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## Occupation, Assimilation and Resistance, 1170–1533

The history of Ireland stretches back into the depths of time. The first settled inhabitants of Ireland were groups of hunters and fishers who travelled the short distance across the water from Scotland into north-eastern Ireland during the Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age) era. Remaining artefacts from these people are few and far between, but archaeologists are certain they inhabited the areas around modern-day Antrim, Down, Louth and Dublin in the years after 6000 BC. They were followed, a mere two and a half thousand years later, by the Neolithic (New Stone Age) settlers. Although the exact origins of these travellers are uncertain, the huge array of megalithic remains which they left behind have similarities with megaliths in England such as Stonehenge, and those in France at Carnac. The Neolithic settlers brought such diverse skills as agriculture, pottery and weaving to Ireland. Their lasting testaments, however, are the megalithic remains. These can be found today at Knowth and Newgrange in County Meath. Essentially the remains are great passage tombs. These tombs demonstrate that the Neolithic Irish had great artistic and construction skills, and the tombs at Newgrange are clearly linked with knowledge and understanding of planetary activity, and especially of the movements of the sun at solstice time. Apart from the megalithic passage tombs and other stone constructions, little remains and little is known of the Neolithic settlers. Their civilisation, judging by the dating of the built remains, certainly appears to have survived across several thousand years, but beyond such basic facts, it is the legends which persist.

## Gaelic Ireland

In approximately 700 BC the Gaels began arriving in Ireland, having spread across the rest of western Europe. It is perhaps unsurprising that such an enterprising people would eventually arrive at the continent's westernmost outpost, but it is possibly in Ireland that their legacy has been most profound. The Gaels, as with most invaders who would follow, brought their own distinctive culture with them, but also adapted much that was specific to Ireland. This resulted in a composite system of religious beliefs and power structures drawn from both the indigenous and settler traditions. The old Neolithic gods (tuatha) who had underpinned the Irish belief system prior to the arrival of the Gaels were adopted, and over time became identifiable as Gaelic gods. In appropriating the old Irish gods, the Gaels also adapted and continued to use the important sites, such as Newgrange, as part of their own religious system. The Gaels did not destroy those groups that existed on the island; indeed it appears that they only ever formed a powerful minority within the total population. They held the best land, wielded the most power, and made the native population pay tribute to them, but they were a minority of the population. This minority position was diluted over time, as would be the case with later invaders such as the Normans, as the Gaels intermarried, forged local alliances and slowly assimilated native customs into their own way of life.

The Gaels based their power structure around a monarchical system. At first the whole system ran on very localised lines. In time there developed a network of local ring forts, remains of which can still be found. Each of these forts served as the centre of a local area of influence for a single king or chieftain who was elected by those regarded as freemen. There was no system of direct succession for those who would be king. The elections drew candidates from anywhere within the ruling family, not necessarily the eldest son. This arrangement, although appearing simplistically as highly democratic, would cause problems as it did little to ensure continuity of rule.

In total the island of Ireland contained around a hundred small kingdoms. The small kingdoms were arranged into five bigger groupings, which form the basis of Ireland's modern provinces: Ulaid (Ulster), Midhe (Meath), Laigin (Leinster), Muma

(Munster) and Connacht. At the head of this system was a single High King (Ard Rí), who would rule a province of his own, but would also exert his supremacy over the other provinces. At times there were legendary High Kings who did manage to rule over the five provinces, but more usually the High King had to rule with the support of others. It appears that the first genuine High Kings, who could claim supremacy over the other provinces, did not come into existence until the fifth century AD. Ultimately the provincial and monarchical system made for an unstable, and at times highly violent, society as coalitions were made and broken and as different local kings sought to propel themselves to the highest power. This meant that Ireland never developed a system of central power, and, as a result, there was little unity across the land. Any unity which did exist was a product of cultural forces, such as a common language and a shared religion. Even the brehon laws, which are accepted by many scholars as having been an important sign of Gaelic sophistication, advancement and unity, were weakly implemented. The brehon laws were overseen by the brehons themselves, who can be considered akin to a group of professional lawyers. Recorded precedents underpinned the whole system. Although national, and therefore an important signifier of a semblance of Gaelic uniformity, the system too often relied on arbitration, rather on enforced judgement. This meant that what could have been a vehicle for the sustained development of a national system, which might have resulted in a more integrated political unity, was ineffective. Despite the problems which accompanied the power structure in Gaelic Ireland, it became, by the end of the first century AD, a centrally important focus for Gaelic culture. The Irish Gaels traded by sea with other Celts around northern Europe, bringing a degree of prosperity, both material and cultural.

Despite the prosperity afforded by the Celtic trading alliances, Ireland, it could be argued, missed out on a more fundamental advance in the first centuries following the birth of Christ. Unlike the bulk of southern and central Europe, Ireland was not invaded by the Romans. It is impossible to argue that this was a bad thing for Ireland historically, as the continuation of an unmolested Gaelic system free of Roman control certainly had its benefits. Roman invasion, however, did have a remarkable

effect on other lands across Europe and brought about quite revolutionary advances in the technological, architectural, military and governmental fields, among others, all of which Ireland missed out on. Put simply, while mainland Britain (south of Hadrian's Wall) witnessed the development of a road system, the introduction of a judicial system, and other trends which, in the context of the time, can be considered as 'civilising', Ireland continued with a society that remained based around the norms of the bronze age.

