

Our Irish Ancestors

Paul Francis, 2010



Our link to Ireland comes through the Knox Family. Edward Baldwin John Knox moved to South Africa in the 1870s. Oupa was his grandson. Edward's grandfather was Thomas Knox, the Earl of Dungannon, a very wealthy man who controlled much of County Tyrone. Back at this time, Ireland was largely controlled by wealthy Protestant landowners, the descendants of the English and Scottish "Planters" who had invaded Ireland in the 1600s, displaced the natives and appropriated their lands, becoming fabulously wealthy in the process.

At first I thought that the story of our Irish ancestors would be entirely the story of these Protestant invaders. But with further research, it became more complex. Some branches of the family tree went much further back: to a previous wave of invaders, the Normans who conquered much of Ireland in the 1100s. And there were many cases of intermarriage with the old Gaelic aristocracy, giving us links back further still, to the Viking raiders of the 9th century, and the Kings of Leinster and Munster back into furthest prehistory. And it is with these kings that I will start...

N.B. ancestors names are listed in bold where they are first mentioned.

1. The Gaels of Leinster

It's hard to know where to start a family history like this. Our early Irish ancestors traced their pedigree all the way back to Adam, via Noah, various Israelite and Scythian kings and Milesius, a Spanish prince who after a stint as an Egyptian General, and having married the daughter of Pharaoh Nectonibus, settled in Ireland in 1699 BC. But the first ancestors for whom there is some trace of historical reality probably come from Leinster.

Leinster was one of the historical kingdoms of Ireland, and occupied roughly to lower 2/3 of the current province of Leinster (see map above), stretching from the future site of Dublin south and west. This province got its name from the Laigin people, most likely a small group of Celts who invaded Ireland from Gaul (France) around 300BC, and inter-married with the locals.

The annalists of Leinster ascribed this invasion to Labraid Loingsech, "The Exile" or "The Mariner". It is unclear whether he was a real figure, or the ancestor-deity of the Laigin. His grandfather had been High King of Ireland, but was treacherously killed by his brother, who also poisoned Labraid's father. Labraid was forced to eat the heart of his father and grandfather by their murderer, and was so traumatised by this that he was struck dumb. This dumbness remained until he was hit on the shin during a game of hurling, and cried out "I am hurt!" From then on he was called Labraid, "he speaks".

He was exiled overseas for many years - most likely in Gaul, where he made a name for himself as a warrior. During this time, he came to the attention of the daughter of the king of Munster, Moriath, who fell in love with him, and send him a love song so beautiful that he decided to return to Ireland. Unfortunately, Moriath's mother disapproved, and always slept with one eye open to keep Moriath under watch. Labraid's harper, Craiftine, had however followed Labraid into exile, and played a lullaby so well on his harp that Moriath's mother fell asleep, and Labraid spent a night with Moriath. When she then became pregnant, Moriath's parents relented and let them marry.

Eight hundred years later, Leinster was ruled by his distant descendant Bressal Béalach (somewhere in the early fifth century AD). Two clans, who for the next thousand years would fight over the rulership of Leinster,

were descended from him. From his son Dúnlaing macÉndae came the Uí Dúnlainge, while from his grandson Énnae Cennsalach came their bitter rivals, the Uí Cheinnselaig. These family trees were very important to our ancient Gaelic ancestors, who would sit feasting while professional praise poets (bards) recited their ancestry.

Ireland at this time was a Gaelic country. It was divided into literally hundreds of tiny kingdoms, each with its own petty king and warriors. People lived in wooden huts, and counted their wealth in cattle. In the fifth century, Christianity became established on the Island, though especially in the early days it would have been very much blended with previous pagan traditions.

Dúnlaing macÉndae's great-great-great-grandson Fáelán mac Colmáin was the true founder of the fortunes of the Uí Dúnlainge. He was son and heir to Colmán Már mac Coirpri, king of Leinster, but was apparently rejected by his step-mother, and brought up instead by Saint Cóemgen (Saint Kevin) at his newly founded monastery at Glendalough. It is certainly true that his descendants were generous patrons of this monastery. The monasteries would develop into the largest towns in Ireland, complete with their own farms, industries, craftsmen and even armies.

Life was violent for would-be kings in Ireland at this time. Fáelán is first mentioned in the annals when he defeated and slew Crundmáel Bolg Luatha of the Uí Cheinnselaig at the Battle of Duma Aichir in 628. Then in alliance with Failbe Flann mac Áedo Duib, the king of Munster, and Conall Guthbinn mac Suibni of the Clann Cholmáin, he defeated and slew Crimthann mac Áedo, the Uí Máil king of Leinster, at the Battle of Áth Goan in western Liffey and took his throne.

His descendants had it no easier. For example, here's a brief account of the first ten years of

the reign of his great-grandson Murchad mac Bran Mut:

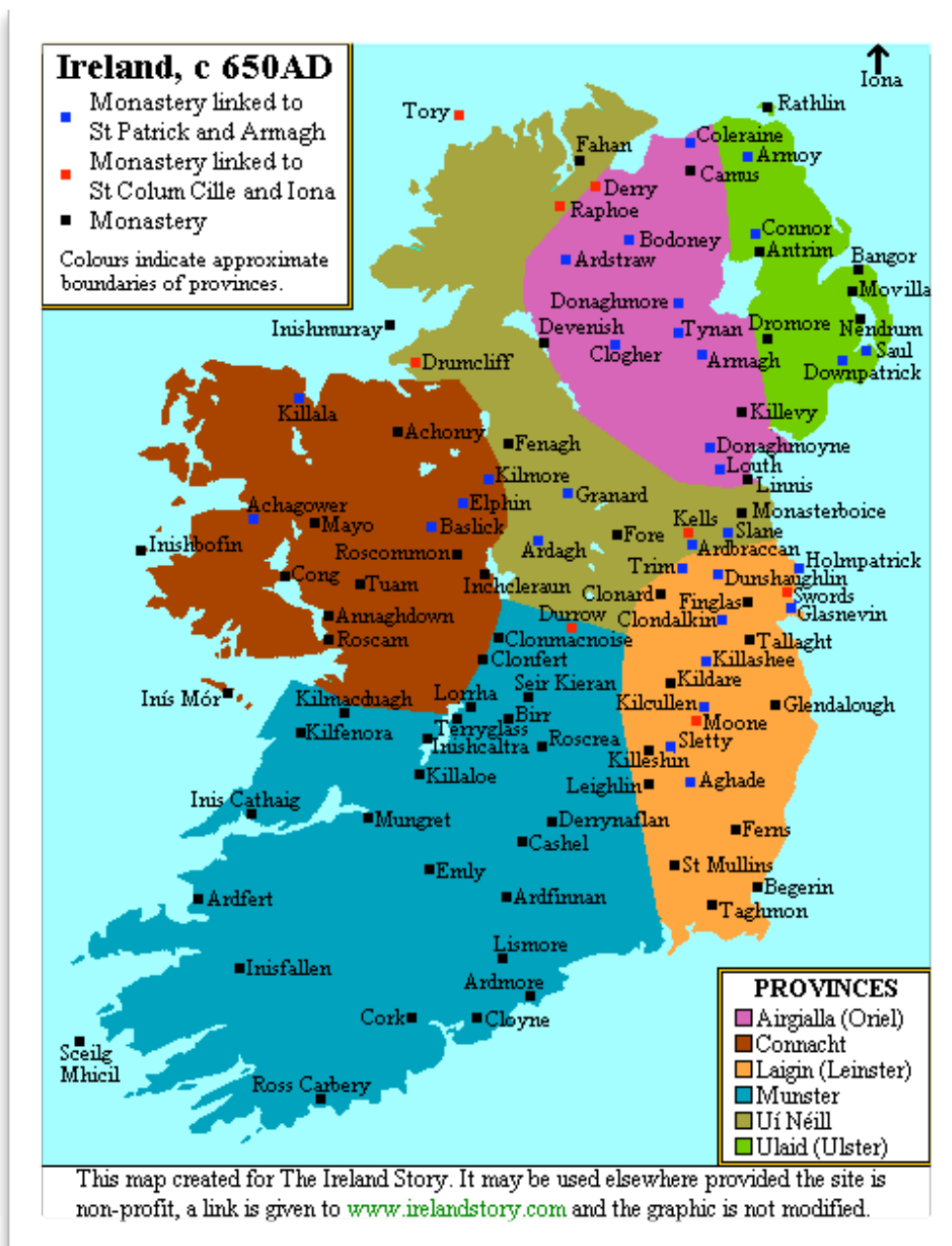
- He began his reign by an inaugural raid into Munster to Cashel in 715
- He fought off five raids from the Ui Neill (O'Neil) clan in 719
- He joined up with the King of Munster to attack Brega in 721
- But later that year the king of Munster changed sides and invaded Murchad's kingdom together with the high king, and enforced the payment of cattle tribute.
- But a year later he rebelled and fought off the high king at the Battle of Allen.

His son Fáelán mac Murchado, in turn, took the kingdom of Leinster by killing his brother Dúnchad mac Murchado at the Battle of Ailenn (Co. Kildare) in 728, and marrying his brother's widow, Tualath ingen Cathail, daughter of the king of Munster.

Their son, Ruaidrí mac Fáeláin, was in turn was defeated in the Battle of Óchtar Ocha (at Kilcock, near Kildare) by the high king of Ireland Donnchad Midi of the Clann Cholmáin, who then proceeded to lay waste to Leinster, burning farms and churches, and in the words of the annals of Ulster, "Great hosts ... pour forth for themselves streams of gore".

And so it had been for countless centuries, endless fights over power, prestige and cattle tribute. Everyone lived in fortified houses, surrounded by wooden walls, ditches and mounds. Whenever a raiding party entered a clan's territory, the serfs would drive the cattle off into the forests, hills and bogs until it was safe to come back.

The Gaels regarded themselves as great warriors and raiders. After reciting their ancient ancestry, their next-favourite pastime was telling incredibly exaggerated tales of their deeds in war. In a typical account, you hear of one king's son carrying a sword in



each hand, and killing fifty enemies with every swing of each sword (and still losing the battle...).

But compared to the next branch of our ancestors, they were rank amateurs at fighting...

2. Ragnar Hairybreeks and the Viking Invasion.

In the late 8th century AD, many countries in Northern Europe were shocked by vicious raids from the hitherto obscure Vikings, pagan barbarians from Norway, Sweden and Denmark. The first raids did not target Ireland, and the Gaels continued happily fighting each other, oblivious of the storm that was about to engulf them.

But in 795 AD, a small fleet of Viking ships, which had been raiding monasteries in England and Scotland, launched an attack on Gwynedd in north-west Wales, but were repelled. They decided to try their luck across the Irish Sea, and in a year of terror sacked coastal monasteries all around Ireland. The ferocious iron-clad Viking warriors, with their long steel swords and swift longboats, seemed invincible to the Irish, who wrote many accounts of the amazing bravery and fighting skills of the invaders (who they called "Gauls" - a generic term for foreigners).

