

Who should control Ireland?

A burning question in the sixteenth century, 1500-99, was: Who should control Ireland - the Irish lords or the Tudor monarchs?

Henry VIII, King of Ireland

Henry VIII was in no doubt about the answer. He was Lord of Ireland as well as King of England. The Lordship had been enjoyed by English kings since the twelfth century. However, it meant very little in practice.

English rule was obeyed only in a very small part of Ireland - around Dublin. This area was called 'The Pale'. The rest of the country was controlled by the native or Gaelic Irish or by 'Old English' or 'Anglo-Irish'. The latter had gone to Ireland in Norman times but many had married into Irish families and adopted Irish ways and laws.

A major rebellion by the Old English FitzGeralds of Kildare and their Gaelic allies forced Henry to act. He crushed the rebellion with a large army, executed the ringleaders, and, in 1541, made himself King of Ireland.



Controlling Ireland, 1500
Living History 1 by Collins, M.
 Educational Company, 0-86167-830-3 , p. 250

He wanted to control the whole country; to make the Irish people obedient to his rule. However, instead of continuing to depend on a large - and expensive - army, he tried to make a deal with the Irish lords. It was called 'surrender and regrant'. If the Irish lords gave up their land to him and promised to use English laws and customs, he granted the land back to them along with English deeds and an English title like baron or earl.

English law

Land was granted by the king to the lord. It passed on to the eldest son - *the law of primogeniture*.

Lord could inherit land and title.

Criminal courts existed with judges who could order imprisonment or execution.

Land and property was most held by men.

Gaelic Irish (Brehon) law

The chieftain did not own the land. It belonged to the clan or family - *the law of tanistry*.

Chieftains were elected from the leading families.

Judges acted as arbitrators and could order offenders to pay compensation but they could not order imprisonment or execution.

Women could hold property.



A civil woman from the Pale and a Gaelic Irishman, c.1575, intended to represent the essential cleavage that was thought to exist in Irish society.

Tudor policy

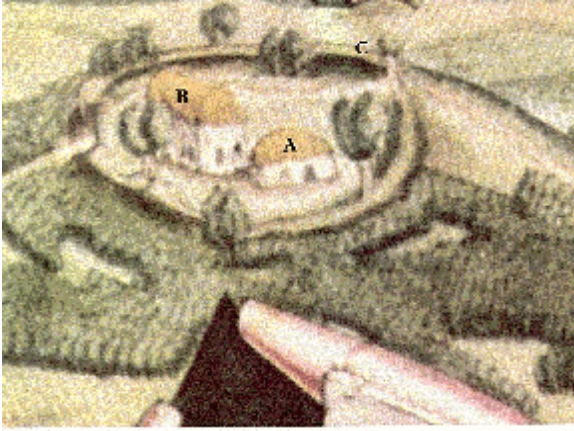
Henry's successors, especially Mary and Elizabeth I, continued the policy of trying to control Ireland by

- introducing English laws, customs, language and methods of agriculture (crop rather than cattle farming) to Ireland;
- spreading the Protestant religion to Ireland; and
- 'planting' or settling English and Scottish people on land taken from the Irish.

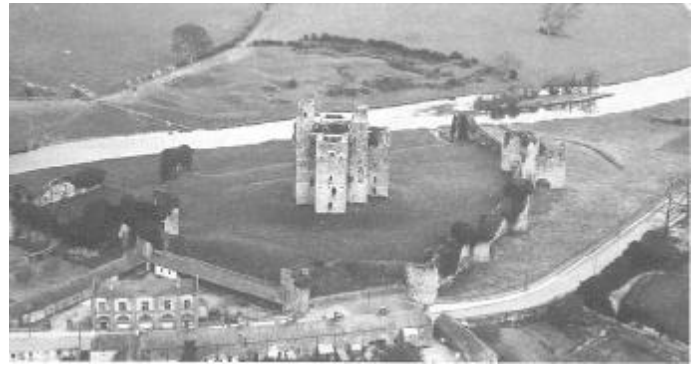
The main reason for wanting to control Ireland was security. After the Reformation, Protestant England was often at odds with Catholic Europe. Ireland might be used as a base from which to attack England.

