# History of Ireland | Flag, Capital, & Population

## History of Ireland

**History of Ireland**: When the **Romans** were conquering the world, they didn't pay any attention to a little island off the coast of **Britain** called Ireland. How did such a small **island** save Western civilization after Rome fell? And how did such a tiny island go on to provide some of the most interesting art, music, and writing available today?

Irish history is full of unique characters who believed in the power of the Irish spirit, culture, and independence, and they longed to share that with the world. Get ready for a brief introduction to the history of Ireland, where we'll introduce the major events and people who built Ireland into the country it is today.

## A History of Ireland
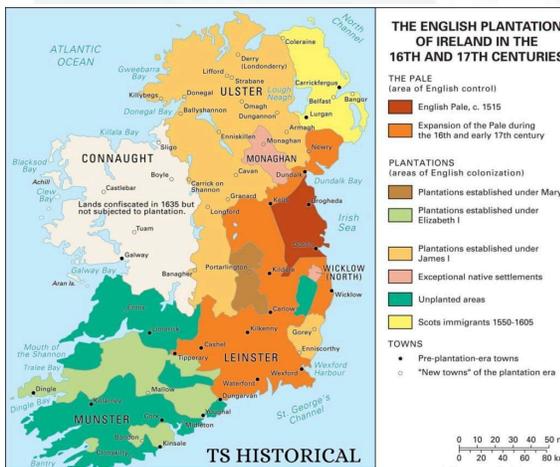


**HISTORY OF IRELAND**

**A History of Ireland:** Historians believe the first people arrived in History of Ireland between 8000 and 7000 BCE. We don't know much about these first settlers of Ireland, but we know they were hunters and gatherers, and they probably first sailed to **Ireland** from **Scotland** or **England**.

The first people lived near the coasts, rivers,  and woods to stay close to natural resources, but they never founded towns or cities. Instead, they stayed in small, nomadic groups that were always ready to move in search of more food and water.

This all changed around 4000 BCE when new settlers introduced farming to the Irish people. Over time,  the people cut down parts of the woods, tilled the land, and built houses, furniture, and fencing.  They also began building stone dwellings for their dead, which is our first glimpse into the religious lives of the **ancient** people of Ireland.

The tombs were often ornate, and the dead were buried with pottery and other items they might need in the afterlife. The Irish continued to develop – they learned how to use metal and built better tools for farming – but the next big culture change came from the Celts, who arrived gradually from 700  BCE to 100 BCE.

The Celts mixed with the people and created what we recognize today as the Gaelic Celts. The Celts first established a social and political structure in the History of Ireland, which had kings and a strict hierarchy. Although the government evolved throughout the years, it stood until the Anglo-Norman conquest of the 12th century.

The Romans did not conquer Ireland, and there is no archeological evidence that they ever tried, even though there is evidence that the Irish traded with the Romans living in Britain. When Rome fell, Ireland was largely unimpacted;  instead, they began to settle colonies in Britain. As the Irish moved out from their island after the Roman Empire, they encountered Christianity in Britain and brought it back to Ireland no later than 431 CE.

Saint Patrick is credited with bringing religion to the island, and the transition from pagan religions to Christianity was so peaceful that there were no Irish martyrs during this time! Saint Patrick was named the island's patron saint, and he is still recognized and honored today by both the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches. Christianity

changed the country by encouraging the Irish to settle around churches and monasteries, which became the center of education from the 6th to the 12th century.

Irish monks would travel far and wide as part of their faith, spreading the gospel and encouraging fellow believers in other countries. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the monks were also spreading literacy and protecting classic religious and secular manuscripts. The Irish also developed into small kingdoms, usually following a wealthy and powerful individual who lived nearby. The kingdoms fought each other for resources and dominance.

This division continued through the 8th century when the Vikings began to arrive. Unlike the Romans, there was nowhere too far for the Vikings to travel, and they attacked Ireland – the first violent invasion the island had ever experienced!  Although the Vikings destroyed many monasteries, they also built cities and introduced the Irish to a broader world of commerce and better weaponry.

They also served as a common enemy who finally helped the kings of Ireland start uniting into a cohesive country because the Irish needed to make alliances to survive the Viking invasions. Some Vikings settled in Ireland and acquired farming land, so by the mid-10th century, life in Ireland had returned to the normal feuding among kings.

Dynasties continued to grow, and by the  12th century, there were only a handful of kingdoms in Ireland, and History of Ireland began establishing a high king that had actual power. But all their work was stopped in 1169 by the Anglo-Norman Invasion when **Henry II** of England was invited to mediate a royal dispute between MacMurrough and High King O'Connor. MacMurrough wanted help in his rebellion against the High King, but by asking Henry II about the History of Ireland, he started one of the most remarkable changes in Irish history.

