BRITISH-IRISH RELATIONS:
“NOT ENTIRELY BENIGN”?

David J. Webb

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A COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP

The history of Irish relations with Britain (or Britain’s relations with Ireland) is a complex and fascinating one. In general, given the broader onslaught on European culture, through multiculturalism and the drift to globalised government, we ought to downplay disputes between European nations, especially those that are largely historical in nature, and focus on how we can co-operate together on the world stage. To that extent, the Queen’s speech in Dublin Castle during her state visit to the Republic of Ireland, during which she admitted the relationship between Britain and Ireland had not been “entirely benign” struck all the right notes.

But protests against her visit to Ireland show that an entrenched culture of grievance does continue to influence a significant minority in Ireland, and some of the historical and political points they focus on deserve to be addressed here. The first part of this essay will address English rule, including the Anglo-Norman conquest; later British involvement in Ireland; a discussion of British “atrocities” in Ireland; British intervention in Irish religious affairs; the Irish Famine; the decline of the Irish language; and Irish independence. The second part will attempt to review Ireland’s lot in the world and will argue that Ireland has little to be aggrieved about in the present day. I will look at depictions of Irish culture and claims that the Irish were responsible for their own socioeconomic problems; the reasons for “prejudice” against the Irish in Britain; studies showing the Irish have relatively low IQs; the culture of victimhood and its incongruent relationship to Ireland’s newfound prosperity; and the likely trajectory of British-Irish relations.

ENGLISH RULE

The Norman Conquest

Much discussion of Irish history mentions British conquest, but there was no British conquest of Ireland. Great Britain has existed as a united state since May 1st 1707 only, and there has been no British invasion of Ireland since 1707. In fact, the initial invasion of Ireland, in 1169, was undertaken by Richard de Clare, known as Strongbow, an Anglo-Norman knight. Strongbow was the great-grandson of Richard fitz Gilbert, a Norman lord who took part in the 1066 Norman Conquest of England, but the integration of the Norman lords into English society was still a work in progress in the twelfth century (the Anglo-Norman dialect of French is believed to have been the mother tongue of all English kings up to Henry IV in the early fifteenth century, giving some indication of how culturally distinct the Anglo-Norman elite remained in England for centuries after the Norman Conquest).

Clearly, Strongbow’s invasion had nothing to do with Great Britain, a state not in existence at the time. Indeed, the English king, Henry II, did not aid the invasion of 1169, although King Henry did invade Ireland in 1172 in order to ensure the Anglo-Norman knights remained under his control and to claim the title “Lord of Ireland”, although occupying only the Viking towns of Dublin, Wexford and Waterford, at least initially. The Gaels were able to hold their own against the Anglo-Normans, as shown by the 1172 defeat of the Anglo-Norman invasion of the western province of Connaught. That the Anglo-Normans invaded at all was a result of internal Irish divisions, with the king of Leinster (the eastern Irish kingdom), Dermot MacMurrough (in Irish, Diarmait Mac Murchada) inviting in the invaders after his 1167 dispossession by Rory O’Connor (Ruaidri Ua Conchobair), high king of Ireland. Before 1169, the high kingship was a very loose title that did not imply the rule of a united nation, but rather overlordship over provincial kings, much as King Egbert of Wessex bore the title “Bretwalda” in ninth-century England.

While the invasion was “English”, in that it led to the supremacy of the English crown in Ireland, at least formally – actual control on the ground was patchy for centuries – England was itself a country with a foreign elite imported from Normandy. If the English do not harbour a grievance to this day over the 1066 Norman invasion, why do the Irish still harbour their grievances, dating back to the 1169 Anglo-Norman invasion, which was fundamentally no different from England’s 1066 experience? Even today, much of the English hereditary aristocracy and the Royal family is of Norman descent, and they retain ownership of a very large part of English land.

One difference is that the Anglo-Norman elite were eventually integrated into English society. The loss of most of the English king’s territories in France and the eventual demise of the Anglo-Norman language effectively integrated the Norman barons into English society. The kings and peers of England remained of Norman descent, but maintained their control over the English polity until the democratic age, although the bond with France was snapped in the Middle Ages.

The snapping of the bond with France, however, still left Ireland’s Anglo-Norman barons with a strong bond with England. When Norman French was no longer spoken, it appeared that the Anglo-Norman lords might assimilate fully to Gaelic language and culture; the process was well under way in 1366 when the Statutes of Kilkenny forbade...
the Anglo-Normans from speaking Irish and intermarrying with the Gaelic population. The adoption of such a law was part of an attempt to maintain a pro-English elite in Ireland. English control meant a continuing influx of English-speaking settlers into the eastern parts of Ireland, with the economically dominant parts of the country (i.e. Dublin in particular) under the control of an elite which spoke English and were connected by ties of allegiance (and property) to England, a country acknowledged to be entirely separate from Ireland in constitutional terms until the 1801 Act of Union between Great Britain and Ireland.

Many of the Anglo-Norman nobles did eventually assimilate to Gaelism; an example is the Norman-Irish lord, Piaras Feiritéar, a noted Irish-language poet in County Kerry in the early seventeenth century. However, the creation of an English-speaking culture in urban areas, fuelled by immigration from England, meant that the assimilation of the Anglo-Irish (including later arrivals in Ireland in the Tudor period) to Gaelic culture was never completed: the “New English” had assimilated to the Irish language. The division of Ireland between towns and cities, founded by the Vikings and populated by English speakers, and the countryside, populated by Irish-speaking Gaels, remained in place until the sudden rapid fall away of the Irish language in the nineteenth century. It should be borne in mind that most Irish cities, including Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Wexford, owe their origins to the Vikings if the Vikings, then the Normans and the English, had never arrived in Ireland, we can suppose that a Gaelic-speaking urban society would eventually have been created, but the fact is that this is not what happened. Consequently, Ireland remained a culturally divided country after the Conquest, with political instability continuing almost to the present day.

**Gaelic culture in the Mediaeval period**

The Gaels fell under Anglo-Norman domination – not exactly British, or even English, domination, in the initial stages, at least – owing to their internal divisions. Initially, Gaelic opposition to Henry II was constrained by a concern to limit the ambitions of the Gaelic kings of Leinster and the Norman knights, who were nominally Henry II’s vassals, but only in a very limited way under his control. The crown controlled a swath of Ireland of varying size (“the Pale”), with the Norman knights increasingly assimilating to the Irish language and culture beyond the Pale and large parts of the country still under the control of native Gaelic lords. An interesting question is whether the politics of English control of Ireland would have been different had Ireland been fully subjugated after 1169, just as England came fully under Norman control after 1066. Had the country been pacified under Norman rule at an early date, the later history of Ireland might have been less traumatic. However, it was not until the early seventeenth century that Ireland as a whole came fully under the effective control of the English crown.

An interesting question is why Ireland fell under English control at all. Economically speaking, Ireland was a backward country in the twelfth century. England had become a united country from the late ninth century under King Alfred the Great and his successors – it is arguable that the Danish invasions helped to destroy the petty kingdoms the country had been divided into, and served to create a united Anglo-Saxon polity under the Royal House of Wessex, which eventually conquered back the Danish territories and created a united Kingdom of England. Thus, even before the Norman Conquest of 1066, England was no longer a tribal society, having become a feudal state based on settled agriculture. In this way, the Danes apparently aided the progress of England in socio-economic terms in the ninth century and beyond, while Ireland remained “stuck” culturally in tribal political and economic patterns.

