INTRODUCTION

Pádraig Lenihan

The thematic essays in this study are comparative, rather than compartmentalised and range across two and, more often, all three of the Irish wars of the seventeenth-century. They embrace grand strategy, logistics and naval warfare, the ‘sanguinary glamour of battles and tactics’ (Brewer, xiv), fortifications, siege warfare, and, not least, ‘war and society’; specifically, in this case, the impact of war on urban life and women’s involvement in warfare. Such a thematic approach demands, however, a contextualising politico/military narrative. J.J. O’Connell in the foreword to his classic Irish Wars (1921) aspired to a narrative ‘divested of political, social and economic complications’, exemplifying ‘old’ military history’s neglect of social context. This study will be full of ‘complications’ though not to the extent of neglecting combat altogether, a charge sometimes levelled against the ‘new’ military history (Paret). A recurrent theme of this narrative will be Ireland’s misfit status within a ‘two kingdoms and a colony’ model composite monarchy (Smith, 23). This is a study of the armed conflict between the Irish ‘colony’ and, first, one kingdom, England, and, later, two kingdoms (the embryonic ‘Britain’).

Two Kingdoms and a Colony—the Military Equation

What was the relative military potential of Ireland and England, the more important of the dyad of Protestant kingdoms?1 England, and, later, Scotland were, in strategic terms, the invaders in all three wars

---

1 The use of the term ‘Britain’ to refer to the Stuart kingdoms of England and Scotland is, strictly speaking, anachronistic since it predates the Anglo-Scottish Act of Union. The term ‘British’ has, however, the validity of contemporary usage, in referring to grantees in the Ulster plantation for example and, especially, because it embraces, as it was designed to, both English and Scottish interests in Ireland. The British-Irish dichotomy is also justifiable since anti-Catholicism would be the vital, unifying component of Britishness. Linda Colley Britons, Forging the Nation 1707-1837 (Yale, 1992) 25.
(with the exception of small Irish expeditions to Scotland in 1644, 1646 and 1688). ‘From its modest beginnings as a peripheral power—a minor, infrequent almost inconsequential participant in the great wars that ravaged sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe—Britain emerged in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as the military Wunderkind of its age.’ (Brewer, xiii). It emerged as a superpower in the 1690s for two reasons. Before then English governments could only borrow on promise of repayment within a year from current taxes. This changed in 1692-93 when William of Orange (Stadhouder of the Dutch Republic and William III of England) managed to raise long-term loans through the newly-founded Bank of England and could now maintain armies at peak strengths of up to 69,000 men (Stone, 8-11). Moreover, England’s disengagement from European warfare for much of the preceding century and a half meant that she emerged free from the chronic burden of inherited debt. While England’s debt rarely exceed the equivalent of one year’s revenue (Brewer, 23) the Spanish royal debt at the accession of Philip IV (1623) amounted to ten years of royal receipts. Disengagement was not the same as weakness. While isolationist towards the continent, England was no military pygmy and could maintain what were by contemporary standards, large armies to secure the fringes of the archipelago. Between 1651 and 1660, for example, the Commonwealth and Protectorate could sustain a standing army of 30,000; indeed, at times there were well over 50,000 men in arms to control Scotland and Ireland. (Morrill, 65) More typically, this potential, along with that of Scotland, was deployed against Ireland.

Disparity of population was not as great as one might imagine from the relative size of Ireland and Britain today. At the end of a century of sustained growth the population of England in the 1650s was about 5.2 million compared to Ireland’s 1640 population of just over 2 million. Irish Catholic enlistment in the Spanish army and navy between 1605 and 1641 represented between five and ten per cent of the adult male population. This exodus had no appreciable impact on, for example, wage levels. Given a curtailment of the mercenary trade, then, a large pool of potential military manpower existed for Irish Catholic armies to tap. That does not complete the manpower

---

2 This is extrapolated from the figure of 24,000 first time Irish (Catholic) enlistments in the Spanish service cited in, Gráinne Henry The Irish Military Community in Spanish Flanders 1586-1621 (Dublin, 1993)
equation; because of immigration on a scale that ‘had no parallel in
the rest of Europe’ (Cullen, 84, 87) a large well-armed, and increas­
ing proportion of the Irish population could be relied upon to side
against the native Irish Catholics in any conflict. In crude terms the
proportion of the population of Ireland of post-Reformation Scot­
tish or English birth or descent can only have been around 2 per
cent in 1600. Contemporary statistical evidence suggests that this
increased to about 18 per cent by 1660 and to about 27 per cent by
1700.

However manpower is only a subsidiary part of the military equa­
tion because money, the proverbial ‘sinew of war’, set the ceiling to
the size of armies. A monetised economy controlling overseas trade
and large cities enjoyed an enormous advantage. Irish trade involved
the exchange of overwhelmingly pastoral products in return for fin­
ished goods. In contrast to an agricultural economy suffering from
a chronic shortage of specie, England offered a commercialised base;
indeed London which, by the 1690s, numbered some 200,000 people,
may have been the most populous city in the world. (Wrigley, 78)
Success in war depended not so much on the sheer scale of avail­
able resources; the economic potential of a population in a market
economy could be more easily mobilised through appropriate taxa­
tion than the less mobile resources of a peasantry living close to
subsistence level. (Wrigley, 73). Raising money was only part of the
problem; transporting it as cash or provisions to where it was most
needed demanded, amongst other things, naval superiority and a
reasonably efficient and honest bureaucracy.

Of all operations, a winter siege or quasi siege, especially, exposed
the limits of early modern government. The Elizabethan army lost
up to 6,000 men (from a total of 15,000) through exposure and sick­
ness during the successful ten-week winter siege of Kinsale; more
fatalities than they suffered in all their major engagements of the
war.(Silke, 128, 140; Mc Gurk, 64-75, 246,). The importance, then,
of logistics and naval operations cannot be overemphasised and is
reflected in contributions by John Mc Gurk, James Scott Wheeler
and Paul Kerrigan.

