



The Irish Wars

1919 - 1921 WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

IRISH CIVIL WAR 1922 - 1923

The Irish Wars 1919–1923 exhibition, on display at the National Museum of Ireland, Decorative Arts & History, Collins Barracks, and online [here](#), examines the turbulent period 1919–1923 in Ireland.

The exhibition explores both the Irish War of Independence, and the subsequent Civil War through a range of objects, looking at themes including civil disobedience, imprisonment, hunger striking and the use of propaganda. The significance of weaponry and military tactics are also examined, as are the effects of the conflict on the civilian population and on women in particular.

Both the War of Independence and the Civil War had a profound effect on Ireland, leading to the creation of the Irish Free State, which would later become the Republic of Ireland, copper-fastening the concept of partition, and creating a historical legacy, some aspects of which are only properly being discussed now.

Join us to explore this exhibition through a series of factsheets focusing on key artefacts from the Museum's collection, that give fascinating insights into the years 1919–1923 in Ireland, as well as offering an overall picture of the period under question.

museum

National Museum of Ireland

Ard-Mhúsaem na hÉireann

Decorative Arts & History

Learning outcomes

This resource has been created by the Education Department at the National Museum of Ireland, Collins Barracks in order to aid the teaching and interpretation of the **Irish Wars: 1919–1923** exhibition.

This Resource aims to:

- Present an engaging and thought-provoking learning resource based around the Irish War of Independence and Irish Civil War, through artefacts from the National Museum of Ireland's recently launched exhibition
- Provide historical context and information around some of the key themes and artefacts presented in the **Irish Wars: 1919–1923** exhibition
- Provoke discussion and reflection on key themes portrayed in the exhibition, including the effects the conflict had on civilians during this period, the tactics that were used, and the consequences of the conflicts on Irish politics and society
- Suggest potential discussion points in order to aid classroom discussion, and to suggest possible solo and group activities for students to engage in, which will enhance their understanding of the material presented
- Highlight the benefits of object-based learning, both in a cultural institution and a classroom setting, using artefacts in the Museum's collection

Curriculum links

Junior Cycle

- Developing Historical Consciousness
- Working with Evidence
- Acquiring the 'bigger picture'
- Social Change in 20th Century Ireland
- Political Developments in 20th Century Ireland

Leaving Certificate

- Working with Evidence
- The Pursuit of Sovereignty and the Impact of Partition: 1912–1949

For more information about The Irish Wars 1919–1923 exhibition, please visit:

<https://www.museum.ie/en-IE/Museums/Decorative-Arts-History/Exhibitions/Irish-Wars-1919-to-1923>

Cordoned-off area in Kildare Street, Dublin, during a search of houses by British Military. HE:EW:89



WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

The Irish War of Independence is seen as beginning on 21st January 1919. On this day, two hugely significant but unrelated events took place.

The First Dáil – the equivalent of the British House of Commons – met for the first time in Dublin. This was a counter-state government established from elected Irish MPs, almost exclusively from the republican Sinn Féin party, in the 1918 General Election. Sinn Féin had told the Irish people that, if elected, they would set up their own government in Ireland rather than go to Westminster in London.

On the same day, at Soloheadbeg in County Tipperary, members of the South Tipperary branch of the Irish Volunteers killed two RIC (Royal Irish Constabulary) men in a mission to obtain the explosive material gelignite.

The War of Independence, which began with occasional strikes by the Irish Volunteers, now the Irish Republican Army (IRA), grew into full guerrilla warfare. As opposed to the Easter Rising of 1916, where the fighting primarily occurred in Dublin, along with smaller outbreaks in Meath, Galway, and Wexford, fighting during this period took place all around Ireland. The upsurge in attacks across the country drove the British authorities to create new groups of police officers to help the RIC, named the Auxiliaries and the Black and Tans (nicknamed after their dark green and khaki uniforms). The violence escalated throughout 1920 and into 1921, with atrocities committed by both sides, and ended with a truce in mid-1921.

IRA during War of Independence.
HE:EW.5865

Further Research

1. Charles Townshend, *The Republic; The Fight for Irish Independence, 1918 – 1923*
2. Michael Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence*
3. John Crowley, Donal Ó Drisceoil and Mike Murphy, *Atlas of the Irish Revolution*

WAR OF INDEPENDENCE



Did you know?

- The 1918 General Election in Britain and Ireland was also significant as it was the first time that a woman was elected as an MP to Westminster. Constance Markievicz was an Irish nationalist who had been second-in-command at St Stephen's

Green during the 1916 Rising. She was elected for Dublin St Patrick's Ward, however refused to take her seat in London, abstaining for Dáil Éireann instead.



Discussion topics

- The idea behind the First Dáil was to create a counter-state government in Ireland. This meant establishing an Irish government who would take care of issues such as finance, the law and policing. In order for this to be successful, the Irish public would need to accept the Dáil was running the country, instead of the British authorities. How successful do you think this could have been, and what possible problems would the members of Dáil Éireann have encountered? Do you think this was a clever idea which could be successful or not?