An interesting question that tantalises Irish nationalists is whether the campaign of King Brian Borcuma, high king of Ireland until the 1014 Battle of Clontarf, fought against the Norse-Gael kingdom of Dublin, could have led to a united Irish polity, and then to economic progress thereafter. This question is, however, a counterfactual one; in the event, Brian Borcuma was killed in the battle, and years of instability followed. Feudalism in Ireland only came about following the Anglo-Norman conquest.

What was Gaelic culture like? What sort of country had the Anglo-Norman knights conquered? The 1187 work Topographia Hibernica (“The Topography of Ireland”), by Gerald of Wales, gives an account of the economic realities of twelfth-century Ireland. This work, which is seen as the founding text in terms of later British cultural representations of Ireland, seems coloured by a considerable contempt for the Irish, although it does contain important details of Ireland at the time:

> The Irish are a rude people, subsisting on the produce of their cattle only, and living themselves like beasts – a people that has not yet departed from the primitive habits of pastoral life... They, therefore, only make patches of tillage; their pastures are short of herbage, cultivation is very rare, and there is scarcely any land sown. This want of tilled fields arises from the neglect of those who should cultivate them; for there are large tracts which are naturally fertile and productive... There are also veins of various kinds of metals ramifying in the bowels of the earth, which, from the same idle habits, are not worked and turned to account... They neither employ themselves in the manufacture of flax or wool, or in any kind of trade or mechanical art; but abandoning themselves to idleness, and immersed in sloth, their greatest delight is to be exempt from toil, their richest possession the enjoyment of liberty.

This description, based on Gerald of Wales’ trip to Ireland in 1185, undoubtedly contains a large element of prejudice, but pastoral transhumance was the main form of economic life in Ireland in the twelfth century, without
developed property rights and settled agriculture. I am not attempting to justify conquest – moral condemnation centuries after the event is ridiculous – but to explain the ability of the English lords to subjugate Ireland. Ireland was still a backward, tribal society in the eleventh century; England was no longer so, and I am advancing the tentative view, in the absence of any alternative explanation, that the Danish invasions that conquered half of England and wiped out the Heptarchy whereby seven kingdoms competed in England ultimately helped to foster the unity of England from the late ninth century and economic progress in England thereafter.

It is well-known today that Ireland has a tradition of Roman Catholic conservatism, but this relates to the stance adopted by the Gaels following the sixteenth-century rupture of the Western church, and it would be incorrect to extrapolate Irish Catholic conservatism all the way back to the early Middle Ages and beyond. St Anselm of Canterbury, an Italian by birth who served as Archbishop of Canterbury (and thus the senior cleric in the English church) until his death in 1109, accused the Irish of exchanging their wives “in the way that other men exchange horses”. Comments about cultural differences are taboo today during the age of multiculturalism, and so such comments are more likely to provoke outrage than considered discussion, but it is likely that sexual and social customs in early mediaeval Ireland were not fully in line with the demands of the Western church. Similarly, the French abbot, St Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), a personal friend of St of the Western church, and it would be incorrect to consider Irish Catholic conservatism all the way back to the early Middle Ages and beyond. Similarly, the French abbot, St Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), a personal friend of St Anselm of Canterbury, an Italian by birth who served as Archbishop of Canterbury (and thus the senior cleric in the English church) until his death in 1109, accused the Irish of exchanging their wives “in the way that other men exchange horses”.14

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shameless in their customs, uncivilised in their ways,
godless in religion, barbarous in their law, obstinate
as regards instruction, foul in their lives: Christians
in name, pagans in fact.15

According to Gerald of Wales:

it is indeed a most filthy race, a race sunk in vice ...
they do not contract marriages, nor shun incestuous
connections ... in many parts of Ireland brothers (I
will not say marry) seduce and debauch the wives
of their brothers deceased, and have incestuous inter-
course with them.16

This is an interesting comment, because the instruction in one passage of the Old Testament that a man should marry his dead brother’s wife was what lay behind Henry VIII’s marriage in 1509 to Catherine of Aragon, previously married to Henry VIII’s brother, Prince Arthur, and his later attempt to dissolve the marriage led directly to the Reformation in England (and Ireland). In the Middle Ages, the church accepted the validity of common-law marriage, and so a consummated relationship was regarded as as fully an instance of matrimony as one cele-

brated in a church service; a failure to observe the requirement to publish banns instituted by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 did not in itself invalidate the marriage where there were no impediment to the marriage.17 The comments of Gerald of Wales are therefore not necessarily clear evidence of debauchery, and it is interesting that the part-Welsh chronicler also condemned the Welsh for greed, incest and sinfulness in his Description of Wales.18 However, the twelfth-century English chronicler Roger of Hoveden or Howden also spoke of both polygamy and incest in Ireland.19 The English pope, Adrian IV, in his bull Landalbitter published in 1155, granted Ireland to the English crown (i.e., Henry II and his heirs) in these terms:

Your majesty ( tua magnificencia) laudably and profitably considers how you may best promote your glory on earth, and lay up for yourself an eternal reward in heaven, when, as becomes a catholic prince, you labour to extend the borders of the church, to teach the truths of the Christian faith to a rude and unlettered people, and to root out the weeds of wickedness from the field of the Lord; for this purpose you crave the advice and assistance of the apostolic see, and in so doing we are persuaded that the higher are your aims, and the more discreet your proceedings, the greater, under God, will be your success.

... You have signified to us, our well-beloved son in Christ, that you propose to enter the island of Ireland in order to subdue the people, and make them obedient to laws, and to root out from among them the weeds of sin; and that you are willing to yield and pay yearly from every house the pension of one penny to St Peter, and to keep and preserve the rights of the churches in that land whole and inviolate.20

The authenticity of this bull has been questioned, as the Vatican no longer holds the original, but Gerald of Wales’ near-contemporaneous account of the bull is historical evidence for its existence. One might expect Adrian IV’s views to have been influenced by his Englishness, but his comments reflected a wider concern in church circles. The Synod of Cashel in 1101 was the first in a series that brought the Irish church into conformity with the Western church, forbidding divorce, incest and clerical marriage. The 1111 Synod of Rath Breasail established the diocesan system, and the 1152 Synod of Kells-Mellifont established Armagh as the metropolitical see of Ireland, removing the Irish church from the aegis of Canterbury in England. The Second Synod of Cashel in 1172 once again forbade the marrying of relatives within degrees of consanguinity and affinity.

By the sixteenth century, Sir Henry Sidney, English Lord Deputy of Ireland 1565-71 and 1575-78 was still writing

surely there was never people that lived in more misery than they do, nor as it should seem of worse minds, for matrimony among them is no more re-
The brutality of English rule

It is undoubtedly the case that English rule was punctuated by frequent atrocities, explaining to a considerable degree the restlessness of the Gaels. In 1305, Piers Bermingham received a reward of £100 for sending 30 O’Connor heads to Dublin, in a rather gruesome episode hard to reconcile with English claims that they were more fully Christian, in deed as well as name, than the Irish. The English were apparently incensed that the Gaels refused to accept English domination and engaged in a spiral of reprisals. From 1315, when Edward Bruce of Scotland invaded Ireland and was briefly made high king, until the mid-sixteenth century, the English-established government in Dublin, which had controlled most of the country around 1300, lost control of much of the country. I referred above to the 1366 Statute of Kilkenny, which forbade the Sean-Ghaill (the “Old English”; the Anglo-Normans) from speaking Irish or marrying Gaels. Such laws reflected frustration in Dublin that even Anglo-Normans were going native. By the same token, the ability of the government in Dublin to enforce such “laws” was patchy, as only the Pale was fully under Dublin control (although the government of Ireland, nominally separate from that of England, fell more fully under English control in 1494, with the passage of Poyning’s Law, requiring prior English approval of any law submitted for passage in the Irish Parliament).