### THE ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY

Although missing out on the possibly positive effects of Roman civilisation, Ireland was the location for a golden age of Christianity and monasticism. The Christian mission to Ireland began during the third century AD. In a relatively short space of time, the old Gaelic religion, although still practised and retaining a function within society, was replaced by Christianity. In the wake of the collapse of the Roman Empire, Ireland, which had avoided any major contact with Rome, perversely became the centre of European Christianity. As the Roman Empire disintegrated and a state of near anarchy, resulting from the success of the Barbarians, spread across western Europe, Ireland became a safe haven for those who followed Christ. In this, Ireland's comparative isolation from the rest of Europe worked to its advantage rather than its detriment. Different religious orders settled across Ireland, and, once established, these orders flourished. In the wild and untamed landscape, made more isolated by its lack of communication, the orders existed in splendid solitude. The monasteries were centres of learning, the most notable and important being those at St Edna's on the Aran Islands, Clonmacnoise in Offaly and Clonard in Meath. In Clonard alone, it is believed that as many as 3000 monks were working and studying.

One of the leading figures in the Christian mission in Ireland was St Patrick. Patrick had first been brought to Ireland as a slave. After escaping, he had travelled to Gaul where he was consecrated as a bishop. In the thirty years following his return to Ireland in 432, until his death in 465, Patrick travelled the

length and breadth of Ireland preaching the Gospel. He established churches in those places he visited and introduced others to the religious order. St Patrick's importance lies in his role as a catalyst for transforming what was essentially a system of religious orders, churches and monasteries, all of which were functioning as separate and discrete entities. Patrick changed that by bringing about a semblance of central ecclesiastical authority. After his ministry, the Irish Church was firmly established.

The structure of the Church in Ireland duplicated the power system that was already in place. St Patrick and others accepted the Celtic system that was based around local kingdoms which, in turn, was underpinned by powerful families and loose alliances, and adapted the Church's system of internal government around such. The bishops of the Irish Church were located around the families who ran the small kingdoms, and were not based around a geographical unit of governance, such as the diocese, as would have been the case elsewhere in Europe. As previously mentioned, the number of local kingships were many, and hence the number of bishops across Ireland was equally plentiful. St Patrick alone is credited as having created some 300 bishops. As the Church structure was essentially a mirror of the Celtic power system, bishops did not develop personal power bases, as was the case in Europe. As a result of this lack of personal power, and the nature of the Church's governing structure, the monastery became all-important in Ireland.

The introduction of Christianity to Ireland at this time was accompanied by the advent of the written word. Irish society under the Celtic system, although developing a written script, which can be seen on standing stones, did not use the written form as central to its way of life. For them the oral tradition had been far more valuable. The monasteries as centres of learning spread throughout Europe the written word and the Latin language. Within the monasteries, religious instruction and learning flourished, and reached new heights of skill and technical ability. The illuminated manuscripts which emerged at the time, such as the *Book of Kells* (written in approximately AD 700 and currently housed in Trinity College, Dublin), are considered some of the finest examples of such work anywhere in the world. Despite having missed out on the civilising mission of the Romans, Ireland, by performing its role as a safe haven for

Christianity, was a bright light through the so-called dark ages. While the rest of Europe slipped into the post-Roman chaos of terror and destruction, Ireland was thriving. Trade continued along the Atlantic seaboard, as it had done under the pre-Christian Celts. Ireland internally was relatively peaceful and ordered, while learning, Christianity and Gaelic scholarship flourished. The strength of the Irish monastic system was demonstrated in the middle years of the first millennium. Whereas Ireland had originally served a function as a safe haven for Christians and scholars fleeing Europe, it later became the launching pad for the re-emergence of Christianity across the continent. The religion had taken refuge in Ireland and had flourished there. In time, this solace was used as a source of strength and later, when the time was right, Christianity was delivered back to those lands from where it had first come. Leading Irish figures in the deliverance of Christianity back to Europe included St Columba, who founded a monastery in Iona in 563, and is credited with having undertaken the evangelisation of southern Scotland and northern Ireland in the years following. There was also St Columbanus, who travelled to Germany and Italy where he eventually founded a monastery at Bobbio, while other Irish bishops were responsible for the Christian recolonisation of Brittany.

#### VIKING INCURSIONS

Peace and tranquillity could not last forever. Under the golden age of monasticism Ireland had been relatively quiet, although internal warfare and division had continued. Christianity, for all the benefits that it brought to Ireland, could not bring about any kind of central political system which would break the cycle of violence and inter-monarch competition. In the past, this lack of internal coherence had not been problematic for the actual survival of Ireland, as the land had not been under threat. As such, its relative weakness had not been uncovered. This situation changed radically, and Ireland with it, in the eighth century with the advent of the Viking invasions. At first these incursions had been localised and had been more concerned with plunder and quick reward than with settlement. A response to this type of

raid, which was a common feature of eighth-century life, was the construction of defensive Round Towers within the monasteries. The towers were used to watch over the surrounding land, and, at a time of attack, were places of sanctuary. An excellent example of this type of structure can still be seen at Glendalough, Co. Wicklow. The monasteries were obvious targets for such attacks of plunder because of the immense wealth which some of them possessed.

