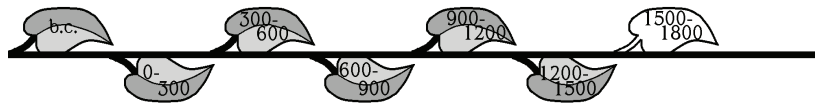


The Planting of Ireland



England took advantage of the Gaelic hopelessness following the death of Hugh O'Neill in 1616. The 17th century witnessed the submergence of Gaelic Ireland, a feat accomplished by England's intentional and concentrated assault on Ireland's society, culture and religion. England suppressed those things on which Irish society was based – their lands, names, and language. They adopted the strategy of establishing a plantation, eliminating the native Irish, and repopulating the country with more trustworthy English, on a scale never before seen in Ireland. They began with Ulster.

Five hundred thousand acres in Ulster were thrown open to settlers in 1609. Preference was given to English and lowland Scots. A second rank of grantees were highland Scots, primarily Presbyterian, and the third rank were "natives." The colony was not an immediate success and grew slowly over the years until 1660, when approximately 90% of the landowners in the six counties of present-day Ulster were Protestant. Even with such a large percentage of Protestant landowners, a large Irish Catholic minority remained. Retaining their culture and religion, they lived mostly in the mountainous and poorer lands. When local protests broke out, the instigators were transported to the new colony of Virginia.

Ulster wasn't alone in being populated with foreigners. In 1610 the English built a castle near Gorey called Fortchester to effectively conquer land that had always belonged to the Irish.

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This still didn't pacify the Irish of northern Wexford (where the majority of Kinsellas settled), so in 1611 a writ was issued approving the seizure of 76,800 acres in that area for "good and sufficient English." By devious means, and despite considerable opposition, the lands were seized from 1610 to 1618 under the official name of the Plantation of Wexford. English nobles received 61% of the land, while 9% was divided among four Irish lords, Morgan McBrian, Donal Kavanagh, Dowling McBrian and Art McDermot Duff Kinsella. One hundred and twenty smaller landholders received patents for the last 30% of the land. The peasants were no worse off, but the small landowning clansmen were reduced to common laborers.

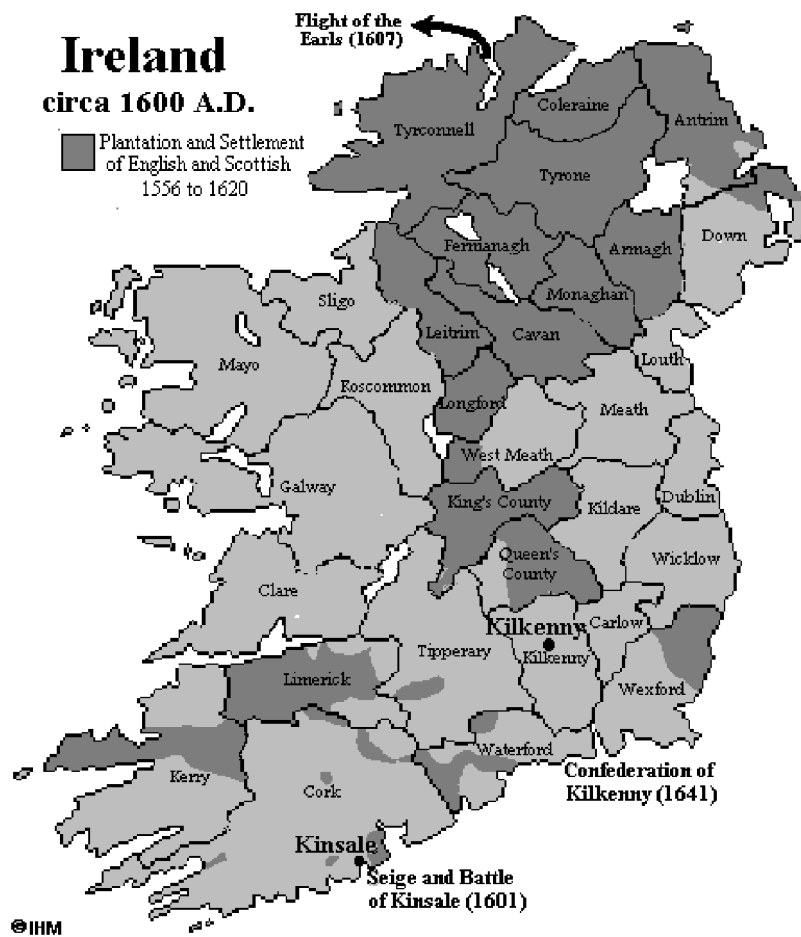
This change in land ownership throughout Ireland sparked a drive for surnames among the common Irish, only the nobility having adopted them previously. Because the commoners often adopted the surnames of their local landowners, the names Kavanagh, Carew and Fitzgerald are very common today. The names of smaller landowners, such as the Kinsellas and MacDavy Mors, are less common. The positive consequence is that a Kinsella is much more likely to be truly descended from Dermot MacMurrough than a Kavanagh.¹

