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In 2007 the Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich Memorial Library and Archive (CÓFLA) marked the four hundredth anniversary of the Flight of the Earls with an exhibition and outreach programme supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The emphasis of that exhibition was to bring the material held within the library and archive relating to the flight and the personalities involved to a wider audience.

In 2009, to examine how those events played a role in laying the foundation for the subsequent Ulster plantation, this brief publication has been assembled again to reflect the many sources within CÓFLA that will assist in the study of this important aspect of our past and to demonstrate the depth and range of those resources.

The Cardinal Ó Fiaich Library and Archive would like to acknowledge and thank the Heritage Lottery Fund for its generosity throughout this project and in particular in support of this publication.

Roddy Hegarty
2010

Introduction

"Beside the wave, in Donegal,
In Antrim's glen or far Dromore,
Or where the sunny waters fell,
At Assaroe, near Erna's shore,
This could not be.
On Derry's plains - in rich Drumcliff -
Throughout Armagh the Great, renowned
In older years,
No day could pass but women's grief
Would run upon the bare-ground
Fresh floods of tears."

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Elizabeth I had demonstrated her ambition to extend the authority of English government to Ireland. She saw this not simply as a means of extending the Protestant reformation but, just as importantly, as a means of curtailing the influence of Spanish imperialism. The Anglo-Norman adventure into Ireland had never fully realised its potential and had largely failed to alter the Gaelic character of much of the island. By the end of the sixteenth century one area more than most proved a thorn in the side of Tudor policymakers—Ulster.

From their power base in Tír Eoghain the Ó Neills had dominated the affairs of Ireland’s northern province. They controlled or heavily influenced most of the northern half of the country alongside the neighbouring dynasties, the Ó Domhnaills and Mag Uidhirs. However, the influence of Elizabethan policies such as ‘Surrender and Regrant’, whereby Irish chieftains could secure the protection of the English crown in exchange for loyalty and the acceptance of English titles, was gradually eroding the formerly solid nature of this Gaelic heartland. The ‘Shiring’ of Monaghan with its attendant courts and English style seneschal began to unsettle the other Gaelic lordships and in particular the figure of Hugh Ó Neill.

Educated in the English fashion within the Pale and adept in the art of politics Ó Neill was prepared to befriend anyone capable of securing his position as the senior authority in Ulster. At times he appeared to support, and at others, threaten, English interests in Ireland. The Settlement of Monaghan in 1588 had, however, persuaded him that only military action would suffice to snuff out the flame of Elizabethan ambition.

In coalition with his old rivals, Ó Domhnaill and the other Gaelic lords of Ulster, Hugh began the war that would in the fullness of time see him die in exile with his lands in the hands of mercenaries, adventurers and erstwhile allies. Of even greater significance would be the impact that his leaving would have on Gaelic Ireland. The old order was lost and, in spite of later attempts to re-establish that hegemony, Ireland, and in particular her northern province, would be set on a course that would bring further conflict and loss over the next four centuries.

Yet Ó Neill’s war was not destined to be the military disaster that it finally became. On the contrary his tactical awareness and ruthless nature might have won for him a greater prize had he only secured the help of the Spanish at a more opportune moment. Fate, however, proved a stubborn foe and the peace that broke out between England and Tyrone’s greatest potential ally ultimately left him with a remarkable effort to secure the sovereignty of Ireland and the integrity of her ancient guardianship. His defeat at Kinsale and subsequent surrender and journey into exile marked the end of centuries of Gaelic rule.

The Nine Years War

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The Battle at the Yellow Ford

The tenth of August 1598, after four years of war, witnessed Ó Neill’s greatest success. An English led army marshalled by the governor of Newry Henry Bagnal suffered a devastating defeat just north of Armagh city. This was a catastrophe for the Elizabethan regime and a victory that Irish nationalism would draw inspiration from for centuries to come.

‘The tenth morning of August rose bright and serene upon the towers of Armagh and the silver water of Avonmore. Before day dawned, the English army left the city in three divisions, and at sunrise they were winding through the hills and woods behind the spot where now stands the little church of Grange. The sun was glancing on the corslets and spears of their glittering cavalry, their banners waved proudly, and their bugles rang clear in the morning air, when suddenly from the thickets on both sides of their path, a deadly volley of musketry swept through the foremost ranks.

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O’Neill had stationed here five hundred light-armed troops to guard the defiles; and in the shelter of the thick groves of fir-trees, they had silently waited for the enemy. Now they poured in their shot, volley after volley, and killed great numbers of the English; but the first division, led by Bagnal in person, after some hard fighting carried the pass, dislodged the marksmen from their position, and drove them backwards into the plain. The centre division under Cosby and Wingfield, and the rear-guard led by Cus and Billing, supported in flank by the cavalry under Brooke, Montacute, and Fleming, now pushed forward, speedily cleared the difficult country, and formed in the open ground in front of the Irish lines... Bagnal, at the head of his first division, and aided by a body of cavalry, charged the Irish light-armed troops up to the very entrenchments, in front of which O’Neill’s foresight had prepared some pits, covered over with wattles and grass; and many of the English cavalry, rushing impetuously forward, rolled headlong, both men and horses, into these trenches and perished. Then the first main body of O’Neill’s troops was brought into action; and with bagpipes sounding a charge, they fell upon the English, shouting their fierce battle cries, Lam-deargh! and O’Donnell aboo! O’Neill himself, at the head of a body of horse, pricked forward to seek out Bagnal amidst the throng of battle; but they never met. The Marshall, who had done his devoir that day like a good soldier, was shot through the brain by some unknown marksman... a cart of gunpowder exploded amidst the English ranks, and blew many of their men to atoms. And now the cavalry of Tyr-connell and Tyr-owen dashed into the plain, and bore down the remnant of Brooke’s and Fleming’s horse; the columns of Wingfield and Cosby reeled before their rushing charge, while in front, to the war-cry of Bataillah aboo! The swords and axes of the heavy-armed gallowglasses were raging amongst the Saxon ranks. By this time the cannon were all taken; the cries of ‘St. George!’ had failed or turned into death shrieks, and once more England’s royal standard sunk before the Red Hand of Tyr-owen.’