Excepting massive foreign intervention on the side of the Irish,
(an aspect explored by Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin) England’s military
potential, then, was immeasurably greater than that of Ireland if the
will existed to deploy it. The firm support of Parliament was
indispensable for the Stuarts to sustain a protracted war effort and
'those campaigns which engendered the greatest co-operation were those fought against the Catholic Irish.' (Fissell, 5-6) ‘Let us keep England’ declared an MP bitterly opposed to Williamite war taxes, ‘whatever becomes of Ireland’ (Miller, 20) More typical was the reaction of another MP; ‘if Ireland be lost, England will follow’ (Miller; 1990, 43) This fear of Ireland as a back-door of invasion, was heightened by religious and ethnic hatred; ‘anti-popery was the strongest, most widespread and most persistent ideology in the life and thought of seventeenth-century Britain’ (Jones, 75). The will to conquer Ireland was never seriously in doubt. This characteristic fear and hatred explains Oliver Cromwell’s strong personal commitment to reconquering Ireland in 1649.

I had rather be overrun by a Cavalierish [English Royalist] interest than a Scotch interest; I had rather be overrun with a Scotch interest, than an Irish interest; and I think of all this is most dangerous (Stevenson, 165)

His attitude to Scotland was completely different; the Scots were basically ‘a people fearing his [God’s] name, though deceived’ and the Commonwealth was even initially prepared to treat Scotland as a separate state, able to determine its own affairs (Smith, 175) In contrast, the determination to reconquer Ireland was never in doubt and the Commonwealth of England was prepared to sustain a heavy price to do so. Between June 1649 and December 1651, over 55,000 men served in the English armies in Ireland but, by the summer of 1652, no more than 35,000 remained alive in Ireland. With no evidence of shipments of English troops out of Ireland this suggests heavy losses, mostly through disease and privation rather than combat. (Wheeler, 194) To summarise, Britain’s capacity and will to conquer Ireland could not be doubted. Nor can there be any doubt who ultimately won and lost. The conclusion of each war (1603, 1653, 1691) marked progressive stages in the displacement of the native, Catholic, élite by an intrusive, Protestant, ruling class. (Gillespie, 19: Simms; 1969, 4) Notwithstanding the disparity in power and the decisive win/lose result, that outcome was not predetermined. Explaining the outcome is a central objective of this study.
The Nine Years War—the last phase 1598-1603

Conflict between the Irish ‘colony’, then, and one or both of the Protestant kingdoms supplies the organising grand narrative of this study. Each of the three conflicts between kingdom(s) and colony share an essential similarity; they were wars of religion, or at any rate, wars in which religion is the central signifier and Irish Catholics fought to maintain or reconstruct an acceptable *modus vivendi* within a stridently Protestant two-kingdom and (after 1603) three-kingdom composite monarchy. Fixing on a point when this conflict could be said to have begun is problematic because the Nine Years War (1594-1603) does not, at least in its entirety, fit this typology of English/British versus Irish religious conflict.

Implicit in the declaration of the kingdom of Ireland in 1542 was the policy of creating a peaceful union of sister kingdoms linked by a common monarch, based on co-opting the native *élite* and respecting their property, culture and religion. Predictably, the uncontrolled rapacity and self-interest of Protestant or ‘new’ English (as opposed to ‘old’ English or pre-Protestant Reformation immigrants) officials and settlers subverted this gradualist and peaceful reform strategy in favour of conquest and colonization (Brady, 298-300); ‘for the husband-man must first breake the land, before it bee made capable of good seed...So a barbarous Country must be first broken by a warre, before it be capable of good Government’ (Davies, 4-5)

Vacillations between these conflicting policies and the consequent uncertainty of government policy help to explain the ambiguous response of Hugh O’Neill, Earl of Tyrone, to the extension of English authority into the fringes of Ulster in the 1590s. Having been backed by the government in securing a dominant position in Ulster he initially co-operated with the government against other Ulster lords (Hugh O’Donnell and Hugh Maguire) in the expectation that he would be rewarded with an exclusive commission to govern Ulster. Disappointed in this he sent his brother to assist O’Donnell

---

3 Asserting that a British-Irish dichotomy existed should not be confused with nationalist teleology. The Irish, by and large, were not separatist in any modern sense but sought to secure or reorder their position within the Tudor and Stuart composite monarchies. That said, the Ulster confederates offered to accept Philip II as king and there were later occasions such as in 1650 and 1687-88 when, in *extremis*, the Irish Catholic leadership offered to place themselves under French protection.
and Maguire in besieging an English outpost at Enniskillen. The ambush in 1594 of an English relief force south of Enniskillen at the ‘Ford of the Biscuits’ (so called from the supplies scattered after the clash) was the first battle of the Nine Years War.

In an number of ways this was ‘the Tudor rebellion par excellence’ (Morgan, 219). It exhibited many of the features of contemporaneous English risings, such as the use by rebellious nobles of their more dispensable kinsmen as proxies while themselves professing loyalty to the monarch, if not to the monarch’s ministers. Catholicism too, was a rallying call for the Western (1549) and Northern (1569) rebellions. Until the Battle of the Yellow Ford in 1598, the war can best be seen as a comparable example of resistance by two aristocrats, Red Hugh O’Donnell and Hugh O’Neill, to a centralising Tudor regime. When O’Neill defeated an English army of over 4,000 men while on route to relieve the Blackwater Fort, the Nine Years War ceased to be ‘just’ another Tudor rebellion. It took on more of the character of a wider national religious war like the later wars of the seventeenth century. As O’Donnell overran almost all of Connacht, O’Neill’s supporters in the midlands thrust towards Munster and in a few days, overturned the Munster Plantation; a panicky Irish council could warn that ‘this rebellion is now thoroughly sorted to an Irish war...to shake off all English government’.