The attempt to control Ireland became increasingly determined, especially under Elizabeth, using martial law rather than the ordinary law. One of her officials, Sir George Carew said:

'We must change Irish government, clothing, customs, manner of holding land, language and habits of life to make them obedient.'



The O'Hagan hill-fort, Tullaghoe, Ulster



Hugh de Lacy's castle, Trim, County Meath

Different ways of living

P. Cremin, *Footprints 3*, C.J.Fallon, Dublin, 1991, pp 65, 106

Irish responses

Most Irish people opposed these changes, especially Irish chiefs who wanted to rule their own territory. Some, like Grace O'Malley (*alias* Granuaile, the Pirate Queen) tried to be clever. She pretended to co-operate with the Tudors, yet continued in her old ways. She remained a Roman Catholic, plundered ships, raided her neighbours and met Elizabeth I. She died in poverty in 1603.

This is how one historical novel describes Grace's attitude to the English invader in an imaginary letter to her son, Toby, in 1575:

Are you well, my son? Are the priests teaching you as I have instructed them? Learn your letters, study Latin, and memorise the names of the major seaports. Your older brothers by Donal O'Flaherty are merely simply warriors, all strength and shouting. I want more than that for you. Against an enemy as powerful as the English it is necessary to fight with one's brains. Fortunately you and I both inherited good brains.

Granuaile. The Pirate Queen by Llywelyn, M., O'Brien Press, 0-86278-5780-2, p. 59

Others resisted violently. They raided the new settlements, burning houses and taking cattle.

English view of the Irish

One of these raids was described by an Englishman, John Derrick. He worked in Ireland at that time for the English government. He thought that the Irish were backward and barbaric, ready to be 'civilised'.



They spoil and burn and bear away as fit occasion serve,
And think the greater ill they do, the greater praise deserve.
They pass not the poor man's cry nor yet respect his tears,
But rather joy to see the fire to flash about his ears ...
And thus bereaving him of house, of cattle and of store,
They do return to the wood from whence they came before.

'Cattle Raid', *Image of Ireland* by John Derrick, 1581

Irish view of the English

The Irish thought themselves superior to the English. Gaelic poets described the 'Saxons' and the 'Scotch' as 'an arrogant, impure crowd, of foreigners' blood'. They were very critical of Irish people who adopted the ways of such foreigners:

You [Son 1] follow foreign ways
and shave your thick-curled head:
O slender fist, my choice!
you are no good son of Donnchadh.

He [Son 2, Eogan Bán] loved no foreign ways,
our ladies' darling, Eogan Bán,
nor bent his will to the stranger,
but took to the wilds instead.

'Two Sons' by Laoiseach Mac an Bháird, late 16th century
One brother is criticised for choosing Tudor ways, while the other has taken to the hills in revolt.

Irish leaders

Two lords from Ulster, in the north of Ireland, led the Irish who wanted to keep their independence. Hugh O'Neill of Tyrone was described by one Englishman as

'Educated, more disciplined and naturally valiant, he is worthily reputed the best man of war of his nation. Most of his followers are well-trained soldiers, using our weapons; and he is the greatest man of territory and revenue within that kingdom, and is absolute commander of the north of Ireland.'

Hugh O'Donnell of Donegal, 'Red Hugh', had been kidnapped and held hostage in Dublin Castle for four years, sometimes in chains. In 1591, when he was nineteen, friends smuggled a rope and some files into the prison. Hugh cut through his chains, got out through a window and let himself down with a rope. On his return home to Donegal, he joined O'Neill to plot his revenge.