But worse was to come. This fleet brought back to the Viking homelands tales of fantastically wealthy, poorly defended monasteries, and these came to the attention of another of our ancestors, Ragnar Lodbrok ("Hairy-breeks")

The Vikings, just like the Gaels, loved story-telling, and Ragnar was one of their favourite topics for hundreds of years afterwards. As such, it is hard to tell the historical person apart from the many legends that grew up around him and his almost equally famous sons. Most likely he was a Jarl in the court of the Danish king, and he was certainly leader of the great raid on Paris in 845 AD. He is known to have launched much larger and better organised raids into Ireland, penetrating far inland and destroying monasteries beyond the reach of previous expeditions. A pagan, he was known for launching attacks on holy days when most soldiers would be in church. He would generally accept a huge payment to leave his victims alone, only to come back later and demand more riches in exchange for leaving. The Irish chronicles (written by monks) describe him as deliberately trying to destroy Christianity, with ceaseless raids on churches and monasteries.

He didn't restrict his attentions to Ireland. In 845 AD he landed with a fleet of 120 ships in France, ravaged Rouen, then sailed up the

Seine and captured Paris. The king of France, Charles the Bald, paid him the staggering sum of 7,000 pounds of silver not to destroy Paris.

Ragnar claimed to be descended from the god Odin himself. Two of his wives were almost as famous as him. His first wife, Lathgertha was a notorious Skjaldmæ (shield-maiden). She was the daughter of a Norwegian Jarl, who was killed by Frodo, a Swithian chiftain. Frodo announced that he was going to place the women of the former jarl's family into a brothel for public humiliation. Ragnar then arrived with a Swedish army to attack Frodo. Lathgertha disguised herself as a man, joined him and chose to fight among his men, leaving a strong impression on Ragnar. According to the Saxo Grammaticus,

"Ladgerda, a skilled Amazon, who, though a maiden, had the courage of a man, and fought in front among the bravest with her hair loose over her shoulders. All-marveled at her matchless deeds, for her locks flying down her back betrayed that she was a woman."

Impressed with her courage, Ragnar courted her from afar. Lathgertha feigned interest but when Ragnar arrived to seek her hand, he was set-upon by a bear and a great hound which she had guarding her home. He killed the bear with his spear and choked the hound to death, and thus won the hand of Lathgertha in marriage.



Painting of Aslaug, 1862

Ragnar was, however, allegedly still annoyed at having the beasts set at him. Some time later, he had sent some men ashore to bake bread in a remote part of Norway. They discovered a beautiful woman called Aslaug there, and confused by her beauty, allowed the bread to burn. When they told Ragnar what had happened, he was intrigued, and sent for the girl. But according to legend, to test her wits he commanded her to arrive "neither dressed nor undressed, neither hungry nor full and neither alone nor in company". She arrived dressed in a net, biting an onion and with only the dog as a companion. Impressed, Ragnar divorced Lathgertha, married Aslaug, and most likely, she was the mother of his famous sons Ivar the Boneless and Björn Ironside. According to the legends Aslaug was the daughter of Siegfried and Brynhildr, the heroes of Wagner's ring cycle.

Despite the divorce, Lathgertha still retained a soft spot for Ragnar. Several years later, he was losing a civil war in Denmark, and sent to her for help. She came, bringing her new husband and son, and apparently 120 ships. When Ragnar was losing the battle of Lanus:

"Ladgerda, who had a matchless spirit though a delicate frame, covered by her splendid bravery the inclination of the soldiers to waver. For she made a sally

about, and flew round to the rear of the enemy, taking them unawares, and thus turned the panic of her friends into the camp of the enemy." (Ragnar's Saga)

When she returned to Norway, Lathgertha quarrelled with her new husband, killed him and usurped his power as Jarl, because, according to the Saxo Grammaticus,

"this most presumptuous dame thought it pleasanter to rule without her husband than to share the throne with him..."



Ragnar being thrown to the snakes
Ragnar met his death most likely in 865AD, when he was shipwrecked on the coast of Northumbria, captured by the king, and thrown into a pit filled with poisonous snakes (must have been interesting gathering that many poisonous snakes in Northumbria...). When his sons heard of this they gathered an immense army (the Great Heathen Army, as it was called by the hapless Anglo-Saxon chroniclers who were its victims). In 866 AD it landed in England. No longer was raiding their purpose - this time they came to stay. First they conquered Northumbria, whose king was killed in a particularly brutal way. Then they conquered Kingdom of East Anglia, then following reinforcements in 871 they conquered Mercia. The only remaining Anglo-Saxon Kingdom was Wessex, but under Alfred the Great, Wessex fought them to a standstill.

It is unclear how many of these stories about Ragnar are true. There may well have been two Ragnars, whose stories have been merged. What is clear is that Ragnar's children were to have a decisive influence on history. He had at least seven children – it's unclear who came from which mother. The two that concern us the most are Björn Ironside and Ivar the Boneless.

Bjorn spent his early years raiding France, but in 860 led a large Viking raid into the Mediterranean. After a year attacking Spain, Gibraltar and Provence, he turned his attention to Italy, where he sacked Piza, and then proceeded inland to the town of Luna, which he believed to be Rome. Bjorn found himself unable to breach the town walls. To gain entry, he sent messengers to the Bishop that he had died, had a deathbed conversion, and wished to be buried on consecrated ground within their church. He was brought into the chapel with a small honour guard, then amazed the dismayed Italian clerics by leaping from his coffin and hacking his way to the town gates, which he promptly opened letting his army in. Flush with this victory and others around the Mediterranean (including in Sicily and North Africa) he returned to the Straits of Gibraltar only to find the Saracen navy waiting. In the desperate battle which followed Bjorn lost 40 ships, largely to Greek fire launched from Saracen catapults. The remainder of his fleet managed to return to Scandinavia however, where he lived out his life as a rich man. We will come back to one of his descendants later.

Ivar was one of the leaders of the Great Heathen Army, but left it in 869 to move to the new Viking settlement of Dublin. For a period of some decades, the Irish had been left in peace, while the Vikings concentrated on building up their empire and raiding elsewhere. But the Vikings had founded a number of towns around the coast of Ireland, including Dublin, Wexford and Limerick, and

these rapidly became major trading centres, even if much of the trade was in captured Irish slaves. The descendants of Ivar (called by the Irish the Ui Imar) ruled many of these settlements from time to time.

During this lull, the Gaels had resumed their customary in-fighting, and indeed several monasteries which had been missed by the Vikings were sacked by rival Irish kings or abbots during this period. But well before 900 AD serious Viking raiding had recommenced. A ninth-century scribe, taking comfort from the storm outside which made the sea impassable, wrote in the margin of his manuscript:

*“The wind is fierce tonight,
It tosses the sea's white hair,
I fear no wild Vikings
Sailing the quiet main”*

(Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland).

Another chronicler wrote of

*“immense floods and countless
sea-vomiting of ships and fleets so
that there was not a harbour or
land-port in the whole of Munster
without floods of danes and
pirates”.*



The Round Tower of Glendalough

Many monasteries built high round stone towers, which could only be accessed by a ladder – when the Vikings arrived, they would retreat into the upper parts of these towers, pull up the ladder, and remain there in safety while the Vikings ravaged the rest of the monastery.

Poorer people dug ditches and covered them over, hiding the entrances, and hid in these makeshift caves while the Vikings rampaged past. Some of these shelters are still being found today.

By the late 10th century, the Vikings were less raiders than Gaelic magnates, running cities and posting tax collectors across the regions which paid them tribute. Those who couldn't pay the taxes were enslaved. They were becoming quite Irish, taking sides (for a suitable fee) in the interminable wars between the Irish clans.

3. Gormflaith and her three husbands.

Some time around 980 AD, King Morugh MacFinn of Leinster (the great-grandson of Ruaidrí mac Fáeláin), married off his beautiful young daughter Gormflaith to the elderly Viking lord of Dublin and York, Óláfr Kváran, commonly known in Ireland as Amlaíb Cuarán, great-grandson of Ivar the Boneless. In his youth, Amlaíb had ruled a vast empire on both sides of the Irish Sea, and was renowned for sacking churches, but by the time he married Gormflaith he was in his late fifties, and had lost much of his English empire to the resurgent Anglo-Saxons. He had, however, established Dublin as an extremely wealthy trading centre, and the marriage was a very desirable one for the kings of Leinster. Amlaíb had converted to Christianity, and was to end his days retired to the monastery of Iona. Gormflaith bore him a son, Sitric Silkbeard, who was to succeed him as ruler of Dublin.

Following Amlaíb's death, Gormflaith married the high king of Ireland, Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill, who came from the northern Ui Neill clan, which had provided high kings of Ireland for centuries. The marriage was not a success – soon afterwards Máel Sechnaill repudiated her (Njal's saga describes her as extremely beautiful and talented, but with a vicious temper and bad morals), and she moved back to live with her brother, Máel Mórda mac Murchada, who had inherited the kingdom of Leinster.

Meanwhile, in Munster, a previously obscure member of a relatively minor clan was achieving remarkable military success. Brian Boru, together with his brother, had succeeded in defeating the Vikings of Limerick. A rival clan had killed his brother, but Brian's vengeance had been complete and had left

him as undisputed master of Munster and of the Vikings of Limerick. A brilliant general, in battle after battle he was establishing himself as the paramount lord in Ireland.

The ancient kings of Leinster were not going to accept some western upstart as their over-king. Neither were the Vikings of Dublin. So when Brian Boru moved his army against them in 999, Máel Morda and his nephew Sitric Silkbeard met him in the battle of Glen Mama. By all accounts it was a drawn-out and bloody affair. Brian won, and in victory made the radical decision to be magnanimous. He gave Máel Morda and Sitric back their lands and titles, as long as they were happy to acknowledge him as their overlord. To seal the alliance, Brian married Gormflaith himself, and gave his daughter Slaine (from a previous marriage) in marriage to Sitric Silkbeard.



Brian Boru, by Ciruelo Cabral

Two years later, Máel Sechnaill, the High King of Ireland, surrendered the title to Brian Boru, who became the first (and so-far only) effective ruler of a united Ireland. For a ten brief years,

according to the chronicles, a maiden could walk from one end of Ireland to the other, carrying a golden ring upon a stick, and not be molested! This is almost certainly gross exaggeration by Brian Boru's partisans – his overlordship was in fact tenuous, and many kings waged their usual fights in this period.

Gormflaith was repudiated by Brian too, though not before bearing him a son. Perhaps her bad character had overcome the attraction of her beauty once again. But she was still living in Brian's court when, in 1012, her brother Máel Morda, still king of Leinster, arrived. He had come with a group of his men dragging a huge tree from a special forest. This tree was his tribute to Brian Boru – for use as a mast in the battle-fleet Brian was building. But in fetching the tree, Máel Morda had apparently burst a button from his tunic, and he went to visit his sister Gormflaith in her rooms to get it sewn back on.



Typical Irish Warrior of the time

Gormflaith took the tunic and threw it into the fire, reproaching him, in bitter and insulting language, for his meanness in submitting to be a servant or vassal to any man, and adding that neither his father nor grandfather would

have yielded to such indignity. Needless to say, this left him in a bad mood as he went to the great hall. Here he saw Brian Boru's eldest son Murchadh playing chess with his cousin. Máel Morda suggested a move to Murchadh, but it was a bad one and caused Murchadh to lose. Angered at the advice, Murchadh insulted Máel Morda, saying that "it was like the advice you gave the Danes at Glen Mama".

