CULTURAL REVIVAL

- A growing interest in sport and new means of transport (bicycle, buses) which allowed more people to attend.
- The low profile adopted by the IRB which was still powerful in the leadership.
- From 1900 GAA provincial and national championship matches became very popular.
- It acquired more sports grounds, e.g. Croke Park.
- It linked in with the growing cultural nationalism which encouraged the Irish language and ‘buy Irish’ campaigns.

The achievements of the GAA

- The GAA created and fostered two unique Irish games.
- It encouraged local and national patriotism.
- It encouraged administrative skills and an understanding of democracy which were valuable when the country gained independence.

9.2 The Gaelic League

The decline of the Irish language

- The Irish language was the most obvious difference between the Irish and the English, but it had been declining since the 18th century. In 1851, 23% of the population spoke Irish, but this had fallen to 14% by 1891. The decline was due to:
  - The low status of Irish. Most people who spoke it were poor and uneducated. Powerful figures like landlords, judges and politicians spoke English.
  - English was more useful for emigration, so parents wanted the schools to teach it to their children and not Irish.
  - Few Irish speakers could read or write Irish and there were no newspapers or books in modern Irish for them to study.

A new interest in Irish

- A new interest in Irish appeared in the 1880s and 1890s because:
  - Linguistic scholars from Europe came to study Irish, which is one of the oldest written European languages.
  - Collections of Irish poetry and folktales like Douglas Hyde’s *Love Songs of Connaught* were published.
Setting up the Gaelic League

- In 1892, Douglas Hyde gave a lecture called *The Necessity of De-Anglicising the Irish People*. He said that if Irish disappeared, the Irish would not be entitled to claim to be a nation.
- In 1893, he and Eoin McNeill, set up the Gaelic League. Its aims were:
  - To preserve and revive Irish as a spoken language
  - To encourage and publish a literature in modern Irish.

Spread and activities

- The League grew rapidly after 1900. By 1908 there were 600 branches.
- Native speakers, known as *timirí* (travelling teachers) went around setting up Irish classes. Young people went to them for music and dancing as well as the language.
- It organised *feiseanna* and literary competitions and promoted Irish music and Irish dancing. It supported the GAA and backed a ‘buy Irish’ campaign.
- The League campaigned to have Irish taught in secondary schools and made compulsory for entry to the new National University of Ireland.
- It had a weekly paper, *An Claidheamh Soluis*, edited for a time by Patrick Pearse, which published many new writers in Irish.

Republicans take over the League

- Hyde, himself a Protestant, wanted the Irish language to be a bridge uniting nationalists and unionists.
- At first many unionists joined, and the League was very successful in Belfast.
- But after Home Rule became likely in 1912 and passions rose, the Irish language became identified with nationalists alone.
- In 1915, at the annual conference in Dundalk, the IRB forced a change in the Constitution, supporting complete separation from Britain. Hyde resigned in protest.

The influence of the Gaelic League

- While the League did not make Irish the everyday language of Ireland, it generated enough enthusiasm to stop it disappearing altogether.
- It encouraged new writers to produce books using modern Irish.
- Many in the League felt only an Irish government could save Irish. This encouraged them to become republicans.
- Almost all of the leaders of the revolution which began in 1916 were members – e.g. Bulmer Hobson, Patrick Pearse, Seán MacDiarmada, Thomas MacDonagh, Eamon de Valera, Michael Collins.
- The use of the Irish name *Sinn Féin* shows the League’s influence on Griffith.
After independence, the leaders of the new state, all influenced by the League, made Irish compulsory in schools and gave it the status of the ‘first official language’ in the 1937 Constitution.