A more determined attempt to bring Ireland fully under English control was made from the 1540s, when the policy of “surrender and regrant” aimed to bring Gaelic lords into the English constitutional setup as peers who owed their titles to royal grants. Attempts to establish plantations (colonies of English settlers) in King’s County (Offaly) and Queen’s County (Laois) in 1556 were a response to the continual raiding by the O’Moore and O’Connor clans into the English Pale, but were not a great success – massacres of the displaced O’Moore and O’Connor clans26 meant that it was difficult to attract English settlers amid the violence – and an attempt to establish a plantation in east Ulster in the 1570s was called off after the local MacDonnell clansmen were massacred in a raid by Sir Francis Drake.27

The first successful mass plantation was that of Munster, the southern Irish province, in the 1580s. The Desmond Rebellion in 1579-83 led to the confiscation of the lands of the Hiberno-Norman FitzGerald Earls of Desmond, followed by the plantation as a punitive measure. A study in 1589 showed that only 700 colonists arrived, but it is thought that this figure refers to heads of households, and that several thousand English colonists arrived, many of whom fled back to England in 1598 during a renewed rebellion.

The Nine Years’ War of 1594-1603 led to the full subjugation of Ulster, and a regrant of the land of the Gaelic lords. The Flight of the Earls, a departure of the Gaelic lords from Ireland under Hugh O’Neill (Aodh Ó Néill) in 1607, had been intended to organise a rebellion from Spain, but a renewed rebellion in Ulster in 1608 led to the expropriation of all Gaelic landowners in Ulster,28 followed by a more determined plantation of Ulster, this time in more compact population groups, to prevent the destruction of the plantation in times of rebellion as had happened to the much more scattered Munster plantations in 1598. It has been estimated that by the 1620s, around 12,000 adults from England and Scotland had settled in the confiscated parts of Ulster, with an addi-
Ireland was profoundly affected by the English Civil War between Charles I and the English Parliament, which in Ireland took the form of a war from 1641 to 1653. In contrast to Ireland’s earlier tribalism, the formation of the Confederation of Kilkenny in 1642 amounted to the first independent government of Ireland, nominally aligned with the Royalists in the English Civil War, although at times at war with the Royal army too. The Kilkenny Confederation was ended by the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland 1649-53, with the entire cycle of wars resulting, according to the survey conducted in the 1650s by William Petty, in the death of 600,000 Irishmen out of a population of 1.5 million. Modern estimates are a little lower, but still show 20-40% of the population dying in the period, of warfare, famine and disease. It is undeniable that the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland was accomplished with extreme brutality, although both sides fell prey to acts of atrocities, with thousands of Protestants and Catholics being killed in massacres. The Irish defeat led to the confiscation of most of the land held by the Catholic nobles and its redistribution to the Protestant Anglo-Irish landowners. By 1660, just 20% of Irish land was held by Catholics, down from 60% in 1640. A further outbreak of war in 1688-91 saw King James II try, unsuccessfully, to use Ireland as his base to regain the English crown after the Glorious Revolution saw the crown pass to William III and Mary II.

The religious divide

From the Tudor period onwards, part of the justification for English, and later British, involvement in Ireland was sought in opposition to Roman Catholicism, partly reflecting concerns that Ireland could fall under Spanish or French domination, with strategic implications for England. However, the Roman Catholic Church also used the antipathy of the Gaels towards English rule in its own interests. While mediaeval Irish culture was characterised by religious devotion, the recounting of the deeds of saints and the copying of religious manuscripts, the same was true of mediaeval English culture; what is interesting is that England took to the new Protestant culture, where Ireland did not, creating a fresh point of cultural divergence between the Gaels and the Anglo-Irish.

The Reformation in the 1530s created a period of uncertainty until the Counter-Reformation began in 1570. Until 1570, there was no Papal injunction for adherents of the Roman church to separate themselves from the established churches of England and Ireland. The bishops of the pre-Reformation churches had been “persuaded” to accept Royal authority over the church, and they were encouraged to adopt vernacular-language services, but there were no rival denominations as the Church of Ireland and the Papacy were still engaged in a struggle for control of the existing church organisation. It was always possible that the breach with Rome would be healed until 1570, when the Pope “excommunicated” Queen Elizabeth I. In fact, during the reign of Queen Mary, 1553-58, communion with Rome was restored briefly.

The Reformation in Ireland was a more reluctant affair than in England, but the bishops of the pre-Reformation church accepted it, and so the creation of a rival hierarchy, loyal to the Vatican, was a new organisation, without links to the pre-Reformation church in Ireland, staffed by priests and bishops consecrated in Italy and Flanders. During the reign of Mary I, George Dowdall had been appointed Archbishop of Armagh by the Pope in 1553. He had previously been Archbishop of Armagh, recognised by the Pope, in 1543-52, but had gradually come to oppose the increasingly Protestant tone of the church under Edward VI, and had left Ireland in protest. His reappointment in 1553 means he is accepted by both the Church of Ireland and the Roman Catholic Church as the legitimate Archbishop of Armagh. He was succeeded as Archbishop by Adam Loftus, who had been consecrated by Hugh Curwin, who became Archbishop of Dublin under Mary I in 1555. Curwin was yet another bishop who did not leave the Established Church upon the breach with Rome. Later bishops of the Church of Ireland trace their episcopal lines of succession back to Adam Loftus and thus to the pre-Reformation church in Ireland.

The existing bishops stayed in the church after the Reformation, probably in order not to lose the money and position that the Established Church offered. There were no rival denominations originally, but in 1558, following the death of George Dowdall, the Vatican declared the see of Armagh vacant, and in 1560 the Vatican appointed Donagh O’Tighe as a rival Archbishop of Armagh, with the consecration being conducted in Rome. His successor, Richard Creagh, appointed in 1564, was also consecrated in Rome. Peter Lombard, appointed Archbishop of Armagh by Rome in 1601, lived out his life in Italy and did not visit Armagh once before his death in 1625. The seventeenth-century leaders of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, Edmund O’Reilly and Oliver Plunkett, were consecrated in Flanders. In Oliver Plunkett’s case, after consecration in Ghent in 1670, he arrived in Ireland and operated more or less openly for most of the 1670s, organising Roman Catholic synods in Ireland, before being arrested on trumped up charges of fostering a French invasion and hanged, drawn and quartered in London in 1681; he has since been canonised by the Roman Catholic church.

The reason the Church of Ireland has all the older church buildings in Ireland is that it inherited the built infrastructure of the church, as organisationally it is continuous with the pre-Reformation church. However, the Roman Catholic hierarchy was successful in making religion part of the national question in Ireland. This reflected in part
the lack of vernacular materials in Irish to promote the Reformation in Ireland. The Church of Ireland largely neglected to use it, limited by its own oversight by the English Parliament. 