According to Morgan, after the Yellow Ford the war ‘merited serious comparison with the crisis facing Spain in the Netherlands’. ‘The opponents of the crown in both countries used a faith and fatherland ideology to transcend regional particularism, ethnic division and factional loyalties...Only the dictates of success and failure ensured that William the Silent became pater patriae and that Hugh O’Neill did not’ (Morgan, 221). Perhaps, but O’Neill’s use of transcendent religious rhetoric was, arguably, opportunistic and did not weld an alliance which weathered adversity. With the arrival of a competent governor, Lord Mountjoy, in 1600 O’Neill now faced an opponent who was adequately supplied with men and supplies. Mountjoy’s use of sea power to insert a 4,000 strong force at Derry (north Ulster) behind O’Neill’s back, as it were, exposed the limitations of fissiparous clan loyalties. While the operation itself stretched the English supply system beyond breaking point the very presence of the force, however debilitated, served as a lightning rod for malcontents including disappointed contenders to the O’Donnell and O’Neill chieftainships respectively. In Munster an apparently deep-
seated revolt collapsed quickly when deft diplomacy by the provincial governor induced the chief rebels to make individual submissions. When a Spanish force landed in Munster the wrong end of Ireland, unaware of the regional collapse of the rebellion, Mountjoy responded by besieging Kinsale and containing the danger. With their position in Ulster constricted and threatened by Mountjoy’s amphibious strategy O’Neill and O’Donnell were reluctant to march south to break the siege. They did march south in November 1601; for O’Donnell, in particular, given the parlous state of his lordship, Kinsale had to be decisive. It was. The Irish defeat at Kinsale foreclosed any outcome other than ultimate surrender.

In a sense, O’Neill lost the war but won the peace in 1603. With the death of Queen Elizabeth, a possible succession crisis, financial exhaustion, the continuing fear of Spanish intervention, and Mountjoy’s preference for a gradualist and moderate political settlement, the peace terms more or less granted O’Neill what he had sought before the war, recognition of his paramount position in Ulster. However, the political settlement was considered a betrayal by most officials in the Dublin administration leaving, as it did, the rebel Ulster lords firmly in control of their localities. (Canny; 1987, 150) The new English class emerged at this point as a coherent group enjoying uninterrupted control of the governorship of Ireland until 1633 and having a vested interest in pursuing a punitive policy against the former rebels and, crucially, Irish Catholic landowners in general.

Mountjoy believed that the relentless questioning of native land titles had destabilised the Gaelic lordships and provoked the war and so, set up a commission for remedying defective titles. After his recall by James I (who succeeded Elizabeth I in 1603) the commission became an instrument of the new English in reversing the post-war settlement. The flight of Hugh O’Neill, Rory O’Donnell and Hugh Maguire in 1607 was, in part, a response to this interference but also an attempt to solicit Spanish aid for a new war. This and the subsequent revolt of the ‘Queen’s Irish’, opened up six of the nine Ulster counties to confiscation and plantation. The plantation envisaged three categories of grantee. The undertakers, English and Scottish gentlemen of means, received blocks of 3,000 acres contracted to create entirely British communities within nucleated and defensible settlements. Irish tenants, specifically, were not to be maintained, though servitors (the second category of grantee) might do so. Na-
tives, the third category of grantee, received between a third and a quarter of the total planted lands, at higher rents and more onerous conditions. This disadvantage, amplified by commercial pressures, would significantly erode the native land holding position over the next thirty years.

If one were to argue that the seeds of the next war were sown in the aftermath of the last then the single most ominous development was the extension of plantation, actual or threatened, from Ulster to the midlands, highland east Leinster and Connacht, between 1610 and the mid-1630s. The legal mechanism of dispossession involved exposing defects in title whereupon the property reverted to the crown and the original owners normally received secure title to most of their lands. The officials who initiated the dispossession usually picked up the balance of the confiscated estates. While Irish Catholic landowners might retrospectively accept the Ulster plantation as delayed retribution for the Nine Years War, they bitterly resented dispossession and plantation in peacetime. (Ó Siochrán, 53). This would have been unthinkable in contemporary England; in elevating the protection of private property as the ultimate rationale for government, Locke’s *Two Treatises on Government* (1690) expressed the conventional wisdom of the day. However, the Catholic Irish were firmly cast as outsiders, anomalous ‘half-subjects’, in a Protestant polity. Despite the superficial similarity of institutions like parliament, Ireland was crucially different.

The emphasis on the outsider status of Irish Catholics is relevant in explaining the severity and brutality that characterised the wars of religion and, for present purposes, in explaining the outbreak of the war. Recent historiography of the causes of the English Civil War emphasises contingency and distrusts long-term explanations, or anything that implies the inevitability of the war. However, war in Ireland was, arguably, inevitable.

In 1634 a new governor, Wentworth, betrayed promises of Catholic security of tenure, ‘the principal thing they desired’ in 1634 (Clarke, 88) and subsequently proved that the preferred (indeed, by now the only) Irish Catholic political response of direct appeal to the king was no longer effective. While Wentworth disparaged new
English greed and pretensions this should not obscure his colonialist agenda; his attitude to Irish Catholics and to the Gaelic Irish, in particular, was fundamentally hostile, the latter might ‘be accounted animals, mean betwixt rationals and brutes, than men’. Wentworth was set on a radical course of colonisation, reshaping Irish society to create, in religion, language and society, a replica of England. Canny argues convincingly that as the full extent of his policy of colonisation was revealed it is likely that he would have eventually encountered armed opposition from Catholic landowners. (Canny; 1996, 159) Such opposition, possibly supported by Irish soldiers returned from continental Europe would have been overcome by the support of Protestants in England, Scotland and Ireland. Conflict in Ireland was, therefore, inevitable. The timing and the circumstances were not.

The spark was lit in Scotland. Having failed to impose a set Scottish prayer book by royal proclamation on his Presbyterian subjects in 1637 Charles I ultimately decided to use force to overcome the resistance of the ‘Covenanter’ so called from their oath to maintain the ‘true religion, liberties and law’ His characteristically over elaborate strategy (First Bishop’s War 1639) involved concentrating the main army on the Anglo-Scottish border while subsidiary landings and risings in the north-east and west of Scotland would distract the Covenanters. Randal Mac Donnell, earl of Antrim, was to raise an army of 5,000 men from his Irish and Scottish followers, cross to Scotland and thereby distract Archibald Campbell, earl of Argyll and one of the main Covenanter leaders. (Kenyon and Ohlmeyer, 17-21)