During the next twenty years the Irish landowners throughout all of Hy Kinsella, which included the Anglo-Irish since they remained Catholic, made desperate attempts to hold onto their land, while the English tried to wrest it from them. Over time landowners in the territory were reduced from 667 to 150. The only effective way the Irish had to halt the rapacious Eng-

¹ To complicate matters further for the Kavanaghs, "in the early years of the seventeenth century the surname Kavanagh was adopted by the ruling sept [clan] of Kinsellagh – descendants of Enna Cionsealach – while their collateral clansmen took that of Kinsellagh." The MacDavy Mor clan did the same. From K. W. Nicholls, "The Kavanaghs, 1400 - 1700," *Irish Genealogist* (1974-9): v, 435.

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lish was to convert to the Church of England, but very few chose that route. The Borris Kavanaghs did and they went on to become the largest Gaelic landowners in Hy Kinsella. They also weathered future rebellions extremely well because to the Irish they were Gaels and to the English they were Protestant. Northern Wexford represents an extreme example of land takeovers at this time though. In the whole of Ireland as late as



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1640 Catholic landowners still held two-thirds of the land. This would change dramatically in the ensuing years.

By 1641 the grievances of the Irish nation, now a blend of native Irish and Anglo-Irish who had retained their strong Catholic faith, reached crisis proportions, and there was a general uprising. The rebellion was caused by several factors: the vast confiscations of lands, the unjust treatment of the Irish and Anglo-Irish, the favor shown the new English colonists, and the exclusion of Catholics from office and civil rights. The rebellion was masterminded by Rory O'More from County Leix and began on October 23, 1641. It met with immediate military success only in Ulster under Sir Phelim O'Neill, but was quickly taken up by the Anglo-Irish and spread to the rest of the country. The castle of Fortchester, in the heart of the Kinsella lands, was quickly taken over by the Irish.

In England the rebellion was reported as a general massacre of English men, women and children. No evidence exists that a deliberate massacre, as such, ever took place,² but anti-Catholic feelings were easily aroused in England and the report of a massacre was assumed to be true without question. Some estimates of the number of deaths inflicted ran higher than 200,000. In all these falsified accounts, the sheer barbarity of the crimes struck a genuine chord of horror in the hearts of the English: could a people who had roasted men and eaten them alive, sent women out to sea in leaky boats to drown, murdered children in a disgusting manner before their parents' eyes, held competitions as to who could hack deepest into a living body, really hold any pretensions towards civilization? Behind it all, it was alleged, were the treacherous and evil machinations of the Catholic clergy. Years later, when the evidence was examined more dispassionately, the number who died was estimated

² Walter D. Love, "Civil War in Ireland: Appearances in Three Centuries of Historical Writing," *Emory University Quarterly* 22.1 (Spring 1966): 57-72.

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to be 4,000, though a figure of 2,000 may be nearer. Retaliatory attacks on Catholics soon added many more fatalities.

This normally would have prompted swift action from the English king, Charles I, but civil war had broken out again in England. By 1649 King Charles had lost the war along with his head, clearing the way for a fervent Protestant zealot, Oliver Cromwell, who was appointed Commander-General for Ireland by the English parliament. He believed implicitly in the exaggerated massacre of 1641, and it provided the moral basis for fresh English colonization that he was planning. Before leaving for Ireland Cromwell told his troops they were Israelites about to extirpate the idolatrous inhabitants of Canaan. He and his men landed near Dublin in 1649.

A combination of prejudice and hard political realities dictated what Cromwell and his troops did. The prevailing English view of the Irish stressed their ignorance, crudity, superstition and barbarity. Edmund Spenser, writing a century before, offered this English solution to the Irish problem: "the corrupt branches and unwholesome boughs are first to be pruned, and the foul moss cleansed and scraped away before the tree can bring forth any good fruit." Added to this prejudice were the powerful myths that had grown about the 1641 uprising, which created an overwhelming desire for revenge in England. Cromwell, the man leading the invasion, the one responsible for controlling the pent-up hatred of the English troops, was convinced that he was embarked on a godly crusade against the Catholics. He felt the Irish expedition had to be speedy, conclusive and cheap. An unsubdued Ireland was again seen as a back-door threat from England's enemies that needed to be shut tightly.

