

OCR – A2 GCE
Historical Themes
1789–1997
F 966

**Unit 4 Britain and Ireland
1798–1921**

ESSAY

Examiner's Specific Advice

An explanation is required that accounts for the changing relationship between Irish Protestants and Catholics in this period. The principal issues in politics, economics and religion should be synthesised across the whole period in a coherent and detailed analysis. Answers are likely to examine the Protestants' political power at Westminster that declined after 1829 but was always potentially revivable if they could control Home Rule and use nationalism for their own purposes, as well as keep control of local politics and law and order. The latter was challenged in towns by the extension of the Municipal Corporation Act to Ireland from 1840 and in rural areas by the Local Government Act of 1898. Their religious power was weakened between 1828 and 1869 as Nonconformist and Radical influence increased within Britain. Their economic power suffered greatly as a result of the agricultural depression in the 1880s and the Land Acts passed between 1881 and 1903. Some answers might look at the activities of the Land League and the impact of the Anglo-Irish War, which led to their final demise.

Exemplar Question

1. How do you explain the changing fortunes of the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland in the period from 1798 to 1921?

[60 marks]

**Click Here for a
Chronology
Relating to this
Topic**

Examiner's Exemplar Plan and Essay 1

Plan

Position in 1798
Politics
Economics
Religion
Position in 1921

When the Act of Union was passed in 1800, two years after Wolfe Tone's uprising, Protestants in Ireland were in the ascendancy. They dominated politics, economics and religion, even though they were only a minority compared with the Roman Catholics. By 1921, however, the situation had changed, indeed reversed, such that Catholics were in control and Protestants were far weaker. How did this come about? (1)

Politically, in 1800 the Irish Protestants had been assured by Pitt and his English colleagues that their dominance would not be affected by the Act of Union but in time it was. The Catholic Association founded by Daniel O'Connell in 1823 campaigned for the vote and when it was given in 1829 the Catholic Emancipation Act opened up most offices to Catholics (2). O'Connell then turned to the question of the Union. He began the National Repeal Association and in 1873 Isaac Butt founded the Home Rule League (3).

An important reason why Irish Protestants lost political dominance was the support given to Catholics and Nationalist politicians by British MPs and prime ministers, especially Gladstone. He believed the best way to solve the Irish problem was to make concessions to the Irish but this only served to undermine the authority of the Protestants (4). Home Rule was always going to mean an end to their ascendancy and, when a bill was finally passed in 1912, so it proved (5).

Economically, Protestants were the major landowners in Ireland in 1798. They were never well liked, partly because some were absentee landholders but mainly because farming conditions were basic, wages were low and rents high. This situation worsened when Ireland was hit by the potato famine in the 1840s. Millions died of starvation (6), lands were deserted and peasants blamed the landlords, who were mainly Protestants. Gladstone was determined to help the starving peasants. In 1870 he passed the First Irish Land Act, which protected the rights of tenant farmers. In 1881 his Second Land Act introduced the three F's – fair rents, fixity of tenure and free sale. The Land Purchases Act (1885) helped landless rural farmers buy their smallholdings. Finally, Wyndham's Land Act of 1903 saw the state buy out the landlords and sell to the tenants through state loans and at low interest rates. In these ways, Conservative governments were trying, it was said, 'to kill Home Rule with kindness', but in fact they were killing the Protestant ascendancy (7).

Catholics constituted 80% of Irishmen during this period but they had few rights and the Catholic Church was inferior to the Anglican Church. I have already explained how the Catholics got the vote in 1829 but it was not until 1869 that the Irish Church was disestablished and the practice of paying tithes to the Protestant Anglican Church came to an end. The payment of tithes had always

(1) You refer to the key issues in the question but the content should be more focused, e.g. no need to mention Wolfe Tone.

(2) Explain how this Act weakened Protestants politically.

(3) Link these themes to the question and develop them more fully. O'Connell wanted to repeal the Act of Union but Butt went further in seeking Home Rule.