Incensed by this insult, Máel Morda left in a furious temper early the following morning. Alarmed at his departure, Brian Boru sent a messenger to apologise for his son's rudeness, but Máel Morda struck the messenger a violent blow on the head with a stick, and broke all the bones in his head.

War was resumed. Both Brian and Máel Morda gathered allies for the upcoming confrontation. Gormflaith had fled to Dublin, where she helped recruit her son Sitric Silkbeard to Máel Morda's side.



The Battle of Clontarf

Gormflaith and Sitric spent the winter recruiting allies. She promised herself in marriage to both the Viking lord of the

Orkneys and to the Viking lord of the Isle of Man, in return for their help. Not at all clear how she was going to marry both had she won. But on 24th April 1014 AD, within sight of the walls of Dublin, the two armies met in the colossal battle of Clontarf.

The battle was long and bloody. On the walls of Dublin, Sitric and his wife Slaine (Brian's daughter) watched. As evening came, it became clear that Brian had won. Slaine taunted Sitric with this, and he, losing his temper, gave her a blow which knocked out one of her teeth. Brian Boru had won. But the cost was heavy. Brian himself had been killed by a party of Vikings.

With Brian's death, his supporters went back to in-fighting. Máel Sechnaill resumed his high king-ship as if nothing had happened. The Vikings resumed their trading and selling themselves out as mercenaries to the highest bidder. But one thing had changed. It was now clear to every petty king that it was possible, if they were ambitious enough, for them to aspire to the high-kingship. The result was two centuries of increasingly large-scale war. And for hundreds of years afterwards, any Irish family with pretensions of nobility tried to trace descent an ancestor who had fought at Clontarf.

4. Normandy

We now need to make a detour to Wales and Normandy, two places where the next wave of migrants to Ireland will come from.

In the year 911, the Viking chieftain Rollo, a veteran of many successful raids on France, was defeated by the Frankish King Charles the Simple. Rather than paying him to go away, Charles came up with a novel plan – he would let Rollo keep the coastal lands he had already occupied, give him his daughter to marry and appoint him a duke, in return for Rollo

swearing feudal allegiance to the King of France, and defending the coast against other Viking raiders. So Rollo became Duke Robert I of Normandy.

Rollo and his descendants kept their word for a bit, but before long were using their new base in “the land of the northmen” (Normandy) as a base for raids into neighbouring regions of France. As time went on, due to continued Viking immigration and marriage with the French, they began to form a distinct race, part French and part Viking. A thousand years later, their descendants would claim that this race combined Viking vigour with French sophistication. It is certainly true that the Normans never saw a neighbouring country without deciding “I’ll have that”.

Most famously, in 1066, Rollo’s great-great-great grandson William “the Conqueror” led a large force of Normans across the channel where they defeated King Harold of England and took possession of the country.

William divided England up between his various supporters, as a reward for their help in the conquest. Some were content with their new lands, but many started looking around for yet more lands to conquer.

5. Wales and the Welsh Marches

Perhaps the most warlike and independent of all the Norman lords were the Marcher Barons – those with lands along the Welsh borders. For hundreds of years these lords would alternately fight and ally themselves both with the Welsh kingdoms to their west, and the Norman kings of England to their east.



Medieval Welsh Kingdoms

Their enemies, and sometime allies, were the Welsh kingdoms. The ancient Welsh were in many ways very similar to the gaels of Ireland – ancient people given to fighting, speaking a Celtic language. The strongest kingdom in Wales was Gwynedd, in the north-west of Wales (centred on Snowdonia and the Isle of Anglesea). The kings of Gwynedd traced their ancestry back to Roman times or even further (Geoffrey de Monmouth, in his self-admittedly partially fictional “History of the Kings of Britain” traced them back to the Trojan Aeneas, himself a son of the goddess Aphrodite).

In 1039 AD, the king of Gwynedd was killed by one of his own men, and the kingdom usurped. His son Cynan ap Iago fled to Dublin, where he took refuge in the court of Olaf of Dublin, son of Sitric Silkbeard and Slaine. He married Olaf’s daughter Ragnaillt, who bore him a son, Gruffydd ap Cynan. His father died while Gruffydd was still young, but his mother Ragnaillt told her son that he was really lawful king of Gwynedd. He was to spend most of his life trying to reclaim his kingdom. Three times he took back the throne of Gwynedd, and three times he was deposed again, sometimes by Welsh rivals and

sometimes by Normans, who had designs on the kingdom themselves. Each time he fled back to Dublin, raised new troops and tried again. He spent several years as a captive of the Normans in Chester, before being rescued by a former supporter who, seizing his chance while the captors were at dinner, picked Gryffydd up, fetters and all, and carried him out of the city. Finally, with the aid of a fleet under the command of King Magnus III “Barefoot” of Norway, he was able to re-take his kingdom from the Normans. His descendants would become kings of both Wales and Scotland, and will come back into the history of Ireland much later.

His distant cousin Rhys ap Tewdwr, king of the southern kingdom of Deuheubarth, had a similarly turbulent life – twice having to take refuge from rebellions. In the end, however, he managed to cut a deal with the Norman King Henry I of England which kept Deuheubarth safe and independent during his lifetime. But after his death in 1093, the Normans over-ran most of Deuheubarth.



Gruffydd ap Cynan escapes from Chester, Illustration by T. Prytherch in 1900

Rhys’ daughter Princess Nest of Deuheubarth was a legendary beauty, which was probably a curse. After her father’s death, King Henry I took her into his protection, and he protected her so well that she bore Henry at least two children, out of wedlock. Henry then married her off to one of his followers, Gerald de Windsor, whom he appointed as constable of Pembroke Castle, putting him in charge of the pacification of newly conquered Deuheubarth. They had five children, one of whom, Maurice Fitzgerald, we will come back to.

During Christmas 1109, Nest and Gerald were visited at their home (most likely Cilgerran Castle) by Nest’s cousin, Owain ap Cadwgan, prince of the still independent kingdom of Powys. Owain was so taken by Nest’s beauty that he and fifteen companions attacked the castle, seized Nest and carried her and her children off. Gerald escaped only by jumping down a garderobe (toilet chute).

Nest bore Owain two sons, but Gerald applied so much pressure that Owain then handed her and her children back, and then fled the country to avoid retribution. This left Owain’s father to bear the brunt of Gerald’s anger – he lost his lands. When Owain came back to Wales, Gerald ambushed and killed him in combat, as retribution for kidnapping his wife and children. What Nest thought of all this is not recorded.



Cilgerran Castle, likely site from which Nest and her children were abducted.

After Gerald's death, Nest became the lover of Stephen, constable of Cardigan, and had yet another child, Robert Fitz-Stephen, by him. Robert, together with his half-brother Maurice, we will come back to.

6. Dermot McMurrough and the Norman Invasion

Back in Ireland, a hundred years have passed since the time of Brian Boru and Gormflaith. A hundred years of endless fighting between the different kingdoms of Ireland. In Leinster, the Uí Cheinnselaig clan have replaced their bitter rivals the Uí Dúnlainge on the throne, though the King, Dermot MacMurrough (Diarmaid Mac Murchadha), is descended from both lines, as his great-grandmother was the grand-daughter of Brian Boru and Gormflaith.

He had a turbulent up-bringing. His father was killed in battle with the Dublin Vikings, and was buried in Dublin along with the body of a dog (considered a vile insult). Dermot unexpectedly came to the throne after the death of his elder brother.

Much of his life was shaped by an epic rivalry with Tiernan O'Rourke (Tigernan Ua Ruairc), king of Briefne. Tiernan started the rivalry by invading and laying waste to Leinster, killing the cattle in the hope of starving the people out. Tiernan was known for his brutality – and indeed had a track record of looting monasteries. But with the help of other Leinster clans, Dermot was able to throw the invader out and keep the throne. Dermot is even said to have abducted Tiernan's wife Dearbhforgaill.

Dermot was apparently a popular king with his soldiers, most at home on the battle-field,

and noted for his voice hoarse with shouting over the din of battle.

For 20 years there was an uneasy peace between Dermot and Tiernan, but in 1166, the High King (Dermot's ally) was deposed, and Tiernan put together a huge coalition and attacked Leinster again in overwhelming force. They over-ran the kingdom with ease, and Dermot and his wife only just managed to flee in time.

It's what happened next that put Dermot's name firmly in the history books. With his wife he took refuge with friends in Bristol, but then, in the time-honoured fashion of exiled Celtic kings, Dermot set about trying to recruit allies to help him reclaim his kingdom.

First he traveled to Aquitaine in France, where he met King Henry II of England and his famous wife Eleanor of Aquitaine at their splendid and cultured court. Dermot obtained permission from the King to recruit some of his subjects to help reclaim the throne of Leinster.

Back in Wales, Dermot set about recruiting allies. He looked for help among the Marcher Barons – probably because of their close links with Ireland, and their reputation as fierce warriors. He first recruited two sons of Nesta, Maurice Fitzgerald and Robert Fitzstephen. Robert was, at this time, imprisoned in the dungeons of Rhys ap Gryffydd (Princess Nesta's nephew, who was busily liberating Deuheubarth from the Normans), but Dermot persuaded Rhys to release him.

Maurice and Robert then went about recruiting an army of Norman and Welsh mercenaries. They struck gold when they managed to recruit Richard de Clare, the 2nd Earl of Pembroke, commonly known by the nickname of "Strongbow", because of his frequent use of Welsh archers in his various battles.



Strongbow had been, in his youth, one of the richest and most powerful Norman Marcher Barons. His descent was illustrious – part Viking, part French, his ancestors included Ragnar Lodbrok and his son Björn Ironside. And on the French side, Charlemagne. But he had fallen on hard times – he’d picked the wrong side in the English civil war that had brought Henry II to the throne, and been stripped of his title by Henry. Dermot promised him his daughter Aoife (Eva) in marriage in return for his assistance in regaining the throne of Leinster.

1169 was pivotal year in Irish history, as the first small party of Normans arrived at a small promontory near Wexford, set up an advance camp and built a rampart across the promontory to protect it. The English were to stay for the next eight hundred years... The 600 invaders, a mix of knights and Welsh archers, together with 500 Irishmen loyal to Dermot, stormed the city of Wexford, which was then given to Maurice Fitzgerald and Robert Fitzstephen as reward for their help. This success encouraged more Leinstermen to return to Dermot’s side, and before long he

had retaken most of his kingdom, and signed a treaty with the high king O'Connor.

If Dermot had stopped there, he might have kept control over his Norman hirelings. But this success made Dermot greedy, and in 1170 he summoned Strongbow, who arrived with 1000 men, and broke the treaty with the high king by attacking and storming the Viking city of Waterford. The following day, Dermot kept his promise and married his daughter to Strongbow amongst the ruins of Waterford.

Dermot had his kingdom back and more. But he didn't live to enjoy it; he died a year later, leaving Strongbow as King Richard of Leinster - the first non-native king of an Irish kingdom. The people immediately rose in revolt, but this was rapidly suppressed. The high king Rory O'Connor gathered an immense army and attacked Strongbow at Dublin, but Strongbow sallied forth and despite being greatly outnumbered, routed the Irish, by dint of his superior tactics and equipment, and O'Connor's bad generalship. O'Connor retreated humiliated to Connacht.