- What do you think the British government's reaction to the First Dáil would have been?
- If you were to form your own counter-state government, what changes would you want to see brought to Ireland? What things would you want to keep the same?

Activities



- When the Dáil met for the first time in 1919, only 27 members were there. The rest either had been arrested or were on the run. Create your own version of the First Dáil in 1919.

Each student can write their own 1-2 minute speech to present in front of the class. Think about what key messages you would want to get across and why you believe what you are doing is important.



The First Dáil, Soloheadbeg and the beginning of the War of Independence

While Dáil Éireann met for the first time in Dublin, the South Tipperary Brigade of the Irish Volunteers (who would become known as the Irish Republican Party, or IRA), planned to obtain the explosive material gelignite from a passing Royal Irish Constabulary truck at Soloheadbeg. Eleven men from the Brigade waited for the truck to pass; including Dan Breen, Sean Treacy, Seán Hogan and their commander Seamus Robinson. While these two events were not connected, together they are seen as marking the beginning of both the physical and political conflict against British Rule in Ireland.



Luger gifted from Dan Breen to Seán Hogan, participants in the Soloheadbeg Ambush, Christmas 1923. This weapon was engraved 'to my comrade in arms, Seán Hogan' and was presented in a leather case. HE: EW. 5860



Handcuffs worn by Seán Hogan when rescued by the Tipperary Brigade at Knocklong, 1919. HE: EWL.155

When the attack occurred, the Volunteers shot dead two RIC men, Constables Patrick MacDonnell and James O'Connell after they allegedly refused to surrender. At the time the attack was widely criticised by both the public and some members of the new Dáil Éireann including Arthur Griffith and Richard Mulcahy. The two RIC men had been very popular in the local area, and so the Volunteers were condemned for their actions, and had to go on the run to avoid police detection. Sean Hogan was captured by the RIC and arrested. However, he was rescued by members of the Volunteers from a train at Knocklong shortly after.



The First Dáil, Soloheadbeg and the beginning of the War of Independence



Did you know?

- The fact that the attack on the RIC at Soloheadbeg occurred on the same day as the meeting of the First Dáil Éireann was a coincidence. The South Tipperary Brigade had no

idea when the truck would pass, and had to spend several days waiting. Some of the men actually had to abandon the mission in order to go back to work as they could not wait any longer.



Discussion topics

- Do you think there was support in Ireland at this time for the use of force as a means of achieving independence? Factors that you may want to consider could include the recent ending of World War One, the public's attitudes towards Britain at this time, and the use of violence in the past – including the execution of the leaders of the 1916 Rising.

- Neither the leaders of the Volunteers nor the members of the First Dáil had authorised the attack at Soloheadbeg. Instead, it was organised by a small local group. Do you think they should have waited or sought permission first?

- Different participants of the Soloheadbeg Ambush have written varying accounts of what happened on the day – primarily based around whether they were planning on shooting the RIC men or not. What do you think this tells us about the reliability and bias of primary sources?

Activities



- **Imagine you Were There:** Work in teams to write an account of the Knocklong Train rescue where some teams write from different perspectives, including Sean Hogan, the Train Driver, the RIC guards who arrested Hogan and bystanders who happened to be on the same train?

Then take turns reading out your accounts in class. You could try creating illustrations to accompany the text and display these together to show how a single event can have multiple viewpoints.

2

Smuggling

As the War of Independence escalated, guerrilla tactics became the IRA's key strategy against the Crown Forces. The British authorities were never sure when they would be attacked. IRA men dressed in civilian clothing, had the advantage of knowing the terrain, and had access to safe houses and protection. As the war progressed into mid-1920 and 1921, the IRA also benefitted from a progressively supportive public, making it easier to hide men and weapons, and launch attacks. This meant that civilians, often women, were involved in smuggling weapons, and working undercover. The following examples highlight the effectiveness of this.



A woman, using the fake name of Miss K. Mullen, left this book in the Gresham Hotel on O'Connell Street in Dublin. Hidden inside was an automatic pistol. This shows the critical and dangerous role Irish women played during the war.

HE: EW.4347



To learn more about the story behind this cap, visit this [artefact's online exhibition page here](#).

HE: EW 29.1&2



Smuggling



Did you know?

- The war saw the creation of 'Flying Columns' appearing all around the country. These were small numbers of Volunteers who were banded together into one military unit. They often used

bicycles to get around their assigned location, and could respond quickly to orders, such as to strike at the British police or aid a local attack which was outnumbered.



Discussion topics

- Smuggling weapons was a very dangerous job, and those attempting to do so faced consequences such as arrest or violence if caught. Why do you think some people were so willing to engage in this activity? (for example nationalism, family, community, social pressure).
- Smuggling was a key tactic in guerilla warfare. What other measures have been used during guerrilla warfare that you have heard of, and how effective do you think they would be?