This account of the battle is drawn from John Mitchel’s ‘The Life of Hugh Ó Néill’, published in 1845 (CÓFLA). ‘It may please your most honourable lordships, albeit we have now joined with the rest of this council in a letter to you signifying the most woeful and grievous accident of the Marshall’s death and the defeat of the army, yet fearing greatly that the blame might be put on to us, which we have not deserved. We are writing to your lordships privily to put our case. We hope that your lordships remember how absolutely her most excellent majesty had left the managing of the military affairs in this realm to the Earl of Ormond, Lord Lieutenant general, and we limited only to the administration of the civil justice, not having to deal with so much as the distribution of the treasure sent.’

These lines are drawn from a letter from the Lords Justice of Ireland to their peers in London following the battle of the Yellow Ford. It was written on 17 August 1598, one week after the battle and was clearly an attempt to avoid any responsibility for the defeat. Elizabeth had gained a reputation for being a ruthless monarch who did not suffer fools or defeat gladly. It is small wonder then that her representatives in Ireland should make such a strident defence of their own actions and attempt to apportion the blame for the defeat elsewhere.

Defeat at Kinsale and Ó Néill’s Surrender

Following his victory at the Yellow Ford, it is quite probable that Ó Néill could have capitalised upon the disarray within the English administration in Ireland, proceeded south and taken control of Dublin and even the entire country. However, aware of rumours of an imminent coastal invasion along the north coast and confident of Spanish support he instead decided to consolidate his position within the Gaelic heartland of Ulster and await reinforcements. The untimely death of Philip II of Spain just as word of Bagnal’s defeat spread across Europe meant that the Catholic counter reformation cause and as a consequence, Ó Néill, had lost one of its greatest advocates. His son and successor hesitated, in the hope that peace negotiations with England over the wars in Spanish Flanders might succeed, leaving Hugh and his allies isolated. Eventually the Spanish did send an
The Spanish did not land in Donegal or Galway as Ó Néill would have desired but at Kinsale on the southern extremity of the kingdom, the abolishing of barbarous customs, the clearing of advance of her service and the peaceable government of the people of my country in such places as I shall be directed by her majesty; or the lord deputy in her name; and I will endeavour for myself and the terms Ó Néill received reflected the desperate state of the English administration following the war. Elizabeth had spent about £2 million trying to secure an Irish defeat and many of those who had helped bring this about were now seeking their own settlements. The pacification of the Irish lords was a key priority but one that did not satisfy many within the English administration in Ireland. They would have preferred to have seen the end of Gaelic Ulster and the rediscussion of the lands of their former foes among those who had fought the war. Chief among this school of thought was the governor of Carrickfergus, Arthur Chichester.

The Consequences of Defeat

Although Ó Néill may have received favourable surrender terms and was allowed to maintain substantial portions of his estates much of his erstwhile authority was gone. His position became increasingly difficult as those who had previously fought against him went to great lengths to crown the victory of both Ó Néill’s amanuensis and of the need to adequately punish his continuing treachery. A very good illustration of Ó Néill’s lost authority came with the following grant of the lands in and around Armagh made to Sir Toby Caulfield in June 1607. In an earlier era the Ó Néill had exercised his authority by selecting his own candidates for the position of Archbishop of Armagh. By the early seventeenth century the cathedral, and the church lands associated with it were in the hands of the new Protestant church.

Grant from the King to Sir Tobias Caufield, Knt. - ARMAGH Co.

The site & c. of the abbey of St. Peter and Paul with all the church

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buildings, gardens, orchards, and certain small parcels of land in or near the town of Armagh, known by the following names, viz. Dromocola, Fyrennargel, Tiallais, Garrockagh, Aghanyre, Tullynalty, Drumduellagh, and parcel of Knockdrum, parcel of the estates of the said abbey – certain little gardens in Ardmagh, the tithes great and small of the following lands, viz. Tyrnassaggard, Dromearge, Doonecavan and Tullaghastney, in or near Ardmigh town.’

From the Calendar of Patent Rolls, James I (CÓFLA).
Between Ó Néill’s surrender in 1603 and the summer of 1607 his position within Ulster became increasingly difficult. The lack of justice felt by those who had brought about his defeat continued to cause resentment whilst the parallel problems of adequately compensating those who had loyally served Elizabeth remained to be addressed. A campaign of harassment and the constant accusations about Ó Néill treasonous contacts with the Spanish were circulated – not entirely without foundation. Eventually, Ó Néill determined to leave for Spain in the hope that a personal conference with Philip II would bring about a fresh attempt to rid Ireland of English governance and restore his own influence. He continued to play a dual role until the very last moment sending Cúconnacht Mac Uidhir to negotiate with the Spanish and at the same time working alongside the English regime at home. By September 1607 Mac Uidhir had returned to Ireland and the time for a decision from Ó Néill had arrived.