Ultimately, plunder was not enough and in 795 Ireland suffered a full-scale Viking invasion. The Viking presence had an important impact on Irish life. At one level the Viking legacy continues today. Whereas Irish settlement had previously been based around forts or monasteries, the Vikings brought with them to Ireland the idea of the walled city. Obviously the central reason for such a city was defensive, and many of those cities remain today. The modern towns and cities of Dublin, Wexford, Waterford, Youghal, Cork, Bantry and Limerick all originate from the time of the Viking invasions. The Vikings were great traders and their operations brought wealth to their cities and the surrounding districts. The cities were centres of trade, manufacture and commerce. All this, conducted as it was behind the city walls, was carried out in relative peace. From ports such as Dublin the Vikings traded with a large number of different areas and brought a variety of goods back into Ireland. As with the Celts when they arrived, the Vikings adopted certain native ways. They intermarried, converted to Christianity, and, when not battling with them, accepted the power structures of the Irish kingships.

In the context of Irish power structures, the Viking presence in Ireland brought about a realignment of the different kings. If this had been sustained it might have radically altered the future history of Ireland. The comparative weakness of the High King system meant that there was no central focus for opposition against the Vikings once their incursions had begun. If a more centralised political system had emerged over the preceding years, then the Viking forces might have been rebuffed. As it was, it took until the first years of the second millennium before Irish forces rallied around a single High King who engendered enough of the support necessary to take on the Vikings. In 1014, the High King, Brian Boru, defeated the Vikings at an infamous

battle at Clontarf. It had taken the Irish two hundred years, but with Boru's victory they finally saw off the threat of being permanently transformed into a Viking colony.

The victory at Clontarf should have been the precursor to the emergence of some kind of centralised Irish power structure, based around the person of Brian Boru. The emergence of a strong centralised rule would have avoided the type of infighting and division that would form the preamble to the English invasion. In a similar vein, it has been argued that the Viking destruction of certain parts of England, such as Northumbria and Mercia, weakened inter-regional rivalries to the point where one region, in the English case, Wessex, was able to become all-powerful. Once Wessex was in the position of primacy over its weakened neighbours it was able to bring about the essential unity of England. Boru's own career demonstrates quite clearly that he was trying to bring about unity in Ireland, albeit a unity engendered by the use of force. He had attacked his main rival, the then High King, Malachy II, and encouraged the Vikings to take Malachy's lands in Connacht and Meath. In 1002, Malachy accepted that Boru should take the High Kingship, as he was the more powerful. Despite taking the High Kingship, Boru depended on the south for the bulk of his support and not all the Irish rallied around him. At Clontarf, the Leinster Irish sided with the Vikings in an attempt to preserve their independence in the face of an all-powerful High King. Unfortunately for any sense of Irish unity, and the possible emergence of a more dynamic centralised rule, Boru was murdered shortly after his famous victory.

Those Vikings who remained in Ireland following their defeat, continued to live in the cities which they had established. The general process of assimilation with the native population continued unabated. Following the death of Boru, however, the Viking communities in the cities were not destroyed or taken over as they might have been had Boru, and the unity he brought to the Irish, survived. In the years following Boru's death, the High Kingship became a battle between different families, most importantly O'Conner of Connacht, O'Brien of Munster and MacLochlainn of Ulster. At various times the heads of these families claimed the High Kingship, but all of them ruled with opposition, and none of them was ever as strong as Boru, or even

his predecessor Malachy, had ever been. In the wake of Boru's death, essential unity was more distant than ever, and Ireland was becoming weaker and increasingly open to destructive forces from outside.

#### THE PRE-NORMAN CRISIS

During the battles between the Irish and the Vikings, and as one of the main parties to suffer at the hands of the Vikings during their plundering raids, the Irish Church was in a greatly weakened position in comparison with its strength during the golden age of Irish monasticism. Some of the monasteries had been broken up, the process of learning had been disrupted and the success of the missions to the rest of Europe had weakened the place of the Irish Church in the grand scheme of things. Distanced as it was from Europe, Ireland was playing no part in the twelfth-century renaissance that was taking place elsewhere. It also seemed clear to Irish bishops that the Irish Church, because of its isolation, had developed an individual system which was out of step with the rest of the wider European Church. By comparison the Irish Church was outmoded and inefficient.

During the twelfth century the Irish Church attempted to bring itself into line with other European systems. Geographically determined dioceses were introduced, under the Archbishops of Armagh, Dublin, Cashel and Tuam. This replaced the old arrangement, which had relied too heavily on the Gaelic kingship system. The new Archbishops were formally recognised by the Pope, thereby inextricably linking the Irish Church to the Vatican. A major driving force behind the reform was St Malachy, who had visited Rome on behalf of the Irish Church in 1139. Malachy had been frank in his discussions with the Rome authorities, and in doing so had presented a less than favourable report on the state of the Church in Ireland.