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The Protestant Ascendancy

The Protestant Ascendancy established in the seventeenth century saw the Irish working as peasants for the Anglo-Irish lords, a settlement challenged by peasant insurrectionists organised in secret societies such as the White Boys that wreaked havoc in the countryside from the 1760s on. Irish Catholics were subject to penal laws, preventing them from sitting in Parliament and limiting their ownership of property. Nevertheless, the Protestant Anglo-Irish worked to free Ireland from economic constraints, and secured free trade with England in 1782 and the reversal of Poyning’s Law, establishing the Kingdom of Ireland as an independent kingdom, without formal oversight by the English Parliament. Ireland entered an economic boom in the late eighteenth century as a consequence of free trade. Catholics gained the right to vote and buy freehold land in the 1790s and the government built St Patrick’s College in Maynooth as a seminary for the Roman Catholic Church in 1795, in an attempt to integrate the Roman Catholic episcopacy into the Anglo-Irish elite. 

The spread of revolutionary ideas in the context of upheaval in France and America led to the United Irishmen’s rebellion in 1798, encouraged by an attempted French invasion in 1796, ultimately leading to the abolition once again of Irish independence, as Ireland was incorporated into the United Kingdom in 1801, a development that could only be pushed through the Irish Parliament by bribery. The United Irishmen’s rebellion in 1798 is interesting, in that it aimed to create a united nation and was led by Protestant Irishmen. The Union itself got off to a bad start, by failing to provide for Catholic emancipation: Catholics were finally seated in Parliament in 1829. 

The Great Famine

British rule and the ownership of land by the Anglo-Irish gentry were a consequence of Ireland’s instability down the generations. The full conquest of Ireland allowed for economic progress, initially within constraints laid down by Britain, but eventually increasingly free of earlier trading constraints. However, the continued dependence of the majority of the Irish population on agriculture meant continual exposure to problems in agriculture. In the famine of 1740-41, caused by a period of cold weather known as the Great Frost, around 400,000 Irishmen are said to have died. In the 1840s, more than 1 million died in the Great Famine, with more than a million emigrating, as the potato blight afflicting Ireland continued for years on end. The result was to reduce the population of Ireland by one-quarter by 1851. Ireland continued to export corn to England throughout the Irish Famine.

Numerous studies by the British government before the Famine had revealed the vulnerability of Ireland to a potato blight. The decimation of a single crop, potato, could wipe out large numbers of peasants, even as Ireland continued to act as a grain export base for Great Britain. Yet the Corn Laws, introduced in 1815, had boosted the Irish economy by supporting the market for Irish corn, to the extent that Ireland was by 1830 providing 80% of Great Britain’s corn imports. The Irish Famine provided part of the justification for the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, and, despite the continued export of Ireland’s high-quality corn to England, Ireland’s corn trade moved into a substantial net deficit during the Famine period. Net grain exports of 485,000 tons in 1845 fell to 87,000 tons in 1846, with net imports of 743,000 tons in 1847 and 125,000 tons in 1848. The imports were mainly of low-quality Indian corn, but nevertheless claims that the Irish famine was tantamount to a genocidal policy implemented by the British government are wide of the mark. Predictably, the repeal of the Corn Laws led to the collapse of corn prices in Ireland, hitting corn production and necessitating greater imports.

Public works programmes and soup kitchen arrangements were implemented on an on-and-off basis, with such spending questioned in England on the grounds of opposition to interference in the free-market economy, and then reintroduced from time to time as food riots grew more persistent. The sheer scale of the public works introduced in the early part of the famine, employing 700,000 people (one-twelfth of the population, but supporting half the Irish population once dependents are included) in the spring of 1847, and of the soup kitchen programme, which was feeding 3 million Irishmen in early 1847, points to an almost modern attempt to grapple with the famine, eventually defeated, politically, by opposition to the gigantic scale of the intervention being embarked upon. The length of the famine, which lasted from 1845 until at least 1850, also led to increasing weariness with the issue in English political circles.

One could argue, with considerable justification, that the conquest of Ireland and the subjection of the peasantry to Anglo-Irish landlords, surviving on potatoes while the rest of their agricultural products were exported to England, condemned over a million to death when the potato blight came. It is possible to argue, although it is impossible to be certain, that more strenuous efforts would have been made had millions of English peasants suffered starvation, but it seems much more plausible that the famine was exacerbated by government negligence, rather than any planned policy of allowing the famine to carry off as many Irishmen as possible. This was clearly exacerbated by the Union, in that Irish political exigencies were subordinated to wider political and economic discussions in England. The English preference for laissez-faire economic policies to address the Famine was also questionable in an Irish context, as the land-owning class had not obtained their
control over the land by \textit{laisser faire}, but rather by conquest. From the 1870s onwards, violence and rent strikes in the countryside challenged the land settlement, eventually resulting in a series of Acts of Parliament providing for land reform.

The decline of the Irish language

The gradual decline of the Irish language was a consequence of Ireland’s economic growth, but was given great impetus by the Irish Famine. While Irish nationalists frequently claim that Britain stamped out the Irish language in Ireland, it seems rather that the decline of Irish was the inevitable result of the economic dominance of the English-speaking cities, where English has been spoken since the twelfth century. The seventeenth-century conquest led to the overthrow of the Gaelic lords, and the bardic schools that they patronised, disrupting the cultural infrastructure of the prior order, but it was economic growth in the 1700s that really promoted the English language. Even so, as late as 1800, Irish was still the language of the majority, losing ground from the 1840s, and in particular as a result of the Irish Famine. The Famine naturally hit the poorer districts harder, and they were, by definition, not the English-speaking urban areas, but the Irish-speaking villages. The Famine carried off many Irish native speakers and led to the emigration of many more, while, more importantly, leaving the remaining Irish speakers convinced of a need to modernise. The experience of begging for food in broken English brought home to the Irish population the need to shift to English if their children were to gain economic opportunities. In the remainder of the nineteenth century, the collapse of the Irish language happened with surprising rapidity.

Daniel O’Connell, the agitator for Catholic Emancipation and Repeal of the Union known as “the Liberator”, was a native speaker of Irish, but a famous quotation attributed to him shows that many native speakers doubted the advantages of speaking Irish:

\textit{I am sufficiently utilitarian not to regret its gradual abandonment. A diversity of tongues is no benefit; it was first imposed upon mankind as a curse, at the building of Babel. It would be of great advantage to mankind if all the inhabitants of the Earth spoke the same language. Therefore though the Irish language is connected with many recollections that twine around the hearts of Irishmen, yet the superior utility of the English tongue, as the medium of all modern communication, is so great that I can witness without a sigh the gradual decline of Irish.}^{52}

What is regularly left out in Irish nationalist accounts is that the Irish people themselves decided to stop speaking Irish. There are many anecdotal accounts of Irish native speakers concealing their linguistic background or refusing to speak their native tongue, preferring a poorly learned, grammatically butchered variant of English. Irish had become a low-status language, a fact that was connected to the backwardness of Gaelic culture. Where were the Irish Isaac Newtons and George Stephensons? There was almost nothing in print in Irish in the early nineteenth century; the language circulated in manuscripts that few could read. The Roman Catholic church did not use the language, preferring Latin, and discouraged its adherents from reading the Irish-language Bible translated by the Church of Ireland. William Magee pointed out the trade-off between support for the Roman Catholic church in Ireland and the loss of the Irish language:

\textit{Few Irishmen will admit that Ireland would have been made a more interesting and agreeable country by an evangelical movement which would have introduced Bedell’s Bible into every cottage; but it was probably at the cost of her ancient language, as well as of some other things, that Ireland kept her religious tradition unbroken.}^{52}