This is how one historical novel imagines a discussion between Red Hugh and his captor, Lord Fitzwilliam:

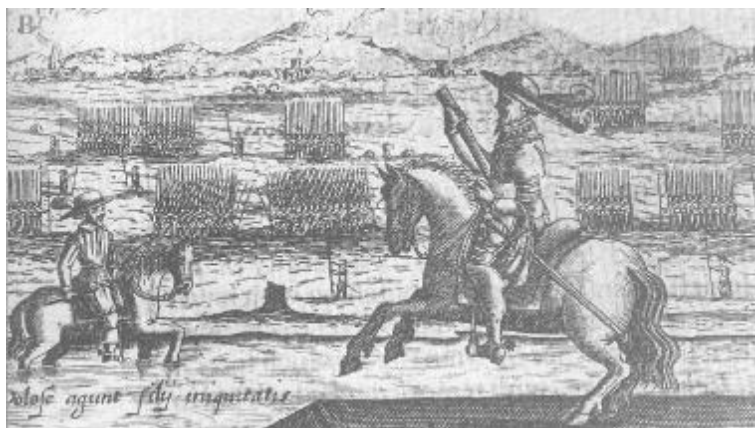
'... It is Her Majesty's greatest wish that you should be taught and civilised.'
'Civilised! And ... and is it her belief that to speak English is to be civilised?'
'Of course, that is a start. With the language and customs and the manners. Once you understand our ways you will see how much better they are. We will teach you to build proper houses and towns and - '
I am going to scream, thought Hugh. It is like beating your head against a brick wall. 'We do not want your towns, ' he said patiently, 'nor your houses nor your customs nor your language. We ...' He took a deep breath. 'WE - ARE - NOT - ENGLISH.'

Red Hugh. The Kidnap of Hugh O'Donnell by Lisson, D., O'Brien Press, 0-86278-604-5, p. 84

The Nine Years War

The two Hughs took to the field against Elizabeth in a savage war which lasted for nine years from 1594 until 1603. The outcome was often in doubt, for the Irish expected help from Spain, which was at war with England.

The Irish inflicted devastating defeats on the English. The most humiliating was the Yellow Ford in 1598, when the English commander was killed. Enraged, Elizabeth sent the ruthless Lord Mountjoy to Ireland as viceroy in 1600 to deal with her Irish problem. He did just that.



O'Neill approaching the English commander before battle
The Race to Rule, by Hodge, A., Colourpoint, 1-89839-249-8. p. 39

The battle of Kinsale

A Spanish force arrived at Kinsale, County Cork, in October 1601. The Irish leaders marched from the north to join them. The march was made in the heart of winter, the worst time of the year for such a long march. Mountjoy's forces were better prepared and defeated the Irish and the Spaniards at the Battle of Kinsale in December 1601.

The Irish retreated to the north. In the following year the English strengthened their forts around O'Neill's

territory in Tyrone. Mountjoy ordered crops and cattle to be destroyed. He intended to starve the Irish into submission. In 1603 O'Neill and the other Irish chieftains did submit and signed the Treaty of Mellifont. They promised to be subject to the English monarch and to adopt English customs and language. O'Neill was given the title of Earl of Tyrone and O'Donnell became Earl of Tyrconnell. Ireland remained Catholic but the power of the Irish lords had been broken.



'An Irish Submission', *Image of Ireland* by John Derrick, 1581



'Flight of the Earls', modern painting by Tom Ryan

The Flight of the Earls

O'Neill and O'Donnell were unhappy with the restrictions on their power. Restless and fearful for their safety, they and over 100 Irish chiefs fled from Ulster to the continent in 1607.

The flight enabled the English to consolidate their hold on Ireland by settling even more people in Ireland, particularly in Ulster, the area which had most strongly resisted English rule.

The plantation of Ulster

The biggest plantation of Ireland took place in Ulster, in 1609, when James I was king. The government gave to English and Scottish people land in places such as Donegal, Londonderry, Tyrone, Fermanagh, Cavan and Armagh was given to English and Scottish people. Many had fought in Ulster and saw how prosperous a land it could be and they were prepared to take a chance to live there.

This plantation helped to solve one problem - establishing English control of Ireland. Did it also store up trouble for the future?



Irish



Planter's

Ulster houses in the seventeenth century



Province of Ulster

Rivalry and Conflict by Logan, A. et al., Colourpoint Books, 1-89839-212-9, p. 27