The role of Rome and the Irish bishops in transforming the Church is instructive when we seek to understand the advance of the Normans into Ireland. With the establishment of Norman rule in Britain in the eleventh century, the Normans had become the controllers of large parts of Europe. They were also closely

linked with Rome, and through diplomacy and intermarriage, with most of the major courts in Europe. In the context of the eleventh and twelfth centuries Europe was becoming a smaller place. Ireland, however, having avoided contacts with continental Europe to its possible detriment in the past, was once more on the outside. In other European regions the development of a strong central system of government, which was the by-product of foreign wars or invasion, had hastened Church reform. In Ireland, the lack of a strong central authority in the country meant that reform of the Church had been, at best, patchy and incomplete. The Church was not cajoled into reform by a strong secular authority, nor could it overcome the divided, destructive and self-interested forces which perpetuated the fragmented kingship system. Neither the Irish bishops nor the Church authorities in Rome wanted that situation to continue. Any further delay in reform would be detrimental to the Church. For them, the arrival of a strong outside force in the shape of the Normans might be welcome, as it would galvanise the whole situation in Ireland.

Whatever the wishes of the wider Church might have been, the post-Boru power vacuum was itself bringing matters to a head. In 1166, Rory O'Conner of Connacht seized power and with it took the title of High King. He was not without his opponents: most notably one Dermot MacMurrough. MacMurrough had been a supporter of the previous High King, MacLochlainn of Ulster. MacMurrough, who ruled over Leinster, was not a popular king amongst his fellows. He had carried off the wife of the King of Breffni in 1151, and had later blinded MacLochlainn of Ulster as a way of taking control for himself. MacMurrough's basic problem was that, in allying himself with MacLochlainn and then usurping him, he had backed the wrong horse. In 1166, it was MacMurrough who paid the price for his previous misdemeanours. With O'Conner as High King, and without the patronage of MacLochlainn, MacMurrough was attacked by O'Rourke of Breffni. O'Rourke was supported by the old Viking community of Dublin (the Ostmen) and various Leinster chiefs, and driven by a need to revenge the theft of his wife fifteen years earlier. MacMurrough was defeated and had to flee Ireland.

For a king to be beaten in battle, and to be forced from his native land, is not unusual in the annals. Dermot MacMurrough

ensured his place in Irish history as a result of his actions once defeated by O'Rourke. Rather than accepting defeat, or attempting to struggle back to prominence from a position of weakness by making local coalitions, MacMurrough travelled to England, and then on to France. There he sought the help of the king of England, Henry II, in restoring his crown. In seeking such help, MacMurrough would fundamentally and permanently change Ireland. He would open Ireland to her powerful neighbour across the Irish Sea, and in doing so would form relationships which, although not completed and formalised until later centuries, would radically alter the nature of the traditional Gaelic power structures.

#### THE ENGLISH INVASION

In the first instance, MacMurrough was not seeking the direct intervention of Henry II, nor did he want to see the English annexation of Ireland. The help that he wanted from Henry was to be allowed to raise troops from among Henry's subjects. Such a request was granted and MacMurrough enlisted the help of the Marcher Lords of Wales in an attempt to regain his kingdom. The Marcher Lords were a mixture of Normans, Flemings and native Welsh. They were experienced fighters who had all the tools of contemporary warfare at their disposal. In return for their help, MacMurrough had made promises of lands and bounty. Foremost amongst his new allies was one Richard de Clare, the Earl of Pembroke, and known by most as Strongbow. MacMurrough cemented the offer of help by giving his daughter Aoife to Strongbow as a wife, thereby beginning a long and popular process of English-Irish intermarriage.

MacMurrough returned to Ireland in the autumn of 1167 and waited for his newly formed band of mercenaries to arrive. In May 1169, the first of the Marcher Lords, Robert Fitzstephen arrived with knights and archers, quickly followed by Maurice de Perendergast and his band of Flemish mercenaries. Joining with MacMurrough, this group laid siege to Wexford, which capitulated in a day. As a result of the quick victory, the opposing forces, which had fought against him years earlier, ceased hostilities. Thus with the support of the Ostmen and the disaf-

fecting Leinster clans, MacMurrough reclaimed his Leinster throne, and settled his differences with the High King. MacMurrough, however, as can be gauged from his wife-stealing, the blinding escapade and the excursion to see Henry II, was not the kind of man to settle quietly for what he had.

After regaining Leinster, MacMurrough set his sights on the High Kingship. In 1170 he once again contacted Strongbow and requested his help in taking control of wider areas across Ireland. In May of that year, Strongbow sent ahead a Geraldine (descendants of the eleventh-century Welsh princess Nesta), Raymond Le Gros, with a small force. They landed in the south of Wexford and soon came under attack from a combined force made up of Ostmen from neighbouring Waterford and the native Irish of Munster. With their military expertise and their greater technological advancement, Strongbow's representatives easily defeated a much larger army.

As the summer of 1170 progressed, Strongbow gathered together an impressive force and prepared to embark for Ireland. As he stood ready, with two hundred knights and a thousand archers, all of whom were the contemporary epitomes of modern warfare, he was sent messages by Henry II, forbidding the attack. Henry was concerned that with such a strong army, Strongbow would not only easily take control of Ireland, but once established, would turn that force against his English king. Strongbow ignored Henry's orders and set sail. He landed in Waterford on 23 August 1170. Strongbow quickly took control of the town, and once established there, was visited by MacMurrough who, as previously agreed, handed over his daughter for marriage.

The combined English-Irish forces of Strongbow and MacMurrough then set out to conquer as much of Ireland as was possible. They took Dublin from the Ostmen who were holding the city, a feat accomplished under the nose of the High King O'Conner, who was camped south of the city waiting to repel the invaders. Once it had been lost, O'Conner gave up the city and retreated. Strongbow took control of Dublin and cemented his control over it and the surrounding area, while MacMurrough set out for Breffni to settle old scores.

