

‘How did cultural and religious identities develop in Ireland 1870-1914’ (2019)

Gaelic culture was beginning to decline and become more Anglicised. There was a growing spread of Irish people embracing English culture, language and customs, and forgetting their own. There was a cultural revival in the last decades of the 19th century. This saw the growth of cultural nationalism. Organisations such as the GAA and the Gaelic League tried to revive Irish identity and culture through sport and language. The Anglo-Irish literary revival also tried to accomplish this through literature and plays.

The GAA

De Valera's English sports such as soccer, cricket, rugby and athletics were organised with rules and competitions. They were mainly confined to gentlemen, who were Protestant, Unionist and upper-class men as games were played on Saturdays when poor Catholics worked. This led to a decline in traditional Irish games and so Michael Cusack, who was a former member of the IRB, saw the spread of English games as a threat to Irish culture. Thus he wrote an article in an Irish newspaper stating his desire to preserve Irish games, open sports to all social classes and achieve greater control over the running of Irish sports.

Maurice Davin who was one of Ireland's greatest athletes, supported Cusack and so he, along with Cusack and 11 other men founded the Gaelic Athletic Association or the GAA in the Hayes Hotel in Thurles on the 1st of November 1884. Davin became the first President while Cusack was elected the secretary. A second meeting was held in Cork in 1885 where they drew up the first set of rules. According to Cusack, the "association swept the country like a prairie fire", with branches established all around the country and over 600 clubs by 1887. The GAA also received support from the Catholic church as the clubs were based on parishes which increased rivalry. The Irish games were more popular in the countryside than in cities like Cork and Dublin.

The rules were influenced by political motivation. In 1886, people who played "foreign", or English games were banned. In 1888, the Royal Irish Constabulary members were also banned and in 1902, the British army were banned. Games were also played on Sundays which was payback as

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Protestants couldn't play on Sundays. The exception was Sam Maguire, the donor of the Sam Maguire Cup.

It was also seen as a breeding ground for the IRB. Later, Cusack was forced to resign as secretary because of "inefficiency", no receipts and letters not replied, and was replaced by IRB man. In 1887, the IRB gained enormous control over GAA when Davin was removed from President and replaced by IRB man Bennet. In January 1888, Davin was re-elected and IRB members were ousted from the most important positions in the GAA.

Also the Parnellite split almost ruined the GAA as they were the guard of honour at his funeral in 1891, the number of clubs fell from 1,000 in 1888 to 220 in 1891 and the majority of anti-Parnellites left the GAA. It took over a year for the GAA to recover. However, the success of the GAA was very important as they improved Rules, Inter county teams, Provincial councils and also Jones Road, also known as Croke Park was purchased in 1913.

The Gaelic League

In regards to the Gaelic League, in 1851, about a quarter of people spoke Irish but by 1901, that was only a seventh because the language was associated with poverty and ignorance, parents wanted their kids to learn English in case they had to emigrate and also the famine was a massive blow to the more rural areas of Ireland, which were the most Irish speaking parts, with death and emigration.

So then Douglas Hyde and Eoin MacNeill founded the Gaelic League in 1893 with four main aims. To revive Irish as the national language, to promote the study and publication of Irish literature, to develop a new literature in Irish and to de-anglicise Ireland.

They set up travelling teachers known as *teachtair* to travel around the country and teach Irish. There were also teacher training colleges found to train people to teach Irish as it was now compulsory to have Irish for admission to the new national university. There were also competitions in dancing and singing known as *feiseannas* and *ceilis*. An *t-Oireachtas* was a national competition.

Douglas Hyde wanted it to be non-political and to be for everyone, at the League Congress in 1915, he resigned because the League agreed to promote Irish Independence, however, as a whole, the Gaelic League failed in stopping the decline in the number of Irish speakers. There was a decline of 100,000 Irish speakers between 1891-1926. However it did make the Irish

language a recognised subject in schools and universities and it did improve the quality and quantity of books in Ireland and also it allowed women to become more involved in nationalists politics through the Gaelic League.

The Anglo-Irish Literacy Revival

Finally, the Anglo-Irish Literacy Revival was a revival of Irish literature through the English language and based on Irish folktales, legends and history. It began with the poet William Butler Yeats, as he formed the Irish literacy Society in London 1891 and then the National Literacy Society in Dublin in 1892. He met with Galway landlords Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn and they all had a great interest in Irish folktales and legends and so they founded the Irish Literacy Theatre in 1898 to stage plays by Irish playwrights.

The first play was Yeats' "The Countess Cathleen", which was based on an Irish lady who sold her soul to the devil in order to feed the starving poor. Maude Gonne who was Yeats' lover starred in the next play called Cathleen Ni Houlihan, in this play, Ireland was portrayed by a beautiful woman whom young would willingly die for her country. After the 1916 rising, Yeats remarked "Did that play of mine send out certain men the English shot?"

Yeats and Lady Gregory were supported by a rich Englishwoman called Annie Horniman and in 1904, she donated money to purchase and equip the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. John Millington Synge was the most gifted writer in the early days of the abbey theatre. His first play, Shadow of the Glen in 1903, was about a young woman who leaves her older husband and runs away with a tramp. The audience was angered by the suggestion that Irishwomen could commit adultery. The Playboy of the Western World 1907 was about a guy called Christy Mahon who kills his father, this once again caused anger and riots. Yeats defended the play and said that the Irish people were becoming too narrow minded.