The plan failed and the following year (1640) the Covenanters raised the stakes by engaging in ‘ecclesiastical imperialism’ to export their religious ideals (Morrill, 84) Galvanised by this radical agenda, the Scots did not wait for Charles’s second attempted invasion. Charles’s planning for this (the Second Bishop’s War) involved mobilising a predominantly Irish Catholic army of 9,000 men at Carrickfergus in readiness to attack the west of Scotland. In the event the Covenanters defeated Charles I before this invasion force could embark and, acting in concert with the King’s English critics, demanded the recall of parliament, the imposition of a Presbyterian form of worship in all three kingdoms, and declaimed ‘against all popery and popish innovations’ (Hill, 89-90)

Initially, Irish Catholics saw more opportunity than danger in the
Anglo-Scottish crisis since Charles I was anxious to cultivate their goodwill to subsidise the new army at Carrickfergus and the existence of a body of armed Catholics (even if under Protestant officers) gave added weight to their demands. The point when the dangers from anti-Catholic hysteria outweighed the opportunities presented by instability came around March 1641 when Charles I agreed to disband the Carrickfergus army from the following May. On the face of it this was a defining moment when Charles I dispensed with Irish Catholic support as the price to pay for support among other constituents of his composite monarchy. However, it is probable that he made covert attempts to keep the army in being for some time thereafter. (Ohlmeyer, 1994, 431-437) When a small body of mainly Ulster-based Catholic conspirators sprung a failed *coup d’etat* in October 1641 ‘to imitate Scotland, who got a privilege by that course’ (Russell, 357) the insurgents could plausibly claim royal sanction and flourish a forged royal commission. Apparent royal complicity in the rising led to the breakdown of trust between king and parliament and accelerated the drift towards civil war in England. The emotional temperature was heightened by wildly exaggerated reports of massacres and atrocities directed against Protestant settlers in Ireland. (Ohlmeyer, 1996; 163) These reports were deliberately inflated in order to invoke collective Irish ‘blood guilt’ and to use this as an excuse for wholesale unrestrained warfare and post-war land confiscations. (Corish, 291-92)

The years of warfare in Ireland from 1641 to 1652 fall into five phases. There is no general and unambiguous term to describe this conflict. It is more than an aspect of the British civil war(s); indeed it was not a civil war in Ireland at all but (in all but one of its phases) a no-holds barred conflict between distinct ethnic/religious groups. Describing it as the Confederate and Cromwellian war is cumbersome and misleading; one of the most intense phases of the conflict preceded the founding of the Confederate Catholic regime in 1642. On balance, Ohlmeyer’s coinage the ‘Wars of Religion’ is probably best; it identifies a crucial unifying motive in what was a more than usually formless, inchoate and complex conflict (Ohlmeyer; 1995, 160) though I argue here that all three wars of the seventeenth century could be regarded as wars of religion.

The first year of insurgency (October 1641-November 1642) saw the insurgents endure a massive counter-attack. At its peak in summer 1642 the government forces, as yet jointly controlled by king
and parliament, numbered 45,000 men, the largest army deployed in Ireland until the Jacobite wars.\(^4\) While the insurgents offered dogged, if unduly localised, resistance they owed their survival less to their own efforts than to the outbreak of civil war in England (August 1645) Winning this war would be the primary goal of king and parliament; Ireland could wait. Until the first English civil war ended definitively in 1646, the new Confederate Catholic regime enjoyed the luxury of strategic choices.\(^5\)

Explaining what happened in Ireland between 1641 and 1653 demands an archipelagic perspective. For example, Scottish Covenant resistance to the imposition of religious order and congruity had what Conrad Russell described as a ‘billiard ball’ effect in Ireland. (Morrill; 1990, Russell, 375) The actors thought and acted in three-kingdom terms; within weeks of hearing about the covenant, for example, Charles I was drawing up contingency plans for a military invasion of Scotland by Irish Catholic and English troops and, throughout, he treated it as a three-kingdom problem, as did the Scots once they decided to export their covenant and send armies to England and Ireland. In contrast the Irish posture was defensive and more insular (Perceval-Maxwell, 207). While this study integrates Irish military history within the three kingdoms it does not follow the ‘holistic’ approach advocated by Morrill (1999, 78-79), largely because of the need to keep units of analysis within manageable parameters. John Young’s study of the politico-strategic links between Scotland and Ireland is included because of the intensity of this relationship, especially in the 1640s.

In this second phase of the war (1642-46) the Confederate Catholics could either have consolidated their control over the entire island or intervened more decisively at an earlier stage of the civil war(s) in Britain to back the king against parliament and the Covenanters. In the event they did neither: ‘From the military point of view the Confederates had a simple choice-either to combine forces with the Royalists with the object of expelling the Scots and Parliamentarians from Ireland and proceeding instantly to the king’s relief in England, or to destroy Ormond’s [Royalist] army, occupy Dublin and

---

\(^4\) These forces by no means comprised, even potentially, a single army. They were mainly scattered in garrisons throughout Ireland and the size of the various field armies was smaller than the grand total would imply.

\(^5\) The surrender of Charles I to the Covenanters, allies of Parliament since early 1644, in May 1646 marks the effective end of the first civil war.
then deal with their two deadly enemies’ (Lowe, 87). In practice, the choice was not so simple. For one thing James Butler, earl of Ormond, Charles I’s governor-designate in Ireland was an Irish Protestant first and Charles I’s servant second; while he wanted the Catholics to send an army to England and Scotland he was even more anxious to keep all British enclaves in Ireland, Parliamentarian or Royalist, out of Catholic hands (Ó Siochrú, 89, 138, 146-47). Moreover preference for an expeditionary or insular strategy coincided with existing political fault-lines within the Confederate polity. The smaller, but usually more influential ‘Ormondist’ faction set the limits of their religious aspirations according to what Charles I could willingly grant. The larger, ‘Clericalist’ faction favoured extracting cast-iron guarantees of religious freedom from the king, guarantees that could only be secured by a Catholic dominated Irish parliament free from the jurisdiction of its English counterpart. The Confederates have invariably attracted rebukes for factionalism from historians but, with the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that the dilemma of reconciling religious and political allegiance was extremely difficult while Ormond was the go-between. Moreover, the ‘window’ of opportunity, when Confederate assistance might have made a difference to the outcome of the civil war in Britain, was actually quite narrow. The ‘window’ was confined, most likely, to the winter of 1644-45, between the Battles of Marston Moor (1644) before which Charles I was not prepared to pay any significant price for Irish Catholic help, and Naseby (1645) after which such help would not have made any difference.

