

# Before the Flight



## LATE MEDIEVAL IRELAND

Late Medieval Ireland was made up of three distinct cultures: Gaelic Ireland, the Anglo-Normans or old English and those who were more recently arrived and lived primarily within the Pale

The Anglo-Norman lords recognised the king of England as their ruler but they lived far from London and often adopted many of the Gaelic customs.

English rule in Ireland was concentrated on an area around Dublin known as the Pale and in small areas centred in larger towns and cities. The people of the Pale kept much closer ties to England and followed English customs and "common law".

Medieval Gaelic society was a clan or lineage based society. The economy was based on farming. Barter, especially in cattle, was the common method of business transaction. Settlements were mostly scattered either in isolated farmsteads or in house clusters.

Gaelic society had its own system of law, known as Brehon Law. Brehons (or brithem) preserved and interpreted the law that had developed from customs passed on orally from one generation to the next. Brehon Law was often in direct contrast to English "common law". Brehon Law recognised divorce. Wives could keep their own names and property when they married. Children born outside marriage were entitled to a share in their fathers' property and any male relative of the chieftain could succeed to the leadership. This often led to many heirs in matters of land and lordship which gave rise to the political instability common in Medieval Ireland. Fosterage and hostage taking were used to strengthen alliances and enforce agreements.



## ULSTER BEFORE THE FLIGHT

In the 16th century Ulster was ruled primarily by Old Gaelic and Anglo-Norman families.

The O'Neill dynasty dominated Ulster from their base in Tír Eóghain, which consisted of modern Tyrone, as well as parts of Counties Derry, Donegal, Fermanagh, Monaghan and Armagh.

By the 15th century the political influence of the O'Donnell family, lords of Tír Chonail, had spread from Donegal across the territories of Fermanagh, Sligo and Leitrim. They were supported by sub-chieftains such as the O'Dohertys, the Mc Sweeneys and the O'Boyles. The O'Donnells kept a tight hold on their territories by eliminating rival claimants and by keeping a large army made up mostly of professional soldiers. The military success of the O'Donnells brought with it wealth. In 1560 The O'Donnell was known abroad as "the king of the fish" because he controlled the greatest share of the Irish fish trade.

In 1541 Henry VIII introduced a scheme of "surrender and re-grant" in an effort to control the Irish lords. If the Gaelic Chieftains surrendered their land to the King and promised to recognise English laws and customs, they were allowed to hold their lands in perpetuity from the monarch and were granted titles. Under this scheme Henry VIII granted the O'Neills the title of Earls of Tyrone.

At the start of Elizabeth I's reign in 1558 Ulster still lay beyond the reach of the English crown. Throughout the 16th century various attempts were made to subdue the Gaelic chieftains and English power slowly advanced in Ulster.

*Augh O'Neill*



# Conflict



## THE NINE YEARS WAR

In the last decade of the 16th century the Gaelic lords felt increasingly threatened by the growing power of the English crown in Ulster. In 1593 the appointment of an English sheriff to Fermanagh led to a revolt by Hugh Maguire. Maguire soon found support from the other chieftains and thus began the Nine Years War. O'Neill secretly supported the rebels but kept up the appearance of loyalty to the Crown until 1595. He had the most to lose but knew that his authority in Tyrone was also under threat.

Maguire defeated the English at the Ford of the Biscuits in Fermanagh and Red Hugh O'Donnell led successful raids into Sligo, Mayo and North Galway. O'Neill defeated the English at Clontibret in Monaghan, Yellow Ford in Armagh and the Moyry Pass on the Armagh/Louth border. These successes were due in no small part to O'Neill's military skills as well as to the fact that the battles were fought mainly on territory familiar to the chieftains.

To build on these military successes foreign aid was essential. The Spanish were interested in helping England's enemy and several meetings took place in Donegal. In the meantime however battles raged within the clans over succession. This, worsened by the delay in the arrival of foreign aid, weakened the ability of the Irish to defeat the English.

## BATTLE OF KINSALE 1601

The Spanish finally arrived in Kinsale, County Cork, in September 1601. Following an arduous journey from the north, O'Donnell persuaded O'Neill to attack the English force in December. The battle was a disaster. O'Neill's forces did not surprise the English and they were forced to retreat while the advancing English cavalry attacked them. O'Donnell's force in the rear guard fled. The battle was soon over. The Spanish Captain, Don Juan del Águila surrendered nine days later to Lord Deputy Mountjoy.

With no army and much of his lordship lost to his cousin Niall Garbh, O'Donnell decided to go to Spain to get further help from King Philip III. He died in Simancas in 1602. He named his younger brother Ruairí as his successor.