# Anglo-Norman Invasion of Ireland
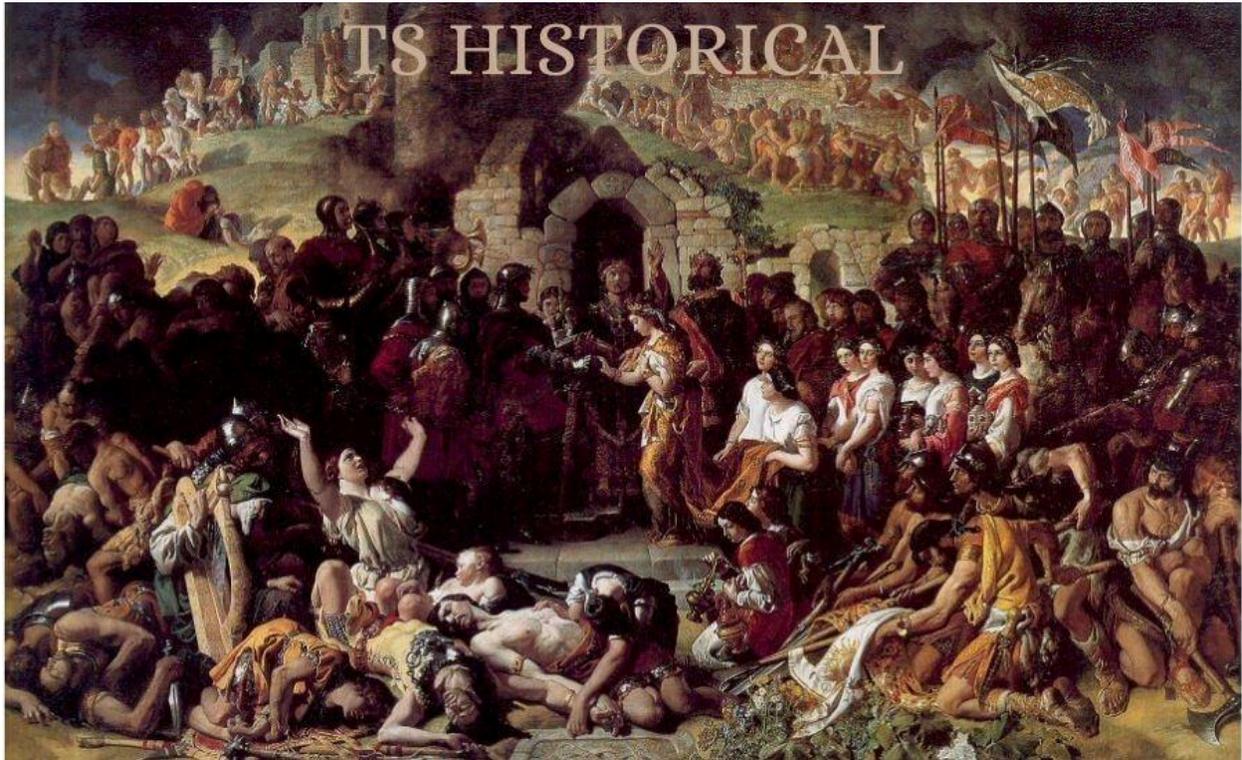


**Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland**

The **Anglo-Norman invasion** began in May of 1169, and they took Dublin on September 21, 1170. By 1172, enough of Ireland had been conquered that Henry II named himself the "Lord of Ireland." Although he quickly lost interest in the island, other Englishmen did not. His son, King John, split Ireland into tenants, which he gave to nobles, and he set up the first Irish national government, which is still used as a model for Irish government today.

Eventually, counties began to take precedence over the rights of landowners. By 1250, the Anglo-Normans had taken about three-fourths of the land, leaving the less ideal remaining portions for the Irish. The Irish felt angry and bitter towards their conquerors, and in the mid-1200s, they began to resist and fight back. Sadly, such resistance failed;

the Irish could not drive the Anglo-Normans from their homeland. Instead, the Anglo-Normans settled down and began calling themselves Anglo-Irish—they built castles, wrote laws against the traditional Irish culture, and joined in the feuds to keep the locals fighting among themselves.