Tadhg Ó Cianáin’s account of the Flight of the Earls was written in 1609 and translated by Paul Walsh in 1916 (CÓFLA). Ó Cianáin travelled with the Earls at least from Rathmullan to Rome but here details the first stage of Hugh Ó Néill’s journey from Slane to Dundalk and then across Ulster.

“In the name of God. Here are some of the adventures and proceedings of Ó Néill from the time that he left Ireland. First, he was with the Lord Justice of Ireland, Sir Arthur Chichester, at Slane. He received a letter from John Bath on Thursday the seventh of September, the year of the Lord at that time being one thousand six hundred and seven. It was stated in the letter that Maguire, Donnachadh O’Briain, Mathew Tullie and John Rath came with a French ship for Ó Néill and the Earl of Tirconnell to Lough Swilly opposite Rathmullan in Fanad.

Ó Néill took his leave of the Lord Justice on the following Saturday. He went that night to Mellifont where Sir Garret Moore was. On the following day he went to Dundalk. He proceeded on Monday from there by the high road of the Fews across Slieve Fuaid to Armagh, over the Blackwater to Dungannon and on to Crieve, one of his island habitations. He made a stop and rested at Crieve on Tuesday. He proceeded in the name of God from Crieve on Wednesday over Slieve Mullich and on to Dungannon, where he was. He was there that night in Munster Luignis in the vicinity of Lough Begbone. On the following day he reached Burn Denne. He rested from midday until nightfall. After that he passed over the great shallow on Lough Foyle and straight forward to Ballindrait. The son of O’Donnell was awaiting them at that time. They went to Rathmellon the daylight shining on them at that time. They proceeded to Rathmullan where the ship we have mentioned was at anchor.

If Ó Néill thought that his imminent departure from Ireland was a secret then a contradictory view emerges from the following account from Sir John Davies taken from ‘the Calendar of State Papers Ireland’ September 1607 (CÓFLA).

…” he wept abundantly when he took his leave (from Mellifont), giving a solemn farewell to every child and every servant in the house, which them marvel, because in general it was not his manner to use such compliments. On Monday he went to Dungannon, where he rested two whole days, and on Wednesday night they say he travelled all night. It is reported that the countess, his wife, being exceedingly weary, slipped down from her horse, and weeping said ‘she could go no further.’ Whereupon the Earl drew his sword, and swore a great oath the ‘he would kill her on the spot if she would not pass on with him, and put on a more cheerful countenance withal.’
Yet the next day, when he came near Lough Foyle, his passage that way was no so secret but the Governor there had notice thereof, and invited Tyrone and his son to dinner; but their haste, however, was such that they accepted not his courtesy, but they went on, and came that Thursday night to Rathmullan, a town on the west side of Lough Swilly, where the Earl of Tyrconnell and his company met with them. There they took some breeze from one Francis Whitty, an Englishman, and killed them for their provision.

...Lastly, he has carried with him a train of barbarous men, women and children to the number of 50 or 60 persons. If he means to make them appear like persons of good quality, they will presently spend all his Althofshide rent, which he has taken up by way of anticipation; but if he shall carry them through the country in the fashion and habit wherein now they are, doubtless they will be taken for a company of gipsies, and exceedingly scorned and despised by that proud nation (Spain)...

...As for them that are here, they are glad to see the day wherein there was no freedom for any of those that had been before them, nor was there power in the hands of any person to decide whether such a company as they, who can only have a chief, and not a king, should be taken for a company of gipsies, and exceedingly scorned and despised by that proud nation (Spain)...

...The night was bright, quiet and calm, with a breeze from the south-west. They proposed putting in to Aranmore because the wind has not wafted in modern times a number of persons in one ship more eminent, illustrious, or noble in point of genealogy, heroic deeds, valor, feats of arms, and brave achievements than they. Would that God had but permitted them', continued the Four Masters, 'to remain in their patrimonial inheritances until the children should arrive at the age of manhood! Was to the heart that meditated – woe to the mind that conceived – woe to the council that recommended the project of this expedition, without knowing whether they should or to the end of their lives be able to return to their ancient principalities and patrimonies. With glomy looks and sad forbodings theＡＢＡＡＢＡＢＡＢＡＢＡＢＡＢＡＢＡＢＡＢＡＢＡＢＡＢＡＢＡＢＡＢＡＢＡＢＡＢＡＢＡＢＡＢＡＢＡＢＡＢＡＢＡＢＡΒΑTeacher’s copy

...They had no pilot who knew this part of the sea so followed the other ships until they lost track of them in the darkness. A Frenchman on board told them not to fear that he could direct them to land in France. They feared that the king's fleet at Galway might intercept them they turned and sailed further out to sea to make directly towards Spain. With them when they had been at sea for thirteen days, in strong storms and dangerously bad weather, the decided to place relics in the sea, trailing them ship the. These included a gold cross belonging to O'Neill which contained part of the cross of the crucifixion. This, they thought brought them great relief from the storms.