Despite the fact that the Anglo-Irish Literacy movement produced a rich body of modern Irish literature in English, the movement declined in the first decade of the twentieth century. Nationalists claimed that they should use plays to promote Irish Independence but Yeats believed that writers should be entitled to freedom of speech and that literacy merit should be the main criteria for judging writers works. Also Synge died in 1909 and Abbey actor Sean Connolly was killed in the attack of Dublin Castle on Easter Monday 1916.

Catholic Power

During the second half of the nineteenth century the influence of the Catholic church grew significantly. 80% of the population were Catholic and the number of priests, brothers and nuns almost tripled between 1870 and 1900. The power also increased with the rising number of churches being built. Protestant power decreased with decrees such as the *Ne Temere* in 1908 which stated that children brought up in mixed marriages between Protestant and Catholics had to be raised Catholic.

The decline of the use of the Irish language meant that now Irish people were gripping to Catholicism as a source of their identity. This was especially true with the cultural revival as GAA matches were played on Sunday and clubs were divided within parishes. Many nationalist leaders stated that "Irishness" included Catholic and Protestant but this was rejected by others who said to be Irish was to be Catholic.

D.P. Moran put forward this idea in his weekly newspaper "The Leader" and his book "The Philosophy of Irish Ireland". He said that the Irish language and the Catholic religion were signs of Irishness. He said the Irish language was the protector of Catholicism from the evils coming into Ireland through the English language. He looked on this as a battle of two civilisations. Moran also attacked the literary revival because its leaders were too Protestant.

The Anglo-Irish Literacy Revival

In the late 18th century, most primary schools were non-denominational until the Catholic church stepped in around the 1870s and made priests and ministers the school manager, exercising power over teachers and students alike. Most kids attended school until the age of 12. Then occupations such as law and medicine required a second level education. Only the rich could afford to send their kids to secondary school bar a small number of scholarships won by poor and clever students. There were also no state exams and teachers didn't receive salaries.

The in 1878 the Intermediate Education Act established the Intermediate Education Board in Dublin as well as State exams in some subjects. This had various pros and cons. The positives being that the number of girls attending school and being treated on equal bar with boys had improved. Many girls were now moving on to third level. Also the social mobility had now improved with many lower-middle class students now being encouraged to attend school with

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new incentives. However the negatives were that the subject choices with exams were too narrow and cultural subjects like music and art were completely neglected. Also Irish was barely taught until the Gaelic league in 1893. The intermediate education act lasted until 1924.

The University Question was also very prevalent in Ireland around this time. Until 1845 there was only one university in Ireland which was Trinity, this was controlled by the church. This was until the British government set up Queens Colleges in Belfast, Cork and Galway in 1845. Since they were non-denominational, ministers called them "godless colleges". Then in 1879, one year after the Intermediate Education Act, "Royal Universities" were set up and Queens Colleges were abolished. These universities educated students of every religious background equally. They were also one of the first universities to admit girls on equal treatment to boys. Then in 1908 came the final settlement with National Universities of Ireland, or (NUIS), in Galway and Cork. They kept Queens college in Belfast as it seemed to be thriving.

The First Sinn Fein Party

Arthur Griffith founded and edited a weekly newspaper called The United Irishman. He wanted to promote Irish language, literature and history. He founded Cumann na Gaedheal in 1900 to support the Irish cultural revival.

He was a republican but he didn't agree with a rebellion so he published The Resurrection of Hungary in 1904 which outlined Hungary's similar experience of gaining independence. He proposed the idea of a dual monarchy and he said it would be achieved by parliamentary abstention which was when Irish people would not take their seats in Westminster but would set up their own parliament in Dublin.

This policy was called passive resistance. He also supported protectionism in terms of economy. These became the main policies for Sinn Fein which he founded in 1905. They made fast progress and in 1908 they had over 100 branches. Sinn Fein was great because it allowed women as full members.

By 1910 though, Sinn Fein was in decline because Griffith was not an easy man to get along with. His newspaper, which he now called Sinn Fein was in financial trouble and he was almost bankrupt. But the Sinn Fein name was used to describe all forms of extreme nationalism. In 1916 the British government mistakenly named the Easter Rising the "Sinn Fein" Rising.

The Suffragettes

Women could not vote in any elections. The demand for women became much stronger in the late 19th and early 20th century for many reasons. Women were now better educated and there were more employment opportunities. Some campaigners worked for women rights in terms of property and education but these could not be achieved until they achieved the right to vote.

The two prominent campaigners were Protestant women Isabella Tod and Anna Haslam. Tod found the Northern Ireland Society for Women's Suffrage in Belfast in 1871. Five years later Haslam founded the Dublin's Women's Suffrage Association. They demanded votes for women in parliamentary elections and local elections and campaigned largely through pamphlets, meetings and petitions to Parliament.

The Local Government Act 1889 gave the right to vote for local councils to women ratepayers. Haslam founded the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association which campaigned to get women elected to local councils. They got about 35 elected.

One of the women who campaigned at this time was Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington. She set up the Irish Women's Franchise League in 1908, which was more militant. Some leaders were arrested and jailed, they went on hunger strike and only called it off when they gained political status.

Some women wanted the vote to be included in the Home Rule bill but leaders of the party, Redmond and Dillon feared that it would lead to the failure of Home Rule. Others believed that they shouldn't get the vote because they had no interest in political matters and should focus on caring for their families (what a disgrace). Redmond later became the accidental target of an attack by English suffragettes on the British Prime Minister Asquith.

Divisions occurred in the suffrage movement as tensions rose during the Home Rule crisis and some women followed nationalist and unionist politics. Women were also divided by support for and against the war when WW1 began. However, women over 30 won the right to vote in parliamentary elections in 1918 after the war was over.