The Strongbow-MacMurrough alliance could possibly have brought about the national unity Ireland needed to repel a full-

scale English invasion. By linking Strongbow to his daughter, MacMurrough had essentially Gaelicised Strongbow, while Strongbow's close links to the English Crown sheltered Ireland from an all-out assault. The combination of MacMurrough's local knowledge and Strongbow's military strength would undoubtedly have been strong enough to suppress the other local kings across Ireland. The Gaelic-English balance which the partnership afforded would have contented those looking across the Irish Sea that Ireland would not become a troublesome outpost that could threaten the Crown. All such plans were destroyed in May 1171 when MacMurrough died.

It appears that in promising his daughter to Strongbow, MacMurrough had also decreed that when he died his powers would pass to his English ally. The problem for this cosy arrangement was that no such precedent existed in Irish law. The wider royal family elected new kings. Despite any loyalty that the family may have had towards MacMurrough, there was no likelihood that they would accept the cuckoo in the nest. The delicate power balance which might have emerged under a Strongbow-MacMurrough coalition, imploded completely. In the process, the Irish were, in part, suppressed and many traditional power structures were challenged. Put simply, too many external and internal power groups became fascinated by the prospect of controlling Ireland.

In the face of the Strongbow claim for the MacMurrough crown, a nephew, Muirchertach, emerged as the family champion. His family group supported him, along with the men of Leinster and the other kingdoms who were fearful of Strongbow. Their fear was not of a new king; after all, power struggles after the death of the monarch were not unusual. The fear was of an Englishman, an outsider, taking control of Ireland. The opposition from the native Irish to Strongbow's presence was aided by the Vikings of the West of Scotland and the Isle of Man, who were outraged at the treatment of the Ostmen at the hands of the English invader.

The remainder of 1171 witnessed a battle for the control of Ireland. This was focused on Dublin, but it would settle the future power dynamics of Ireland for years to come. The Vikings freely attacked Dublin from the coast and were a constant threat to the resident English forces. More serious, however, were the

combined Irish forces ranged outside the city walls. As High King, Rory O'Conner had brought together a force of some 30,000 men from across the land. After a two-month siege, the Irish were caught off guard by a Norman breakout from the city, and, despite a numerical supremacy of fifteen to one, the Irish were routed. It had been a difficult year for Strongbow, but his position, in Ireland at least, was secure because of his military might.

The rise of Strongbow, and his emergence as the most powerful entity in Ireland, brought Henry II's attention back to his western neighbour. His concerns, which he had stressed in 1170 when trying to prevent Strongbow from embarking for Ireland, had come to fruition. Despite Strongbow's protestations that he had won Ireland for the Crown, Henry decided to act. In 1172, Henry gathered together a huge force and set sail.

Once in Ireland Henry did not have to fight to win subservience from either the resident English or the native Irish. Strongbow had no choice but to accept Henry as his ruler. His best lands on the eastern seaboard were transferred to royal ownership, and he was only granted control of Leinster as a tenant. The former Viking towns still in the hands of Ostmen were taken directly into royal ownership. Many of the native Irish kings paid tribute to Henry and agreed to accept him as overlord. For them it seemed more comforting to accept the rule of a fair-minded foreign king, than to have to fight self-interested aggressors such as Strongbow for control of the land. It was equally reassuring to know that Henry was intent on keeping Strongbow in check.

It is difficult to know exactly why Henry decided to embark for Ireland. The control of an itinerant and possibly problematic knight was undoubtedly an important motivating factor, but it also seems that religion, once again, played an important role in affecting the course of Irish history. Churches in Ireland had been placed under the control of Canterbury as early as the time of St Augustine. This control had been depleted when the Vikings had converted to Christianity. They had placed their faith in the Synod of Kells, thereby cutting the Irish Church off from Canterbury's control, and distancing it from Rome. Effectively it had become an independent Church. The archbishops at Canterbury had always wanted to regain control of

Ireland. Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury, first suggested it as a definite plan to Henry in 1155. A year later, the idea was given Papal sanction by Adrian IV, who granted control of Ireland to Henry with the understanding that the Irish Church would be returned to Rome. Despite all the pressure that was being applied to Henry, he was seemingly in no hurry to actually make a move and claim Ireland either for himself or in the name of the Church. Events elsewhere forced action. In 1171, Thomas à Beckett was murdered in Canterbury Cathedral. Henry was roundly condemned and held responsible for the murder. He was duly banished from the Church until such time as his guilt had been discharged. In searching for a suitable deed that would return him to favour, Henry's eyes were drawn to Ireland and the memory of Papal pleadings of years earlier to intervene. The potentially threatening activities of Strongbow added to the justification for action, if anymore were needed, and enabled Henry to kill two birds with one stone.

Following the favourable reaction from the Irish kings, Henry called an Irish synod together at Cashel. The synod brought the Irish Church back into line with the greater Church and enacted reforms which addressed Papal concerns. Through his actions, Henry brought a level of peace to Ireland which had been absent for years, reformed the Church and won the approval of the majority of the different native kings.

#### THE LORDSHIP OF IRELAND

Unfortunately for Henry, his stay in Ireland was curtailed by the actions of his son, also named Henry, who was planning a rebellion in his absence. Quickly leaving Ireland to deal with problems at home, Henry left Hugh de Lacy as chief officer (justiciar) to assert the royal power in Ireland and, more immediately, to continue keeping Strongbow in check.