...Since they found it impossible to make it to Spain as the wind came straight against them, on Sunday the thirteenth of September they decide to head for the port of Criosc in Brittany. It was the Earl, who because of the shortage of food and water and because of the sickness onboard, who advised that they should try to land in Normandy before the next day. They had originally needed to get food and drink. An exceedingly strong storm and bad weather arose against them, together with fog and rain so that they were driven away from shore. They crossed the sea far and wide. The storm lasted until the middle of the following night. After they left Donegal they set a course straight past Sigo and straight ahead until they could see Cregagh Point in Connacht. They feared that the long's fleet at Galway might intercept them they turned and sailed further out to sea to make directly towards Spain. They travelled for two days and two nights under full sail. They reached no land at all in that time. They did not even know what coast the might be close to. At about mid-day on the Tuesday they saw three very large ships approaching as if from the direction of Spain. At first they thought that these might belong to the king of England. But so desperate were they that they decided to risk their own safety and attempted to approach the other ships. They found it impossible for some time to get close enough to communicate with the other vessels because of the weather but eventually learnt that they were Spanishmen on their way back from Spain and that they were at that time in the Flemish Sea close to the coast with England.
The journey to Louvain

The Countess Cataríona, Ó Domhnaill’s daughter and the children along with some of the other passengers and their attendants were sent with their luggage the short distance along the river to Rouen. The main group including the Earl of Tír Chonaill and Ó Néill went with 17 men on horseback to La Bouille, about twenty miles away to the south west of Rouen. Quilleboeuf was thirty miles from La Havre. The following day the main group were detained and taken a further fifty miles to Lisieux where they were received by the Marshal. The separation of the two groups caused some confusion for a time. The Marshal at Lisieux wrote to the King of France to inquire what was to be done with the group. The English king’s ambassador was in the city, and having learned that the French king had granted the Irish group free passage dispatched a messenger to England informing James I of their arrival in France.

From France the group travelled not south to Spain but north-east to Flanders. Ó Néill’s son Enri, who had been sent to Spain in 1600, aged 15, and was at this time Colonel of the Irish in Flanders. They needed Enri to obtain a warrant like that issued by the King of France to allow them to travel to Spain. On Monday 15 October the whole group left from Rouen - 31 on horseback, two coaches, three wagons and about 40 of them travelled on foot. For the warrant the group paid the local governor about 40 tons of salt which had been on the ship that brought them.

Rouen impressed the travellers because it was strongly Catholic with 33 parish churches and it also was well situated in fertile land with good links along the river to Paris and a strong harbour. There were also 14 monasteries of religious orders and a splendid town hall. One of the younger members of the party was lost for a while having got separated from the rest. They travelled on to a little town called La Boissière about fifteen miles away, where the lodgings were poor. The following day, 16 October, they reached the town of Neufchatel where they heard Mass and had dinner. Leaving there they travelled to Aumale and on to Poix, about 25 miles south-west of Amiens. The next day they arrived in the city of Amiens on the river Somme. There they went to see the church of St. Mary and the head of John the Baptist contained in crystal. From there they went to the small village of Centay and made the short journey to Arra the day after.

On 21 October the Earls made it to Douai where an Irish college had been established in 1594. The following Friday, 26 October, they set out for Tournai stopping over night at a small village. There they saw the tomb of an Irish Saint, St Linard. The next day they continued on to Tournai on the river Schelde. On Sunday 28 they came to Ath twenty miles from Tournai and the following day they arrived in Notre Dame de Hal passing through Enghein. In Hal on 30 October they met with Ó Néill’s son Col. Enri Ó Néill. Saturday 4 November they met at the Marquis Spinola (an Italian in the service of the Spanish king). He had come to Hal from Brussels with a large group to meet with them and invited them to dinner in the city. On Sunday they went to Mass and then set out in coaches accompanied by others on horseback to Nyvel about 19 miles south of Brussels where they were entertained with music and dance that evening.

On Monday they continued on to Bincot to meet the Archduke Albert of Flanders. It was a very wet day and when they arrived they had to spend some time drying off. They were met by Don Rodrigo de Laso who had served in the Spanish Armada and had been ship wrecked off the Belgian coast. He went on to become the Archduke’s chamberlain. At the palace of the Archduke they were met by the Albert and the Infanta, the King of Spain’s daughter. There they held a long conversation before dining and returning to Nyvel.

The next day they went to Hal and spending the night there travelled on to Brussels where they were met by Col. Francisco and a party of Irish, Spanish, Italian and Flemish captains. They went to the Marquis’s palace where they were welcomed by the Marquis, The Papal nuncio and the Spanish ambassador. They spent some time in conversation before the Marquis himself seated them for dinner. It was a lavish affair fit for a king and Ó Néill was given the place of honour at the head of the table. The
Earl of Tir Chonroll on one side and the Papal nuncio on the other. Ó Néill’s children and Maguire were seated beyond Ó Domnroll with the Spanish ambassador and the Duke of Aumale beyond the nuncio. The Marquis and other nobles were seated opposite Ó Néill. There was nothing inferior about the banquet with gold and silver plate. That night they returned to Hal.

On Friday 9 November they travelled to Louvain where they stayed for 10 days. Ó Néill stayed in a hostel called ‘The Emperor’s House’ and Ó Domnroll in another.

On Sunday 25 November leaving the women and some attendants behind the Earls set out intending to travel for Spain. They went to lodges about 10 miles south of Louvain where they were met by a troupe of the Archduke’s cavalry who escorted them to Perthuis along an ugly road. The following day, in the midst of great sheet they reached Namur. Here they received a communication from the Archduke telling them to return to Louvain and wait for instructions. They returned to the small town of Werven overnight and then back to Louvain where they remained until 28 February 1608.

