



## The Right Honorable Augustine Birrell, M.P.

### Date

1907

### Primary Maker

Sir William Orpen

### Medium

Oil on canvas

### Dimensions

113 x 85.1 cm

### Description

Augustine Birrell (1850-1933) academic, author, barrister and politician was Chief Secretary for Ireland from 1907 to 1916. In 1907 he introduced the Irish Council Bill which sought to offer a measure of devolved powers for Ireland.

This, however, was rejected by both Unionists and Nationalists for both going too far and not going far enough. He also sought to discontinue the Irish Crimes Act 1887 which dealt severely with agrarian crimes. He had more success with the Irish Land Act 1909 which was an attempt to ease congestion through the compulsory purchase of large areas of land. Birrell enjoyed good relations with the Catholic hierarchy helping to pave the way for the Irish Universities Bill, 1908 and the establishment of the National University of Ireland and Queens University, Belfast. Birrell disapproved of the militancy of the suffragette movement and was on one occasion physically surrounded and jostled while out walking. The illness of his wife put him under significant strain and may have contributed to his ineffective response to the industrial unrest of 1913. Following the Easter Rising of 1916 he resigned amid criticism of failing to act against rebels in the months preceding the rising. This portrait of Augustine Birrell was painted by Orpen at Lane's suggestion with the intention of its becoming part of the municipal gallery collection. Orpen was pleased with the result as was Hugh Lane who wrote to Orpen saying 'It is the best thing by you in the gallery.'

(JO'D)