(4) An example is needed to support your point about 'concessions'.

(5) Explain how Protestants were affected by the Third Home Rule Bill.

(6) An exaggeration – between 1 and 2 million died (look at the Chronology).

(7) How did these Land Acts change the status of Irish Protestants? Make the connection much clearer.

(8) The rise of nationalist opposition to the Protestant rule

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been resented by Roman Catholics and Dissenters – there had even been a war in the 1830s on this subject – and was a reason for the growth of Irish nationalism in the nineteenth century (8). The British government solved this problem at the expense of the Protestant monopoly of the Irish Church and another nail was put in its coffin.

In conclusion, the Protestant ascendancy ended as a result of the British government's legislation. Political, economic and religious acts of parliament undermined or changed Protestant dominance in Ireland such that by 1921 Catholics were in control everywhere apart from Ulster (9).

Examiner's Assessment

The answer is factually accurate, reasonably detailed and relevant; it is clearly structured and well written. It has been given a Level II mark of 14 (AO1a).

The essay is mostly analytical, more than 100 years have been covered and a synthesis has been attempted in some sections. The candidate has shown a firm understanding of why the Protestant Ascendancy changed over time. Its main limitations are that ideas are not always fully explained and linked to the question set. As a result, the essay is quite short. It has been given a mark of 25 at Level III (AO1b).

Overall the essay gained 39 marks (Grade C).

pressurised Irish and English governments to introduce reforms. How much did groups like the Fenians, National League and Sinn Fein contribute to the decline of Protestant dominance?

(9) Explain this. It is the only mention of Ulster in the essay and not a good note on which to end.

Examiner's Exemplar Plan and Essay 2

Plan

Introduction:

Position in 1798/1800 – Ascendancy's opposition to Union

Position by 1921 – decline in power

Why? 1) Catholic success in 1829 and 1870

2) Effects of Famine – landlord/tenant relations

3) Land Acts: 1870, 1881, 1888, 1903

4) Resentment by majority of Irish

5) British politicians sacrificed Protestant Ascendancy

Conclusion: Br. Government and external factors to blame

Ireland was made part of the United Kingdom in 1800. In 1800 the Protestant ascendancy dominated Ireland's social, political and economic scene. Whilst only a tiny proportion of the population, about 5%, they owned nearly all the land and dominated the Irish political scene, including its government before 1800. When Pitt the Younger proposed Union between Great Britain and Ireland he met some of his strongest opposition from the Ascendancy. This opposition was due to several factors. Since the establishment of Grattan's parliament in 1782, the Ascendancy had run Ireland. Union would remove their control over Irish affairs and place it in Westminster. Another factor for opposing Union was due to a fear of loss of status. The Ascendancy dominated Irish life but when they became part of the UK their influence would surely diminish. Even

(10) A strong and interesting start

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– Standard A2 Question**

with the Ascendancy opposition, Union was passed by both houses by Pitt and Castlereagh in 1800 (10).

It is slightly ironic then that after 1800 the Ascendancy became the staunchest supporters of Union. This change in attitude came about for a variety of reasons (11). But by 1921 the Ascendancy failed to exist and throughout this period its power waned (12). This happened for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the granting of Catholic emancipation damaged the Ascendancy. This momentous victory for O'Connell and the Catholic Association was achieved in 1829. It removed the penal laws which had prevented Catholics from voting and taking up prominent positions such as lawyers and MPs. Whilst emancipation itself did not damage the Ascendancy, it was the way successive prime ministers used it. The Liberals and Conservative governments appointed many Catholics to prominent positions within the state. Also, Catholics were voted into prominent positions, such as O'Connell becoming mayor of Dublin. The appointing of Catholics to prominent positions, especially as part of Peel's attempts to deal with the Irish question, diluted the power of the Ascendancy in the political arena (13).