That winter was very harsh with lakes and rivers freezing over. News reached them of how in Antwerp the townspeople were amusing themselves on the ice over the river when the sheet cracked and broke off carrying a large number towards the sea. Luckily all but five were rescued. News also reached them that twenty of three of the Earls’ children and Maguire were seated beyond Ó Domhnaill in another. In the days that followed they continued to travel to the Alps passing over a deep gorge by a bridge known as the Devil’s Bridge and one of their horses was almost lost. They stayed that night in a little town called Pedemonte. Ó Néill remained there for a day to try to recover money (about £120) that been lost when the ill-fated horse had fallen the previous day whilst the Earl of Tyrconnell proceeded over the Alps. They had to cross the mountain using sleighs drawn by oxen and had great difficulty descending the icy and rugged roads on the other side. There they made their way to Faido meeting up again with Ó Domnroll. In the days that followed they continued their journey through the Lugano valley to Capo di Lago (Lugano) crossing the lake separating Italy from Switzerland. They landed at a small town called Capiago and although the weather was wet and stormy, reached Como before travelling to Milan along good roads where they remained for three weeks.

In mid April the reached Parma where they were shown a number of exotic beasts, lions, leopards and camels, and made their way to Modena and Bologna. The following day Ó Néill met with the cardinal there. From Bologna they travelled to Saint Nicholas and Assisi. As they journeyed closer to Rome they sent some people ahead of the group to look for a crossing of the Alps. On 28 February the Earls and some of their entourage set off for Rome. Thirty-two travelled on horseback and their ladies in a coach. Behind them, in the care of Ó Néill’s son Eoin, they left Sean, aged 7 and Brian his younger brother, Cathal Ó Domhnaill’s son Aodh, aged 2, the Earl of Tir Chonroll’s son also called Aodh, aged 1 and another young boy called Ó Conneige along with Ó Néill’s rent gatherer, Sean Ó hUigínin, and other of their nobles and followers.

Across the Alps to Rome

Having failed to get the permission of the Archduke to travel to Spain, on 28 February the Earls and some of their entourage set off for Rome. Thirty-two travelled on horseback and their ladies in a coach. Behind them, in the care of Ó Néill’s son Eoin, they left Sean, aged 7 and Brian his younger brother, Cathal Ó Domhnaill’s son Aodh, aged 2, the Earl of Tir Chonroll’s son also called Aodh, aged 1 and another young boy called Ó Conneige along with Ó Néill’s rent gatherer, Sean Ó hUigínin, and other of their nobles and followers.

On 8 March they left Nancy and although the weather had improved they had to cross the Mountain of St Martin along roads that were difficult and covered with snow and ice. Eventually they arrived in Bernhomme before continuing on to Kaysenberg and Culmar. They journeyed on through a town called Hoimers, possibly Ottenheim on the Rhine and Bâle (Basel). On Sunday 13 March they had reached Lucerne and crossed over a great lake (Vierwaldstätter-See) reaching Faido late at midnight. Monday was St. Patrick’s Day and they went through the Alps passing over a deep gorge by a bridge known as the Devil’s Bridge and one of their horses was almost lost. They stayed that night in a little town called Pedemonte.

On Monday 18 the Earls went to Menthon and then to the following day to Antwerp crossing the Schelde on the way, which although very wide was still partly frozen. They were able to cross the ice on horseback before being put into boat at a quay of ice and disembarked on the opposite side at a similar quay. Having failed to get the permission of the Archduke to travel to Spain, on 28 February the Earls and some of their entourage set off for Rome. Thirty-two travelled on horseback and their ladies in a coach. Behind them, in the care of Ó Néill’s son Eoin, they left Sean, aged 7 and Brian his younger brother, Cathal Ó Domhnaill’s son Aodh, aged 2, the Earl of Tir Chonroll’s son also called Aodh, aged 1 and another young boy called Ó Conneige along with Ó Néill’s rent gatherer, Sean Ó hUigínin, and other of their nobles and followers.
(On 28 April 1608) ‘they went to Prima Porta, a distance of three leagues. They stopped there that night. They sent on some persons before them to Rome. After that they went two leagues to Ponte Molle. Peter Lombard, the archbishop of Armagh and primate of Ireland, came with a noble young man in his company, having a large number of coaches sent by cardinals, to meet them to that place. The steward of each of a certain number of cardinals came to them to welcome them and to receive them with honour in the cardinals’ name. Then they proceeded in coaches. They went until they came to Rome. Porta del Populo was the name of the gate by which they entered the city. They went after that through the principal streets of Rome in great splendour. They did not rest until they reached the great church of San Pietro in Vaticano. They put up their horses there and entered the church.’

An extract from Tadhg Ó Cianáin’s account of the Earls’ arrival in Rome.

Unable to gain the permission of Phillip III to travel to Spain and equally unable to convince him of the merits of assisting a return to Ireland at the head of a new force, the Earl of Tyrone consistently lobbied the Spanish monarch for support. Ó Néill continued his protracted discussions through the Spanish ambassador to Rome, the Conde de Castro. Having made it safely out of Ireland and then endured what must have been a treacherous voyage to Normandy the Earls and their extensive entourage had divided at Louvain. The Earls and Mag Uidhir had arrived in Rome in the spring of 1608. However, by the autumn Ó Néill had been left virtually alone. The Earl of Tyrconnell, his brother Cathbharr, Mag Uidhir and Ó Néill’s own son Hugh, Baron of Dungannon, had all died. Nevertheless Ó Néill remained resolute in his determination to return to Ireland and reclaim his estates.