The third phase (1646-49) saw the Confederate Catholics thrown on the defensive by a parliamentary offensive directed from their Leinster and Munster enclaves. Confederate successes in 1646, including the recapture of Bunratty, the capture of Roscommon and Benburb were, essentially defensive victories. The chances of the Confederate Catholics consolidating control of the island had passed. Battlefield reverses at Dungan’s Hill and Knocknanuss the following year between them opened up the hitherto secure Confederate Catholic heartlands of south Leinster and east Munster to extensive raiding. Plunging Confederate morale, the execution of Charles I, growing tensions between the Covenanters and their erstwhile

---

6 The use of the terms ‘Old English’ and Gaelic Irish’ respectively to denote these parties helps to confuse an already complex situation, not least, because the political fault lines did not coincide with putative ethnicity.
Parliamentary allies, and French patronage all facilitated a Royalist grand alliance in Ireland, under Ormond’s leadership in 1649.

In the next, or fourth, phase of the war (1649-50) Ormond’s Royalist coalition failed to deter or repel a Parliamentary invasion, suffering a serious defeat at Rathmines (August 1649) while ineffectually preparing to assault the city. This gave Oliver Cromwell, emergent ‘Protector’ of the English Commonwealth, a suitable base for invasion. (Gentles, 357). However, Ormond cannot be totally blamed for the faltering Irish resistance. After Rathmines, he decided to scatter his army in garrisons and trust in ‘Colonel Hunger and Major Sickness’ to wear down Cromwell’s forces in the hardships of siege warfare (Simms; 1974, 215) This was a valid strategy since the Royalists could not mobilise a substantial field army and newly landed troops were especially vulnerable to the ‘country disease’ (diarrhoea and dysentery). The strategy of trading space for time was, however, derailed by the fact that ‘the winter proved fairer than in man’s memory any winter hath been’ (Gilbert; ii, 466) enabling Cromwell to shorten the winter off-season by about ten weeks in all. Despite meeting stiff resistance at Waterford, Kilkenny and Clonmel, by the time of Cromwell’s departure in May 1650 his forces controlled the south-eastern half of the country (Corish; Cromwellian Conquest, 338)

The fifth and final phase of the wars, (1650-53) would grind on much more slowly after Ireton, Cromwell’s son-in-law, took command. This was partly because of Ireton’s limitations as a general, but also because Irish royalists offered more dogged, indeed, desperate resistance. The stakes became clearer to the Irish as Cromwell reasserted his unremitting hostility to Catholicism; ‘...if by liberty of conscience you mean liberty to exercise the mass’ he told the defenders of Ross (October 1649) ‘...that will not be allowed of’. So too did Charles II’s repudiation of his alliance with Irish Catholics in return for support from the ‘Kirk’ or radical Covenanter, party in Scotland; even Carte the pro-royalist biographer of Ormond, described this as a ‘base betrayal’ (Corish; Cromwellian Conquest, 349) Ormond’s flight to France in December 1650 and the desertion of most of the Protestant Royalists to Parliament, clarified the overriding objective of the war; Catholic self-defence.

The final phase of reconquest was characterised by protracted sieges; the siege of Limerick, for example, dominated the entire 1651 campaigning season. Large-scale guerrilla, or ‘Tory’, bands shading
into the larger fragments of the Royalist field armies, controlled, by
the Cromwellian’s own reckoning, about half the territory behind
the notional front lines. Co-ordinated advances by these groups from
the midlands and west Munster to relieve Limerick were beaten back
in the summer of 1651. This, and Cromwell’s shattering defeat of
the Covenanter/Royalist forces at Worcester (September 1651) meant
that the outcome of the war could no longer be in doubt. The surren­
der of the final scattered outposts, Inishbofin off the west coast
and, some hundred miles away, Cloughoughter in Cavan, in 1653
mark the end of a war that, in contrast to the other wars of the
century, ended in, more or less, unconditional surrender. The guer­
rilla and counter-insurgency campaigns and the importance of
siegework in this final phase ensured that it would have a more
devastating impact on civilians than the cumulative impact of the
preceding nine years of warfare; or of any of the wars of the seven­
teenth-century. The counter-insurgency campaign, in particular,
involved large-scale forced population movements from the exten­
sive Tory-dominated countryside ‘without the line’ and deliberate
destruction of crops. This created the conditions that, by the latter
phase of the war, could bring about the death of an estimated 15-20
per cent of the population, mainly through privation and epidemic
diseases (Lenihan, 1-21)

The Cromwellian conquest represented the worst possible outcome
for Irish Catholics. All Catholic landowners would be treated accord­
ing to their ‘respective demerits’. At the very least, failing to ‘show
constant good affection’ to Parliament by, for example, staying at
home and paying taxes to Confederate collectors, involved forfeit­
ing one third of ones estates. Forfeiture meant surrendering ones
estate completely, transplanting to Connacht, and there (perhaps)
receiving a proportion of the surrendered estate. On the basis of a
reconstruction of what happened in one county it can be inferred
that something like three-quarters of the Catholic landowners in the
country did not, in fact recover any lands at all in Connacht, and
the remainder received less than half their original estates. (Corish;
the Cromwellian regime 1650-60, 369-70)

The key point about the Cromwellian land settlement was that,
in its essentials, it proved to be irreversible after the Restoration of
Charles II (1660) After a new land scramble, smaller gentry lost out
completely while only a nucleus of greater Catholic nobles, such as
the earl of Clancarthy in Munster, Antrim in Ulster and Clanricard
in Connacht, survived. However politic, or even necessary; the land settlement was unjust, as more perceptive Protestant commentators like Dean Swift recognised; (Simms; 1967; 205-206)

The catholics of Ireland...lost their estates for fighting in defence of their king. Those who cut off the father’s head, forced the son to flee for his life, and overturned the whole ancient frame of government...obtained grants of those very lands.

