

May 3, 1921: The Birth of Northern Ireland

Good afternoon children – take your seats quickly and quietly! For our afternoon lessons we will begin with our history and geography, before moving on to our drawing.

Today is however, a very special day. Today is Tuesday 3rd May 1921, and it is a historic day, for this is the day that Northern Ireland has been born on. Today children, we are living history. This date will be remembered in the history books and talked about for years to come. Like all important events in history – the Black Death, the Battle of Waterloo, King Henry VIII – it will be talked about and it will cause great discussion, and surely that is what history is about? The chance to take an event, share your opinion, and learn of others' viewpoints?

Now although today is the creation of Northern Ireland, the law making this so came into being back on the 23rd of December 1920 when King George gave his agreement to it. The Government of Ireland Act was read out and discussed in the Houses of Lords and Commons, where it was debated and then agreed or disagreed on. Once it was agreed there, the King had to give his approval – that is called Royal Assent and no law can be passed without it.

It is worth noting one thing about the Government of Ireland Act, and that is that it has given us an advantage over Wales and Scotland. It means that out of all three countries, we are the first to have our own parliament; our own government; and our own bureaucracy. The first elections to our Parliament are to be held on the 24th of May – Empire Day, and on the 22nd of June, King George will be coming here to Northern Ireland to make history by opening the first parliament here. This will be a great journey for the King and also for the law. Both events will have begun their journey in London...

King George will be arriving in Belfast Harbour on the Royal Yacht to Donegall Quay, where the Belfast Harbour Board will be meeting him and making a speech. He and the Queen will then make their way by carriage to the City Hall through streets lined with people; then he will make a speech to open Parliament. The King will then make his way to the Ulster Hall for a ceremony where some of the most famous citizens in Belfast will be honoured. Lord Pirrie, the chairman of Harland and Wolff is to be made a Viscount! Of course, the Northern Ireland Parliament will not stay in City Hall but it is to be based in Assemblies College in the city.

The King's journey will have taken him from Buckingham Palace to Euston railway station where he and the Queen will have boarded the Royal train. That train will take them to Holyhead in North Wales where the Royal Yacht, the 'Victoria and Albert' will be waiting for them. On the journey across the sea and into Belfast Lough, they will be escorted by two battleships, two cruisers and nine destroyers. By the time the Royal party reach City Hall, they – and this new Act – will have travelled nearly 500 miles (482) and across three countries. Standards 5, 6 and 7 – your task is to map out the route taken by the King. You will work in pairs and draw out a map of the British Isles, using our map on the wall as guidance. In your pairs one will draw the route from London to Wales; the other will draw the route from Holyhead to Belfast, and then from the harbour to the City Hall. Your markings must be clear.

Standards 3, 4 and 5 – your drawing work for the day will be to create a coat of arms to represent this new place of Northern Ireland. Work well, work hard, work quietly – and remember this date of 3rd May 1921.