Ulster, totally under the control of the Irish again, was Cromwell's first destination, and the key to Ulster was a town known as Drogheda. On September 11 the town was sacked

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and a massacre transpired. According to Cromwell, “the slaughter of women and children is allowed to have impunity, as comprehended in right of war and the 137th Psalm, ‘Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy children against the storm.’” The town’s garrison troops, almost to a man, and all priests, were killed. Those who fled to hide in St. Peter’s church were easily dispatched – clustered in the steeple, they were burned to death. The voice of a miserable human torch was heard to cry out: “God damn me, God confound me; I burn, I burn.” Cromwell repeated the words without emotion in his battle report to parliament. Defending himself concerning the estimated 3,000 slain, Cromwell said, “I am persuaded that this is a righteous judgment of God upon these barbarous wretches, who have imbued their hands in so much innocent blood.”

The reaction to the news in England was one of delight and rejoicing. The ministers gave out the happy tidings from the pulpits. September 11 (9/11) was set aside as a day of public thanksgiving. The heinous Irish rebels had received their just rewards.

The lesson was repeated on October 11 in the town of Wexford in southern Hy Kinsella. Once again the Irish refused to surrender, and after eight days the town fell and was sacked. At Drogheda, Cromwell had chosen a policy of slaughter in the heat of battle; at Wexford his normally well-disciplined troops ran amok, and no effort was made to control them. Nearly 2,000 troops, priests and civilians were killed. Heath, in his biography of 1663, painted a poignant picture of 200 women, many of them of high rank, asking for mercy “with the command of their charming eyes and those melting tears,” but it was denied to them as they were massacred. Cromwell again wouldn’t accept blame, for it was God who had “brought a

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righteous judgment upon them [the inhabitants of Wexford] causing them to become a prey to the soldier.”

This military policy of extreme violence had positive short-term results. The towns of Dundalk and Trim, faced with the example of Drogheda, surrendered tamely. The long-term results, a lasting and seething hostility to the English, proved devastating. Cromwell continued his attacks and, after a few setbacks, regained control of Ireland. Among his special targets during the campaign were the Gaelic filid, which the English had never managed to stamp out. Revered by the Irish, these bards were detested by the English authorities, who saw them as architects of Gaelic resistance.³ Unable to find and kill them all, Cromwell sought out and destroyed their few remaining schools.

The war was finally over in May of 1652 when Ireland’s army, both Irish and Anglo-Irish, surrendered to Cromwell’s forces. It’s estimated that of the 1.5 million inhabitants of Ireland before the rebellion, over 600,000 were killed or died from famine or disease.⁴ Cromwell wrote:

And if ever men were engaged in a righteous cause in the world, this will be scarce a second to it. We are come to ask an account of the innocent blood that hath been shed We come to break the power of a company of lawless rebels We come (by the assistance of God) to hold forth and maintain the luster and glory of English liberty in a nation where we have an undoubted right to do it

With the war over, England felt it could begin again with Ireland, but first they had to remove the estimated 30,000 rebel

³ Caesar had reached the same conclusion over 1,600 years earlier during the Gallic Wars, when he was conquering the Celts of the area now called France.

⁴ Fiachra O’Lionain, *Croghan to the Sea* (Enniscorthy).

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soldiers still in Ireland. Parliament decided these soldiers could emigrate to any country at peace with England but not with their wives or children. Because of their reputation as excellent soldiers, representatives from France, Spain, Austria and Poland flocked to Ireland, signing up as many as possible.⁵ Now the Irish “tree” could be pruned.



The Burren is where many dispossessed were sent

In 1653, Cromwell issued his famous “to hell or Connacht” edict, which read, “under penalty of death, no Irish man, woman or child is to be found East of the River Shannon.” By this edict, all native Irish landowners in eastern Ireland were ordered to vacate their land and move to Clare and Connacht, a treeless, rockbound land. Of those forced to move, only about one in five received any land while their property was confiscated as pay for the English soldiers. Ireland had to pay for its own conquest. Eanna, Griffin and Edmond Kinsella, extensive

⁵ Many returned illegally and began fresh insurrections. They were hunted down with dogs by the new Protestant landowners.