‘The Earl of Tyrconnell (Rury, son of Hugh, son of Manca, son of Hugh Dow, son of Hugh Roe O’Donnell) died at Rome, on the 28th of July, and was interred in the Franciscan monastery situated on the hill on which St. Peter the Apostle was crucified, after lamenting his faults and crimes, after confession, exemplary penance for his sins and transgressions, and after receiving the body and blood of Christ from the hands of psalm-singing clergy of the Church of Rome. Sorrowful the short life and early eclipse of him who was there deceased, for he was a brave, protecting, valiant, puissant, and warlike man, and had often been in the gap of danger along with his brother, Hugh Roe, in defence of his religion and patrimony. He was a generous, bounteous, munificent and truly hospitable lord, to whom the patrimony of his ancestors did not seem anything for his spending and feasting parties; and a man who did not place his mind or affections upon worldly wealth and jewels, but distributed and circulated them among all those who stood in need of them whether mighty or feeble.’

From The Annals of the Four Masters concerning the death of Ruairí Ó Domhnaill in Rome.

‘At Rome, since Tyrconnell’s death, his page is also dead, and two or three more (wheresoever Tyrone’s son is one) are very dangerously sick, and the death is now laid upon a riotous journey which they took to Ostia.

The Spaniards here have news this week from London that the rebels of Ireland are for the most part killed, and the rest dispersed, which he hopes is true, and this will make more of them sick in Rome.’

A communication from Sir Henry Wotton in Rome recorded in the Calendar of State Papers Ireland for 22 August 1608. (CO.114.)

The Irish rebels he mentions are those who took part in Sir Cahir O’Dochartaigh’s rebellion that year.

Destruction by Peace
The Earl of Tyrone has heard that, by act of Parliament, there has been a further confiscation of his estates and of those of the Earl of Tirkonel. In view of this he begs Your Majesty to take a decision in the matter concerning which he has submitted a petition so far. In the meantime he wishes to have permission to go to the territory of the Princes of Lieja (Liège) if this Prince of his fatherland is prepared to order that a decision be taken concerning his affairs in this country, he has no hope of consolation. I humbly beg Your Majesty to grant permission of the territory of the Princes of Lieja (Liège) if this Prince of his fatherland is prepared to order that a decision be taken concerning his affairs in this country, he has no hope of consolation. I humbly beg Your Majesty to grant permission if this Prince of his fatherland is prepared to order that a decision be taken concerning his affairs in this country, he has no hope of consolation.

The Grant from the King to Robert Maxwell (27 February 1612), dean of the cathedral church of st. Patrick of Armagh, and his successors - ARMAGH Co'.

In the year 1609 a survey of the confiscated or ‘escheated’ lands was begun. For a number of reasons this was to prove more complex than first envisaged and the wish to begin the plantation properly that year had to be deferred. Not least among these reasons were the extent of the lands themselves, the distances that those taking up their new grants would have to travel and the continuing presence of the native Irish. By the following spring, however, the first detailed maps of the plantation era had been forwarded to England. A letter from Sir Josias Bodley to Salisbury 24 February 1610 describes how this process was undertaken.

'Having been employed the last six months in the cronographical descriptions of the Northern parts of Ireland as preparations to the intended plantations, think it his duty to give him an account thereof. It was required that those escheated countries should be so plotted that the known bounds of every country might be discerned by the eye. The church land distinguished from the temporal, and land already granted from that which is yet to be disposed of, the shares for the undertakers to be laid out with their apparent limits according to certain conceived proportions of different quantities, the goodness or badness of the soil, its waters, rivers, or mountains, bogs and lochs, to be specified in different cases as their several places. It was late in the year when this service was put on foot, and the shortest course for dispatch that might be was to be taken. They thought it their readiest course that, while the Deputy and commissioners in their inquisition concerning the bishops’ claim occupied their time in those counties, they should call such persons unto them out of every barony, by their experience could give them the name and quantity of every barony, quarter town, or any other common measure in any precincts of the same, with special notices how they butted or meandered the one on the other, by which means they contrived these maps which are now sent to you.'

An extract form Calendar of State Papers Ireland 1608-10 (CÓPLA)

Just ten years after O Néill’s extraordinary victory at the Yellow Ford the area over which the battle was fought was subject to a grant made by James I to Sir Toby Caulfield. He was granted the lands pertaining to the abbey of St. Peter and Paul at Armagh as well as other areas including Charlemont, Blackwater and Grange. As the new plantation scheme was developed, however, more and more of what had previously been under the control of the Gaelic lordships was transferred into English and Scottish hands.