There are anecdotes relating how the Catholic priests in nineteenth century Ireland railed against \textit{An Bhiobla Gaedhla}, “the Foreign Bible” (i.e., a perverse reference to the Bible in Irish, not Latin). (The Roman Catholic Church did not complete a translation of the Bible into Irish until 1981, a project only begun after the Second Vatican Council authorised the use of the vernacular in the liturgy; by this time native speakers of Irish had dwindled to less than 1% of the Irish population.) Cyril Ó Céirin recounts the opposition of the Roman Catholic hierarchy to the Irish language:

\textit{The period witnessed a wholesale effort to win the Irish peasantry over to the Established Church – through the medium of Irish. The attempt failed but struck a devastating blow at the language, for the Roman Catholic clergy panicked and urged their flocks to abandon the language in case it turned out to be the means for their destruction. The teaching and reading of Irish in those areas where proselytism was vigorous was forbidden, collections of manuscripts were made and burnt publicly and preachers fulminated against the language from the pulpit.}^{53}

Rural “hedge” schools grew up in the eighteenth century, as officially established Catholic schools were forbidden under Penal Laws in force between 1723 and 1782. Yet it must be remembered that this was well before the advent of publicly funded mass education, and the unofficial hedge schools, set up by local rural people, tended to teach English, without any government encouragement, simply because to do so offered economic advancement to the pupils. After 1831, the hedge schools were replaced by the national school system, a state education system run largely by the Catholic church, and it is reported that, as in Wales, children were beaten in many of the national schools for speaking Irish, apparently with the approval of their parents, who wished their children to learn English. With no published literature in Irish, the Catholic church railing against the language and parents determined to raise their children in English it is unsurprising that Irish fell away. The role of Irish parents in
enforcing this transition to English is clear from the account of Robert Lynd:

In many places, teacher, priest and parent combined with the authorities in stamping out all knowledge of the native language from the minds of the children. The children were forbidden to speak any Irish in the schools, and they carried little tally-sticks hung round their necks so that, every time they lapsed into Irish in their homes, their parents might cut a notch in these and the teacher might award as many strokes of the cane as he found notches in the tally-stick on the next morning.

It is difficult to forgive a generation of parents, priests, politicians and teachers who thus flogged the children of the country out of the knowledge of their natural speech. Many parents, it is clear, looking at the course of events in the world, came to the conclusion that English was the language of success and Irish the language of decay and starvation. If they punished their children for being Irish, they thought they were punishing bread-and-butter into their stomachs, if not the bread of life into their souls. Curious to relate, this idea is not dead among Irish-speaking parents even today. Those who know English, though they speak Irish to each other and to grown-up neighbours, very often drop into English when they address their children.54

The government regulations under which national schools were set up did not mention the Irish language. The Irish language was not expressly forbidden in the schools, but it was a language in which there were only a handful of published books (the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer and one or two others), and so literacy was naturally understood to mean literacy in English. The Irish language was not placed on the curriculum in the national schools until 1878. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that there was no call for Irish-language education in the 1830s and 1840s, although later in the century, during the Gaelic Revival, there arose a call for the language to be saved.

Achieving independence

The 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin took place while Britain was busy fighting the First World War. In 1918 Sinn Féin won the majority of seats in Ireland in the UK general election and proceeded to convene a rival legislature that proclaimed a Republic in 1919. Following the War of Independence, the British government offered Ireland independence for the southern 26 counties, in order to protect the interests of the Protestant settlers in the North, resulting in the Irish Civil War, eventually won by those who supported the settlement on offer from the British, including Partition of the island. It is worth pointing out that support for Irish independence was far from universal in Ireland in 1916, or in 1922, when independence was finally achieved. An interesting article in The Guardian by the Irish historian Ruth Dudley-Edwards presents an alternative viewpoint:

I began my career as a biographer of Patrick Pearse and James Connolly – two leaders of the 1916 rebellion. I viewed them sympathetically, as I view all my subjects, but I could not but conclude that they had no more justification for revolution than did the Provisional IRA more than sixty years later nor the Real and Continuity IRAs now. They were leaders of a tiny cabal: Ireland was a democracy, and Home Rule was on the statute book.

The British reaction to a revolution in the middle of a world war was harsh enough to alienate Irish public opinion, while too mild to smash violent nationalism. (Salient figures: 450 deaths, of which 116 were soldiers, 16 policemen, 242 civilians and 76 insurgents.)

Although there were only 16 executions, they aroused the sympathy of the hitherto unimpassioned Irish and in 1918 won the election for Sinn Féin, though there was no mandate for future violence. Yet violence had become respectable. The unnecessary war of independence began when in January 1919, a handful of Irish Volunteers took it on themselves to kill two members of the Royal Irish Constabulary. From then on it was a war on anyone in uniform – British or Irish – or with unionist sympathies. Ken Loach set The Wind That Shakes the Barley in County Cork, but I’m told there is no mention in it of the ethnic cleansing of Protestants in several villages.55

It seems that the British reaction to the Easter Rising created greater support for violent revolution in Ireland. Famously, the people of Dublin spat on the rebels as they were captured in 1916,56 but opinion turned against the British following the execution of the rebels. Of course, harsh reprisals were bound to be adopted by the British, given that the rising took place even as Britain was engaged in the First World War. In the December 1918 election, Sinn Féin won 73 of the 105 Irish parliamentary seats, with 46.9% of the vote. The Irish Unionist Party won 22 seats with 25.3% of the vote, and the Irish Parliamentary Party (which advocated devolution within the Union) won six seats, with 21.7% of the vote. A further three Labour Unionists and an independent Unionist were also elected. It is argued that support for Sinn Féin was much higher than it appeared to be from these results, as Sinn Féin was elected unopposed in many constituencies, a fact that would have reduced the turnout in those areas. Clearly, however, there was a large minority of people in Ireland who supported the Union with England.

Decades of government by parties whose ultimate origin lies in factions of the IRA that fought the Civil War in the 1920s mean that the support of many Irishmen in 1918 for the Union, or for devolution within the Union, has been forgotten. The tens of thousands of Irishmen who fought for Britain in the Second World War received a frigid welcome upon their arrival home in Ireland; yet the fact that they fought for Britain at all indicates that the
many modern concepts, to nothing more than a political "playing of the green
It seems undeniable that the Irish language amounts today
bringing their children up as native speakers of Irish.)
paid €260 a year to families in Irish-speaking villages
such as Dublin and Cork, will become Irish-speaking.
would not only maintain the Irish language in the isolated
villages where it has survived, but also "restore the Irish
language as the language of popular, everyday use in the
rest of Ireland". In other words, the fantasy has been
sacrificed for political purposes that one day large cities,
such as Dublin and Cork, will become Irish-speaking.
Other aspects of a flawed approach include the creation
of an artificial standard language that did not correspond
to any living or historic dialect; government policies
allowing the thousands of books that had been published in
Irish in the first half of the twentieth century to go out of
print, because they were not in the new "Standard Irish";
the refusal (to this day) to draw up dictionaries indicating
the pronunciation of words in the three main dialects of
Irish, making the language very difficult to learn, as aca-
demics focused their efforts on inventing a new artificial
pronunciation system for Irish, which is indicated in a
pocket dictionary although it has never been spoken any-
where; and even the bizarre bureaucratic approach of
awarding monetary payments (the deonta) to parents in
Irish-speaking villages whose children speak Irish, which
has helped to co-opt an air of a self-serving dash for
public cash about the Irish-language "movement". (The
abolition of the deonta scheme established in 1933 was
finally announced in mid-2011; the scheme until recently
paid €260 a year to families in Irish-speaking villages
bringing their children up as native speakers of Irish.)

