

IRELAND 1898

From the *Citizen's Atlas*,
cartography by J. G. Bartholomew, F.R.G.S.

Although this map shows Ireland in its pre-Partition state, there is little to distinguish it from a modern map of the island. Ireland's administrative geography has in fact been remarkably stable, with few changes to the names and boundaries of its 32 counties since they were formalised during the 16th and early 17th centuries. Notable exceptions are King's County and Queen's County, which in 1922 became County Offaly and County Laois respectively following the creation of the Irish Free State.

The map of course lacks the present-day border surrounding the six north-eastern counties of Antrim, Down, Armagh, Fermanagh, Tyrone and Londonderry. In 1921 these Unionist-dominated counties were to opt out of the fledgling Free State to form the self-governing administrative region of the UK known as Northern Ireland.

In 1898 Ireland as a whole was still very much part of the British Establishment and had been so for almost a century, following the Act of Union of 1801, which merged the Kingdoms of Ireland and Great Britain (and gave rise to the official designation of the state as the *United Kingdom*). As a result of this Act, the Irish parliament had been abolished and the country was effectively ruled from London via an executive based in Dublin.

A significant piece of legislation enacted by Westminster in 1898 was to have important consequences for the governance of the country. The Local Government (Ireland) Act replaced the existing local administration with a system of county, urban district and rural district councils as in England. While this resulted in only minor alterations to the boundaries of a few counties, the social and political impact of the Act reverberated throughout the entire country. Prior to 1898, local government had been managed by grand juries of the major landowners in each county; these were now replaced by elected councils widened to include all male householders and for the first time certain qualified women. With the power of the aristocracy weakened, a new political class emerged whose experience would prove vital to the operation of the independent and devolved legislatures that subsequently emerged in post-partition Ireland.

The insets on the map show in detail the major ports in Ireland. Belfast was one of the world's great shipbuilding cities while Cork and the neighbouring Queenstown, now Cobh, were Ireland's transatlantic ports, through which more than two million emigrants passed en route to the Americas in the century following the Famine of the 1840s. Interestingly, the famous liner RMS *Titanic* was to provide a link between these two ports: built at Belfast's famous Harland & Wolff shipyard in 1909–11, the *Titanic* made a final port of call at Queenstown before embarking on her ill-fated maiden voyage in 1912.

EVENTS	
1897	Bram Stoker's novel, <i>Dracula</i> , is published for the first time.
1898	Dr John Colohan of Dublin imports the first petrol driven car into Ireland.
1898	The Local Government Act is introduced. It establishes popularly elected local authorities and gives qualified women a vote for the first time.
1898	Oscar Wilde publishes <i>The Ballad of Reading Gaol</i> .
6 September 1899	The foundation stone of St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast is laid by the Countess of Shaftesbury.
BIRTHS	
13 February	Frank Aiken, Fianna Fáil TD and founding member, Cabinet Minister and Tánaiste (d.1983)
29 November	C. S. Lewis, novelist and author of <i>The Chronicles of Narnia</i> (d.1963)
DEATHS	
25 January	Frederick Dobson Middleton, British general noted for his service particularly in the North-West Rebellion (b.1825)
29 June	William Knox Leet, recipient of the Victoria Cross for gallantry in 1879 at Inhlobana, Zululand, South Africa (b.1833)