De Lacy, like Strongbow, was Welsh-Norman. His presence alongside Normans, Flemish, English, Ostmen and native Irish was symbolic of the wide mix of races that were living, and assimilating into, Irish life. It was the assimilation of the different groups, especially the Normans, into Gaelic culture, combined with the lack of a clear Irish policy from the various

English monarchs, which would prevent Ireland from becoming a peaceful colony, as seemed possible at the time of Henry's visit. The lordship of Ireland, despite its promising and peaceful beginning, signalled four hundred years of power struggles, warfare, and a reassertion of an Irish way of life distinct from the English, which would not be combated until Henry VIII took direct control of the country in the sixteenth century.

The doubts left by Henry II's rapid departure from Ireland before his work was complete led to Church intervention in an attempt to secure a lasting peace. The major problem was the High King, Rory O'Conner. Although he had travelled to meet Henry's envoys, he did not meet the King himself and did not submit to Henry's overlordship. The lack of an agreement between Henry and O'Conner could have caused problems in the future if O'Conner had ever chosen to rise against the new English ruler of Ireland. It is doubtful that O'Conner would have been successful in the face of English military technology, but he could have made the country ungovernable and required the commitment of a disproportionate amount of Henry's resources to keeping Ireland quiet. The Archbishop of Dublin, Laurence O'Toole, recognised this and brokered an agreement between Henry and O'Conner in 1175, the Treaty of Windsor. In agreeing to the treaty, O'Conner recognised Henry as his overlord, while Henry accepted that O'Conner was the ruler of Connacht and the Irish High King. In his role as High King, O'Conner would have to collect tribute from other kings, which would be forwarded to Henry.

As with the potential Strongbow–MacMurrough alliance that might have brought a degree of stability to Ireland, the same is true of the Treaty of Windsor. In forging an alliance between the Norman and Irish kings, O'Toole had brokered a reciprocal agreement that should have secured the peace of Ireland. The difficulty was that there were too many loose cannons in Ireland at the time. Whereas Henry could genuinely claim to rule over his kingdom and have a level of undisputed power (his rebellious sons notwithstanding!), O'Conner could not make the same claim. MacMurrough and others had challenged O'Conner as High King. Following the English invasions he was in an even weaker position. How could he, in these circumstances, ever successfully claim tribute from other Irish kings on behalf of a

foreign ruler, when they did not even wholeheartedly support (or acquiesce) to his High Kingship? An additional problem was posed by the English representatives who remained in Ireland after Henry's departure, men such as Strongbow and other adventurers, who although professing loyalty to Henry, had no respect for the Irish kings, and coveted the land and wealth which were available in Ireland.

Soon after his departure, the two men that Henry had left in Ireland with sizeable grants of land, Strongbow in Leinster and Hugh de Lacy in Meath, both sought to enlarge their territories. The expansion was not merely concerned with the gaining and holding of lands, but was also driven by a desire to transform Ireland into a society run along English lines. In Leinster and Meath the way of life, especially administration of the land, was changed so that it duplicated the norms of life in England. The territories of Strongbow and de Lacy were placed under the control of a manor house. Alongside the establishment of the manor evolved a system of basic land management involving the use of sub-tenants. Charters were granted to towns, so that their existence became formalised and recognised; many abbeys were founded and defensive fortifications were built around important areas of settlement. In the years following Strongbow's initial invasion, and Henry's reconsolidating of the English presence in Ireland, the cultural and economic colonisation began. The aim was to make Ireland part of the English world.

It quickly became apparent to others watching from foreign shores that the success of Strongbow and de Lacy could be duplicated. Ireland appeared a nation rich in resources, full of opportunities and one that no longer needed to be conquered before it could be exploited. The seemingly free hand which Strongbow and de Lacy had in Ireland, despite any controls that Henry had attempted to put into place, only served to encourage other speculators. As the twelfth century ended and the thirteenth began, English adventurers began arriving in Ireland in increasing numbers looking to make a name, and wealth, for themselves.

Some of the adventurers to Ireland were of sufficient prestige that their arrival there and their claims on Irish lands, despite the Treaty of Windsor, had to be recognised by Henry. Others, ignoring the Treaty and the sensibilities of Irish-English relations,

took the land which they desired. Many of the maverick adventurers to Ireland who were operating without Royal backing depended on their military superiority to defeat the Irish, yet others were also helped to pursue their claims for land by the Irish themselves. In the post-MacMurrough uncertainty, and with the inability of O'Conner to establish himself clearly as the High King, remained countless disputes relating to land and title amongst the Irish kings. The different disputes could be settled far more quickly if one of the kings in question was prepared to utilise the services of an English invader and his forces. The problem for the Irish was that once they had invited the English in to assist them, the English often proved untrustworthy and used the request for help as a springboard to domination of the local area. Effectively, the process witnessed years earlier with MacMurrough and Strongbow, where the English came out on top, possessing all the land and the title, was being repeated across the country. The nature of this second wave of English conquest directly challenged the scheme of politics that Henry and O'Conner had attempted to put into place to secure the long-term peace in Ireland. Through the Treaty of Windsor, Henry had recognised the rights of the different Irish kings and had secured for them the future ownership of their lands. In granting land titles to those English adventurers he supported, and lacking the will or the force to control the mavericks, Henry had undermined the treaty which was supposed to bring stability. By the middle of the thirteenth century, English influence, with the exception of specific pockets of resistance (such as Ulster), stretched across three-quarters of Ireland.