Some examples could include the IRA's lack of uniform or their use of their local terrain for fighting instead of one set location.

- Many of those who were fighting in the conflict were also trying to hold down their jobs and feed their families. How do you think this would have affected how they conducted their activities during the war? Can you think of any jobs people had that were useful to the IRA during the war?



Activities

- Write a short diary entry from the perspective of Miss K Mullen on the day she smuggled the pistol into the Gresham Hotel. Take time to think about the different emotions she might have experienced, and what her motivations might have been. Think about who might have been collecting the pistol, and the risks and consequences involved in an operation of this kind.

Find out more about the pistol and other similar operations, and their impact in the Museum's Irish Wars online exhibition [here](#).

3

Hunger Striking and Terence MacSwiney

One form of protest during the War of Independence was hunger striking. This tactic had been becoming increasingly influential prior to the war, with 30,000 people joining the funeral procession in Dublin of republican Thomas Ashe, who had died on hunger strike in Mountjoy Jail on 25th September 1917.

The most famous hunger strike during the war was that of Terence MacSwiney, Lord Mayor of Cork. His protest gained massive interest in Ireland and internationally, and ended with his death after 74 days, in Brixton Prison in London.



Portrait photograph of Dáil Éireann on 10 April 1919. MacSwiney is standing second on the left of the middle row. HE:EW.2023

MacSwiney was elected Lord Mayor in March 1920, after Cork's previous Lord Mayor, Tomás MacCurtain, was killed by the RIC. He said in his inauguration speech that 'it is not they who can inflict the most, but they who can suffer the most, who will conquer'. MacSwiney was arrested on 12th August 1920 at an IRA meeting in Cork. He went on hunger-strike after being sentenced to two years in prison.

The hunger strike became a propaganda tool for the IRA, who ran campaigns calling for MacSwiney's release. The hunger strike had a massive effect on public attitudes towards the war; with many moderates demanding his release. His family visited MacSwiney daily, including his wife Muriel and sister Mary. He died on 25th October.

Plaster life mask of Terence MacSwiney, taken by artist Albert Power in the days prior to his death in Brixton Prison in October 1920. HE:EW.793





Hunger Striking and Terence MacSwiney



Did you know?

- The hunger strike had a profound effect not only on Irish attitudes towards the war, but also internationally. One figure who was said to be significantly impacted by MacSwiney's protest and subsequent death was the Vietnamese revolutionary Ho Chi Minh, who would later lead the Vietcong in their war against America in Vietnam. He apparently cried when he heard

of MacSwiney's death, and wrote in his diary that 'a nation which has such citizens will never surrender'.

MacSwiney's hunger strike was also an inspiration for leaders fighting for independence in their own countries, including Mahatma Gandhi.



Discussion topics

- Terence MacSwiney wanted to be treated as a prisoner of war, instead of a regular prisoner. Why do you think the British refused this request? What differences do you think there are between these two kinds of prisoners?
- One of the artefacts you can see on the previous page is of a life-mask of MacSwiney. They were traditionally made after an individual had died, however his family wanted this one made before his death. Why do you think this would have been?

- Hunger striking would later become an infamous tactic used during the Civil War in Northern Ireland, also known as the Troubles, from 1968 – 1998. However, it was a tactic used around the world. Are there any other famous hunger-strikes that you have read about?

Activities

- Hunger striking is described as a form of non-violent protest. Do you agree with this description? In your class, consider what drives people to take this form of action. Think about various struggles that have involved this type of protest. Take into account the potential benefits in regards to propaganda and public opinion,

and weigh this against the extraordinary health ramifications and personal suffering. It would also be worth considering the effect that this type of protest would have on the family of the individual. Do you think it is more effective than using physical force?



4

Developing weapons

During the War of Independence, it was vital that the guerilla fighters were armed as quickly as possible. Initially the IRA were very successful at raiding RIC Barracks. For example, a raid on the Collinstown Aerodrome on 20th March 1920 netted 75 rifles and 5,000 rounds of ammunition. Some IRA members bought weapons from the RIC and sympathetic British Army soldiers – some soldiers at Richmond Barracks sold rifles for £4. The Irish diaspora in America also provided weapons.



Hand grenade with cut out section, used for demonstration and training purposes by the IRA, 1921.



Concrete land mine case, made by H. Fairclough of the 9th Brigade, 1st Eastern Division (Louth) circa 1920.
HE: EW. 57.

Making weapons became increasingly important to the IRA. Munitions factories were set up around the country; one bicycle shop on Parnell Street in Dublin had its cellar turned into a grenade factory. By late 1920, another Dublin workshop was building approximately 1,000 grenades a week. Land mines were also built, to be laid under roads in order to destroy passing British vehicles. They were built with a concrete base and sides, meaning the explosion travelled upwards and exploded under any passing vehicle. There was a hole at the side of the mine, where the detonator leads could run through and into a ditch or hedge where the IRA would be waiting to detonate the mine. These mines held 16-18lbs of homemade explosives named 'Irish War Flour' or 'Irish Cheddar', which had been invented by Séamus O'Donovan, a chemistry student and member of the IRA.