Norman Knight

The Normans were now out of control. Seeing how weak the Irish were, the various Norman lords were not content with Leinster - they wanted more! Before long, groups of Normans were attacking all the neighbours of Leinster, raiding and annexing territories. They even launched a raid deep into Tiernan's home of Briefne. Their superior military technology (knights and archers) seemed unstoppable to the Irish. Things were looking bad for the Gaels.



The marriage of Aoife and Strongbow by Daniel Maclise. A 19th century Irish painting symbolising the unwilling marriage of Ireland to England.

The Gaels weren't, however, the only ones worried by the rapid advance of the Normans. King Henry II (fresh from ordering the murder of Thomas Becket) was also highly alarmed by the prospect of Strongbow, an old enemy of his, setting up a rival kingdom in Ireland. He was apparently receiving floods of messages from the Gaelic lords, begging him to rein in his subjects. He decided he had to do something, and so in 1171 he set sail with a large army.

Strongbow learned that the King was coming, and realised that he had no hope of fighting him. He therefore sped off and intercepted the King en route, begging forgiveness and offering to hold the kingdom of Leinster as a fief of Henry. This must have worked.

Henry then continued on to Ireland, and rapidly sorted things out, allocating land to the various Norman lords, and accepting the allegiance of the various Gaelic kings, who felt that by accepting the King's protection he would stop the Norman raids. With amazing speed, Ireland had become, at least nominally, a vassal of the Kings of England.

Strongbow was probably expecting to become an Irish equivalent of William the Conqueror, and start a line of kings, but it was not to be. Immediately after fighting off Rory O'Connor, King Henry forced Strongbow to return to England with most of his men, and stripped him of his newly conquered lands - handing them out instead to the king's cronies. Strongbow was able to regain the king's trust by helping him fight off a rebellion by his sons, and a couple of years later was back in Ireland, fighting off an almost constant series of rebellions. Six years after his first landing, he was finally beginning to become secure in his holdings, when he died of a foot infection, leaving behind his wife Aoife and two infant children. His son and heir Gilbert died before reaching adulthood, so all his vast lands in England and Ireland became the dowry of his daughter, Isabel de Clare.

Isabel was described by her contemporaries as pleasant, gentle and extremely attractive. Aged 13, she was a ward of King Henry II, and one of the wealthiest women in Europe. She might have expected Henry to marry her off to some great lord, but instead, he picked a truly extraordinary husband for her, William Marshal.

William was not a great magnate - he had been born the second son of a very minor knight. He made a name for himself as a sportsman - a professional joust. At this time, jousting was a much rougher sport than it became later, with teams of knights, often sponsored by major lords, fighting huge pitched battles. If you were good at it, you could take hostages

of those you defeated and make a lot of money by ransoming them. William Marshal was the greatest joust of his time, claiming on his death-bed to have defeated over 500 adversaries. He was certainly the only man ever to beat Richard the Lionheart in a fight. Richard bore William no grudge, and on taking the throne, fulfilled his father Henry's promise and gave William the hand of Isabel de Clare in marriage, together with all her vast possessions in Ireland and England and the Earldom of Pembroke.



William Marshal unhorses Baldwin de Guisnes in a Joust.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the age difference (he was 43, she was 17) the marriage appears to have been happy; they had ten children, and he sired no known illegitimate children (highly unusual for such a lord at this time). He went on to loyally serve a total of four kings.

Curiously, while Isabel and William had five sons, none of them had male heirs. There is a story that he had been cursed by the Bishop of Ferns in Ireland (from whom he had taken two manors), and the curse was that his sons would have no male heirs and his estates would be scattered (between the husbands of his daughters), as indeed happened.

7. The Lords of Trim Castle

Despite Henry II's interference, the Norman lords continued to invade new territories in

Ireland in search of land. One of the most successful was Hugh de Lacy, another Marcher lord, a close ally of the King, who was given Strongbow's northern lands (part of the Irish kingdom of Meath) by the King.

This put him up against Tiernan O'Rourke, Dermot's old enemy. Soon after arriving in Ireland (1172), Hugh called a parley at the Hill of Ward. Details of what was said are sketchy, but it is clear that they came to blows, Hugh himself killed the translator, and then Kiernan was killed while trying to escape. His body was strung up and his head sent to the King.

Like all the Norman lords who had captured new and hostile territory, his first step was to build castles. Hugh and his son Walter built one of the largest to defend their newly stolen lands - Trim Castle.



Trim Castle

Like most of the Norman castles, a town sprang up around it, with imported English farmers and imported English farming techniques. The Irish attacked at least once during the construction, but were beaten off, and before long the castle became virtually impregnable. Hugh himself was killed in an ambush a few years later while overseeing the construction of another castle.

His son Walter finished construction of the castle, and lived there with his wife, Margaret de Braose, who became known as the "Lady of Trim". Margaret's father was William de

Braose, a powerful Marcher baron, and her mother was the extraordinary Maud de St Valery. Born in France, Maud married William at the age of around 11 and moved to his lands on the Welsh borders. Both of them were formidable. In 1175, William committed the "Abergavenny Massacre". He and Maud invited several Welsh lords to a Christmas feast (this being the traditional time for the settling of differences), and then had them murdered. Not surprisingly, this led to them being deeply unpopular amongst the Welsh. William put Maud in charge of Hay Castle - she came to be known as "The Lady of Hay". According to Welsh folk-lore, she built the castle at Hay single-handedly in one night, carrying the stones in her apron. In 1198, she led the defence of Painscastle against a huge Welsh army, donning armour in battle, and successfully defending it for three weeks until the arrival of English reinforcements.



One of the Norman Lords, from a contemporary manuscript.

In 1208, William and Maud got their daughter and Irish son-in-law into trouble with King John. Apparently William owed King John some money, and Maud publicly told the king's messengers that King John was a murderer who had done away with his own brother. Maud, upon realising her grave error, tried to make amends by sending the queen (Isabella) a herd of four hundred cattle. The King would not be mollified and quickly led a force to the Welsh border and seized all of the castles that belonged to William de Braose. Maud and her eldest son William fled to Trim castle, where Walter de Lacy and his wife Margaret gave them refuge. But King John sent soldiers to arrest them - they fled, but were apprehended trying to escape on a boat to Scotland. King John had Maud and her son walled up alive in the dungeon of Corfe Castle, where they starved to death. Walter de Lacy was stripped of all his lands for giving them shelter, though a few years later he managed to regain the king's favour and get his lands back. This behaviour of King John so appalled the barons that a few years later they insisted that a clause was inserted into the Magna Carta prohibiting such arbitrary justice.

Walter and Margaret's great-great-granddaughter Joan de Geneville married yet another Marcher Lord, Roger de Mortimer. On the death of her grandfather, they inherited Trim Castle and all its lands. But before long, they had to fight for it. King Edward II of England was a weak king who spent his time lavishing affection on a series of gay lovers, and not defending his Kingdom, and had managed to lose his lands in Scotland to Robert the Bruce. Robert (a descendant of Sitric Silkbeard, Gormflaith and Gruffydd ap Cynan), sent his brother Edward over to Ireland to stir up trouble for the English.

Unlike the Norman conquest of England, the Norman conquest of Ireland had never been completed. The Gaelic kings retained control of at least half of Ireland. Most were, at least

nominally, vassals of the Norman lords or the far-away Kings of England, but in practice many were highly independent. The Norman lords were often more interested in fighting amongst themselves than in fighting their Gaelic neighbours, and the Kings of England were more interested in fighting for the rich territories in France than for the much poorer land in Ireland.

When Edward the Bruce arrived, the Gaelic Kings thought that their chance had come to rid Ireland once-and-for-all of the hated Normans. And at first they were very successful. But Roger de Mortimer was appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and gathering a huge army was able to defeat Edward and drive him out of the Norman areas.

Meanwhile, back in England, King Edward was allowing his latest favourite/lover, Hugh le Despencer, to appropriate all sorts of lands and honours from the nobles. This caused a rebellion, which Roger de Mortimer joined. The King had Roger arrested and flung into the Tower of London in 1322, but Roger drugged the constable and escaped to France, pursued by a warrant for his death.

The following year, King Edward's disgruntled wife Isabella arrived in Paris (her father's court) on a diplomatic mission, and refused to return to her husband. Roger and Isabella soon became lovers - an affair so flagrant that they had to take refuge in the Flanders. In September 1326, Roger and Isabella successfully invaded England, capturing and murdering Edward II and putting Isabella's infant son Edward III on the throne.

Roger became de-facto King of England for three years. Isabella became known as the "She-Wolf of France" for her ferocity in dealing with Hugh le Despencer and the cronies of her ex-husband. Roger used this

time to purloin a number of valuable lordships, and so alienated many of his former allies. But her son Edward III was also nursing a grudge against the murderer of his father, and just before his 18th birthday had Isabella and Roger arrested. Roger was sent to the tower once again, and this time was hung, despite Isabella's pleas.



Queen Isabella returns to England

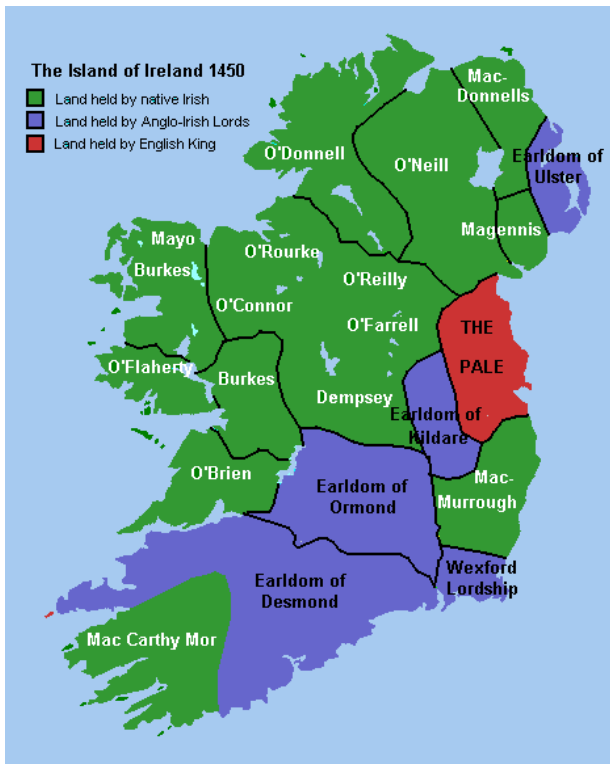
Hundreds of years later, the Brothers Grimm were collecting ancient folk tales, and amongst them was a ghost story set in the Castle of Trim. In the story, three sisters lived there, and one night the youngest dreamt that it was God's will that one of the sisters would be struck by lightning. She told her sisters about this, and sure enough, by mid-day a huge black thunder-storm loomed over the castle. The oldest sister, believing that it was God's will that she be struck, sat outside for a day and a night on the stool, but was not struck. The second sister did the same and was also unharmed. But when the youngest sister did this, she was struck and killed within minutes.