The gradual annexation of Ireland created a series of problems which would make the long-term tenure of control in that country difficult, if not impossible. Ireland had no central scheme of control before the English arrived. As the conquest of Ireland was carried out by a series of different adventurers – most of them motivated by their own greed – rather than by a campaign under the control of a single authority, conquest, once achieved, would itself be piecemeal. Without any form of central control over, rationale for, or driving force behind the conquest, it would be difficult for the English to control Ireland and make it a model in their own image. It is true that they brought the feudal system of land ownership and administration to Ireland,

but, though imposing it in places, they failed to destroy or replace the Irish system of kingships and law. In total, the nation was neither Irish nor Norman, but perpetually weak and unstable as neither group had an authority that stretched across Ireland.

The lack of leadership from Henry served only to increase these difficulties. He was too involved in political intrigue elsewhere to devote much attention to Ireland. He hoped instead to rule it through a justiciar. However, without a central administrative and legal system which was commonly understood and acted on by both invader and native alike, then the power of the justiciar would always be minimal.

In an attempt to force his authority, Henry put forward his son John for the lordship of Ireland. This was done in 1177, when John was nine, and thus by virtue of his age, despite any authority he may have had, was as good as useless in maintaining control. Indeed, it took eight years, until he was seventeen, before John travelled to Ireland. The trip of 1185 was designed so that the English and Irish nobles and kings could pay their dues to, and recognise, their new lord. As with many seventeen-year-olds, royal or otherwise, John was full of his own self-importance and exerted his father's power over Ireland in a dreadful manner. He offended the Irish kings by insulting them and their traditions, and distanced the nobles by choosing to ignore the advice they offered on the state of Ireland. To add the final insult to injury, John began granting land titles to his young friends and followers, most notably in Tipperary and Limerick, thereby taking titles from older settlers and placing the Irish under the control of new, less experienced and more boisterous overlords. After a few months, even the seemingly uninterested Henry realised that John was doing more harm than good and recalled him home.

After John's return to England the justiciar, Hugh de Lacy, was replaced by John de Courcy; de Lacy's loyalty to the crown was called into question, like Strongbow's years earlier, as he had taken the daughter of an Irish king for his wife. De Courcy remained in office until 1192, when he was replaced by Peter Pipard and William le Pettit. The reason for his fall from grace was that he backed the claims of John's elder brother Richard in the battle for succession following Henry's death. In 1199, John took the crown for himself, and in 1205 granted de Courcy's

lands to the rival de Lacy family (who had to take them by force). In doing so he settled an old score, and Ireland had once more been used as a place to resolve intrigues and power struggles which emerged from the English court.

Once in power John's attitude to Ireland was in marked contrast to the immaturity of the seventeen-year-old who had first made the trip across the Irish Sea. On his succession he merged the lordship of Ireland with the monarchy, thus making the king directly responsible for his western land. John's greatest aim was to bring Ireland under the control of the English system of law. He was well aware that the conquest of Ireland had been a makeshift affair, and that royal power over Ireland was not complete. One of the great weaknesses of the legal system was that the settlers, individuals as they were, did not follow the law or any central administration. The Irish kings, after the failure of the Treaty of Windsor, were equally immune to any central authority. John introduced a system of sheriff's courts, assizes, travelling judges and trial by jury which brought Ireland into line with the English system. The construction of Dublin Castle was begun. This building was envisaged as the centre of English rule over Ireland. John also tamed and utilised the geography of Ireland: county boundaries were made clearer and the coastline was used in an attempt to create a more sustained system of sea trading. In addition to all the legislation, which he put in place from afar, John made his second visit to Ireland in 1210.

The reason behind John's visit was the same that had driven his father across the Irish Sea years earlier: the power of the monarch's subjects in Ireland was becoming a cause for concern. As the struggle for succession had taken up so much of John's time, Ireland had not only been ignored, but had also avoided such struggles and had been left untouched by division. In place of the factions that had ravaged England, the settlers in Ireland had set about consolidating their power in a way that ignored the authority of the throne. To put down his increasingly powerful barons, John brought a large army to Ireland. He stayed in the country for a mere two months, but, in that time, marched from coast to coast. He reinforced the power of the monarchy across all the English-controlled parts of Ireland. In reasserting his power in such an overt fashion, he underpinned his strength of commitment to the English system of law within Ireland. Put

simply, those barons who did not submit to it would face military attack at a future date.

John's problem, however, was that Ireland was not comprised solely of disloyal barons. The settlers may well have agreed to obey the letter of the English law and to operate within the English system which John had introduced. What though of the Irish? In legal terms the Irish were to be considered as serfs (betaghs) by the English. This would have been fine, and could have worked quite simply, if Ireland had been like other settled lands where the native populations were subservient and recognised the laws and customs of their overlords. This was not however the case. The Irish had never been settled in the true sense, and their way of life was never supplanted by the English system. As a result, the settlers in Ireland were colonisers surrounded by a hostile population. In not being able to enforce English law beyond his own settlers, John's system of rule became ineffective. What was needed was a complete conquest of Ireland – not just of the land, but also of its people – at which point genuine central government and control could follow. Another difficulty was that Ireland was not simply a nation that had not been fully conquered; it was a land where the colonisers were adapting to the habits and the systems of the native through inter-marriage. With the emergence of an Irish–Norman elite (shown by the marriages of men such as Strongbow and de Lacy), the law, and its central strength in underpinning the system of government, was further weakened.