You can see further examples of homemade weapons in the National Museum's online exhibition of the **Irish Wars 1919–1923** exhibition in the **Experimenting and Innovating** section [here](#).

4

Developing weapons



Did you know?

- Because weapons had to be stolen, bought or even created by the IRA, it meant that weapons were not evenly spread around the country.

While some IRA Brigades were well stocked with ammunition, others would only have had access to shovels and hurls as weapons for any fighting they were involved in.



Discussion topics

- Why would it have been so dangerous to create weapons such as explosives in houses around Dublin? Do you think everyone would have been as well trained as Séamus O'Donovan. Looking at the images of the weapons on the page above, as well as from the online exhibition, do these weapons look as sturdy or as reliable as the ones that a normal army would have access to?
- Some counties saw more fighting and activity than other areas – why do you think that was? Could it relate to local structures (such as the GAA being more prominent) or less suitable terrain? Examples could include the suitability of the local terrain, the makeup of the IRA in these areas, and the willingness of the local population to aid those fighting.
- Why do you think British Army soldiers would have sold weapons to IRA men?

Activities



- While the War of Independence saw virtually no large-scale battles, the war mainly consisted of small attacks and ambushes throughout the country. As of such, every county in Ireland has its own unique experiences of the war.

See if you can research the nearest fight to your school or home and write a short essay on what happened and who was involved. One way of researching the conflict in your area is to look

at the primary source material available in the Bureau of Military History Witness Statements **here**. These files consist of firsthand accounts from those involved in the Irish Revolution from 1913–1921. Search for your town or area and see if you can find stories about individuals who fought or any action that took place.

5

Civilian punishment

Civilians experienced violence by both sides during the War of Independence. The brutality of the British Forces – consisting of the RIC and the newly created ‘Black and Tans’ and Auxiliaries forces – towards the public through reprisals for IRA activities, as well as IRA actions against perceived spies and potential enemies meant that innocent civilians were often targeted. However, neither side made a habit of killing those unconnected to the enemy.

Women suffered many types of violence, including physical and sexual assault. A common form of violence was the forced hair-cutting of women. At the time this was known as ‘bobbing’ or ‘shearing’. Women were targeted by the Crown Forces due to their link (real or perceived) to republicanism, and to assert dominance over the population. The IRA attacked women whom they suspected of consorting with the police, and therefore a threat to the Republican movement. Attacking women also created a climate of fear and a culture of obedience in society.

Women were often dragged from their beds at night and pulled outside by their hair. Other injuries would occur during the ‘bobbing’, including cuts from the shears. It is impossible to know the exact amount of hair-cuttings, which occurred in Ireland during the War of Independence; many were not reported to the police or in newspapers. There was often little sympathy in the courts for Irish women who were seen to be consorting with the enemy.

Hair said to have been shorn from a woman by the IRA during the War of Independence, found in the possession of IRA man Michael Barry after his arrest in late 1920.
HA:NN.04.





Civilian punishment



Did you know?

- The practice of cutting women's hair as a punishment is not limited to Ireland and dates as far back as the Middle Ages. One of the most infamous examples comes from France after

World War Two, where thousands of French women accused of collaborating with the Nazis and the Vichy Government had their hair cut off.



Discussion topics

- Why do you think women's hair was targeted in particular? What significance would this have carried?
- What do you think the social ramifications would have been for a woman who had her hair sheared?
- What do you think it says about society at the time that both sides in the war would have used

this tactic? Unfortunately, this treatment, and worse, is still experienced by some women in different countries around the world. What do you think the response of the public in Ireland would be now if something like this was to happen again? Can you think of any modern day version of public shaming which people might experience, either physically or emotionally?

Activities



- **Imagine You Were There:** Write a letter to a relative, describing your experience of witnessing a hair shearing of a neighbour. Include in your letter who was involved and whether you had any

idea why it was happening. You can also include how you felt watching it, and how others around you were reacting.

