

# 1916

THE 1916 RISING:  
PERSONALITIES &  
PERSPECTIVES

*an online exhibition*



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## Introduction

# **POBLACHT NA H EIREANN, THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF THE IRISH REPUBLIC TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND.**

**IRISHMEN AND IRISHWOMEN:** In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.

Having organised and trained her manhood through her secret revolutionary organisation, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and through her open military organisations, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, having patiently perfected her discipline, having resolutely waited for the right moment to reveal itself, she now seizes that moment, and, supported by her exiled children in America and by gallant allies in Europe, but relying in the first on her own strength, she strikes in full confidence of victory.

We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible. The long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government has not extinguished the right, nor can it ever be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people. In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty; six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms. Standing on that fundamental right and again asserting it in arms in the face of the world, we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State, and we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades-in-arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare, and of its exaltation among the nations.

The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.

Until our arms have brought the opportune moment for the establishment of a permanent National Government, representative of the whole people of Ireland and elected by the suffrages of all her men and women, the Provisional Government, hereby constituted, will administer the civil and military affairs of the Republic in trust for the people.

We place the cause of the Irish Republic under the protection of the Most High God, Whose blessing we invoke upon our arms, and we pray that no one who serves that cause will dishonour it by cowardice, inhumanity, or rapine. In this supreme hour the Irish nation must, by its valour and discipline and by the readiness of its children to sacrifice themselves for the common good, prove itself worthy of the august destiny to which it is called.

Signed on Behalf of the Provisional Government,

THOMAS J. CLARKE,

SEAN Mac DIARMADA,

P. H. PEARSE,

JAMES CONNOLLY.

THOMAS MacDONAGH,

EAMONN CEANNT,

JOSEPH PLUNKETT.

The Proclamation of the Irish Republic.

On Easter Monday, 24 April 1916, at a time when Ireland was an integral part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, seven Irishmen proclaimed the establishment of the Irish Republic, nominating themselves as its provisional government. Together with 1,600 poorly armed followers, they occupied a number of prominent buildings near the centre of Dublin, the General Post Office in Sackville Street (now O'Connell Street) being designated as headquarters. The government of Great Britain and Ireland regarded the insurrection as treason, all the more reprehensible as it came in a critical phase of the war then being waged with Germany and her allies.

The response was immediate and decisive, the outcome being a foregone conclusion: by the following Sunday close to 2,000 people—mostly civilians—had been killed or injured, the General Post Office and various other buildings were in ruins, and the insurgents had surrendered. The seven signatories of the Proclamation and eight others were tried by courts-martial and executed by firing squad. A sixteenth man, Roger Casement, was tried in open court in London and hanged in Pentonville Prison.

The insurgents had no electoral mandate. Indeed, most Irish nationalists condemned the insurrection as foolhardy in the extreme and downright criminal. Nevertheless, within two years opinion had shifted dramatically: a substantial sector of the nationalist electorate now pledged allegiance to the Irish Republic and honoured the Proclamation as virtually constituting the national constitution.

The morality and political legacy of the 1916 Rising have long been matters of debate. Some maintain that the Rising was unnecessary and that a republic could have been achieved by purely democratic means. They claim that the limited form of Home Rule already enacted (but suspended for the duration of the war) was a basis for further advance in an evolving process. They deplore the loss of life and national trauma resulting from the Rising, from the ensuing War of Independence (1919-21), and from the Civil War (1922-23). They further argue that the Rising made the Ulster unionists more averse to sharing power with nationalists, thus making the partition of the country in 1921 all the more inevitable. Others, however, believe that the 1916 Rising was the catalyst that inspired the country to abandon Home Rule as a worthless half-measure and to strive for complete independence from Britain. These accord the 1916 leaders iconic status as the founding fathers of the present Irish Republic.

In this documentary review of the Rising, the main focus is on the personalities involved—their personal circumstances, their political formation, their perspectives, and their aspirations. As context is crucial to an understanding of the Rising, the social, cultural and political background is also documented, the primary focus again being on the personalities: Herbert Asquith (British prime minister), John Redmond (leader of the Home Rule nationalists), Edward Carson (representing the Ulster unionists), and over a dozen others who, mostly unwittingly, set the stage for the Rising in the previous decades.

As the documents are drawn almost exclusively from the collections of the National Library of Ireland and so emanate from a particular range of sources, the perspective tends to be nationalist. In so far as possible, however, the material is presented in a non-prescriptive manner, allowing people to make their own judgements on the basis of the evidence.