It seems undeniable that the Irish language amounts today
to nothing more than a political "playing of the green
card". Even the "native speakers" lack the vocabulary for
many modern concepts, although a large vocabulary of
made-up words, largely used by enthusiastic learners, has
been created by government committees. The entire ed-
ifice of bilingualism, including the right to fill in tax returns
in Irish Gaelic, the translation of EU laws into Irish that
no-one ever asks for, and the habit of politicians in Ire-
land of delivering the cúpla focaí ("the couple of words"), a
tokenistic sentence in basic Irish at the start of their
speeches, calls into question the validity of government
spending in this area.

IS IRISH GRIEVANCE JUSTIFIED?

A long legacy of backwardness
In this section, I want to review Ireland's experience of
modernisation against the background of the historical
disputes with England and comment on Ireland's nurtur-
ing of a culture of historical grievance despite what is oth-
erwise a broadly successful linking up with the modern
international economy. I will argue that Irish culture was
one of the reasons why Ireland had a wretched history; the
Irish could have made much more progress on the
basis of their geographical proximity to England had they
not been given to fractiousness, drunkenness and rebel-
lon. Even so, the modern world has treated Ireland well.
Ireland is one of the most prosperous states in Europe
today. Consequently, Ireland has no justified basis to feel
aggrieved or hard done-by in the present day.

Ireland's history amounts to a struggle to achieve the
modernisation of the country. Having been ahead of
other countries in the Dark Ages, the country then en-
tered a 1,000-year-long decline, facilitating the English
conquest, with wars, famine, religious conflict and cultural
decay all playing a part. Even in relatively late modern
times, the Anglo-Irish seemed to believe there remained
something wrong with the behaviour or culture of the
Gaels that held them back. Jonathan Swift, dean of St
Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin in the 1740s and author of
Gulliver's Travels addressed the causes of Irish backward-
ness in his Sermon on the Causes of the Wretched Condition
of Ireland which seems to highlight moral flaws in the popula-
tion, although ultimately condemning the negative effects
of the exploitative system of land tenure:

In most parts of this kingdom the natives are from
their infancy so given up to idleness and sloth, that
they often choose to beg or steal, rather than support
themselves with their own labour; they marry with-
out the least view or thought of being able to make
any provision for their families; and whereas, in all
industrious nations, children are looked on as a help
to their parents; with us, for want of being early
trained to work, they are an intolerable burthen at
home, and a grievous charge upon the public, as
appeareth from the vast number of ragged and na-
ked children in town and country, led about by
strolling women, trained up in ignorance and all
manner of vice.
Lastly, a great cause of this nation’s misery, is that Egyptian bondage of cruel, oppressing, covetous landlords, expecting that all who live under them should make bricks without straw, who greed and envy when they see a tenant of their own in a whole coat, or able to afford one comfortable meal in a month, by which the spirits of the people are broken, and made for slavery; the farmers and cottagers, almost through the whole kingdom, being to all intents and purposes as real beggars as any of those to whom we give our charity in the streets. And these cruel landlords are every day uprooting their kingdom, by forbidding their miserable tenants to till the earth, against common reason and justice, and contrary to the practice and prudence of all other nations, by which numberless families have been forced either to leave the kingdom, or stroll about, and increase the number of our thieves and beggars.

... It is indeed in the power of the lawmakers to found a school in every parish of the kingdom, for teaching the meaner and poorer sort of children to speak and read the English tongue, and to provide a reasonable maintenance for the teachers. This would, in time, abolish that part of barbarity and ignorance, for which our natives are so despised by all foreigners: this would bring them to think and act according to the rules of reason, by which a spirit of industry, and thrift, and honesty would be introduced among them.

... I think there is no complaint more just than what we find in almost every family, of the folly and ignorance, the fraud and knavery, the idleness and viciousness, the wasteful squandering temper of servants, who are, indeed, become one of the many public grievances of the kingdom; whereas, I believe, there are few masters that now bear me who are not convinced by their own experience. And I am not very confident, that more families, of all degrees, have not been ruined by the corruptions of servants, than by all other causes put together. Neither is this to be wondered at, when we consider from what nurseries we have our servants come to us, sufficient to corrupt all the rest. Thus, the whole race of servants in this kingdom have gotten so ill a reputation, that some persons from England, come over hither into great stations, are said to have absolutely refused admitting any servant born among us into their families. Neither can they be justly blamed: for although it is not impossible to find an honest native fit for a good service, yet the inquiry is too troublesome, and the hazard too great for a stranger to attempt.

In 1843, the Marxist writer, Frederick Engels, painted a picture of the Irish Gaels and their economic and political situation, referring in the opening sentences to Daniel O'Connell. It is worth quoting at length:

The cunning old fox is going from town to town, always accompanied by a bodyguard such as no king ever had — two hundred thousand people always surround him! How much could have been done if a sensible man possessed O'Connell's popularity or if O'Connell had a little more understanding, and a little less egoism and vanity! Two hundred thousand men — and what men! People who have nothing to lose, two-thirds of whom are clothed in rags, genuine proletarians and sansculottes and, moreover, Irishmen, wild, headstrong, fanatical Gaels. One who has never seen Irishmen cannot know them. Give me two hundred thousand Irishmen and I will overthrow the entire British monarchy. The Irishman is a carefree, cheerful, potato-eating child of nature. From his native heath, where he grew up, under a broken-down roof, on weak tea and meagre food, he is suddenly thrown into our civilisation. Hunger drives him to England. In the mechanical, egoistic, ice-cold hurly-burly of the English factory towns, his passions are aroused. What does this raw young fellow — whose youth was spent playing on moors and begging at the roadside — know of thrift? He squanders what he earns, then he starves until the next pay-day or until he again finds work. He is accustomed to going hungry. Then he goes back, seeks out the members of his family on the road where they had scattered in order to beg, from time to time assembling again around the teapot, which the mother carries with her. But in England the Irishman saw a great deal, he attended public meetings and workers’ associations, he knows what Repel is and what Sir Robert Peel stands for, he quite certainly has often had fights with the police and could tell you a great deal about the heartlessness and disgraceful behaviour of the “Peelers” (the police). He has also heard a lot about Daniel O'Connell. Now he once more returns to his old cottage with its bit of land for potatoes. The potatoes are ready for harvesting, he digs them up, and now he has something to live on during the winter. But here the principal tenant appears, demanding the rent. Good God, where’s the money to come from? The principal tenant is responsible to the landlord for the rent, and therefore has his property attached. The Irishman offers resistance and is thrown into gaol. Finally, he is set free again, and soon afterwards the principal tenant or someone else
who took part in the attachment of the property is found dead in a ditch.