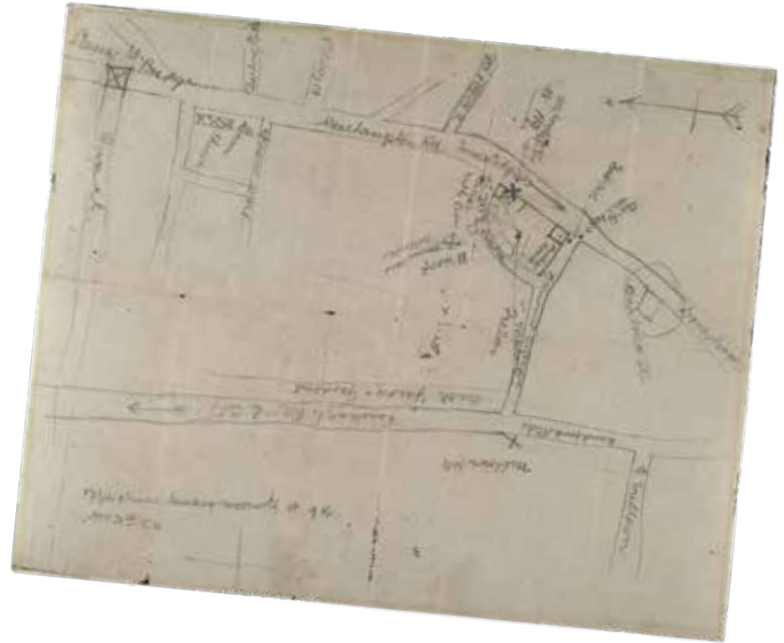


Bloody Sunday, 21st November 1920

Bloody Sunday was a day of violence in Dublin, which led to the deaths of 32 people, including civilians. On the morning of 21st November 1920, the IRA mounted an operation against British intelligence agents based in Dublin. Most of the killings occurred within a small middle-class area of south inner-city Dublin, with the exception of one shooting at the Gresham Hotel on O'Connell Street. Fifteen people were killed and six wounded, including suspected agents, one of mistaken identity and two Auxiliaries. However, this only amounted to approximately a third of those who the IRA had targeted for the morning raid.



Waistcoat of the suit in which Peadar Clancy was killed on the night of 21st November 1920. The waistcoat is in two pieces as it was cut from his body after his death.
HE: EW. 819b



Hand-drawn map of the positions of The Squad in Dublin, 21st November 1920.
HE.EW.1183

That afternoon, the Dublin Gaelic football team were playing Tipperary at Croke Park, in front of approximately 5,000 spectators. Outside the stadium British forces arrived in order to search every man in the stadium for weapons. However, shots were fired by the British forces once the convoy reached the stadium. Fourteen civilians were killed, including Tipperary player Michael Hogan. The Hogan Stand at Croke Park is named in his memory.

Three other victims of Bloody Sunday were IRA men Dick McKee and Peadar Clancy and a civilian called Conor Clune, who were arrested, brought to Dublin Castle, and killed by their Auxiliary captors under suspicious circumstances. The official explanation, that they had tried to escape, is widely disbelieved.



Bloody Sunday, 21st November 1920



Did you know?

- There have been four Bloody Sundays including the 21st November 1920. The first was on 31st of August 1913, where several hundred people were injured after the police baton-charged protests during the 1913 Lockout in Dublin. The third was also during the War of Independence, and occurred in Belfast on 10th July 1921, where

16 civilians died in fighting between the IRA, Loyalists and the police. The final one was in Derry in 1972, where 13 civilians died when they were shot by British forces during a civil rights march.



Discussion topics

- Why do you think the British Authorities would have targeted a GAA match to search for potential IRA men?
- The police who arrived at Croke Park had been ordered to surround the stadium and search every man inside. They said that they planned on announcing to the crowd that every man would be searched and anyone who tried to escape would be shot. They later argued that, before this could happen, they had been shot at upon their

arrival into the stadium. As of such, they argued their actions were in connection to this. However, this has never been proven and is widely disbelieved. How likely do you think this is?

- Bloody Sunday was one of the deadliest days during the War of Independence, and led to both sides beginning to consider looking for a Truce to end the conflict. Why do you think it had such an effect on both sides?



Activities

- **Imagine You Were There:** Write a newspaper report from the day after Bloody Sunday. Report on what happened at the match, and throughout the city during the day. Remember that, as a reporter, you might not know about the connection with the Squad assassinations. You could interview people at the stadium at the time, or write from the perspective of a player on the pitch when the British Forces arrived.

As this is a contemporary newspaper, it would be important to make reference to other reprisals by the British Army, to place Bloody Sunday in context. Looking at the map provided at the link **here** of the American Commission on Conditions in Ireland Interim Report in 1920, see if you can find the closest incident to your school and include it in your report.

Pen used by
Michael Collins
to sign Treaty.
HE: 1995.24



CIVIL WAR

By the middle of 1921, the escalating violence drove both the British government and the IRA leaders to seek a way to end the war.

A truce was agreed and the President of Dáil Éireann, Eamon de Valera, sent six men (called plenipotentiaries), including Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith, over to London to negotiate with the British government. On 6th December 1921, they signed the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The Treaty created the Irish Free State; consisting of 26 of the 32 counties in Ireland. The Crown Forces left Ireland and the Free State now had its own government. However, the Free State was still part of the British Empire, and Irish MP's had to swear loyalty to the British Monarchy.

