

# The 1641 Rising & The English Civil War:



Sir William Cole, Constable of Enniskillen Castle. Photograph courtesy of John Cathcart.

## 1641 Rising & The English Civil War

The Confederate War, which was launched by the 1641 Rising, was fought on two fronts. In Ulster, the Gaelic order was once again on the march. The grievance they held was against the Plantation – against the deed and the people who enforced the new order. The Rising was precipitated by the creeping colonialism of the Crown, which had continued to swallow their territory. The remnants of the Gaelic order – ironically,

the families who had allied themselves to Elizabeth I in the Nine Years War and thus retained their territory – rose up to protect the last enclaves of its power.

Meanwhile a Civil War was brewing in England. The assumption that the King should enjoy absolute power was being challenged by the Puritans in England and the Covenanters in Scotland. The Gaelic order in Ulster was as afraid of the advance of Puritanism and its threat to their faith as they were embittered by the irrepressible tide of the Plantation and the grip in which Charles I held Ireland. Fast approaching was a time when the champions of the Plantation, themselves, would have to choose between King and Parliament in England. So, the Rising and the Confederate war in Ireland often became a surrogate for the battle between autocratic monarchy and Parliamentary democracy in England, and loyalties were confused and allegiances perpetually shifting.

Conor Maguire – he now held the title of Lord Enniskillen, a badge of his absorption into the Plantation background – was Fermanagh's leading rebel. He set out in 1641 to capture Dublin Castle. This daring act was to open the Rising. But the plot was betrayed and Conor Maguire was captured. He was taken to England and, four years later, he was hanged.

However, despite the failure of the centrepiece of the Rising the spark of rebellion lit a fire throughout Ulster. Alone, the Plantation garrison in Enniskillen held out against the forces of the Rising. Rory Maguire, Conor Maguire's brother, himself affiliated to the planter community by marriage to Edward



Enniskillen Castle and town c. 1620. Conjectural drawing by D Warner. Copyright of Fermanagh County Museum.

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Illustration of Enniskillen Castle from map of Ulster by John Speede, published in 1610.



Monea Castle. Copyright of Fermanagh County Museum.



Map of the Barony Of Magheriboy, Co. Fermanagh by Sir Josias Bodley, 1609.

Blennerhassett's daughter, led the people's revolt in Fermanagh. He opened his campaign with a theatrical ruse to capture the cream of the planter aristocracy in Fermanagh. He invited them all to dinner at his Crevenish stronghold, but they were tipped off. Rory Maguire orchestrated the capture of the planter houses throughout Fermanagh. It was a ruthless, sometimes a savage campaign as the peasantry wreaked revenge on their incomer neighbours. It culminated in the bloody capture of Lisgoole and Monea.

Through the winter and spring of 1642 the Rising foundered. It was joined by the Anglo-Irish aristocracy who, preoccupied with events in England, diluted the unity of purpose and action amongst the Gaelic order in Ulster. The Ulster planters' determined Laggan Army, bolstered by a contingent of itinerant Scots soldiers, routed the rebel army at Glenmaquin. In June of 1642, the Ulster chiefs gathered at Glaslough to seek a way out of the conflict. Suddenly, though, Eoghan Rua O'Neill arrived on the scene to renew their resolve.

Eoghan O'Neill was the nephew of Hugh O'Neill the expatriate Earl of Tyrone. He had won renown fighting for the Spanish army against the French. With this pedigree and reputation he was ideally cast in the heroic mould and he was a suitably charismatic leader of the Gaelic order. But, his energies were dissipated in a new rainbow coalition – a Confederacy of the rebelling Irish. At Kilkenny on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1642, a shadow government with a two tier Assembly – an upper house of lords and bishops and a lower house of the people's representatives – was established and adopted a model democratic constitution. But the Confederacy was inevitably compromised by the English Civil War. In 1645, the assembly split into Nunciists – supporters of the Papal Nuncio Rinuccini who journeyed from Rome to advocate simplicity in the aims of the war, returning Ireland to its Catholic rootstock and Ormondists, who favoured entering the English Civil War and declaring for King Charles I.

In 1646, O'Neill won for the Confederation and its Nunciist wing a stunning victory at the Battle of Belturbet but, a month later, the Ormondists had manoeuvred the Confederation into a pact with the King. The Confederation splintered in 1647 and Ormond relinquished Dublin to the Parliamentarians. For two years O'Neill and the Ulster chiefs were in limbo, unsure of the next move. In that time, Rory Maguire, who had been one of O'Neill's staunchest allies, was killed in battle at Jamestown. His death was commemorated by the Gaelic bards and is recorded as an ominous loss for the Ulster army.

Cromwell's landing at Ringsend in 1649 united the Irish rebels once again, this time not in hope but in fear. Soon after, O'Neill was killed at Belturbet and

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*The building of the Watergate in 1611.  
Drawing by Philip Armstrong courtesy of  
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passed into legend. Heber McMahon, the Bishop of Clogher, succeeded him as leader of the Ulster army, but his generalship lasted only three months before his army was routed at Scarriffhollis, outside Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. McMahon was betrayed by Brian Maguire of Tempo, who had remained aloof from the Rising, and he was hanged on the Broadmeadow, Enniskillen. The Bishop was then beheaded and his head impaled on a spike at the Castle – a trophy of the planter and parliamentarian victory.

Many of the Ulster Scots had sided with the crown in the Civil War – Enniskillen was divided, though William Cole was able to pull the town to the parliamentarian cause. For a decade after the end of the Confederate War, Cromwell consolidated the Plantation, declaring all lands of the Irish rebels forfeit. Maguire land at Magherasteffany was given to the Brooke family. Only Brian Maguire survived in place with his estate at Tempo intact.

The restoration of the monarchy and the ascension of Charles II to the throne of England did little other than preserve the status quo – even though Charles II did return to Catholicism.

**Author Iain Macauley**

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