Churchill and Ireland
A Brief History of Ireland

• The Norman Conquest of Britain in 1066 was followed by the Normans landing in 1167 and taking control of it. Many of the Norman (and later English) lords settled in the north of Ireland, in areas such as Ulster.
In 1348

- The Black Death arrived in Ireland in 1348 and, as it was the English lords who had the most dealings with Britain, it was those in the North that were hardest hit. English authority weakened.
In 1536

- Henry VIII decided he needed to regain control of Ireland. In 1541, Henry VIII was proclaimed King of Ireland in the Irish Parliament where there were some Irish chieftains, however, it was not accepted universally and some brutal fighting ensued. This was partly due to religious differences.
The Plantations

- During the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I, the Plantations took place, where English aristocrats were sent to attempt to spread Protestantism and English rule. They replaced the Irish landowners and harsh laws tried to convince them to convert to the Anglican church. The Gunpowder plot did not help.
Throughout the 1800s

• Bloody wars ensued between the English and the Irish throughout the 17th Century (battles such as the Battle of the Boyne of 1690 still rouse passions in the Irish today).

• In 1800, British and Irish Parliaments signed the Acts of Union and Britain was now the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.
19th Century Troubles

• Famines, further rebellions, political campaigns and other issues continued to affect British and Irish relations.

• In the 1870s, the Irish Parliamentary Party was formed which began (under Charles Parnell) to campaign for Home Rule, which some were concerned would become ‘Rome Rule’ (particularly in Ulster). It was not intended to be Irish independence.

• Attempts by some Irish campaigners (and some British, including Prime Minister Gladstone) led to tension between the Irish Nationalists and the Irish Unionists.
Home Rule = Rome Rule
Catholic vs. Protestant

Catholics
• Thought they would get better opportunities economically.
• Thought the Church would be more influential on the Irish Parliament.

Protestants
• Concerned that the Catholic majority would oppress them.
• Thought that there would be economic problems for Ireland if its links with Britain were reduced.

Mostly concentrated in the north east of Ireland
Churchill’s Position

- Churchill’s father had played a leading role in opposing Home Rule.
- Churchill however, favoured the imposition of Home Rule. By force if necessary.
- The Home Rule Party got more and more frustrated.
- Home Rule was due to come into force in 1914. Both Ulster Unionists and Irish Nationalists had arms by this point. Civil War was expected but World War broke out, and Ireland rallied to the British.
• April 1916. Nationalists occupied parts of central Dublin and read out a proclamation declaring the establishment of an Irish Republic.

• The British were shocked that the Irish would do this whilst Britain was fighting the Germans. After a week, the rebels surrendered. They were executed by the British government, which lead to some more opposition.

• Meanwhile, Sinn Fein (‘Ourselves Alone’) began to get more support amongst the Irish, and in 1919. they declared themselves to be the Dail Eireann (government of Ireland).
How did that sit with those in Ulster?

• Were concerned. Remained loyal to the British Crown.
• In many areas of Ireland, Sinn Fein were considered the real government of Ireland.
• Lloyd George was alarmed.
• Things got no better during the Anglo Irish War, 1919-1921. This was when the IRA fought the Royal Irish Constabulary (even though most of the RIC were local Irish Catholics).
• Britain’s troops included new forces (the Black and Tans) that were guilty of many atrocities (burning homes and killing and torturing suspects and civilians).
• This led to many loyalist reprisals, and Catholic homes and businesses were destroyed by many mobs.
Churchill’s position

- Diary of Sir Henry Wilson (leading British soldier). 23rd September

- “General Tudor made it very clear that the Black and Tans are carrying out reprisal murders. At Bilbriggan, Thurkles and Galway yesterday, the police marked down certain Sinn Feiners as in their opinion the actual murderers and then coolly went and shot them without question or trial. Winston saw little harm in this, but it horrifies me”.
Effects

- USA unhappy- ruined Britain’s reputation abroad.
- British people at home (including the King) weren’t happy with it.
- Britain had been unable to defeat with force or win hearts and minds.
- The only solution left was negotiation.
- Churchill showed his political acumen and was urging a truce- moderating his hard line of 1920. Churchill led the negotiations for a truce which was agreed on 11 July 1921.
Churchill as negotiator.

- Negotiation between Churchill and Michael Collins.
- Churchill able to convince Collins that failure to sign the final settlement (partition of Ireland) would mean a ‘real war’.
- Collins believed him and Ireland was partitioned.
- Churchill became very unpopular with the Conservatives, Collins very unpopular with the radical Irish.
Civil War Broke Out and then Ended

• Anti-treaty forces seized the centre of Dublin.
• Churchill put considerable pressure on the Free State government to crush the rebellion- otherwise there would have to be intervention from the British.
• In the end, the Irish Free State put down the rebellion. Lloyd George had ended the Irish problem and Churchill had handled the issue appropriately (good negotiating and letting the Irish deal with the issues first).