Northern Ireland, which had been formed one year previously, after the Government of Ireland Act in 1920 created two separate government institutions on the island, consisted of the remaining six counties, and would remain inside the United Kingdom.

The Treaty was passed in the Dáil by 64 votes to 57. Afterwards, the Anti-Treaty members walked out of the Dáil chambers in protest. The signing of the Treaty triggered a short but bitter Civil War, during which more than a thousand Irish people died. The war was fought between the Pro-Treaty IRA, also known as the Free State Army, and the Anti-Treaty IRA, known as the Irregulars. The war began after the Free State forces bombed the Four Courts in Dublin on 28th June 1922, where the Anti-Treaty had been illegally based for several months, before the fighting spread out into the rest of Ireland, until the Anti-Treaty IRA called for a ceasefire on 24th May 1923.



**Destruction of
Four Courts, Dublin.**
HE:EW.70P

Further Research

1. John Dorney, *'The Civil War in Dublin: The Fight for the Irish Capital, 1922 – 1924.'*
2. Michael Hopkinson, *'Green against Green, The Irish Civil War'*

CIVIL WAR



Did you know?

- Although the total number of deaths in the Irish Civil War is unknown, it is estimated that between 1,500 to 1,700 people lost their lives,

although the number is probably higher. Included in that were between 300 to 400 civilians.



Discussion topics

- What do you think would be the long-term effects of a civil war on a country and its people, especially one as new as Ireland? How do you think it would affect families, friends and neighbours?
- Civil Wars are tragic events which have occurred in many countries. Have you heard of any others? How do they differ, or are similar, to the Irish Civil War?
- Can you understand the perspectives of both sides during the Irish Civil War? Why do you think both sides would have felt as strongly as they did?

Activities



- Like the War of Independence, the Irish Civil War occurred across the island, in some areas the fighting was more intense than in others.

Find out if there were any battles or incidents around where you live or where your school is located.

Unlike the War of Independence, there are not the same first hand accounts that we saw with the Bureau of Military History. Instead, look at local newspapers to try and find stories of the conflict.

7

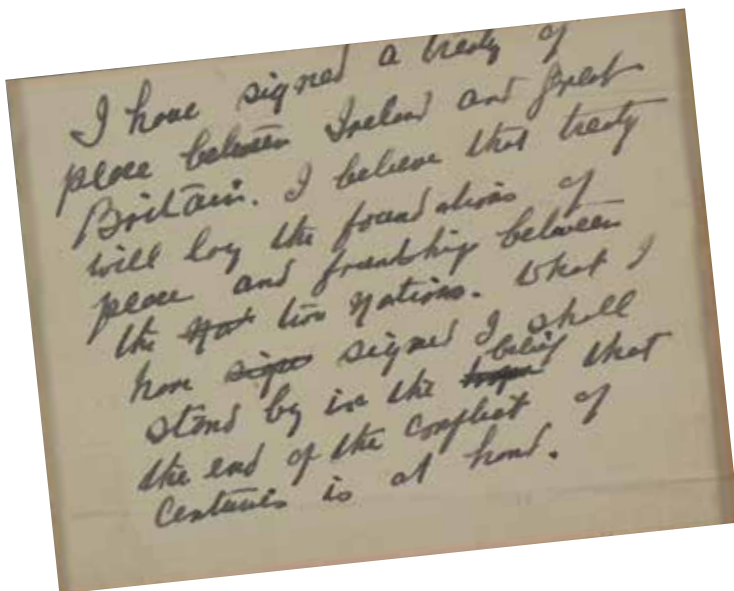
Arthur Griffith and the Anglo-Irish Treaty

Arthur Griffith was born in Dublin in 1871. He worked in print media and was editor of a weekly newspaper called **United Irishmen** in 1898. In 1905, he established Sinn Féin who wanted Ireland to have a dual-monarchy, which would be similar to the model used in Austria-Hungary. While Griffith was not involved in the 1916 Rising, the rebellion became known as the **Sinn Féin** rebellion, and the party soon became a Republican party, with many arrested in 1916 standing in elections under the party name. Griffith stood down as President in 1917 in favour of Eamon de Valera.



Death mask of Arthur Griffith, President of Dáil Éireann, died August 1922.

HE: EWL. 66



Arthur Griffith's note to the World Press announcing the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, 1921.

HE: EWL. 402

He was elected to the First Dáil, and became Acting President when de Valera was in America from June 1919 to December 1920. Griffith led the truce negotiations in London when the Irish delegation was sent over to London, and agreed to sign the Anglo-Irish Treaty on 6th December 1921. His note to the world's press upon this decision read 'I have signed a Treaty of peace between Ireland and Great Britain. I believe that treaty will lay foundations of peace and friendship between the two Nations. What I have signed I shall stand by in the belief that the end of the conflict of centuries is at hand'. Griffith defended the Treaty during the Dáil debates and became President of the Dáil after de Valera led the Anti-Treaty TD's out of Dáil Éireann. Griffith died of a brain haemorrhage in Dublin on 12 August 1922.