Years later, the castle had been abandoned, and a poor shepherd was grazing his sheep in the ruins.

He saw in the bright sunshine a snow-white woman standing at the castle door. She had spread out a white cloth and in it lay clumps, which sparkled in the sunlight. The shepherd was amazed to find a maiden in such a lonely place. He walked toward her and said "Oh, what beautiful things are lying there!" He took a few in his hand, gazed at them and put them back on the cloth. She looked at him kindly but with sadness in her smile and said nothing. The shepherd became frightened and withdrew without looking back, driving his herd away with him. But a few of the clumps had fallen into his shoes when he stood there. On the way home, they pressed him so that he sat down, took off his shoes and wanted to shake them out. Five or six gold pieces fell into his hand. The shepherd hurried back to Boyne Castle, but the woman in white had vanished with all of the clumps. But with these gold pieces he was able to clear all of his debts and set up his household again.

(Grim's Saga 10, as translated by the Fairytale channel).

8. The Gaelic Resurgence



Ireland in 1450

By the 15th century, three great families had come to dominate the Norman part of Ireland. Two of them, the Earls of Desmond and of Kildare were descended from different sons of Maurice Fitzgerald. The Butler family of Ormond were descended from Theobald Walter, hereditary Butler of England, who was given land near Limerick in 1185 by Prince John, and was immediately involved in a series of wars, negotiations and treacherous deeds with Rory O'Connor.

Many of these Norman lords were beginning to "go native", and adopt the language and customs of the Irish amongst whom they lived. The most famous of these was Maurice FitzGerald, the 2nd Earl of Desmond, Lord Chief Justice of Ireland. At one point, he spent time in the captivity of Brian O'Brien of Thomond. While in prison, he wrote a series of poems in the Gaelic language, most famously "Maigr adeir olc ris na mnáibh" ("Speak not ill of womenkind").

*Speak not ill of womenkind
'Tis no wisdom if you do,
You that fault with women find
I would not be praised of you.*

*Sweetly speaking, witty clear
Tribe most lovely to my mind,
Blame of women I hate to hear
Speak not ill of womenkind.*

*Bloody treason, murderous act
Not by women were designed.
Bells o'erthrown nor churches sacked
Speak not ill of womenkind.*

*Bishop, King upon his throne,
Primate skilled to loose and bind
Sprung of women every one
Speak not ill of womenkind.*

*For a brave young fellow
Hearts of women oft have pinned,
Who would dare their love to wrong?
Speak not ill of womenkind.*

*Paunchy greybeards never more
Hope to please a woman's mind,
Poor young Chieftains they adore
Speak not ill of womenkind.*

The King of England directly ruled only a small area around Dublin, and a few other small seaports such as Limerick. The area around Dublin was known as the "Pale", and its inhabitants thought of themselves as a tiny civilised minority surrounded by barbarians, those that lived "beyond the Pale". They looked on with alarm as the great families, nominally Norman/English, became steadily more like the Gaelic lords.



16th Century illustration contrasting a civilised lady from the Pale with a wild savage from the Gaelic West.

The Earls of Ormonde, Desmond and Kildare alternated between fighting their Gaelic neighbours and marrying their daughters. This was actually in defiance of the King - the Statutes of Kilkenny had been passed in 1367, at the urging of the inhabitants of the Pale, to limit fraternisation between the Normans and the Gaels. The preamble to the act noted that:

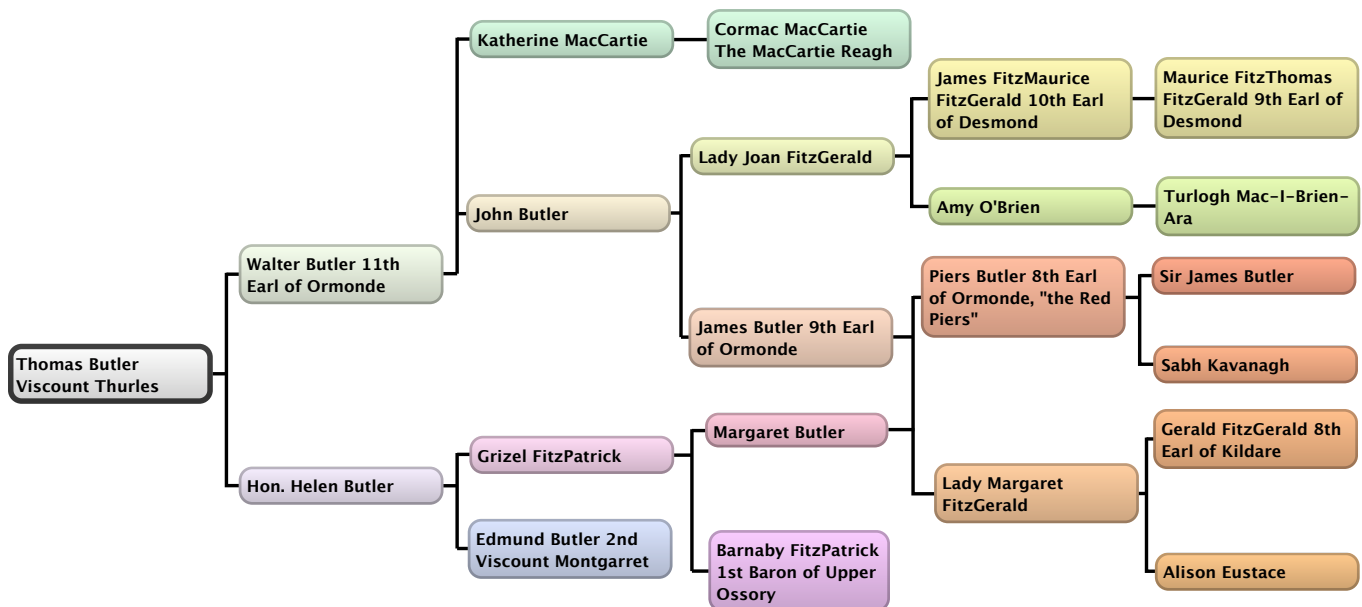
“now many English of the said land, forsaking the English language, manners, mode of riding, laws and usages, live and govern themselves according to the manners, fashion, and language of the Irish enemies; and also have made divers marriages and alliances between themselves and the Irish enemies aforesaid; whereby the said land, and the liege people thereof, the English language, the allegiance due to our lord the king, and the English laws there, are put in subjection and decayed”

The statutes forbade the intermarriage between the native Irish and the native English, the English fostering of Irish children, the English adoption of Irish children and use of Irish names and dress. Those English colonists who did not know how to speak English were required to learn the language (on pain of losing their land and belongings), along with many other English customs. The Irish pastimes of “horling” and “coiting” were to be dropped and pursuits such as archery and lancing to be taken up, so that the English colonists would be more able to defend against Irish aggression, using English military tactics.

But the three great families happily ignored these statutes. Indeed, they had been ignoring everything the King in far-away England told them to do for centuries, and busily running their own affairs, and fighting constant wars between themselves and against the Gaels. An implicit quid-pro-quo had developed: the Kings left them to themselves, in return for keeping some semblance of peace.

Gerald FitzGerald, the Great Earl, was Lord Deputy of Ireland from 1477 to 1494, but blatantly disobeyed the King of England and at one point helped lead a rebellion against him. Despite this, he was too powerful to curb, and remained in control of an effectively independent Ireland until his rivals took power in Ireland and had him clapped in irons and sent to London as a traitor. At his trial before the new King Henry VII in 1496,

A whole crowd of enemies came forward to accuse him. He was charged with burning the church of Cashel, to which he replied, that it was true enough, but that he would not have done so only he thought the archbishop was in it. The archbishop himself was present listening; and this reply was so unexpectedly plain and



blunt that the king burst out laughing.

The king advised him to have the aid of counsel, saying that he might have anyone he pleased; to which the earl answered that he would have the best counsel in England, namely, the king himself; at which his majesty laughed as heartily as before. At last when one of his accusers exclaimed with great vehemence: "All Ireland cannot rule this man!" the king ended the matter by replying: "Then if all Ireland cannot rule him, he shall rule all Ireland!"

Thus the great earl triumphed; and the king restored him, and made him lord lieutenant of Ireland.

From A Concise History of Ireland by P. W. Joyce.

A legend says that Gerald was skilled in the black arts, and could shapeshift. However, he would never let his wife see him take on other forms, much to her chagrin. After much pleading, he yielded to her, and turned himself into a goldfinch before her very eyes. A sparrowhawk flew into the room, seized the "goldfinch", and he was never seen again.

According to the legend, the Great Earl and his soldiers now slumber in a cavern beneath the Curragh of Kildare, ready to awaken to defend Ireland in her hour of need. The Earl rises once every seven years on May Day, and rides around the Curragh on his steed. When his horse's shoes are worn down to the thickness of a cat's ear, he will lead his army against the English, drive them out, and reign as king of Ireland for forty years.

These were the glory days for the great Norman/Irish lords, but they were difficult times for the more minor old English families. The Stackpole family of Limerick (the old Viking port on the west coast) were descended from Sir Richard de Stakepole, the minor knight who had come over with Strongbow. They were a family of merchants, trying to import and export goods. This was difficult work - traders were caught up in the constant fights between rival lords (both Gaelic and Norman) and would have to pay tribute to all the petty chiefs through whose lands they passed. Perhaps they had to deal with the ancient O'Casey family, chiefs of Rathconan, in the barony of Pubblebrien, near Limerick.

9. The Elizabethan Adventurers



The Tudor re-conquest of Ireland

For two hundred years, the Earls of Ormonde, Desmond and Kildare had defied the Kings of England and gotten away with it. So it must have seemed quite normal for Gerald Fitzgerald's grandson Thomas, in 1534, to defy the young King Henry VIII of England and call him a heretic. But Henry VIII was not like his predecessors. A descendant of Rhys ap Tewdwr (hence the name of his dynasty, Tudor), Henry did not take challenges to his rule lightly. An army was despatched to Ireland, Thomas and all his relatives captured and killed. The Tudor re-conquest of Ireland had begun. Over the next 70 years, King Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth I would send ever greater armies to Ireland to reassert their direct effective control. The English fought the Gaelic lords, the Earls of Ormonde, Desmond and Kildare (collectively known as the Old English) changed sides with regularity, and when nothing else was going on, fought amongst themselves. The war was bloody, and by the end, whole swathes of Ireland had been largely depopulated.

This was an age of adventurers. Some (like Walter Raleigh and Francis Drake) explored the new world. And some took advantage of the turmoil in Ireland to make new lives for themselves there.

John Dowdell was the youngest son of a Devon farmer. He signed up in Queen Elizabeth's army, and fought for 30 years in various Irish campaigns. He led Elizabeth's forces in the Battle of Eniskillen, was knighted, and then commanded a fort in the town of Dungannon in County Tyrone. On retiring, he settled his family in the newly built castle of Kilsinny near Limerick.

William Vesey came from an ancient family of squires in Northumberland, but while still young, he killed a man in a duel and had to flee across the border to Scotland. He married a girl from Cesford, and together they crossed the Irish sea and made a new life for themselves in the north of Ireland, an area particularly devastated by the constant fighting.