## TREATY OF MELLIFONT 1603

During 1603 Mountjoy concentrated his campaign in the northern counties and Leinster. Harvests and stocks were destroyed and famine soon set in. O'Neill returned home. Mountjoy however knew that O'Neill was still a threat. Reluctantly the Queen authorised him to open negotiations with O'Neill. On the 29th March 1603 O'Neill knelt before Lord Mountjoy at Mellifont, County Louth. He swore to be loyal to the crown and not seek further assistance from foreign powers. The Treaty of Mellifont was signed on the 31st March 1603. O'Neill was granted pardon and was restored as the Earl of Tyrone. Ruairí O'Donnell was created the Earl of Tír Chonnail.

## AFTER THE TREATY

Although Ruairí O'Donnell had received a patent from the crown of all the territories in Tír Conaill the patent also stated that the O'Donnells must renounce their claims to the overlordships in areas west and south of Lough Swilly. Niall Garbh O'Donnell who was allowed to hold his own land around Castlefinn directly from the crown, continued to challenge O'Donnells leadership. There was ongoing tension over land between O'Donnell and the other Donegal families, in particular the McSweeney's and O'Boyles. Furthermore O'Donnell was constantly antagonised by the actions of the English officials in his territories.

Between 1603 and 1605 O'Neill slowly began to strengthen control over his territories. However, in 1605 O'Neill's old enemy Chichester was appointed as Lord Deputy. Chichester wanted to civilise Ireland and to get rid of Catholicism from the country once and for all. He was determined to prove that the northern chieftains, in particular O'Neill, were planning treason. Throughout 1606 royal officials provoked the chieftains who found it increasingly difficult to get support from the Lord Deputy. Rumours persisted that an Ulster presidency was to be set up with Chichester appointed as the royal governor of the north. Furthermore a succession of royal officials supported the O'Cahan chieftain's claim to an area of O'Neill's estate. Finally in 1607 O'Neill and O'Cahan were summoned to London by King James I to settle their dispute. It was believed that O'Neill and O'Donnell were to be arrested for treason. O'Neill considered that he had no option but to leave Ireland for the continent.



# Flight, Exile and Death



*King Philip I*

## THE FLIGHT OF THE EARLS

Hugh O'Neill was in Slane, County Meath when word reached him on the 6th of September 1607 that Cúchonnacht Maguire had arrived with a French ship, hired to bring the Irish Earls to Spain. The ship was harboured in Lough Swilly near Rathmullan.

O'Neill travelled from Slane to Mellifont on the 8th of September and from there on to Dundalk. His route then took him over Sliabh Fuadh to Armagh and then to his home in Dungannon, County Tyrone. From there he travelled over the Sperrin Mountains and was met in Ballindrait in County Donegal by Cathbharr O'Donnell. Together they travelled to Rathmullan where Ruairí O'Donnell and others were loading the ship.

Ninety-nine people in total departed for the continent on the 14th of September from Portnamurry near Rathmullan. The passengers assembled in such a hurry that O'Neill's infant son could not be retrieved from his foster family and they were forced to leave without him. Ruairí O'Donnell also left behind his young and heavily pregnant wife, Bridget.

Thirteen days into the journey, heavy storms diverted the ship from its intended destination of Corunna in Spain and they headed for the north of France. On the 4th of October the ship landed at Quilleboeuf on the Seine River near Rouen.

## EXILE AND DEATH

The Earls were eager to travel to the safety of Spanish controlled Flanders. They travelled east and reached Louvain, in Belgium in November 1607. They spent the winter at the Irish Franciscan College, awaiting news from the Spanish King. Having received no word from Spain by February the Earls set out for Rome, leaving the children and some of the women in Louvain. After a difficult journey over the Alps they reached Rome on the 29th of April 1608. The party were made welcome and Pope Paul V granted them the hospitality of the Papal Court.

In the summer of 1608 Cahir O'Doherty's rebellion in Inishowen made O'Neill impatient to return to Ulster. He wrote to Philip III on the 9th of July to say that they should 'not allow that such a good opportunity be lost'. International relations in Europe at this time were complex and the King was slow to commit Spain to open support for the Irish rebels. O'Doherty's death in July and the subsequent suppression of the rebellion put paid to O'Neill's efforts to return to Ireland at this time.

By the end of the summer of 1608 Ruairí and Cathbharr O'Donnell and Cúchonnacht Maguire had all died from fever. The O'Donnell brothers were buried in the Church of San Pietro Montorio in Rome.

O'Neill continued to write to the King of Spain up until the year before his death, still waiting for the opportunity to return to Ireland. He died of a fever on the 20th July 1616 and was buried along with the O'Donnells in Rome.