The losers remained unreconciled to the loss of their estates. However, this disaffection need not have led to another war. In contrast to the first half of the century, Irish Catholics no longer had the capability to launch a credible or sustain a military effort. Extraneous events in the mid-1680s, however, gave them that capability.

*The Jacobite War 1689-91*

The first such extraneous event was the accession of a Catholic, James II, to the throne of the three kingdoms. Before the birth of a Catholic heir in June 1688 the most that James II hoped was to ‘establish’ Catholicism; that is, to put Catholics in such a position of security that they would continue to enjoy toleration and civil liberties under his Protestant successors. To do this he could not afford to become entangled by his son-in-law William of Orange in war against France because he would then be dependent on parliamentary grants of supply and would have to abandon royal religious initiatives. James II’s Declaration of Indulgence of April 1688 and the prospect (June 1688) of a Catholic dynasty were unwelcome developments to the English ‘Tories’7, his natural political allies. His opponents, however, would probably would not have been able to mobilise effective military opposition; not least because, however antagonised, the Tories abhorred the idea of active resistance and feared anarchy more than ‘tyranny’. William of Orange gave them a choice between the two; some Tories were prepared to make common cause with the ‘Whig’ opposition and invite William of Orange to lead an expedition to England to secure a free parliament and investigate the legitimacy of James’s heir. It was, in effect, an invitation to invade England.

---

7 The name of Irish irregulars was originally applied as a term of abuse to Charles II’s supporters in the 1670s
Why did William of Orange invade? Since the early 1680s Louis XIV, the Roi Soleil of France, had pursued a policy of réunion or annexation along his north-eastern and eastern frontiers and, latterly, waged economic war against the Dutch. William of Orange’s attempts to cobble together an anti-French coalition had consistently failed until the Habsburgs, no longer distracted by Turkish attacks along the Danube Valley, took the lead in creating the League of Augsburg (1686). James, in contrast, refused to countenance an anti-French alliance, thereby raising the spectre of a renewed Anglo-French alliance such as had been created in 1670 and had very nearly extinguished the Dutch republic in the war (1672-78) that followed. (Gibbs, 17) Neutrality was not an option (Kenyon; 1958, 156) and, however unintentionally, James signalled that he was moving into the French orbit when he abruptly demanded the return of English and Scots regiments from the Netherlands. William of Orange wanted to secure effective control of British foreign policy, her navy and army and was prepared to pursue a high-risk strategy in order to do so. It was dangerously late in the year (November 1688) his army was smaller than that of his father-in-law and there was no way of verifying assurances of support from his English associates and correspondents until he had made the irreversible decision to land. The risk was validated by the sudden collapse of James’s authority in Britain, though not in Ireland. Here his Catholic governor, Richard Talbot, earl of Tyrconnell, consolidated Jacobite support, having already Catholicised the administration and the standing army and disarmed the Protestant militia.

Arguably, it was the accession of James II and not his deposition, that made a war involving Ireland inevitable. After all, Tyrconnell had considered severing the Anglo-Irish connection in the event (as both the King’s supporters and opponents expected) that James died without a Catholic heir. Tyrconnell secured a secret guarantee from Louis XIV that the French king would then be prepared to recognise him as head or governor of an independent Ireland and support him militarily. (Pillorget, 3) A French protectorate in Ireland would not

---

8 As early as the end of 1686 some 67 per cent of the rank and file were Catholics. However, over 3,000 ‘expert soldiers’ or some 40 per cent of the standing army was squandered when sent to England in a vain attempt to prop up James II in November 1688. Most were rounded up and delivered to the Habsburg Emperor to fight the Turks. Anon The True Impartial History and Wars of the Kingdom of Ireland (London, 1692) 27
have been acceptable to any British regime, still less to William of Orange, husband of James II’s daughter and heir, Mary. The key factor in the origins and continuation of war was French strategy towards Ireland at the beginning of the War of the Grand Alliance (1688-97).

Throughout the war, James II complained, the French were ‘avers from venturing more succours than what was absolutely necessary to keep the war alive’ (Clarke, J.S., 387) Why would French assistance prove to be so limited compared to the resources William of Orange was prepared to invest in Ireland.? The strategic choices facing the Jacobites were similar to those dividing the Confederate Catholics during the 1640s; between an insular and an expeditionary strategy. James II as the would-be effective monarch of three kingdoms naturally saw Ireland as a stepping-stone to regain, first, Scotland and then England. Louis XIV did not agree; (D’Avaux *Négociations* 648-49)

He [James II] should be told that the best way to strengthen his support in England and Scotland and to heighten the discontent of the people with the present government is to prevent his enemies succeeding in Ireland....it is necessary to wait until my navy secures a sufficient advantage over the enemy fleet that it cannot prevent the passage of the king and his soldiers to England;

It has been argued that French policy oscillated between maintaining a French protectorate in Ireland as a permanent diversion or restoring James II to Britain and Ireland, alternatives ‘which proved in the end to be mutually exclusive’ (Symcox, 79) In fact (this is implicit in Symcox’s study and the quote from Louis XIV) Ireland was a secondary or even tertiary priority to the French navy and, moreover, Louvois, the War Minister, was sceptical of any ‘blue water’ strategy. The fleet’s first duty was seizing control of the English Channel by *guerre d’escarade* concentrating a great battle fleet and destroying the enemy’s main battle fleet. Once achieved, this opened up a variety of secondary possibilities, of which invading England was the most attractive. Nowhere are the limitations of French naval strategy more apparent than in the failure to prevent Williamite landings in Ulster in 1689 and 1690 (Pearsall, 104).

The war falls naturally into three phases, corresponding to the campaigning seasons of 1689, 1690 and 1691 respectively. The Jacobites embarked on war enjoying territorial control of all of Ireland outside Ulster, and secured control of east Ulster in a lightning
cavalry campaign in March 1689, the month that James II arrived in Ireland from France. Control of east Ulster opened up the possibility of linking up with Jacobite resistance in Scotland, before and in the wake of the Jacobite victory of Killiecrankie (July 1689) However, the elderly and distinguished Duke of Schomberg was able to land an expeditionary force in east Ulster in August 1689, thereby forestalling any lingering possibility of a Scottish invasion. His choice of east Ulster illustrates the peripherality of west Ulster and the relative unimportance of Jacobite reverses there; the relief of the siege of Derry (May, 1689) and the defeat at Newtownbutler (July 1689) Having lost north-east Connacht in addition to most of Ulster, the Jacobites would not have had a Shannon non plus ultra behind which to retreat and Schomberg stands accused of being ‘dilatory’ and ‘unenterprising’ (Childs, 195) in failing to march on Dublin and end the war at a blow. However, the real reasons for Schomberg’s failure and the loss of about a third (Story, 40) of his army virtually without firing a shot are more complex than one individual’s shortcomings. The episode, analysed by Wheeler below, serves as a reminder of the crucial importance of logistical support.