Arthur Griffith and the Anglo-Irish Treaty



Did you know?

- Despite the 1916 Easter Rising becoming known as the **Sinn Féin** rebellion, Arthur Griffith was deeply opposed to the rebellion and the idea of using violence to overthrow British Rule.

Despite this, he would be one of approximately 3,500 people arrested after the rebellion finished.



Discussion topics

- While Arthur Griffith was the leader of the Anglo-Irish Treaty negotiations, there were many who believed, and many who still believe, that Eamon de Valera, the President of the First Dáil, should have gone over instead. He told the six men to not sign anything before consulting him in Dublin. Do you think he should have gone? Why would he decide not to?
- Do you agree with Arthur Griffith signing the Anglo-Irish Treaty? Would you have signed if you were in London? Give reasons for your decision,

in terms of what you think was best for Ireland's interests at this time.

- Arthur Griffith had also been involved with the **Celtic Revival**, a nationalist effort in the late 19th Century to revitalise and rediscover the Celtic language, culture and traditions. Do you think it would be important or necessary for a fledgling nation to have an understanding of its past traditions and cultures?



Activities

- Research and debate the Anglo-Irish Treaty. Choose key individuals from this period, or create your own, who would have strong feelings for one side of the debate. To gain an insight and understanding of the opposing attitudes towards the Treaty, look at some of the Civil War stories presented in the Museum's online Irish Wars exhibition **here**, which include Civil War artefacts and Anti-Treaty propaganda posters. Have your class vote anonymously after the debate and discuss the result.

Things you can think about could include:

1. Why could the Anglo-Irish Treaty be seen as a positive or negative step for Irish independence
2. How would the Irish population at large have felt about a Treaty being signed that ended the fighting?
3. How different was the Anglo-Irish Treaty from the Home Rule Bill of 1914?

8

The Battle of the Four Courts



Four Courts on fire
HE:EW.68

The signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty arguably made Civil War almost inevitable; a divide emerged between those who saw the Anglo-Irish Treaty as a stepping stone to independence, and those who saw it as a betrayal to those who had died to achieve a completely independent Ireland. The Civil War officially started at the end of June 1922, with the Battle of the Four Courts in Dublin. On 16th April, 200 Anti-Treaty IRA

members, led by Rory O'Connor, occupied the building and began to run operations from its new headquarters. While they were not removed immediately, pressure began to be put on Collins and Free State to react; Winston Churchill telling Collins that the Irish government would perish if it did not assert itself.

The Anti-Treaty forces were presented with an ultimatum to leave the building. When they did not comply, Free State forces shelled the building on 28th June 1922. Some weapons used had been provided by the British, including two artillery guns, which would be the basis of anti-Treaty propaganda towards the Free State after the attack. The bombardment was so strong that some Anti-Treaty IRA surrendered after two days; the rest continued fighting in Dublin City Centre.

Burned fragment of a tax roll (Limerick, 1737), found after the destruction of the Four Courts, 1922.
HE:EW.273d_8201





The Battle of the Four Courts



Did you know?

- One key consequence of the destruction of the Four Courts was the subsequent destruction of the Public Records Office, which was housed in the same complex. Thousands of precious documents were destroyed, with the loss described as irreparable. Some of the documents

dated back as far as the 13th century. With the destruction of the building, many scraps of archival paper landed on the ground around the building. Although a request was made for as much of it to be returned as possible, lots of material was taken as souvenirs.



Discussion topics

- Some of the weapons used by the Free State troops had been supplied by the British. How do you think that would have made the Anti-Treaty side feel about the relationship between the new Free State and Britain? Would it have solidified a belief that Ireland was not independent?

- Why do you think the Anti-Treaty troops decided to take over the Four Courts in particular?
- Why do you think the British authorities would have been keen to help the Free State end the occupation of the Four Courts?



Activities

- Create a news report about the Battle of the Four Courts. You can interview locals to gauge their reactions (bearing in mind that, seeing how the Treaty was such a divisive issue, could vary from person to person).

You might be lucky enough to get a comment from a Free State soldier about to bombard the building, or an anti-treaty soldier leaving the Four Courts. Try and imagine what their reactions to what is happening could be.

9

The Death of Michael Collins

Michael Collins was born in Clonakilty in Co. Cork in October 1890. He fought in the General Post Office during Easter Week as aide-de-camp to signatory Joseph Plunkett before being sent to Frongoch prison camp in Wales, where he gained a reputation as a leader amongst many inmates. In 1918, he was arrested and, upon his release, disappeared from official view, and would manage to remain undetected by the British for the entire War of Independence.



Death mask of Michael Collins, taken at St. Vincent's Hospital by Albert Power, August 1922.

HE: EWL.65



Greatcoat worn by Michael Collins when he was killed, still with dried mud from Béal na mBláth.