'Grant from the King to John Brownlowe, esq. - ARMAGH Co. In-Office Bar. The middle proportion of Doughcoron – Taberhany, 1 bal. the moiety of the barony of Aghenecloghy, Keilmarigie, 2 bal. Tirnurye, Doughcoron, Taunaghvore, Ford the area over which the battle was fought was subject to a grant made by James I to Sir Toby Caulfield. He was granted the lands pertaining to the abbey of St. Peter and Paul at Armagh as well as other areas including Charlemont, Blackwater and Grange. As the new plantation scheme was developed, however, more and more of what had previously been under the control of the Gaelic lordships was transferred into English and Scottish hands. The middle proportion of Doughcoron – Taberhany, 1 bal. the moiety of the barony of Aghenecloghy, Keilmarigie, 2 bal. Tirnurye, Doughcoron, Taunaghvore, Ford the area over which the battle was fought was subject to a grant made by James I to Sir Toby Caulfield. He was granted the lands pertaining to the abbey of St. Peter and Paul at Armagh as well as other areas including Charlemont, Blackwater and Grange. As the new plantation scheme was developed, however, more and more of what had previously been under the control of the Gaelic lordships was transferred into English and Scottish hands. The middle proportion of Doughcoron – Taberhany, 1 bal. the moiety of the barony of Aghenecloghy, Keilmarigie, 2 bal. Tirnurye, Doughcoron, Taunaghvore, Ford the area over which the battle was fought was subject to a grant made by James I to Sir Toby Caulfield. He was granted the lands pertaining to the abbey of St. Peter and Paul at Armagh as well as other areas including Charlemont, Blackwater and Grange. As the new plantation scheme was developed, however, more and more of what had previously been under the control of the Gaelic lordships was transferred into English and Scottish hands. The middle proportion of Doughcoron – Taberhany, 1 bal. the moiety of the barony of Aghenecloghy, Keilmarigie, 2 bal. Tirnurye, Doughcoron, Taunaghvore, Ford the area over which the battle was fought was subject to a grant made by James I to Sir Toby Caulfield. He was granted the lands pertaining to the abbey of St. Peter and Paul at Armagh as well as other areas including Charlemont, Blackwater and Grange. As the new plantation scheme was developed, however, more and more of what had previously been under the control of the Gaelic lordships was transferred into English and Scottish hands. The middle proportion of Doughcoron – Taberhany, 1 bal. the moiety of the barony of Aghenecloghy, Keilmarigie, 2 bal. Tirnurye, Doughcoron, Taunaghvore, Ford the area over which the battle was fought was subject to a grant made by James I to Sir Toby Caulfield. He was granted

3. Part of the Barony of Doughcoron as depicted on a map by Josias Bodley c. 1609 (CÓPLA).
5. Sir Arthur Chichester’s plan of the ruined city and cathedral of Armagh S. c. 1601 from G.A. Hoyos-MacCoy Ulster and other Irish Maps (CÓPLA).


Endnotes:
1. Portrait of Peter Lombard Archbishop of Armagh from Meehan’s Kerney Walsh papers (CÓPLA).
2. A letter to the King of Spain from the Spanish ambassador to Rome 15 March 1615, Micheline Kerney Walsh papers (CÓPLA).

1. Portrait of Peter Lombard Archbishop of Armagh from Meehan’s Kerney Walsh papers (CÓPLA).
2. A letter to the King of Spain from the Spanish ambassador to Rome 15 March 1615, Micheline Kerney Walsh papers (CÓPLA).

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3. The church of San Pietro in Montorio, Rome, the last resting place of the Great Ó Néill, Ó Fiaich papers (CÓFLA).


Exile and Death

Even in exile in Rome Ó Néill continued to lobby the Spanish for support to return to Ireland at the head of new fighting force. Obviously concerned by developments at home and increasingly unsettled by the solidifying peace between Spain and England he wrote to The Duke of Lerma, leader of the Spanish government in May 1615.

‘Señor
The peace with England, though prejudicial to our holy faith, is so well established that I have begun to lose hope of His Catholic Majesty’s protection upon which I had counted up to the present. The state of Ireland, my afflicted country, is now so desperate that most of the principal people and some of the most important cities of the kingdom have determined to perish in defence of our holy faith, which our enemies are now making greater efforts than ever to destroy, and I am resolved to go and die with them. However, in order to satisfy my conscience, and because present circumstances are such that with very little help much more could be achieved now that ever before, I make this final effort for the sake of the cause which I profess and which is no other than the defence of our holy faith. I beg Your Excellency to represent this case favourably to His Majesty. Unless we avail of the present opportunity, all will be lost irretrievably.

The archbishop of Tuam and Don Andres Velazquez, to whom I have written at length of the present state of that afflicted kingdom, will give detailed account of everything to Your Excellency. May God keep Your Excellency for many fortunate years, that you may add to your glorious deeds the liberation of Ireland and its happy union with the Crown of Spain, a deed which will undoubtedly surpass all others. Rome, 23 May 1615.’

Hugh Ó Néill in a letter to Andrés Velázquez, a member of the Spanish Council of State, 23 May 1615: ‘We beg His Majesty to be moved to help us, remembering what the English have done many times despite their peace treaties with Spain: since their first rebellions in Flanders until today they have fomented these rebellions against His Majesty and continue to do so. They have given to these rebels of Spain the power they now hold. The English themselves, using the name of peace as a deception teach us this manner of feigned friendship and of destruction by peace.’

A little over a year from his writing to Lerma Ó Néill himself had died on 20 July 1616. He was buried in the church of San Pietro in Montorio in Rome close to the graves of his son the Baron of Dungannon and that of the Earl of Tyrconnell.
On 4 October the Earls landed at Quilleboeuf a small town on the river Seine. There were at least one hundred people on board the ship. When they arrived they had less than one barrel of water remaining.