That is a story from the life of the Irish proletarians which is of daily occurrence. The half-savage up-bringing and later the completely civilized environment bring the Irishman into contradiction with himself, into a state of permanent irritation, of continuously smouldering fury, which makes him capable of anything. In addition he bears the burden of five centuries of oppression with all its consequences. Is it surprising that, like any other half-savage, he strikes out blindly and furiously on every opportunity, that his eye burn with a perpetual thirst for revenge, a destructive fury, for which it is altogether a matter of indifference what it is directed against, so long as it can strike out and destroy? But that is not all. The violent national hatred of the Gaels against the Saxons, the orthodox Catholic fanaticism fostered by the clergy against Protestant episcopal arrogance — with these elements anything can be accomplished. And all these elements are in O'Connell’s hands.65

The poverty and the anger of the Gaels probably encouraged the English to see them as a threat, much as the counterproductive violence of the Afghan Talibans does little to commend their culture to the world, and indeed is interpreted as retrospectively justifying intervention. It is worth recalling that neither Jonathan Swift nor Frederick Engels were anti-Irish commentators: Swift has something of a patriotic reputation, and Engels supported the Irish against the British state. Their comments merely sum up the prevailing views of Irish culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively.

Victims of prejudice in English cities?

Numerous English commentators down the centuries condemned the Irish for their perceived cultural failings. It is likely that continual wars, famine and general political instability failed to engender good economic habits, thus allowing the English (later the British) to justify their control of the country, and, it is claimed, fuelling prejudice and discrimination against the Irish in England. Were the Irish victims of pure prejudice? Or were the negative stereotypes grounded in reality? In his Condition of the Working Class in England, written in 1843, Engels relates how Irish immigration into England had a destructive effect on socioeconomic conditions in English cities:

The worst dwellings are good enough for them; their clothing causes them little trouble, so long as it holds together by a single thread; shoes they know not; their food consists of potatoes and potatoes only; whatever they earn beyond these needs they spend upon drink. What does such a race want with high wages? The worst quarters of all the large towns are inhabited by Irishmen. Wherever a district is distinguished for especial filth and especial ruinousness, the explorer may safely count upon meeting chiefly those Celtic faces which one recognises at the first glance as different from the Saxon physiognomy of the native, and the singing, aspirate brogue which the true Irishman never loses. I have occasionally heard the Irish-Celtic language spoken in the most thickly populated parts of Manchester. The majority of the families who live in cellars are almost everywhere of Irish origin. In short, the Irish hare, as Dr Kay says, discovered the minimum of the necessities of life, and are now making the English workers acquainted with it.

Filth and drunkenness, too, they have brought with them. The lack of cleanliness, which is not so injurious in the country, where population is scattered, and which is the Irishman’s second nature, becomes terrifying and gravely dangerous through its concentration here in the great cities. The Miskian deposits all garbage and filth before his house door here, as he was accustomed to do at home, and so accumulates the pools and dirt-heaps which disfigure the working-people’s quarters and poison the air.

He builds a pig sty against the house wall as he did at home, and if he is prevented from doing this, he lets the pig sleep in the room with himself. This new and unnatural method of cattle-raising in cities is wholly of Irish origin. The Irishman loves his pig as the Arab his horse, with the difference that he sells it when it is fat enough to kill. Otherwise, he eats and sleeps with it, his children play with it, ride upon it, roll in the dirt with it, as any one may see a thousand times repeated in all the great towns of England.

The filth and comfortlessness that prevail in the houses themselves it is impossible to describe. The Irishman is unaccustomed to the presence of furniture; a heap of straw, a few rags, utterly beyond use as clothing, suffice for his nightly couch. A piece of wood, a broken chair, an old chest for a table, more he needs not; a tea-kettle, a few pots and dishes, equip his kitchen, which is also his sleeping and living room. When he is in want of fuel, everything combustible within his reach, chairs, door-posts, mouldings, flooring, finds its way up the chimney. Moreover, why should he need much room? At home, and if he is prevented from doing this, he lets the pig sleep in the room with himself. At home in his mud-cabin there was only one room for all domestic purposes; more than one room his family does not need in England. So the custom of crowding many persons into a single room, now so universal, has been chiefly implanted by the Irish immigration.

And since the poor devil must have one enjoyment, and society has shut him out of all others, he betakes himself to the drinking of spirits. Drink is the only thing which makes the Irishman’s life worth living, drink and his cheery care-free temperament; so he revels in drink to the point of the most besotted drunkenness. The southern facile character of the
Irishman, his crudity, which places him but little above the savage, his contempt for all humane enjoy-
ments, in which his very crudeness makes him incap-
able of sharing, his filth and poverty, all favour
drunkenness. The temptation is great, he cannot
resist it, and so when he has money he gets rid of it
down his throat. What else should he do? How
can society blame him when it places him in a posi-
tion in which he almost of necessity becomes a
drunkard; when it leaves him to himself, to his
savagery?64

The Irish, for whatever reason, lived in squalor, and they
were not extended a warm welcome by all landlords in
England as a consequence. Realistically speaking, the
Irish who arrived in England were disproportionately
drawn from the shifting population. There is some evi-
dence that there were occasional handwritten advertise-
ments for domestic servants in England in the 1820s that
excluded Irish applicants, a fact that is comprehensible
against the background of political instability in Ireland,
the perceived antagonism ("chippiness") of Irish people in
England and the filth of the districts inhabited by the
Irish. It is claimed that landlords frequently excluded
Irishmen from their tenements until at least the 1960s,
although it is unclear how widespread such "prejudice"
could have been, given that a large proportion of the
working class of London, Birmingham, Manchester and
Liverpool is of Irish descent. It seems likely that an immi-
grant group often comprised of travellers and builders,
even to this day, enters the lower echelons of society to
begin with, and that most of what is claimed as "stereotype" and "prejudice" is firmly rooted in perceived
behavioural patterns.

The Irish IQ

Another example of negative stereotypes of the Irish re-
lates to the intelligence of the Irish race. Research by
Richard Lynn, professor emeritus at the University of Ul-
ster, indicates that the average Irish IQ is much lower than
the British equivalent, at around 92 where the British aver-
age is 100.66 This breaches a lot of rules relating to political
correctness nowadays, but the point about such re-
search is that it is based on empirical testing, and empirical
IQ tests do not show average IQs in Ireland to be equal to
those in Britain. From this point of view, Ireland's long
history of socioeconomic backwardness would not be
surprising. However, it is worth pointing out that we do not
have a series of such data going back centuries, and as
the British and Irish have similar racial origins, the emer-
gence of a significant IQ differential requires explanation.

Dr Lynn's claims could be explained in two ways. Firstly,
the Roman Catholic culture in Ireland has regularly re-
moved the most intelligent of the population from the
gene pool, as they joined the church and became priests.
Such people often exerted their talents in rabble-rousing
and the generation of hatred against England and the
Protestant church rather than in socioeconomic uplift,
thus arguably ruining the chances of economic progress of
generations of Irishmen. By not reproducing, they would,
according to genetic theories of intelligence, contribute to
a downward slide in Irish intelligence. While such theo-
ries generate loud, synthetic outrage today, the trend in
scientific studies of the genome is to support a large ge-
netic component, and so it seems likely that the evidence
will show that intelligence is genetically based, although
with a large cultural component too.

Another possibility is Irish emigration as a factor in re-
moving the most talented from the Irish gene pool, in a
development that has spanned centuries. Ireland had a
population of more than 8 million in the pre-Famine pe-
riod, compared with 5 million today, showing the large
demographic effect of continual emigration. Such waves
of emigration may have reversed during the years of the
Celtic Tiger, only to be resumed in recent years as the
Irish economy entered severe economic difficulties.

