



1916

THE 1916 RISING:
PERSONALITIES &
PERSPECTIVES

an online exhibition

LEABHARLANN
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3. 4. **Those primarily concerned with Irish culture**

Those primarily concerned with Irish culture: Cusack and Davin (Gaelic Athletic Association); Hyde and MacNeill (Gaelic League); and Yeats and Lady Gregory (Irish Literary Revival). These fostered a sense of national identity which was a factor in the intellectual formation of many of those involved in the 1916 Rising.

Apart from those who actually took part in the Rising, the main players in the events leading up to the 1916 Rising were Asquith and the British government, Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party, and Carson and the Ulster Unionists. There were also a number of peripheral personalities and organisations such as MacNeill and the Irish Volunteers; advocates of physical force such as Hobson and Devoy, the Irish Republican Brotherhood and Clan na Gael; Arthur Griffith and Sinn Féin; Larkin, Connolly and the labour movement; and Maud Gonne and women's organisations, including Inghinidhe na hÉireann and Cumann na mBan.

These political movements, however, all operated against a background of very significant cultural change that was taking place in Ireland in the final decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century. In the course of the nineteenth century, Ireland had become largely anglicised: the Irish language was no longer the language of the majority; the writing of literature in Irish had largely ceased, and Irish games, pastimes, music and dance were no longer part of mainstream culture. From the 1880s onwards, however, a generation of cultural activists - enlightened patriots, one might say - endeavoured to stem the seemingly irreversible advance of anglicisation and restore traditional Irish culture.

The cultural activists were in no way homogeneous and represented diverse strands in the Irish society of the period, featuring in their ranks Home Rulers and unionists, Protestants and Catholics, and people of no particular political or religious persuasion, their only unifying principle being that they were Irish, and that they wished to restore the appreciation and practice of traditional Irish culture in its many manifestations. Their degree of success in the face of a generally apathetic population is remarkable: the numbers learning the Irish language, the numbers enjoying traditional Irish music and dance, the numbers playing or attending Gaelic games, or the numbers enthusing at the poems or plays of Yeats or Lady Gregory attest to considerable success.

Their most significant achievement, however, was in fostering a change in the national psyche: people became more conscious of their Irish identity and more proud to be Irish. They belonged to organisations in which they were supported and influenced by like-minded colleagues. It was perhaps natural that for many cultural radicalisation resulted in political radicalisation: people now were more aware of their national history and questioned the justice of Ireland's position as, in some respects, a virtual colony. Why should Ireland be satisfied with Home Rule? Why should it not be an independent republic?