## AFTER THE FLIGHT - EUROPE

A whole generation of Irish exiles now found themselves in Europe dependant for survival on their wits and the generosity of their hosts.

Ruairí's son, Hugh Albert O'Donnell, an infant at the time of the flight, became an army officer in the Austrian service, and was killed in battle in 1642. His sister Mary was raised in the English court and met with her brother for the first time in Brussels in 1626. Nuala O'Donnell survived her four brothers; Red Hugh, Manus, Cathbharr and Ruairí but never returned to Ireland.

John O'Neill, Hugh's son, made a career for himself in the Spanish Army. He died in 1641 in battle at Catalonia.

The descendants of the families who left Rathmullan in 1607 made lives for themselves in Europe and their names survive to this day in their adopted countries.

## AFTER THE FLIGHT - AT HOME

Following the departure of the Earls, Lord Deputy Chichester continued to suspect them of plotting rebellion in Ireland through foreign intervention. Sir Donal O'Cahan who had assisted the crown in undermining O'Neill's territorial claims was imprisoned in the Tower of London following accusations of treason. Brian MacArt O'Neill, O'Neill's nephew was executed. O'Neill's son Conn and O'Neill's brother Sir Cormac O'Neill were imprisoned for life.

In April 1608 Cahir O'Doherty of Inishowen who had fought on the side of the crown during the Nine Years War led an attack on Derry following repeated attempts by English officials to undermine his authority. Following O'Doherty's death in July and the subsequent suppression of the rebellion, a scheme was formulated for the plantation of Ulster.



*Hugh O'Neill*



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# Plantation of Ulster



## PLANTATION

With the Flight of the Earls in 1607, an opportunity arose for King James to stamp his authority once and for all on this 'most rebellious corner'. The proposed plantation of Ulster was to be the biggest ever undertaken.

The decision to carry out a plantation in Ulster was based on two considerations: fear and opportunism. It was feared that if the earls returned they would land in Ulster to lead another rebellion. Furthermore the monies that could be earned from this plantation would be equal to that from the previous plantations in Munster or Connaught.

In December 1607 the earls' lands were confiscated and preparations for a plantation began. It was not until 1610 however that the new ownership arrangements were brought into operation. The scheme included six counties – Donegal, Armagh, Tyrone, Cavan, Fermanagh and the subsequent county of Londonderry. The basic principle of the plantation was that of segregated communities. English and Scottish Protestants were to be settled on land confiscated from native Irish. New landowners were banned from taking native Irish tenants. There were to be two types of new owner – undertakers and servitors. Undertakers were English and lowland Scottish in equal numbers. Servitors were mainly military officers who received estates ranging in size from 1,000 to 2,000 profitable acres. The other major group of owners comprised the Ulster Irish themselves.

By 1640 about 40,000 English and Scottish settlers had come to Ulster. They brought with them new ways of farming with an emphasis on arable farming. They set up over 20 new towns and organised fairs and markets.

## PLANTATION IN DONEGAL

Estates in Donegal as elsewhere were granted out on a barony or precinct basis. Groups of Scottish undertakers were planted in two areas; Portlough and Boylagh joined with Banagh and English undertakers were planted in Lifford. Servitors and native Irish together got the barony of Kilmacrennan or Doe and Fanad.

There were two exceptional areas in Donegal: Tirhugh and Inishowen. In Tirhugh, Henry Folliot was already the leaseholder at Ballyshannon. In 1610, captain Basil Brooke received a crown lease of twenty-one years for Donegal Castle. Captain Paul Gore purchased the property of the two Third Order Regular Franciscan friaries of Magherabeg and Flannacharta at St John's Point. James Magrath of the hereditary erenach family there secured the lands of Termonmagrath with St Patrick's Purgatory and Termonomongan.

The barony of Inishowen was granted to one man, Sir Arthur Chichester, the Lord Deputy.

## DERRY CITY AND THE HONOURABLE THE IRISH SOCIETY

In 1609 the city of London was invited to take part in the plantation. It was believed that this would ensure stability and prosperity and would encourage others to participate. Agreement was reached with the London Livery Companies in January 1610. The grant of land to the city included Culmore, the towns of Derry, Coleraine, and the Tyrone barony of Loughinsholin.

A new body was established to supervise the management of the plantation; the Society is known today as 'The Honourable The Irish Society'. On 17th December 1613 a draw was held for 12 proportions of the County of Londonderry and the fifty-five London companies organised themselves into twelve associations, for example the Goldsmiths joined with the Cordwainers, Paint-stainers and Armourers.

King James