
it seemed as if the whole city was on fire,
the glow extending right across the heavens
and the red glare hundreds of feet high.
While above the roar of the fires,
the whole air seemed vibrating with the noise
of the great guns and machine guns.
It was an inferno.
We remained spellbound and I can't tell you
how I longed for you to see it.
So the sense there that this is a horror,
but also an incredible spectacle.
And Sackville Street, as it was then,
was the most handsome city in Dublin?
The most handsome street in Dublin, yes.
And as the Freeman's Journal wrote afterwards,
the most handsome street in Europe had been destroyed
and turned into a room like you would see at Ypres.
And it was a simple case.
We look at the GPO and this,
for people who don't know it,
there's a couple of hundred meters between the GPO

and the Liffey.
All of this was flattened.
Everything was blown out of it.
The rebels had had to retreat back along there.
And there was no doubt the overwhelming gunpowder.
They didn't try and storm the building,
which would have cost enormous loss of life.
So they just put shells in.
And so by the end of the week,
the rebels, I mean, they've held out for a few days,
but it's perfectly obvious to Pierce
to hold out much further and involve colossal loss of civilian life.
There's just no points.
And he agrees to surrender.
On Friday, they're forced to leave this building here
to evacuate through the back entrance
or to a side entrance onto Moore Street.
There was a retreat with a couple of hundred people.
James Connolly is on a stretcher.
He's not able to walk.
His ankle is gone.
Plunkett is sick.
There are a lot of people in a bad way,
but the heat is too much to say.
The timbers from the roof are cascading down.
Let's talk about the intense heat
and everybody's hungry.
And they've all been.
Even in the biscuit factory,
because they're complaining that they're so fed up
with eating biscuits that they do anything to have bread.
And what happens then is they withdraw down Henry Street
and onto Moore Street,
where there's a last stand on the flight.
But by Saturday morning,
Plunkett is sending Elizabeth O'Farrell under a white flag
to suggest surrender and looking for terms.
And it's told back to say it's unconditional surrender
or no surrender.
And they go for the unconditional surrender.
And Elizabeth O'Farrell is then dispatched around the city
to go to the different garrisons.
And you talked about the view of the city being on fire,
but the rebel garrisons were untouched elsewhere.

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Broadly speaking, there was trouble around the forecast.
There were street fighting around that area,
which led to a lot of civilian death.
Money killed by the British army
who couldn't distinguish between rebels and civilians
as they came true.
South Dublin Union was left untouched.
Bollons Mills was left largely untouched.
So they were going,
wait, we don't need to surrender.
And the country hadn't risen,
but Enes Garthy had been taken.
And Enes Garthy, they're going,
why do we have to do this?
Out in Ashburn, there'd been a small rising in Ashburn
where there were running battles
with the RSC and British army.
They don't want to stop.
But they do stop eventually.
They do stop within a couple of days
and it's clear that the Republic lies in ruins.
But this is the fascinating thing, isn't it?
So the rising has been a complete failure.
Militarily, you know, it hasn't worked.
But the reason we're even doing this podcast
is because politically, it is a resounding success.
And now the usual account that I'm guessing
that most people listening to this will have,
who know about it, will have at the back of their minds is
the British defeated the rising
and then completely screwed it up
by their violent repression
and by the cruelty of the executions and all this.
Now, both Tom and I were listening to a series of lectures
by your old tutor, Professor Michael Lafferman.
UCD, who compares it with the Paris Commune of 1871.
For the Paris Commune, he said 20,000 people were executed.
Is it 16 executed?
Including casement.
Including casement at the end of these.
So in other words,
actually when you look at people repressing rebellions.
Well, the British don't execute loads of...
But he also makes the point

that this is seen as treachery and treason.
In the middle of a world war.
In the middle of a world war
where Britain is facing a kind of deadly threat,
that the rebels have sided with the Kaiser.
But also, does he not also make the point?
He says, for us with government,
it's completely and utterly inconceivable
that they would say, oh, that was poor form.
You know, the central Dublin lies in his five years prison.
Then you can come out and be rehabilitated.
I mean, that's never going to happen, right?
And to add to that, the rebel leaders themselves
knew they were going to be executed beforehand.
There was no surprise in this.
But how then does it become such a massive issue?
I mean, these guys, we've come from downstairs.
The statues are there, the sense of martyrdom.
The sense that these guys gave their lives
against a hideously repressive enemy.
And that this became an absolute motivating...
I don't want to say legend,
because that makes it sound like it didn't happen.
It did happen.
The extent to which it became...
It changed utterly.
A terrible beauty is born.
How did it then become,
against the background of the slaughter in the trenches,
how does it become this, dare I say, Tom's sacril...
Yeah, a story for our nationalism.
Oh, it is a sacril story.
And the answer is because of the executions.
Because it doesn't matter what happened in Paris.
It didn't matter these things.
And it come back to this idea where I disagree
with the idea that there was widespread revulsion
around the place.
There is an underlying current there,
which is looking for a reason.
And the reason you find is in the executions.
And you can see it in the middle of the executions.
The executions began on the 3rd of May,
and they ran for 10 days.