Disestablishment under Gladstone was another nail in the Ascendancy's coffin. It removed what had been a pillar of the Ascendancy. The Church of Ireland had only ever represented a tiny minority but had been closely intertwined with the Protestant Ascendancy. By 1870 both the political and religious power the Ascendancy controlled had diminished (14); the one big remaining factor was land.

A major event that damaged the Ascendancy was the Famine. The Famine killed over a million people in Ireland. The policies of British governments under Peel and Lord Russell were haphazard and half-hearted. Their policies put the responsibility on the landlord. Landlords were required to provide the funds for much of the relief in the form of taxes. They were also encouraged to provide labour for the starving masses. The pressure to let Ireland deal with the Famine put massive financial burden on landlords. Many went bankrupt during or after the Famine thus diminishing their control over the land. The landlords also lost support as they were blamed for exporting grain to Britain during the Famine and often clearing their estates. This turned public opinion against the Ascendancy.

The Ascendancy had controlled the majority of the land for centuries. Between 1870 and 1903 the land issue was dealt with by a series of Acts. Gladstone's first Land Act in 1870 saw more rights given to tenants. It established Ulster rights in law and protected tenants against unfair eviction. In 1881, under pressure from the Land League, Gladstone passed the second Land Act. The Land League, which involved Parnell, Davitt and Davis, formed the New Departure, which incorporated the issues of land and Home Rule under one party. The second Land Act gave the three F's, fair rent, fixity of tenure and free sale. This saw legislation increasing the power of the tenant in the tenant-landlord relationship (15). The Ascendancy was further damaged by the Land Purchase Act and Wyndham's Act. These Acts permitted the large-scale sale of land to the people who farmed it. Thus Ireland changed from having a land system controlled by the Ascendancy to a nation of peasant farmers. By 1903 the Ascendancy had lost control of politics, religion and land in Ireland

(11) And what were these reasons? You do not say.

(12) 'throughout this period' is a useful synoptic phrase; it emphasises change over time even if, in practice, Protestant power did not wane consistently or continuously.

(13) Good section on the results of the Catholic Emancipation Act.

(14) You could be more precise here since the Act was passed in 1869.

(15) Links clearly made between changing patterns of land ownership and the Protestant Ascendancy.

(16) Good summary of position in 1903,

(16).

Their decline was due to several factors. The resentment that the majority of the Irish population felt towards them. This was due to their disproportionate levels of power. Also the willingness of British politicians to sacrifice the Ascendancy to try and build up a more stable Union. This can be shown by the second Land Act, which was aimed at resolving the land issue, at the cost of the Ascendancy, to break the New Departure. External factors such as famine must also be considered in the fall of the Ascendancy. It must also be considered that nearly all movements against the Union had the removal of the Ascendancy in them. The fact that there were so many and varied movements only further damaged the Ascendancy (17). Overall the Ascendancy had lost the powerful grip it had on Ireland by early 1900 due to the actions of British governments and important external factors (18).

focusing on the key issues in your argument.

(17) More could be said about the more important opposition groups in Ireland.

(18) What about developments between 1900 and 1921?

Examiner's Assessment

This essay stays focused on the key issues of politics, religion and land, and explains their importance in the Protestant Ascendancy's decline and fall. There is a good blend of factual content, explanation and argument that covers most of the period. It is well organised and clearly written, worthy of a Level IA mark of 19 (AO1a).

There is a clear and accurate understanding of key concepts, and explanations are mostly analytical and developed. To gain a higher mark, it would need to consider how and when the Protestants lost control of local politics and should refer to the growth in violence for and against Irish Protestants between 1903 and 1921. It has been given a Level IB mark of 35 (AO1b).

The total mark awarded is 54 (Grade A).