The island was drained of its natural resources,  and its people were sent to fight English wars. Still, the constant feuding eventually caused the wealthy landowners to move back to England. Although the Anglo-Irish still technically owned their vast estates, they were absentee and had no way to protect them, so the locals moved in and terrified their Anglo-Irish neighbors. Ireland also suffered from famine and the Black Death in the 14th century, which also drove away from the Anglo-Irish. Eventually, England lost control of the entire island except for Dublin.

The Anglo-Irish who remained took control of the government, ensuring their own interests were represented. Although the locals outnumbered them, the Irish could never unite into a confederation, so the Anglo-Irish remained in power over the island as they strained against the King of England. The tensions between the English and the Irish continued to grow in the 16th century because of the Reformation, which swept across  **Europe** and saw England become Protestant.

Ireland remained Catholic, and the English attempts at religious reform on the island led to further oppression of the local people and resentment between the two groups. England decreed that only Protestant Englishmen could take political office, which excluded the Irish from having their own government. The Irish fought against the English colonization, but the English were persistent, fueled by religious fervor, economic interests, and cultural arrogance.

In the **Nine Years War** –  fought in Ireland from 1593-1603 – the English conquered the Ulster providence, the last of the Gaelic strongholds. In 1653, the English had successfully transplanted a new official church and governmental system on the island, but they could never wholly quench the local practice of Catholicism or the local culture. Instead, the English Protestants created a  two-class system that favored themselves, and they called it the "Ascendancy" or the "Protestant  Ascendancy."

Essentially, two separate societies were living in Ireland, and they both resented the existence of the other. The Protestants exercised complete control of the island, passing penal laws to prevent Catholics from participating politically or socially in society,  and they enjoyed all the benefits of privilege.

The **Catholics** remember this period as a time of **great oppression**, even though they were the majority on the island. The Ascendancy is the most extended period of peace in Irish history, but they could not achieve great prosperity. They did achieve some, but the English restricted the island's access to transatlantic trade, which limited the island's economic growth. Both groups in Ireland resented the English for that, and for the first time, the Protestants and Catholics joined together.

When the Irish Parliament secured its virtual freedom, the Catholic Irish began to demand more rights, and inspired by the revolutions in **America** and **France**; they wanted the Irish Republic that Englishmen didn't rule. Their loss led to a forced union with Great Britain in 1801, but even as part of the United Kingdom,  the Irish were not treated as equal citizens. The Irish continued to resist English rule,  pushing for their emancipation, and they were led by **Daniel O'Connell**, an Irish politician who believed in the power of non-violent resistance.

In 1828, O'Connell was elected as an MP in the British Cabinet. Technically, because he was Catholic, O'Connell was not allowed to have this office, but the English feared the Irish would react violently if they were denied this victory. So, in 1829, the Catholic Emancipation Bill passed Parliament,  and the Irish Catholics were allowed to hold any governmental office except the two highest –  lord-lieutenant and lord chancellor of Ireland.

The 1800s were also a time of great hardship.  In 1845, the Great Famine swept through **Western Europe** and left devastating damage in Ireland. A  potato blight swept through the island, leaving thirty to forty percent of the crop inedible. By  1846, the blight had settled on the whole island. Although the English initially offered help, the anti-Irish sentiments led them to rely on private groups to feed the people.

Thousands died while the English politicians ignored the Irish plight. Those who could leave Ireland did,  and historians estimate that Ireland lost one-quarter of its population

to emigration alone during the Great Famine. The Irish who remained and survived felt an even greater resentment towards the English for not helping during the disaster, and more than ever, they wanted Irish independence. However, their push for nationalism achieved little because of the divisions on the island until after **World War I**.

The people were divided economically, religiously, and politically, and all of this division made it hard for them to successfully advocate for emancipation and Home Rule, which Charles Stewart Parnell led. The English put the push for Irish independence on hold during World War I, and while most of the Irish were content to wait, a small faction planned and launched the Easter Rising.

The public was angry with the rebels and supported the government for putting down the rebellion, but when the government began to arrest innocent citizens because of their political beliefs, nationalism awoke, and the people once again pushed for their freedom. However, Ireland had been divided for so long that they remained divided even as they pushed for freedom. After World War I, the island was divided into Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Even though they were no longer a colony of  England, the tensions and strife between the different religious, economic, and political factions continued throughout the 1900s. Even as Ireland industrialized, it saw huge population losses to emigration, and its economy only began to stabilize in the 1960s, leading to more prosperity for all. As the economy grew and stabilized, the Republic of Ireland started to give the Irish people hope for a better tomorrow.

Although the South is doing well, tensions continue in Northern Ireland between the Protestants and the Catholics, but the two governments are working together to see how they can resolve their differences and join together in a celebration of all things Irish.