And that was a mistake,
because by the middle of the 10 days,
there are people looking for clemency.
And to be...
When you have people looking for clemency,
you have to deny clemency.
And it becomes a story as much as the execution itself.
So that was a mistake.
But is it also a kind of reflection of the fact
that actually Irish nationalists
are holding the British to quite high standards,
that they feel that the British have then failed to maintain?
Is there an element of that?
I wouldn't think so.
I think they're just...
They're just looking for reasons to...
I think you're looking for reasons.
And if you look at it, it happens immediately.
And there's a roundup afterwards, which is a disaster.
The corral 3,500 people,
loads of people are sent to Wales
and interned, and people are moved to different places.
They lift all the wrong people,
as well as there were rebels there.
There are stories coming out,
but also now the factory of nationalist grievance
has something to work with.
It has two things.
It has...
Sorry, it has two things.
It has the fight now,
because there has been a redemption through resurrection,
and it has the treatment afterwards to work with.
One other extraordinary consequence of this
is that one group who you've not mentioned once
is Sinn Féin.
Sinn Féin, which had been a monarchist party.
Arthur Griffith was a monarchist.
He wanted a kind of Austro-Hungarian system.
And the British don't really know what Sinn Féin is
and say, this is all Sinn Féin's work.
This is a Sinn Féin uprising.
And they basically...
The reaction to the Easter Rising creates...

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Sinn Féin is a kind of...

As a mass revolutionary party, I guess, does it?

Is that right?

And it begins by things like...

Sinn Féin being named...

So, for example, The Irish Time has published a handbook, which is a huge seller, sells out of the rebellion, a couple of hundred pages with pictures and portraits of the leaders, and they call it the Sinn Féin Rebellion.

So, the idea of Sinn Féin is an idea.

It's an accumulation of...

The idea of Sinn Féin in Irish means ourselves.

And it captures an idea beautifully.

Now, Sinn Féin had nothing practical to do with the rebellion at all,

but it now becomes a vehicle for people to push into.

Right.

And push into the course.

But it's amazing.

It's amazing some of the things that happen.

Within a month, there are prisoners who've been wrongly lifted, or had nothing to do with the Rising, are coming back on ships, and they're being met at the key by loads of people wearing tricolours.

A year after, there were requiem masses.

For the executed of 1916, huge crowds are going.

There is now taunting of the soldiers in the streets.

A year after the rebellion, on Easter Monday, 1917, a group of people come here to the rubble of this site, and they gather to say the Irish Republic is not dead, that the Irish Republic transcends time, that Pearson Connolly, and Clark, and Kant, and MacDermida, by the very fact of establishing their provisional government, by signing that proclamation, by leading a rebellion, had made certain the idea that there could be no unity.

So, that raises a wonderful counterfactual.

What if the Rising had been cancelled?

What if, you know, the casement, the failure of the gun running that you started, this part of the episode with?

What if the Rising doesn't happen?

Is the course of Irish history different,

or would the trigger have come at some point in the 1910s anyway?

Yeah, it's a brilliant question,

and this idea of the counterfactual of this period

has been looked at by, say, for example,

someone like Professor Alvin Jackson up in Edinburgh,

brilliant historian, who's looked at what would happen

if home rule had been granted, for example, and things.

And it's one of those things that it's really difficult.

What I can say is there is a strain of Irish society

which never accepted the idea of a United Kingdom.

And in the middle, there was a huge swede of population

who, they were Irish, they were not British,

and it comes down to language as well and terminology.

Ireland was never part of Britain.

There were people who identified,

and still identify as British who lived in Ireland,

but it was part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland,

that geographic boundary had to matter.

And maybe in time, things would have been dissolved to the point

where it wouldn't matter anymore,

but there was no evidence in history that that would be the case.

But it does go ahead,

and Fogel MacGarrion, brilliant book on the Rising.

Yeah, it's a fantastic book.

He describes the proclamation with which we began this series

as a stunningly ambitious act of imagination.

And the amazing thing about it is, as you've been saying,

that this stunningly ambitious act of imagination

creates a reality that maps onto the act of imagination in the long run,

because what happens in due course is the War of Independence,

the Civil War, the establishment of the Free State,

the Independence State of Ireland exists now,

kind of does follow from this to a degree, doesn't it?

And you look at some of the people who are here who came back,

and we didn't mention the people who came from England or Scotland

despite in this rebellion, one of whom was Michael Collins,

who came back having worked in the post office in London for a while,

and they learned the lessons,

because there had been a dispute in the volunteers before this

on whether they should be going into a hedge campaign,

as in it would be guerrilla warfare,

but they learned the lessons, they never set up in the city again.

They go for guerrilla warfare,

and it is the rebels who are from here, they build from this,

and they build out into success,
and the idea of anything less than ultimate independence
will not be acceptable.

But that is another story, is it not?

Tom, we will have to, we will clearly have to return to Dublin
at some future point to do the rest of the story,
the War of Independence, the Civil War,
Ireland in the 1920s and so on.

I know we're also going to do a series about the troubles at some point,
so more Irish history to come.

And I hope Joyce.

Tom's desperate to do Joyce, because Tom wants everybody to know,
and this is really what this series has been about.

This is the story we want people to take away, isn't it, Tom?

That you once won a t-shirt and a James Joyce-themed pub quiz.

Pub, crawl, quiz, competition in Dublin.

Yes, but I don't want that to be the note on which we end, Dominic.

No, well it won't be, because we should say a massive thank you
to Paul Rouse, who has performed manfully.

We've asked an awful lot of you, Paul,

because basically your brief was to do all Irish history.

So thank you so much, not just for your fantastic performance in the episode,
but also for your tremendous hospitality here in Dublin.

And we also did a live show, didn't we, last night, Tom?

Yep, we did.

So thank you to everybody who came to all our Irish listeners.

And also thank you to Angus Lefty, who has provided this room,
looking out over what was Sackville Street, it's now O'Connell Street.

And here we are.

I mean, what better place to have recorded this series than in the GPO itself.

So thank you, Paul, and thank you to everybody for listening.

And goodbye.

Bye-bye.

Goodbye.