NMIHE:EW.42a

Collins was elected to the First Dáil and was made Minister for Home Affairs, and later the Minister for Finance. He was also Director of Intelligence for the IRA, where he supported the tactics of guerrilla warfare, although he rarely left his base in Dublin. He established an assassination squad, known as the 'Twelve Apostles'. Collins was part of the Truce negotiating committee who signed the Anglo-Irish Treaty; famously saying *'I have signed my own death warrant'*. Collins led the Pro-Treaty side at the beginning of the Civil War. In August of 1922, Collins travelled to Cork. He had been advised against this, but believed that *'they won't shoot me in my own county'*. However, when travelling through Béal na mBláth at 8pm on 22nd August, Collins was shot and killed in an ambush.



The Death of Michael Collins



Did you know?

- As well as leading the IRA during the War of Independence, Michael Collins was also the Minister for Finance for the First Dáil. In particular, he organised a national loan campaign,

where the Irish public could give money to help fund the new state. In total, they raised £371,000.



Discussion topics

- During the War of Independence, Michael Collins had a unique tactic in order to avoid arrest – he kept himself hidden in plain sight. Rather than staying hidden, he would walk and cycle around the city undetected. That does not mean he did not occasionally have some narrow escapes when the authorities raided somewhere he was. Why do you think this tactic was so successful, and what were the key factors to make it work?
- As a military leader, Michael Collins garnished respect in Ireland but also, reluctantly, in Britain, with one British civil servant saying he would have been worth ‘a dozen brass hats’ (a high ranked

officer) during the First World War. Why do you think people felt this way?

- The life of Michael Collins was later portrayed by actor Liam Neeson in the film **Michael Collins**, which was directed by Neil Jordan. While an entertaining and popular movie, much has been made of the historical accuracy of the movie (for example, it is implied that Eamon de Valera was involved in the assassination of Collins, while there is no historical basis for this). How important do you think historical accuracy is in movies set in the past, and how can they shape our understanding of history?



Activities

- Look at the propaganda poster in the Museum’s online exhibition **here**. The poster, written by the Anti-Treaty forces about Michael Collins, presents two very different images of Collins – one which paints him as a proud republican, while the other shows him as an enemy of the Irish people. Prepare a question and answer session where

one member of the class occupies the ‘hot seat’ acting as Michael Collins. The person in the ‘hot seat’ answers questions about their life asked by other class members, based on what you have read about Michael Collins, and the different perceptions towards him during the Irish Civil War.

10

State Executions



Rory O'Connor's Vesta pistol and dolours beads

HE: EW. 5657 & HE:EW. 5670

One controversial tactic used by the Free State during the Civil War was that of official state executions. After the death of Michael Collins, the Free State government, led by W. T. Cosgrave, Richard Mulcahy and Kevin O'Higgins, adopted the position that the Anti-Treaty IRA were conducting an unlawful rebellion against the legitimate Irish government and should be treated as criminals rather than as combatants. Another factor was the escalating level of violence; the Anti-Treaty side had resorted to guerrilla tactics in August-September. On 27th September 1922, the Free State's Provisional Government put the **Public Safety Bill** before the Dáil.

The Dáil set up military courts which allowed for the execution of men who were arrested and found to be armed, or were aiding and abetting attacks on state forces. On 15th October 1922, the Public Safety Bill came into effect.

In all, the Free State legislatively sanctioned the execution of between 77 and 81 Anti-Treaty fighters during the Civil War. On 8th December, Rory O'Connor, Liam Mellows, Richard Barrett and Joe McKelvey were executed. The order for this was given by Minister for Home Affairs Kevin O'Higgins; one year previously O'Connor had been his best man at his wedding. The Anti-Treaty side eventually called a ceasefire on 30th April 1923.



O'Higgins Wedding photograph.

HE:EW.991.9



State Executions



Did you know?

- One of those executed during the Civil War was Erskine Childers, who had signed the Anglo-Irish Treaty as a member of the negotiation team sent over to London. A novelist, he had written 'The

Riddle of the Sands', which was turned into both a movie and television series, and is regarded as one of the finest espionage books ever written.



Discussion topics

- The executions were said to be justified in order to keep the public safe and protect the state. Do you think they were justified? Why or why not? How do you think the public would have reacted to this?
- Executions are also known as Capital Punishment. While it does still exist in many countries round the world, it was discontinued in 1954 and officially abolished in Ireland in 1990.

Do you think this kind of punishment is ever justifiable, and do you think that Ireland is a better country by not having it?

- In your studies, have you come across any other famous examples of executions in Ireland? Examples could include the 1916 Rising, or the 1798 Rebellion.



Activities

- Organise a class discussion around the topic of Capital Punishment. Research into the different countries who still have it in their statute books and find famous examples of executions both in Ireland and internationally.

Discuss whether it is ever justifiable to take another person's life.