Those who travelled who are listed in Tadhg Ó Cianáin’s account are:

Hugh Ó Néill Earl of Tyrone
The Countess Catriona
Hugh Baron of Dungannon
Seán, Son of Hugh and Catriona
Brian, another son
Art Óg Ó Néill and his wife
Brian Ó Néill, nephew of Hugh
Feardorcha, Ó Néill’s grandson
Aodh Óg, Ó Néill’s grand-nephew
Henry Hovendon, Ó Néill’s secretary
Enri Ó hAgáin
Seán na bpunta Ó hÁgáin, Ó Néill’s rent collector and his wife
Richard Weston a Dundalk merchant
John Bath, a Drogheda merchant
Christopher Plunkett, Ó Néill’s master of horse
Muircheartach Ó Cionne, Hugh’s marshall
Séamus Mac Éimhir Mac Connell, son of the Lord of Fermanagh and his brother
Ruari Ó Domnhaill, Earl of Tyrconnell
Catbhillan: Ruari’s brother
Nuaid: Ruari’s sister
Aodh: Ruari’s son
Róna: Catbhillan’s wife
Aodh: Catbhillan’s son
Dommhaíl Óg, son of Ruari’s half brother Domhnall
Nestean: Ó Domhnaill, second cousin of Ruari
Seán Crón Mac Daibhid, Ruari’s steward
Eamonn gournadh Mac Daibhid and his wife
Muiris Ólach: a Franciscan friar
Colman: Hugh’s private
John Rath, the ship’s pilot
Aodh Mac Domhnaíl
A Spaniard who had lived with Ó Néill since the Armada
Donnchadh Mac Suibhne
Gearóid Ó Conchobhair
Ger Mac Tairenl
David Creggott
*Tómaithe Ó Fiaich later identified this man as Pedro Blanco.

Tómaithe Ó Fiaich spent many years exploring the continental archives and in his publication Imeacht na nIarlaithe with Padraig de Barra in 1972 added the following names to Ó Cianáin’s list.

Aodh Mac Éinrí Ó Néill
George Ichingham
Donncha Ó hAgáin
Pádraig Ó Coinne
George Moore
Peter Preston
Patrick Rath
Pádraig Mac Éinrí Ó hAgáin, student
Pádraig Mac Cormaic Ó hAgáin, student
Eamonn Ó Maolchonaí, student
Fearghas mac Céithinbeáin, student
Mathes Mac Thairnach, student
Walter Rath, student
Cathair mac Art Ó Gallchóir
Tuaidh Ó Gallchóir
Aodh Ó Gallchóir
Eoghan Rua Mac an Bhaird on Bhaird
Seán Mac Pháibí
Aonghus Mac Diúiltí Uíbháin Mac Luighnéadh
Cathal Ó Bruaí
Fr. Tadgh Ó Maolchonaí
Fr. Diarmaid Ó Duláin
Bernard Morris
Niallan Mac Domhnaíl
Donnchadh Ó Dubhatháin
Donnchadh Coghlan
Donnchadh Dalain
Brian Ó Heggarty
Doighre Ó Duígeannáin.

4 servants of Ó Domhnaill’s
3 lackies of Ó Domhnaill’s
3 serving women
Maghbeadhach Ó Néill
James Bath
A Spaniard who had lived with Ó Néill since the Armada
Donnchadh Mac Suibhne
Geóread Ó Conchobhair
Ger Mac Tairenl
David Creggott
*Tómaithe Ó Fiaich later identified this man as Pedro Blanco.

Those who left Ireland in 1607

Cover of Imeacht na nIarlaithe, Page from Ó Fiaich Manuscripts (CÓFLA)
O, no! – from Sharon, Boyne, and Sarr, From Hugh Dunluce’s castle-wall, From Lismore, where rising slopes ascend!
Would flock alike both rich and poor, One would wave from Cruachan’s cliffs To Tara’s hill; And some would come from Barrow-side, And many a maid would wave her hand On Leinster’s plains, And by melodious Banna’s tide, And by the Mourne and Erne to come And swell thy strains!
O, how the hosts would trample down The mount whereon the martyr-saint Was crucified. From Glen and hill, from plain and town, One loud lament, one thrilling song, Would echo wide. There would not soon be found, I ween, One host of ground among those bones For mournful thought, So many shriekers of the land Would cry aloud, and clap their hands, All viva-destrage!
Two princes of the line of Conn Steep in their clay of clay beside O’Dowd’s Rock. Three royal youths, alas! Are gone, Who lived for Erin’s weal, but died For Erin’s woe! Did they ever wave from Cruachan’s cliffs To Tara’s hill; But, had our Roderick fallen too, Among the foe So swift to save.
Was there an eye of Conn to weep, To mourn, alone, the champion sprung From high Dunluce’s castle-walls, If on the day of Balloch-boy, Our victory doomed! Some arm had left them lorn, By foul surprise, Which England rued, Had Hoderraught found on Sigia’s field A gory grave, Had Hoderraught found on Sigia’s field
Three royal youths, alas! Are gone, Who lived for Erin’s weal, but died For Erin’s woe! Did they ever wave from Cruachan’s cliffs To Tara’s hill; But, had our Roderick fallen too, Among the foe So swift to save.
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In 1612 a volume of maps was published under the title of Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine. It is possible that as James I was by this time not only king of England and Scotland but also regarded as conqueror of Ireland that their cartographer, John Speed, decided to include the latter in his atlas as a gesture of recognition.

As with many of the previous maps of the country there is little evidence to suggest that Speed spent much if any time in Ireland and on the western seaboard he repeats an error common on Tudor maps of Ireland in that neither Galway nor Mayo are given their true westernly extent. The north western coast, however, is much more accurate that previous surveys probably due to the post war surveys in Donegal and the fact that the coastline had recently been charted from the sea. This is probably the first map to show to any great extent the interior of the province of Ulster which Speed took to include ten counties including Louth.