Richard Boyle

Richard Boyle grew up in Canterbury, where he was at school with the playwright Christopher Marlowe. In 1588 he abandoned his job as a clerk in London to "to gain learning, knowledge, and experience abroad in the world". He arrived in Dublin, possessed only of 27 pounds, a gold bracelet, a diamond ring given to him by his mother, a rapier and a dagger. Over the next thirty years, by an inspired combination of embezzlement, fraud, land speculation, legal action and the purchase of distressed estates, he became the first

colonial millionaire, building a vast estate and eventually purchasing the title of the Earl of Cork.



Claud Hamilton

Claud Hamilton was a definite trouble-maker. Son of the Earl of Arran and a staunch catholic, he helped Mary Queen of Scots escape from Lochleven castle, fought for her at the Battle of Langside, arranged the assassinations of two rivals, was twice imprisoned and once exiled to England.



James Hamilton

His son James became one of the foremost administrators in Scotland, and played a key

role in arranging for King James to take the throne of England after Queen Elizabeth died. For his services, he became Earl of Abercorn, and acquired vast estates in Ireland. We will come back to his son.

10. The Plantation of Ireland

By the start of the 17th century, the conquest of Ireland was complete - it was firmly under the control of King James. In 1607 many of the remaining Gaelic lords fled Ireland, never to return - an event known as "the Flight of the Earls".



The Flight of the Earls

Two Scottish adventures had managed to get title to a large area of land near Belfast from an imprisoned Gaelic lord, and in 1606 they established a highly successful colony (or "plantation") here, importing over 10,000 lowland Scots.

The success of this colony focussed everyone's attention - it was clearly possible to set up a profitable and self sufficient colony in a savage-infested wilderness (as Ireland was seen). Inspired by this example, the English launched two major colonisation attempts over the next four year. One was the celebrated Jamestown colony (the Virginia plantation) - the first English colony in North America. The other was the plantation of

Ireland. In both cases, English settlers established towns and farms in what they regarded as a wilderness inhabited by barbarians (American Indians on one hand, the Irish on the other hand). One led to the modern USA, the other to the current troubles in Northern Ireland.

The plantation of Ireland was to be a joint English/Scottish enterprise. Wealthy entrepreneurs from England or Scotland (known as "undertakers") were granted 12 square kilometres each, on the condition that they establish colonies of English-speaking Protestants on this land. They were required to exclude the Irish, and to be prepared to fight to defend their land.



Richard Brownlow

John Brownlow and his son Sir William offered themselves as undertakers, and were granted a large area of land on the South of Loch Neagh, on which they and their successors would found the town of Lurgan. William's father Richard had made the family fortune by getting the lucrative job of Chief Prothonotary of the Court of Common Pleas under Queen Elizabeth. He bought an estate, and soon settled in to the life of a landed gentleman. His younger son William would not inherit this land, but used some of the family fortune to become an "undertaker". He

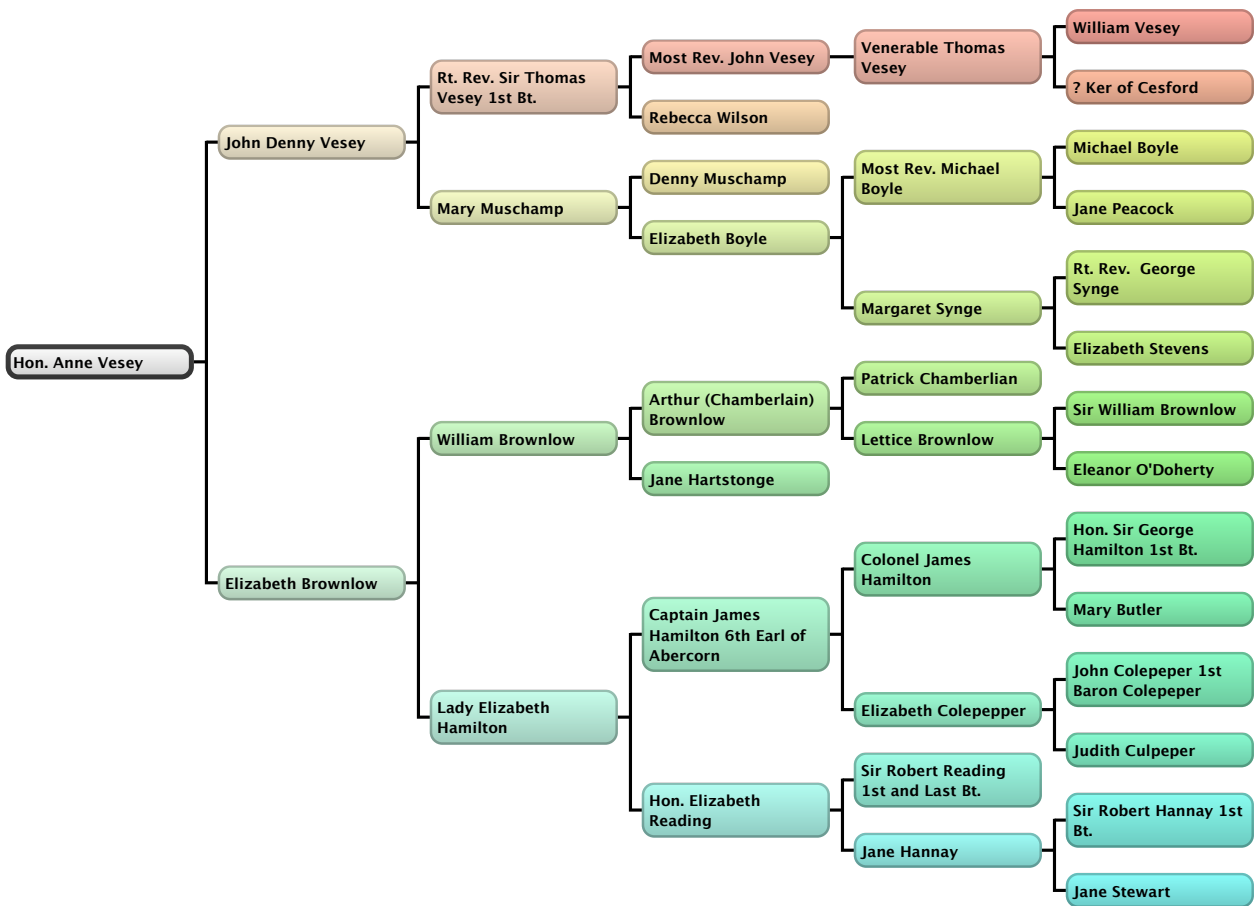
and John moved in in 1610, bringing with them six carpenters, one mason, one tailor and six workmen. Ten years later, a report notes that:

"He hath made a very fair town, consisting of 42 houses, all of which are inhabited with English families, and the streets all paved clean through; also two water mills, and a third mill, all for corn; and he hath store for arms in his house ... planted and estated on the land ... 57 British families ... 52 lessees and 5 freeholders ... and all these have taken the Oath of Supremacy and are able to make 100 men with arms ... and not one Irish family upon all the land."

On the 15th December, 1622, William Brownlow was knighted by the Lord Deputy of Ireland, Sir Henry Cary and the following year was High Sheriff of the county. By 1636, the Lurgan estate was worth £750 a year in rents.

The prohibition on Irish families did not last - William himself married the daughter of the Gaelic chief of Innishowen (County Donegal), Eleanor O'Doherty, and possibly influenced by her (or by the rents they could pay) he started allowing the Irish onto his lands in more than the permitted numbers.

The Old English families were also being dispossessed of their lands. Walter Butler, the 11th Earl of Ormonde, found himself in a protracted legal battle with one of King James' Scottish favourites, who'd acquired a tenuous legal claim to the Ormonde lands by marrying a relation. With King James in charge of the legal system this was a battle he couldn't win, and he spent the years 1617-1625 locked up in the Fleet Prison in London, while most of his lands were taken.



His son, Thomas Butler, Viscount Thurles was summoned to England in 1619 to answer charges of treason, but the ship conveying him was wrecked and he was drowned on 15th December 1619.

In addition to the plantations, the lands owned by the Catholic church were stripped from them and given to the new protestant Anglican church of Ireland, and clerics from England, Scotland and the Pale were expected to go out and convert the Irish to this new faith.

These clerics did not have an easy job. On one hand they were expected to convert the catholic Irish, but on the other hand they had to resist the presbyterian tendencies of many of the scots migrants. Dr Henry Leslie was one of the clerics who made a name for himself by staunchly defending anglican orthodoxy. Educated in Aberdeen, he went to Ireland in 1614, where he was ordained priest on 8 April 1617. In 1622 he was selected by Primate Christopher Hampton to preach at Drogheda

on Whit Sunday before the royal commissioners. The sermon was printed next year at Hampton's request, as "a treatise tending to unity"; Leslie had proposed that no one should be allowed to go beyond seas for education, and that no popish schoolmaster should be allowed at home (presumably to stop the wicked papists from corrupting young minds). But before long he was involved in bitter disputes with the Presbyterians, and on 10th August 1636 he preached at Belfast on the text, "If he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." This sermon, in defence of Anglican orders and of kneeling at the communion, was printed in the following year.

11. The Uprising of 1641

The Irish and old English were, of course, not overjoyed to have their lands taken from them,

and in 1641 they rose up against the newcomers.

In October, William Brownlow was warned that a force of around 1000 rebels, led by the Maginneses of Clanconnel, was on its way to attack Lurgan. Englishmen from the town gathered up the nearby English farmers, and they all took refuge in a small fort (Bawn) in town. They were soon surrounded. The Maginneses offered William and the other English safe passage to Lisnagarvey (Lisburn), but when the fort's gates were opened, the terms of the agreement did not come to pass and many Englishmen were killed. Some were stripped and injured. William Brownlow, his wife and family were taken prisoner and brought to Armagh and then to Dungannon, in County Tyrone.

On the other side of Ireland, John Dowdall's son (also called Sir John Dowdell) was on his way to relieve a rebel siege of Newcastle Lodge when he was ambushed and killed at Grangy Bridge. His wife, Elizabeth, gathered up some English settlers and holed up in her home at Kilsinny Castle. It withstood the siege for a long time, but she too was eventually captured.

Dr Henry Leslie was in Lisburn when the rebellion broke out. The town was soon flooded with refugees, and Henry wrote many letters begging for help to his English contacts. Both his sons joined up to fight the rebels. But help, when it came, was a presbyterian Scottish army, which was probably more hostile to him than the Irish - he lost everything and fled to England.



James Butler.

Before long, the Irish and old English rebels controlled most of Ireland. The leader of the English forces was James Butler, son of Thomas Butler. At King James' insistence, after the shipwreck of his father, James had been brought up in London under the (rather neglectful) tutelage of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and was hence a Protestant.

His sister Mary Butler, in contrast, had stayed in Ireland and was Catholic. She had married Sir George Hamilton, son of James Hamilton, who at this point was running his father's Irish properties, including the silver mines of Knockaunderrig. Due to his Catholicism, George had been unable to get government appointments, and so was probably happy to side with most of the Ormonde family on the side of the rebels and against his brother-in-law.



Sir George Hamilton.