Schomberg’s failure notwithstanding, for William, the war in Ireland was a French invasion by proxy and the appropriate response was to strike directly at France as the principal in the war. However, given his dependence on the English parliament ‘it is absolutely necessary that I conduct myself according to their humour and that I try to put an end to this affair before I can think of another’ (Miller; 1995, 32) Writing to the Duke of Bavaria, William made his strategic priority clear;

It is a terrible mortification for me that I ... am obliged to go to Ireland, where I shall be beyond all knowledge of the world. If I can reduce that kingdom quickly, I shall then have my hands free to act with so much more vigour against the common enemy.

According to conventional wisdom ‘the invader is still to proffer and the invaded to decline a battle’ (Story, 40) especially when the invader enjoyed significant numerical advantage. The relative strengths of the armies at the Boyne (1 July, 1690) the largest battle in Irish history, were 23,000 Jacobites to 36,000 Williamites with the latter enjoying disproportionately more firepower (see O’Carroll below). It was very much James’s decision to stand and fight on the Boyne, ‘to hazard a battle on this inequality’, according to his memoirs, rather than ‘lose all without a stroke’ (Clarke J.S., 393). I discuss the
strategic thinking behind this last-minute decision below. In the event, the Jacobite army, though defeated, escaped from near encirclement; the Boyne would not be the decisive battle of the war. William thought otherwise and this delusion explains his subsequent unattractive peace terms inviting the ‘meaner sort’ to make peace but excluding landowners from pardon. This crude attempt to divide tenants from landowners was motivated by the expectation of an unconditional surrender and a mass forfeiture of Jacobite estates that he could then use to pay for the campaign. (Simms; 1986, 182) More attractive propositions would have been accepted; Tyrconnell, for one, was anxious to reach a compromise peace while the Jacobites still had an army in being. By mid-August as he prepared to besiege Limerick, William realised that the Boyne had not proved as decisive as he had thought. After his assault was beaten off he withdrew his army and left the country, delegating command to a Dutch officer, Godard, baron de Ginkel.

The Williamites failed to break through the defensive line of the Shannon during the winter of 1690-91. This failure probably explains why William finally (June 1691) decided that he should leave Jacobites in possession of their estates as the price of extricating his army from Ireland (Miller; 1995, 27). Ginkel’s argument that one month of war cost more than all the forfeitures were worth was, by this time, persuasive (Childs, 205; Simms; 1986, 194).

Once Ginkel breached the Shannon line at Athlone (30 June 1691) he published the new peace proposals guaranteeing pardon and retention of estates to those who surrendered. Notwithstanding the belated arrival of a French convoy bringing desperately needed supplies and a new commander, Saint-Ruth, these proposals had a significant impact in reducing Jacobite will to fight. In the circumstances, Saint-Ruth may have been wise to reject advice to split the army and hold Galway and Limerick in strength; instead he fought a do or die battle at Aughrim (12 July 1691).

Aughrim was a hard-fought battle but, even if he had won, Saint-Ruth would hardly have been able to restore the Shannon line. In the event the Irish cavalry performed poorly, symptomatic perhaps of the impact of the new peace proposals, exposing the infantry to a flanking attack. In the rout that followed much of the 20,000 strong Irish army was cut down; between 4-7,000 to the not more than 2,000 Williamite casualties sustained in the preliminary attacks.

Despite Aughrim, the fall of Galway and the driving in of the
outposts of Limerick, the Irish still retained a bargaining position of sorts. The French would not cede naval superiority until next year, thus keeping open the possibility of supplying the Jacobite bridgehead at Limerick and protracting the war into another summer. The war in Flanders had been going badly for the Grand Alliance; by April 1691 a French army commanded by Louis XIV himself, had captured Mons. It is a measure of Ginkel’s desperation to wind up the war that he agreed to allow some 19,000 soldiers to sail for France. In other respects the Treaty of Limerick was unsatisfactory. Protection under the articles of Limerick and Galway did not include those officers who had surrendered or been captured before then, or civilians who lived outside the areas still deemed to be in the Jacobite quarters; in all the net effect of forfeitures was to reduce the proportion of land owned by Catholics from 22 per cent in 1688 to 14 per cent in 1703. (Maguire, 156) Provisions relating to religious freedom for Irish Catholics were to be ‘consistent with the laws of Ireland, or as they did enjoy in the reign of King Charles II’. Carelessness in accepting such vague guarantees⁹ would facilitate the later passage of severe Penal Laws against Catholics in general, and Catholic landowners in particular. William, personally tolerant and dependent on Catholic allies like the Habsburg Emperor, was prepared to honour the implicit promise of religious freedom. Not so, however, the Irish parliament and (after 1704) the Whig dominated English parliament. Irish Protestants felt that the Catholics had escaped lightly from, as they saw it, complete and irreversible defeat and, because they retained significant landownership, feared that they might be in a position to mount another challenge to the Protestant ascendancy in the future. It was against this background that the apparently favourable conditions of the Treaty of Limerick were eroded and the agreement became a byword for English bad faith.

Insofar as any historical episode has a definite conclusion, there is a sense of closure after Aughrim that is expressed most potently in popular poetry of the period (Ó Buachalla, 173)

Tá leasú ag Ó Ceallaigh ‘s ní gainimh é ná aoileach,
ach saighdiúirí tara dhéanfaidh gaisce le pice;

⁹ Much might depend on what particular year of Charles’s reign was intended. In 1670 the Lord Lieutenant had, on royal instructions, adopted a policy of open toleration while by the end of the decade the Popish plot hysteria brought religious persecution.
do fágadh iad in Eachroim ‘na sraitheanna sínte
mar bheadh feoil chapaill ag madrai á sraoileadh

O’Kelly has fertiliser that is neither sand nor dung
but nimble soldiers who wielded the pike bravely
they are left in heaps at Aughrim
to be eaten like horse meat by the dogs

The Irish century of warfare has a definitive conclusion, if not a
beginning.