[Click here for a Mark Scheme that accompanies the exemplar answers provided above](#)

[Click here for further sample Questions to test your skills](#)

Mark Scheme

Examiners use Mark Schemes to determine how best to categorise a candidate's essay and to ensure that the performances of thousands of candidates are marked to a high degree of accuracy and consistency. Few essays fall neatly into the mark levels indicated below: some answers only cover part of the period; others give a good overview but provide few supporting details. As a result, examiners seek to find the 'best fit' when applying the scheme. Each essay has a final mark based on two Assessment Objectives (AO1a and AO1b) worth 20 + 40 = 60 marks. As the standard of the two essays lies between Level 1 and Level IV, only the descriptors and marks for these levels have been tabulated below.

AO1a Mark Scheme for Levels I, II, III and IV	
Assessment Objectives	Recall, select and use historical knowledge appropriately, and communicate knowledge and understanding clearly and effectively
Level IA 18–20 marks	Uses a wide range of accurate, detailed and relevant evidence. Accurate and confident use of appropriate historical terminology. Answer is clearly structured and coherent; communicates accurately and legibly.
Level IB 16–17 marks	Uses accurate, detailed and relevant evidence. Accurate use of a range of appropriate historical terminology. Answer is clearly structured and mostly coherent; writes accurately and legibly.
Level II 14–15 marks	Uses mostly accurate, detailed and relevant evidence, which demonstrates a competent command of the topic. Generally accurate use of historical terminology. Answer is structured and mostly coherent; writing is legible and communication is generally clear.
Level III 12–13 marks	Uses accurate and relevant evidence, which demonstrates some command of the topic but there may be some inaccuracy. Answer includes relevant historical terminology but this may not be extensive or always accurately used. Most of the answer is organised and structured; the answer is mostly legible and clearly communicated.
Level IV 10–11 marks	There is deployment of relevant knowledge but level/accuracy of detail will vary; there may be some evidence that is tangential or irrelevant. Some unclear and/or under-developed and/or disorganised sections; mostly satisfactory level of communication.

AO1b Mark Scheme for Levels I, II, III and IV	
Assessment Objectives	Demonstrate an understanding of the past through explanation and analysis, arriving at substantiated judgements of key concepts and of the relationships between key features of the period studied
Level IA 36–40 marks	Excellent understanding of key concepts relevant to the question set. Excellent synthesis and synoptic assessment of the whole period. Answer is consistently analytical with developed and substantiated explanations, some of which may be unexpected.
Level IB 32–35 marks	Clear and accurate understanding of most key concepts relevant to analysis and to the question set. Answer is mostly consistently and relevantly analytical with mostly developed and substantiated explanations. Clear understanding of the significance of issues and synthesis of the whole period
Level II 28–31 marks	Mostly clear and accurate understanding of many key concepts relevant to analysis and to the topic. Clear understanding of the significance of most relevant issues in their historical context. Much of the answer is relevantly analytical and substantiated with detailed evidence but there may be some uneven judgements.
Level III 24–27 marks	Sound understanding of key concepts relevant to analysis and mostly focused on the question set. Answers may be a mixture of analysis and explanation but also simple description of relevant material and narrative of relevant events OR answers may provide more consistent analysis but the quality will be uneven and its support often general or thin. There may only be a limited synthesis of the whole period.
Level IV 20–23 marks	Understanding of key concepts relevant to analysis and the topic is variable but in general is satisfactory. Answers may be largely descriptive/narratives of events and links between this and analytical comments will typically be weak or unexplained OR answers will mix passages of descriptive material with occasional explained analysis. Limited synoptic judgements of part of the period.

Further sample questions

1. To what extent did support for an independent Ireland change in the period 1798 to 1921?
2. How far did the Irish economy hinder or help the cause of Irish nationalism in the period 1798 to 1921?
3. How consistent was British policy towards Ireland from 1798 to 1921?
4. How far do you agree that British governments in the period 1798 to 1921 preferred concession to coercion in Ireland?
5. To what extent did Protestant Ulstermen oppose political change in Ireland in the period 1798 to 1921?
6. How successful were opponents of the Union in organising support for their causes during the period 1800 to 1921?