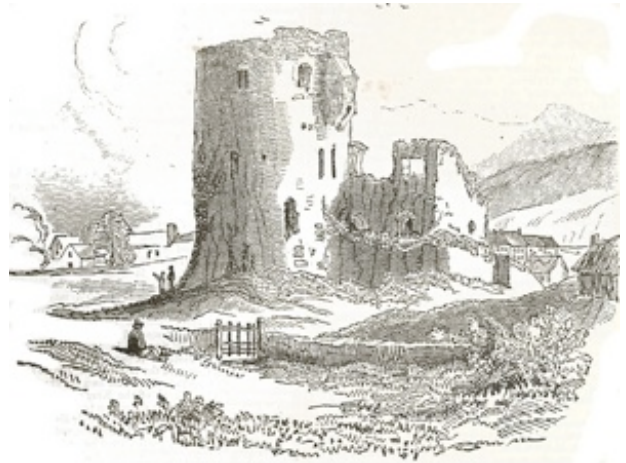
James Butler was initially pushed back to Dublin by the rebels, but in 1642 with the aid of reinforcements from England was able to expand the region he controlled (which was filled with refugees from the rebel-controlled regions). One English raid rescued the Brownlow family from captivity in Dungannon. In many of the battles he was fighting against his own cousins. But in September 1642 the English civil war broke out, and King James called most of the troops back to England, to fight off the parliamentarian army. James Butler arranged an informal truce with the Irish/Old English rebels - he couldn't do much else with so few troops. The old English and Irish set up a government of their own (the "Irish Confederacy") based at Kilkenny, and from there ruled over 80% of Ireland.

Meanwhile, back in England, the parliamentarians (roundheads) were defeating the royalists (cavaliers). The roundheads, under Cromwell, were staunchly anti-catholic, and this alarmed the Irish and old English. In 1649, after the execution of King James, in return for a promise of religious tolerance, the rebels allied themselves with James Butler,

forming a joint Irish/Royalist force to defend Ireland from Cromwell and support King Charles. Sir George Hamilton was welcomed into this new army, and James Butler found himself leading the whole force.

Cromwell's army was the ruthlessly modern and efficient Protestant New Model Army, experienced and fresh from defeating the cavaliers in England. The disunited and disorganised Irish, though fighting bravely, never stood a chance. Under their general Henry Ireton (Cromwell's son-in-law), the New Model Army systematically besieged and starved out the Irish-held towns, and conducted a scorched earth policy against rural rebels.

James Butler was deposed by his own troops, who didn't trust him (understandably, as he'd been fighting against them for the previous eight years), and fled to France and the court of King Charles.



Nenagh Castle

Dr Henry Leslie had come back to Dublin, acting as an aide to James Butler. But when Cromwell took over and began enforcing a hard-line presbyterian religion, he too fled to the continent. In June 1649 he preached at Breda on the royal martyrdom before Charles II and the Princess of Orange; in drawing an elaborate parallel between Charles I and Jesus, Leslie compared presbyterianism and independency to the two thieves between whom Christ was crucified. The sermon was

printed at the Hague and translated into Dutch, and there was an English reprint the following century.

Sir George Hamilton was put in charge of the defence of Nenagh Castle, which was besieged by Ireton as he advanced on Limerick. Initially defiant, George surrendered to Ireton when the latter threatened to breach the walls with artillery. Hamilton's Irish lands were confiscated and he too went into exile in Paris.

With Nenagh out of the way, Ireton besieged Limerick in October 1650. He had to abandon the siege due to bad weather, but in July 1651 he was back with 8,000 men, 28 siege artillery pieces and 4 mortars. The defenders, including the city recorder, Bartholomew Stackpole, refused to surrender, and so the siege began. Limerick was too well defended for a direct attack, and the defenders beat off a few probing raids, so Ireton cut it off, bombarded it and waited for starvation to reduce the city. An Irish attempt to relieve the city was defeated and by October, the civilian population was starving, and the plague had broken out. The civilian town leaders, presumably including Bartholomew, urged the defending general Hugh Dubh O'Neill to surrender. Eventually, Ireton succeeded in knocking a hole in the wall with his artillery, and Hugh had to surrender. Though ironically, Ireton himself died of the plague a month later.

Cromwell and Ireton had crushed the rebellion. James Butler and Sir George Hamilton were in exile in France. Most remaining old English and Irish landholders were stripped of their lands and transplanted to new lands on the far side of the Shannon river. Bartholomew Stackpoole was resettled in County Clare, near the town of Enagh, together with a large number of his relatives. The transplanted certificate notes:

"1653. Bartholomew Stackpoole of Limerick made a declaration that

he was aged 34 years, of indifferent tall stature, flaxen hair; John Stackpoole, aged 28 years, tall stature, flaxen hair; Thomas Stackpoole; James Stackpoole, son to the said Bathw. S., aged 10; Christian, daur. to the said Barthw., aged 8; Diphna, another dau. of the said B., aged 6 years ; Arthur, son to the said Barthw."

(John and Thomas were brothers of Bartholomew.)

While things were bleak for the Old English and Irish, for the more recent English migrants Cromwell's reconquest was welcome news. The Brownlows and Dowdalls got their lands back: remarkably soon, Lurgan was a flourishing English-style protestant town again. But they remembered the terrible days of 1641, and to this day the events of this year are a potent part of northern Irish loyalist folklore.

12. Restoration

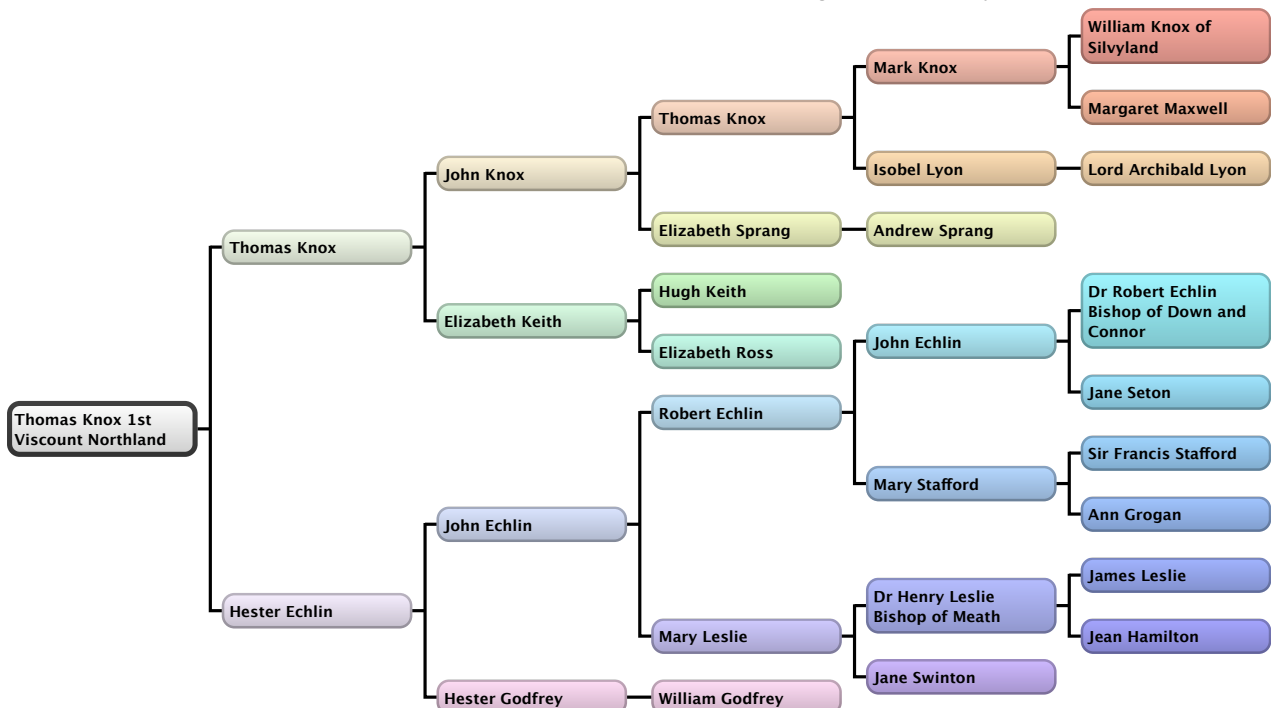
Ten years later, Cromwell was dead, and Charles II was invited back to take the throne. This "restoration" brought the exiles back. Dr Henry Leslie ended up as Bishop of Meath, and then of Down and Connor. James Butler was rewarded for his support of the exiled king by getting all his vast Irish estates back, and by a special grant of 30,000 pounds. He was appointed Lord Steward of the Household, a Privy Councillor, Lord Lieutenant of Somerset, High Steward of Westminster, Kingston and Bristol, Chancellor of Trinity College Dublin, Chancellor of the University of Oxford, and was made Baron Butler of Llanthony, Earl of Brecknock, Lord High Steward of England, and eventually he became the 1st Duke of Ormonde. Queen Elizabeth 2nd is his 8 times great grand-daughter.

Sir James Hamilton was created a baronet, and together with his wife Mary Butler (James Butler's sister) returned to a life of wealth in England and Ireland. Their son, Colonel James Hamilton, was a close friend and favourite of King Charles II. Colonel James was known for his fine manners, his dress and his gallantry. An admirer of the famous beauty the Countess of Chesterfield, his first cousin, he carried on a affair with her by turning her husband's suspicion on the Duke of York, only to discover that York was courting her as well. He was appointed Ranger of Hyde Park in 1660 and Groom of the Bedchamber on October 28, 1664. He was responsible for the partial enclosure of Hyde Park and its restocking with deer. Hamilton Place, in the vicinity of Hyde Park, is named for him. He had one of his legs carried away by a cannonball in a sea-fight with the Dutch (presumably the Battle of Schooneveld), and died in consequence thereof on June 6, 1673. He was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Around 1665, a Glasgow merchant named Thomas Knox settled in Belfast (though without severing his ties with Glasgow, of which he was elected a burgess in 1686). He

clearly did very well there, being elected a free burgess of the corporation of Belfast on 27 August 1680; and he had then served as sovereign, or mayor, of Belfast for the year ending Michaelmas 1686. In 1692 we was elected Member of Parliament for Newtownards, Co. Down. But being a wealthy merchant was not enough. To be respectable, you needed to own land. So in 1692, he bought the town of Dungannon (County Tyrone) and its surrounding estates from the Earl of Donegall, and moved there, to take up life as a member of the landed aristocracy.

In 1688, King James II was deposed in a relatively bloodless coup, known as the glorious revolution, and King William of Orange and his wife Mary took power. Many in Ireland continued to support King James, but Captain James Hamilton (the son of Colonel James Hamilton), who had been appointed by James II to the Privy Council of Ireland, deserted James and supported William of Orange. The town of Derry was a stronghold of William's supporters, and was besieged by the royalists in 1689, with Captain James taking part in the defence. After 108 days of siege, and terrible privations (including the death by disease and starvation



of as much as a quarter of the city's population) the siege was relieved by English forces. Colonel James Hamilton succeeded to his grandfather's baronetcy in 1697. Between 1692 and 1699, he represented Tyrone in the Irish House of Commons.