9.3 The Anglo-Irish Literary Revival

- Interest in Gaelic literature encouraged some people to develop a distinctively Irish literature in English.
- One was the poet, W B Yeats. He came into contact with Irish nationalism through his friendship with John O’Leary, the old Fenian and Douglas Hyde, as well as in his passionate love for Maud Gonne.
- After studying art, Yeats began writing poetry in 1880s, using stories and images from Gaelic myth. He published *The Wanderings of Oisin*, a long poem based on Irish mythology in 1882 and his first poetic play, *The Countess Cathleen* in 1892.
- In 1891, he, Hyde and others set up National Literary Society to encourage interest in Irish mythology. He joined the Gaelic League, but did not succeed in learning Irish.
- Through Maud Gonne, he became involved with extreme nationalism and briefly belonged to the IRB. Gonne rejected him and married John McBride in 1903.
- In 1896, he met Lady Gregory, widow of a Galway landlord. She had been collecting folk tales locally and writing plays.
- At her home in Coole Park in 1898 they set up Irish Literary Theatre. It staged Yeats’ play *The Countess Cathleen* in 1899.
- In 1902, Maud Gonne played the title role in his *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, which had a powerful influence on nationalists.
- In 1904, Yeats and Gregory formed the Irish National Theatre, in collaboration with a group of actors led by Frank and William Fay.
- A wealthy English woman, Annie Horniman, bought a hall in Abbey Street and fitted it out as a theatre. It opened as the Abbey Theatre in December 1904 with two short plays by Yeats and one by Lady Gregory.
- The Abbey’s most distinguished playwright was J M Synge. His play *The Playboy of the Western World* was interrupted by riots protesting at its language in 1907. Synge died soon after.
- From about 1910, the Literary Revival ran out of steam. Yeats grew disillusioned after Dublin Corporation refused to build an art gallery to house paintings collected by Gregory’s nephew, Hugh Lane. In 1913, he wrote that ‘Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone’.
9.4 The Consolidation of Catholic identity

The growth of Catholic power

- In 1870, 75% of Irish people were Catholics and 25% were Protestants
- As Protestantism was the established religion in Britain, Irish Protestants enjoyed a privileged position. Catholics resented this. For that reason most of them supported Home Rule, while most Protestants were unionists
- From 1870 to 1914, Catholics increased in wealth and influence:
  - They built many churches, schools and hospitals
  - The number of priests, nuns and brothers trebled
  - They controlled Catholic education at all levels
  - The number of Catholics with secondary and university education grew rapidly
- In 1908, the Pope issued the Ne Timere decree, forbidding marriages between Catholics and Protestants unless the Protestant partner agreed to bring up the children as Catholics
- In the early days of Home Rule, the nationalist leaders were Protestants (Butt and Parnell), but after 1900 most nationalist leaders were mainly Catholics (Redmond and Dillon)
- Catholics dominated nationalist organisations like the GAA and the Gaelic League.

D P Moran and The Leader

- At the start of the 20th century a debate developed about the nature of Irishness
- Most nationalist leaders, like Redmond or Griffith, wanted Irish identity to include both Protestants and Catholics. They pointed to the many Protestants from Wolfe Tone to Parnell who had led Irish nationalists
- But some nationalists believed that Catholics were the real Irish people. The most important of them was the journalist D P Moran
- In his paper, The Leader, he said that Protestant Britain and Catholic Ireland were involved in a battle of civilisations. The reason for seeking independence was to preserve Catholicism in Ireland.
- Moran’s ideas got support from some young Irish men who felt that Protestant-controlled businesses and government kept them out of the best jobs
- Moran’s ideas were not widely accepted.
## William Butler Yeats (1865–1939)
- W B Yeats played a key role in the anglo-Irish Literary Revival. Here is a brief outline of his life. For the exam you will need a detailed knowledge of the part he played in the Revival.
- Born in Dublin, the son of a Protestant painter. He spent his childhood holidays with his grandparents in Sligo, and was heavily influenced by folklore and scenery from an early age.
- He studied art at college. He became a nationalist through friendship with John O’Leary and Douglas Hyde.
- Began writing poetry in 1880s, using stories and images from Gaelic myth. Helped set up National Literary Society in 1891 to encourage interest in Irish mythology. He joined the Gaelic League but did not succeed in learning Irish.
- Love for Maud Gonne, a passionate nationalist drew him into extreme nationalism for a time.
- In 1898, he set up Irish Literary Theatre with Lady Gregory.
- In 1904, they formed the Irish National Theatre. Name changed to the Abbey when they got a theatre in Abbey Street.
- In 1907, Yeats defended 'The Playboy of the Western World' during riots.
- Grew disillusioned with nationalism after 1912. Concentrated on poetry and wrote his greatest poems.
- Became Senator when Irish Free State was set up. Awarded Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923. He died in 1939.