The final achievement of prosperity

A long, ingrained culture characterised by drunkenness
and large families, with emigration and the role of the
Catholic church playing a role too, appears to have kept
Ireland relatively poor until at least the 1980s. Yet Ireland
managed to shake off a legacy of poverty in the 1990s and
emerge as a modern country, leveraging its English lan-
guage, its low taxation (reflecting elements of a shared
culture with England), the skills many of its young have
gained in spells of employment in England, and European
Union money that has helped to modernise the transport
network and offered other subsidies to Ireland. For many
years, Ireland was a net recipient of EU funds, while the
UK has always been a net contributor. The unspoken
reality is that the UK has contributed the money that has
been used to modernise the Irish economy. Following the
accession to the EU of Eastern European countries, and
given Ireland's relative prosperity, Ireland is now also a
net contributor (contributing a net €156 million in 2009,
or 0.09% of Irish GDP, compared with the €3.9 billion, or
0.24% of British GDP, contributed by the UK on a net
basis).

The English language has played a vital role in Ireland's
rise to prosperity, together with Ireland's economic links
with the US, which reflect the history of British colonial
rule on both sides of the Atlantic. Ireland's current eco-
nomic travails derive directly from its decision to join the
euro, a decision likely to have been influenced by a desire
to move out of the penumbra of British economic influ-
ence. To join the euro while Britain continued to use ster-
ling was an act of hubris that has set back Ireland's econo-
my for many years. Ireland is still wealthy, and the
numerous six-bedroomed homes in the country-
side cannot be unbuilt, and so, when the current banking
and sovereign debt crisis is worked through, Ireland will
probably eventually continue to progress on the back of
the construction accomplished during the EU-fuelled
boom that came to an end in 2009. It seems that, just as
generals are continually fighting the previous war, Irish
economic planners may have viewed the UK as the eco-
nomic foe to be defeated by joining the euro, little suspecting that that decision would lead to Ireland’s subjection to impertinent oversight by the Germans and the French.

Ireland’s achievement of prosperity might have seemed a somewhat improbable development to earlier generations of Irishmen, but cultures do slowly change and progress. They can also regress, and the astonishing decline of Britain over the last five decades or so means that few in Britain can doubt this. Squalor and moral turpitude, children raised without fathers, housing estates where anti-social behaviour has become the norm, and an astonishingly self-serving bureaucratic caste in local and central government are some of the defining features of Britain today. It ill becomes us to highlight the problems of others, and it is not the purpose of this essay to denigrate the Irish. Families remain strong in Ireland. The country has not fallen prey to multiculturalism in the same way that England has, or, if it has in official circles, the development is much more incipient on the ground in most of Ireland. A country that was founded in a distorting hatred eventually grew to reject Republican violence. Christopher Booker has commented on the difference between the British and Irish approaches to social work:

Such is the reign of terror now being imposed on innocent English families by social workers that scores of parents have been fleeing with their children to Ireland to escape their clutches. I have followed a dozen such stories over the past two years, and in all of them two things stand out. One is that the English social workers seemed prepared to stop at nothing to get the children back. The other is the extraordinary contrast between them and the Irish social workers, who again and again have satisfied themselves that the children are at no risk from their loving parents and are astonished by the ruthless behaviour of their English counterparts.67

Ireland was once a disorderly country that faced moral criticism from both English observers and the Anglo-Irish clergy. Today it is England that deserves to be rebuked for its cultural weaknesses. Finally, Ireland’s relatively stoic reaction to the current economic crisis contrasts positively with the riots and disorder in Greece. The Gaels were once described as wild and furious, yet have become one of the milder-mannered peoples of Europe. This may be because Ireland’s history of poverty has reconciled them to economic difficulties, as there are many anecdotal accounts of Irishmen rubbing their eyes in disbelief at the sudden rise of Ireland to prosperity over the past few decades. Whatever the reason, Ireland today has become a nicer and more admirable country than the country next door.

Time to give up victimhood

In overall terms, therefore, Ireland today is a country that the nineteenth-century Gaels would not recognise. It is now one of the richest countries in Europe. Accounts of nineteenth-century Ireland show the Irish did not wear shoes until the final decades of the century; the children went virtually naked; family members often had to share the only coat between them; and children and parents slept together in the same straw bed with rags for blankets.68 They lived in sacks, with the rain entering through the ceiling. Many traditional stories tell of the níce na gco, the water used to clean muddy feet within the cabins, that the Irish then threw out the door, careful as they did so to issue a warning to “the wee folk” or leprechauns to mind the dirty water coming their way.69 When the potatoes ran out, usually in July, the Irish peasants reconciled themselves to a month or two eating nothing but cabbage. By contrast, the country that Ireland has become represents the fulfilment of the dreams of generations of Irishmen. While the history of the Famine, of British rule, of the loss of the Irish language, and of discrimination both in Ireland and in Britain, fuels a developed victim mentality to this day in Ireland, it would be true to say that the modern world has been kind to Ireland and the Irish.

The recent visit of the Queen to Ireland indicates that there is an appetite in Ireland to move on, finally — very finally — from historical grievances. The misbehaviour of the Roman Catholic church in Ireland, arguably amounting to a conspiracy to cover up child abuse, has helped Ireland to see the Roman church in its true light. The UK is an ally of Ireland in terms of opposing EU attempts to dictate Ireland’s corporation tax rates. While the Northern Ireland issue has been resolved in an apparently unjust fashion, allowing terrorists into government, the issue is no longer the running sore it was in British-Irish relations. I hope that the British and the Irish will one day see themselves much as the Scandinavians see each other. Finland, Norway and Denmark were at various points ruled by Sweden, or under a common jurisdiction, but now that those nations are independent, there is much that they clearly have in common. Culturally, linguistically, economically and politically, they form a group of related nations. Why should Britain and Ireland not see themselves in the same way?

Finally, the demographic engulfing of the British population by waves of immigrants will almost certainly transform the bilateral relationship. Why will Northern Ireland be determined to be ruled by Westminster when Britain itself has a majority Third-World population? The current arrangements are clearly nearing their end, as is shown by Scotland’s moves towards independence. I would not like to see the Protestant Unionists of Counties Antrim and Down railroaded into a united Ireland, and if the six counties as a whole expressed a desire for unification, I would like to see dissenting counties retain the right to opt out. After all, the Isle of Man, with a smaller population than Antrim and Down, flourishes as a dependent territory. But in the end, a change is coming in the constitutional arrangements in Northern Ireland too. If only Ireland would halt its own pro-immigration policies, a better future could be envisaged for both halves of the island. It is difficult to be optimistic about the cultural future of the
entire European continent, but by the same token, intra-European disputes, such as those between Britain and Ireland, are backward-looking and no longer relevant. What can we do now to preserve the Nationalist and Unionist cultures of Ireland from multiculturalism? Let us focus on that question.

REFERENCES


(4) Ibid. p. 496ff.


(10) Webster Hollis, Daniel. The History of Ireland, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2001, pp. 23-24. Brian Boruma is here described as having brought a unified political system to a “near-reality” before his death at Clonfard.

(11) Ibid. p. 27.


(15) Ibid. p. 146.


(31) Ibid. p. 130.


(33) Brennan, Michael John. An Ecclesiastical History of Ireland: From the Period of the English Invasion to the Year 1829, Dublin: Francis Coyne, 1845, pp. 193-194.


(41) O’Beirne, Eugene Francis. Maynooth in 1834, Dublin: Carson, 1835, p. 7. O’Beirne here argues that the establishment of Maynooth college was intended to win the loyalty of the Roman Catholic church, but that sedition remained rife within the college.


(46) Ibid. p. 53.
(47) Ibid. p. 60.
(48) Ibid. p. 59.
(60) Ibid. p. 42ff.