13. The Protestant Ascendancy

The 18th century is known in Irish history as the "Protestant Ascendancy". For the first time in centuries, Ireland was mostly at peace, and the economy boomed. And many of the descendants of the planters became very wealthy indeed. They lived the life of English gentfolk, building huge mansions surrounded by manicured estates, and moving to Dublin for the season, where they built elegant townhouses in the Georgian style.



A ball in Dublin

Despite all their wealth, they still seemed to have laboured under an inferiority complex compared to their English peers. Where possible, they tried to marry into the great English families, and they were ceaseless in their quest for titles.

Thomas Knox, for example, lodged an application for the title "Lord of Ranfurly", a extinct Scottish peerage, from which he claimed descent via a minor branch of the

family. However, when he was made an Irish Privy Councillor in 1715, objections were stated to his appointment on the ground of his mercantile origins.

His nephew, also called Thomas Knox, inherited his lands, and the son of this nephew, yet again called Thomas Knox, was successful in gaining the title "Viscount Northland". He won the position by unswerving support of the government in the Irish Parliament. The Lord Lieutenant, the 2nd Earl of Buckinghamshire, wrote to the Prime Minister, Lord North, on 8 September 1780: '

"Nothing could be more against my inclinations than yielding to solicitations of gentlemen upon the line of the peerage, but without engagements strongly to recommend several for that mark of his Majesty's favour at the close of the session, it would have been impossible for me in any sort to have surmounted the various difficulties which have lately attended the Government. ... Mr Knox is a gentleman of respectable family, with a very large property, and has, with two sons, supported the Government..."

Edmond Sexton Pery, Viscount of Newton-Pery was descended from the Irish Caseys, the old English Stackpoles and the Elizabethan soldier Dowdells. His grand-mother was English, and descended from the Cecils, and through them from Strongbow, Brian Boru and Ragnar Hairybreeks. He was perhaps the most distinguished of our ancestors during the Protestant ascendancy. Son of a clergyman, and trained in the law, he rose to become speaker of the Irish Parliament. Grattan said of Lord Pery:

"He was more or less a party to all those measures [of free trade and

Irish liberation], and indeed in every great statute and measure that took place in Ireland for the past fifty years, a man of the most legislative capacity I ever knew, and the most comprehensive reach of understanding; with a deep engraven expression of public care, accompanied by a temper which was adamant. In his train is every private virtue which can adorn human nature."

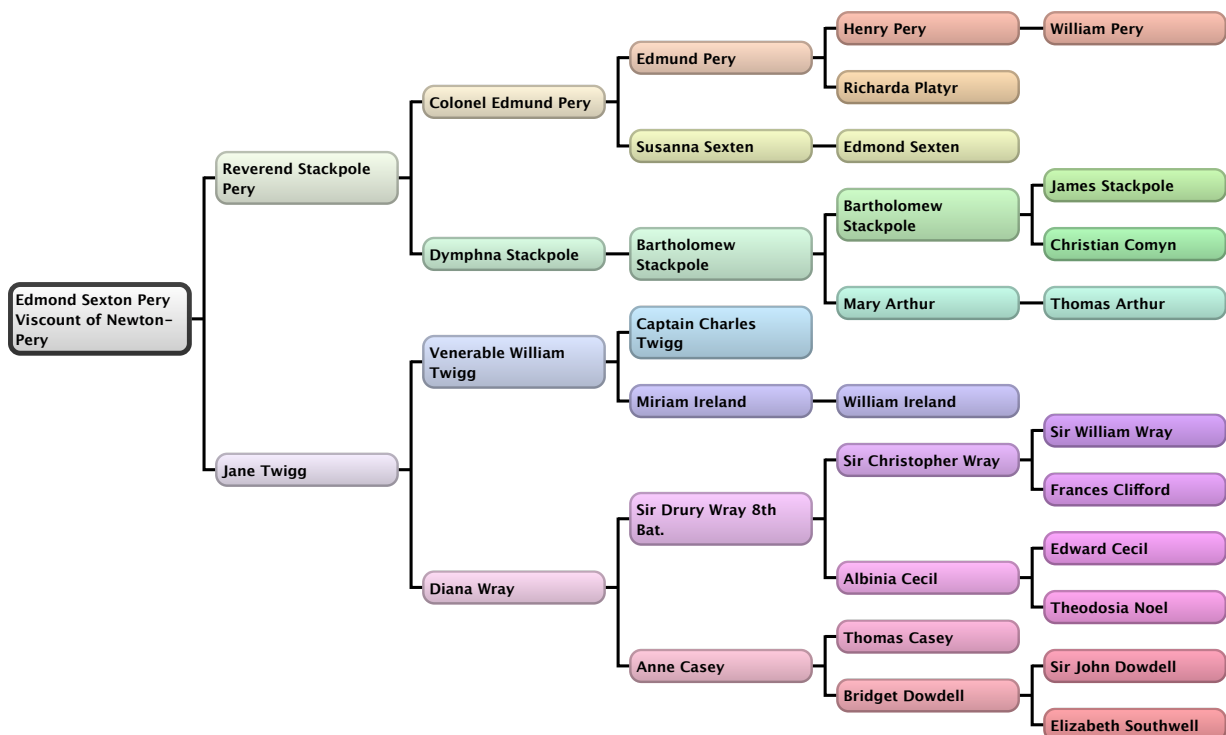


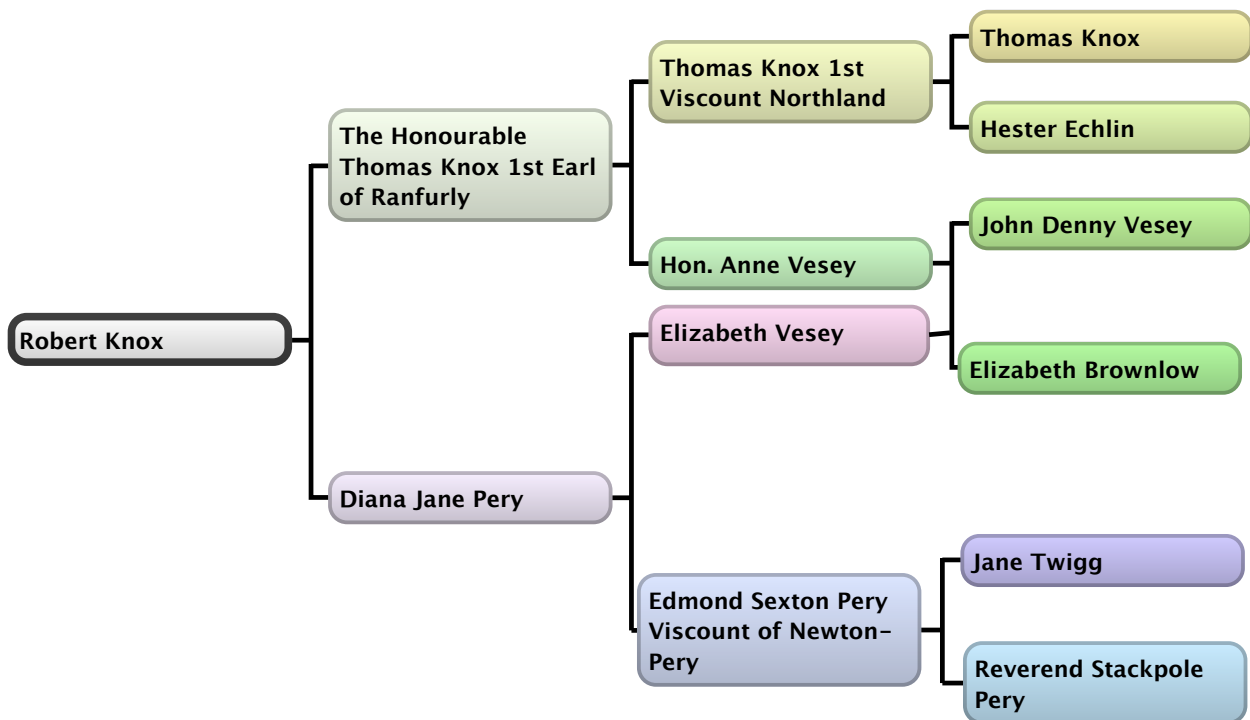
A Protestant Ascendancy family in their Dublin townhouse.

Edmond's daughter Diana married her cousin, the Honourable Thomas Knox, son of Thomas Knox, the 1st Viscount Northland. Together they built a mansion in Dungannon (since demolished). They were mostly, however, absentee landlords, living in Upper Grosvenor Street, London, for much of the time between 1802 and 1823, and then spending a good deal of time on the Continent. When Thomas died, in 1840, it was in his house in the Place Vendome, Paris.

It was quite easy for Thomas Knox to keep his seat in the house of commons, as prior to the great reform act of 1832 (which he supported), there were only 12 eligible voters in Dungannon, all of whom were nominees of the Knox family, and 11 of whom had the surname Knox! Thomas succeeded in getting himself awarded the titles Earl of Dungannon and Ranfurly.

Thomas and Diana's (or as they were now called, Lord and Lady Ranfurly) first son succeeded as 2nd Earl. Their second son, Edmond-Sexten Pery Knox (1787-1875), rose to the rank of Rear Admiral in the Royal Navy, and their fourth son, John James (1790-1856),





who was called after Lord Abercorn, was a Lieutenant Colonel in the army and was wounded at the battle of New Orleans in 1814. Their third son, John Henry (1788-1872), fought through most of the Peninsular War and lost an eye at Burgos in 1812 (receiving a pension of £70 a year in compensation). Because he lived to a ripe old age, it became a family joke that his eye cost the nation £4200.

Lena Czerny, cousin to Alfred Krupp, the "cannon king" from Essen in Germany, who was at this point already one of the world's greatest weapons manufacturers. She had been sent out to South Africa for her health. They married, and their grandson was John Patrick Cope (Oupa), my grandfather.

13. Leaving Ireland

It is from their seventh son, Robert Knox, that we are descended. He married Lady Maria Lindsay, daughter of the Scottish Earl of Crawford. I don't know much about them; they lived through the terrible Irish potato famine, and the mass emigration of the poor Irish, but they most likely were not based in Ireland, seeing it only as a source of wealth.

Their seventh son, Edward Baldwin John Knox, was an architect and an engineer. Birth order really mattered; had he been the first son of a first son, he would not have had to work for a living. But he was the seventh son of a seventh son, so jobs were needed. He came out to Cape Town at the request of Cecil Rhodes to do some architectural work. On ship he met



Edward Baldwin John Knox.

Notes

It is not clear that Ivar the Boneless is identical to the "Imar" of the Irish chronicles, though it is quite likely. It is also unclear which of the Viking raiders

corresponds to Ragnar as once again the match between Viking and Irish records is poor.

There is some dispute about whether Brian Boru and Gormflaith really had children together. Irish chronicles say they did, Viking Chronicles say they didn't. There is probably an ulterior motive in the Irish chronicles as without this link, Dermot Mcmurrough was not descended from Brian Boru and the Ui Dunlainge, which would have weakened his position. Gormflaith would certainly have been quite old, having a grown child at the time of her marriage to Brian. We are descended from both anyway via Sitric Silkbeard and Slaine.

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