7. 'The economic problems of Ireland were the same after the Great Famine (1845–50) as before.' Discuss with reference to the period 1798–1921.
8. Which proved to be more difficult for British governments to deal with in Ireland during the period 1798 to 1921: religious or economic issues?
9. 'The Easter Rising of 1916 and its aftermath was the **most** important turning point in the history of the Union with Ireland.' How far do you agree with this view of the period from 1800 to 1921?
10. To what extent did support in Ireland for the Union with Britain change during the period from 1800 to 1921?

Chronology: Key Events in *Britain and Ireland, 1798–1921*

- 1782: Grattan's Parliament (1).
1798: Wolfe Tone's Rising.
1800: The Act of Union.
1823: O'Connell forms the Catholic Association.
1829: Catholic Emancipation Act (2).
1830: Anti-Tithe Campaign begins, leading to a Tithe War.
1841: O'Connell establishes National Repeal Association.
1845–50: Great Irish Famine (3).
1869: Disestablishment and Disendowment of the Irish Church.
1870: First Irish Land Act (4).
1873: Butt founds Home Rule League.
1879: Land League formed by Davitt to campaign for the Three Fs.
1881: Gladstone's Second Irish Land Act enacts the Three Fs.
1882: National League founded (5).
1885: Ashbourne Act (6).
1893: Second Home Rule Bill defeated in the Lords.
1903: Wyndham's Land Act.
1905: Griffith founds Sinn Féin.
1912: Third Home Rule Bill; Ulster Volunteers formed (7).
1919: Anglo-Irish war begins.
1921: Anglo-Irish Treaty establishes Irish Free State.

- (1) Poyning's Laws of 1494 and the Declaratory Act of 1719 were repealed to grant the Irish parliament a high degree of independence of Westminster.
- (2) Political and civil rights were granted to Roman Catholics but by raising the franchise qualification from £2 freehold to £10 household suffrage, the Irish electorate was cut by 80%.
- (3) One million died as a result of starvation and disease between 1845 and 1850; the population continued to decline with a significant impact on landholding.

- (4) Gladstone achieved several rights for tenants – they could not be evicted if they paid their rents; they could claim compensation when they sold their 'interest' in the land or if they were evicted by the landlord; they could get a state grant to enable them to buy their land.
- (5) Founded by Parnell, the aim of this League was to get the support of all classes of Irish society and push for Home Rule.
- (6) This was the first effective land purchase scheme by which tenants got 100% state loans at low interest rates.
- (7) Ulster Unionists and English Conservatives strongly opposed this bill but it was easily passed by Liberals and Irish Nationalists in the Commons. Defeat in the Lords and the outbreak of World War, however, delayed its implementation and gave rise to acts of Protestant violence by Ulster Volunteers.

Teaching Activities

1. Compare the contributions of O’Connell, Parnell, Redmond and De Valera to the development of Irish nationalism between 1798 and 1921.
2. Using the Chronology, what were the most important turning points in Anglo-Irish relations between 1798 and 1921? Explain your reasons.
3. How successfully did Pitt, Peel, Gladstone, Asquith and Lloyd George deal with Irish problems between 1798 and 1921? In the table below, assess their policies towards Ireland.

	Policies	Outcome
PITT		
PEEL		
GLADSTONE		
ASQUITH		
LLOYD GEORGE		

Resources

P. Adelman and R. Pearce, *Great Britain and the Irish Question, 1798–1922* (Hodder Murray, 2005)

D. G. Boyce, *The Irish Question and British Politics 1868–1996* (Macmillan, 1992)

D. G. Boyce, *Nationalists in Ireland* (Routledge, 1995)

R. Kee, *The Green Flag – a History of Irish Nationalism* (Penguin, 1994)

F. S. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine* (Fontana, 1973)

G. Morton, *Home Rule and the Irish Question* (Longman, 1980)

A. O'Day, *Irish Home Rule 1867–1921* (Manchester University Press, 1998)

Weblinks

www.aol.bartleby.com/268/6/22.html

www.irelandseye.com/aarticles/history/events/dates/homerule.shtm