

# Imagining Ireland

A vivid imagined world of early Ireland emerged in the late nineteenth century. It was influenced by investigations into the past and changing concepts of how Ireland might be governed in the future.

## Imagining government

Stories of his grandfather's involvement in the 1798 rebellion led by the United Irishmen inspired F J Bigger to take an active role in the centenary celebrations. Bigger saw the 1798 leaders, many of them Protestant, as potential heroes for those supporting the nationalist cause.

The name of warriors in ancient Ireland inspired the term Fenian, the name adopted by a revolutionary republican group founded in New York and Dublin in 1858. The Irish Republican Brotherhood emerged from the failed 1867 Fenian rebellion. It was not until 1914 that the revolutionary movement gained support through Sinn Féin and the 1916 rising.

From the 1870s, the Home Rule movement used parliamentary means to try to achieve self-government. As the movement strengthened, divisions hardened with those who favoured the unionist cause. Organised unionism developed in reaction to the Home Rule movement, strengthened by economic success in north-east Ulster and a revitalised Orangism.

The 1690 victory of King William III inspired the founding of the Loyal Orange Institution in 1795. The Order was revived in response to the 1886 Home Rule Bill. Some of its imagery related to the Williamite Wars 1689-91.



Illustrated by John Campbell, Fenian Mac Cathmhaoil in response to the Fenian Museum, 1900.



Portrait of William III, King of England and Ireland, 1689-1702.



Illustration of the Fenian flag, 1900.



Illustration to a screen in Anghli, 1884.



The Revolution of Francis McKinlay of Donegal at Coleraine 24th June, 'The revolution painting by the Cape Coleraine Museum collection.



Nineteenth-century mug commemorating the capture of William of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne with inscription, 1690. Museum collection.



**Francis Joseph Bigger**  
(1863-1926)

Born in Belfast, F.J. Bigger studied law and established a legal practice in Belfast in 1889. He devoted much of his life to history, archaeology and the natural sciences. He revised the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, was active in the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club, the Royal Irish Academy and the Gaelic League. Many of his antiquarian investigations were in County Antrim, where he played a key role in the 1904 Glens Fés.

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## Imagining music, literature and language

Celtic myths and legends were rediscovered and rewritten, bringing ancient heroes alive through words, illustrations and sculptures. Sir Samuel Ferguson was influenced by traditional Gaelic legends, using their rich legacy and colourful settings in his writings. Ferguson's interest in Irish mythology inspired many later writers.



Illustration from 'The Starvation' in Irish, 1900.



Illustration from 'The Starvation' in Irish, 1900.



The Gaelic, 'Dúshlán', by W. A. McKinnon and W. F. McKinnon.



Circular plaque, 'The Mourning of the Dead', produced by the Irish Art Company, Dublin.

Music and lyrics were composed, often influenced by folk tunes, early music and ballads.

F J Bigger appreciated Irish music and dance. His imagined old Irish world came to life at Jordan's Castle, Ardglass, where he hosted 'medieval' musical events. Bigger had purchased and restored the castle, which he renamed Castle Sean or Shane's Castle.



Portrait of Castle Sean, Castle Sean Ardglass and by W.F. McKinnon by F.J. Bigger.



Programme for the 1903 Irish Harp Festival, Belfast.



**Samuel Ferguson**  
(1810-1886)

Born in Belfast, Samuel Ferguson worked in the legal profession in Dublin before becoming Deputy Keeper of Public Records in Ireland. His enthusiasm for Irish legends and history was reflected in his writings. Many of his poems and essays incorporated his affection for the Donegore area of County Antrim where he spent much of his childhood. His work inspired many and in 1910 his centenary was marked by F.J. Bigger at his grave in Donegore.

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Joseph Campbell (Seosamh MacCathmhaoil) had an enthusiasm for the Irish language and the oral folksong traditions of Ulster. He wrote the lyrics to *My Lagan Love* and *The Blue Hills of Antrim*.



Irish at Home, 1900.



Advertisement for 'Songs of Death' by Joseph Campbell, 1900.



A CLANNAN OF BIRIEL.

Illustration by Joseph Campbell, 1900.

For some, the Ireland of the future was one where the Irish language was used every day. Enthusiasts learned much from Irish speakers in the Glens, and language books were published for home learning.

In 1893 Eoin MacNeill from Glenarm helped to found the Gaelic League to promote the Irish language. Many branches were established, including one at Glenarm in 1902. Early enthusiasts included Ballymena-born writer Anna MacManus ('Ethna Carbery'). Initially non-political and non-sectarian, by 1915 the Gaelic League embraced nationalism.



Publication for a Gaelic League, 1902.



Ethna Carbery, 'The Gaelic League', 1900.



**Anna MacManus**  
(1866-1902)

Born in Ballymena, Anna MacManus, nee Johnston, was prominent in the Irish revival movement in Belfast. She edited the publication *Sham Lam Iocht*, was active in the Gaelic League and promoted Irish music, history and drama. Writing as 'Ethna Carbery' she was known for her poetry and short stories. She was married to the writer Seamus MacManus. Her publications inspired many of those associated with the 1904 Glens Fés.