Bibliography

Anon. ‘A True Relation of a Great Victory obtained by the Forces under the
Command of the Lord Inchiquin’ (London, 1647)

Brady, Ciaran The Chief Governors: The Rise and Fall of Reform Government in Ireland 1536-
1588 (Cambridge, 1994)

Bradshaw, Brendan ‘Was the Ulster Rising a bolt from the blue?’ Times Literary
Supplement, 14 October, 1994)

Brewer, John The Sinews of Power War, money and the English state, 1688-1783 (Lon-
don, 1989)

Canny, Nicholas From Reformation to Restoration: Ireland 1534-1660 (Dublin, 1987)

Canny, Nicholas ‘The attempted Anglicisation of Ireland in the seventeenth-century’ in
Merritt, J.F. (ed.) The Political World of Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford 1621-
41 (Cambridge, 1996)

Childs, John ‘The Williamite War, 1689-91’ Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffrey
(ed.s.) A Military History of Ireland (Cambridge, 1996)

Clarke, Aidan The Old English in Ireland 1625-42 (Cornell, 1966)

Clarke, J.S. (ed.) The Life of James the Second… (2 vols., London, 1816) ii

Corish, Patrick, J. ‘The Rising of 1641 and the Catholic Confederacy, 1641-5’ in
New History of Ireland iii (Oxford, 1976)


Davies, Sir John, A discoverie of the true causes why Ireland was never entirely subdued…
(London, 1612)

Dickson, David New Foundations Ireland 1660-1800 (Dublin, 2000)

Falls, Cyril ‘The Growth of Irish Military Strength’ Irish Sword ii No. 6 (1955)

Ferguson, Kenneth ‘The organization of King William’s Army in Ireland’ Irish Sword
Vol. XVIII, No. 70 (1990)

Gentles, Ian The New Model Army in England, Ireland and Scotland, 1645-1653 (Ox-
ford, 1992)


--- O’Kelly was, presumably, the name of the farmer on whose land the battle
was fought.
Kings in Conflict: The Revolutionary War in Ireland and its Aftermath 1689-1750 (Belfast, 1990)

Gilbert, J.T. A Contemporary History of Affairs in Ireland (3 vols. Dublin, 1879)

Gillespie, Raymond The Transformation of the Irish Economy 1550-1700 (Dundalk, 1991)

Hayes-McCoy, G.A. ‘Strategy and Tactics in Irish Warfare 1593-1601’ Irish Historical Studies no. 7 (1942)


Henry, Gráinne The Irish Military Community in Spanish Flanders 1586-1621 (Dublin, 1993)

Hill, Christopher The Century of Revolution 1603-1714 (London, 1980)


—— Irish Manuscripts Commission Négociations de M. le Comte D’Avaux en Irlande 1689-90 (Dublin, 1934)


Kenyon, John The Popish Plot (London, 1972)


Lenihan, Pádraig ‘War and Population, 1649-52’ Irish Economic and Social History XXIV (1997).


Mc Gurk, John The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland (Manchester, 1997)


—— ‘The War(s) of the Three Kingdoms’ in Glenn Burgess (ed.) The New British History Founding a Modern State 1603-51 (London, 1999)


Ó Buachalla, Breandán ‘Aisling Chéar Na Stiobhtaigh agus an tAos Léinn’ (Dublin, 1996)

O’Connell, J.J. The Irish Wars (Dublin, 1921)


—— From Independence to Occupation: Ireland 1641-1660 Cambridge, 1995) pp.66-88


Ó Siochrú, Micheál Confederate Ireland 1642-1649 (Dublin, 1999)


Perceval Maxwell, Michael. The Outbreak of the Irish Rebellion of 1641 (McGill-Queens, 1994)
Introduction

—‘Ireland and Scotland’ in Morrill (ed.) *Scottish National Covenant*. Pillorget,
René ‘Louis XIV and Ireland’ in Bernadette Whelan (ed.) *The Last of the great
Wars: Essays on the Wars of the Three Kings in Ireland 1688-91* (Limerick, 1995)
Russell, Conrad *The Fall of the British Monarchies* 1637-42 (Oxford, 1991)
Silke, John L. *Kinsale: the Spanish Intervention in Ireland at the end of the Elizabethan Wars*
(Liverpool, 1970)
Simms, J.G. ‘The Restoration and the Jacobite War’ in T.W. Moody and F.X. Martin
*The Course of Irish History* (Dublin, 1967)
—‘Cromwell at Drogheda 1649’ *Irish Sword* vol. xi No.45 (1974)
—‘The Restoration, 1660-85’ in *New History of Ireland* iii (Oxford, 1976)
—‘Williamite Peace Tactics’ in Hayton D.W. and Gerard O’Brien (eds.) *War
and Politics in Ireland 1649-1730* (London, 1986)
Stevenson, David *Alastair Mac Colla and the Highland Problem in the seventeenth century*
(Glasgow, 1980)
Stewart, R.W. ‘The Irish Road’ in Mark Fissel (ed.) *War and Government in Britain
1580-1630* (London and New York, 1995)
Story, George *An Impartial History of the Affairs of Ireland* ... (London, 1691)
Symcox, Geoffrey *The Crisis of French Sea Power* 1688-1697 (The Hague, 1974)
Treadwell, Victor *Buckingham and Ireland A Study in Anglo-Irish Politics* 1616-1628
(Dublin, 1998)
Wheeler, James Scott *Cromwell in Ireland* (Dublin, 1999)
Wauchope, Piers *Patrick Sarsfield and the Williamite War* (Irish Academic Press, 1992)
Wrigley, E.A. ‘Society and Economy in the Eighteenth Century’ in Lawrence Stone
(ed.) *An Imperial State at War Britain from 1689 to 1815*