#### THE FAILURE OF THE LORDSHIP

Despite the concerted efforts made by John to bring effective and unified rule to Ireland, his mission was to fail in the long term. The nature of the conquest of Ireland, which had been partial and had been driven by individuals who were not under the central control of the monarch or his agents, weakened English rule from the start. The continued presence of the Irish kings as a powerful group further added to the difficulties, and the rate of assimilation between English and Irish reduced the links between coloniser and home. All of this was compounded by the lack of interest which the different English monarchs had

in Ireland. After John's visit in 1210, it was not until 1394 that an English king, Richard II, visited Ireland again.

With the actual monarch having so little interest, it is hardly surprising that the justiciars were in such a weak position and were so ineffective in attempting to control events in Ireland. While English law functioned so ineffectively, baron and Irish king alike sought to settle their differences through war. The barons would form alliances between themselves, and with Irish kings, in an attempt to build power bases and to take land. In all this the justiciar was weak, and the chances of English law being effective became less and less likely. The nature of localised wars and shifting power relationships meant that, by the beginning of the fourteenth century, two-thirds of the island of Ireland was under English control. The total number of English at this time was probably no more than 2500. It is clear that their power far outstretched their comparative numerical strength. The hope amongst these English had always been that the attractions of land and wealth that were available in Ireland would bring other migrants. In reality this never happened. Although many came over in the years following the establishment of Strongbow in Leinster, the passage of the years and the continuing instability of Ireland made it an unattractive trip to make for the English. Under Henry III, they were too preoccupied with wars elsewhere to go and struggle in Ireland. As a result, the total number of settlers was always to remain low. While they remained a small group, the Normans' hold on power would always be tenuous, and their need to intermarry greater, despite the English military strength, which had taken them into positions of power across the country. The Irish were still strong and controlled most of Ulster, and parts of Connacht, Leinster and Munster. In other areas where they did not have direct power, the Irish kings were enough of a threat to the settlers that they could not be driven off the land, and had to be brought into power alongside the invader.

For the settlers, their small numbers were a cause of concern. Families were dying out, and the numbers for expansion were not present. By contrast, the Irish were plentiful in number. The multitude of kingdoms meant that the different combinations of alliances, which could create difficulties for the English, were huge. Significant victories were won by the Irish in the second half of the thirteenth century in Sligo, at Kenmare, Carrick on

Shannon and at Loch Neagh. The English tenure of Ireland, in the second half of the thirteenth century, was reaching a point of crisis.

Despite the impending difficulties, some aspects of the lordship did develop during the thirteenth century in the way envisaged by John. The system of counties and their borders was completed, and each county was given its own sheriff and shire court. Under this system all lawmaking and decisions were driven by the English system. The justiciar used his power to summon Irish parliaments, whose membership was drawn from all the knights of the different counties. The only people who could attend the parliament were those who were either settlers or their descendants. Any legislation which emerged from the parliament could only be applied to areas controlled by the English, and the Irish-controlled regions were beyond the law.

Any chance of success for John's system of government, which seemed, by Irish standards at least, to be flourishing under the rule of Edward I (reigned 1272–1307), was destroyed by the Scottish invasion of 1315. Despite any consolidation in the field of administrative government that may have occurred under Edward's reign, his problems elsewhere in his kingdom cost him dear in Ireland. Edward embarked on, and fought, a long and costly campaign against the Scots at the end of the thirteenth century. The cost of his campaign was spread across all territories which he controlled. Ireland was duly called on to provide men and wealth for the campaign. In total nearly 8000 men were sent from Ireland to fight in Scotland, all at the cost of the Irish purse. The effects of such demands were hugely damaging to Ireland. The Irish treasury could barely cope with the cost of a domestic campaign, and while this money was being spent in Scotland, very little was being used to preserve the peace in Ireland.

This regression of the situation in Ireland was not lost on Edward II. He promised that all money in the Irish treasury would be spent on Ireland in order to try and prevent the slide into anarchy and lawlessness which seemed to be taking place. The barons could not be controlled as they were now beyond the reach of English law and only serving their self-interested needs. Alongside this collapse in the strength of the relationships between the settlers and their king, was a resurgent Irish race.

Since the middle of the thirteenth century, the Irish kings had been using the services of the gallowglasses, a group of mercenary troops from north-west Scotland. They fought with huge axes, wore body armour and were experienced in the ways of contemporary warfare. They brought to the Irish everything they had lacked in modern warfare technology since the arrival of Strongbow. The gallowglasses had been instrumental in the small victories claimed by the Irish in places such as Sligo, mentioned earlier. Their role in the Scottish invasion would be crucial.

The English–Scottish war ended in 1328 with Robert the Bruce's victory over the English at Bannockburn. As a result of this success, and bearing in mind the close proximity of Scotland to Ulster, with regular contacts between the two nations, and the victories inspired by the gallowglasses, Donal O'Neill, the King of Ulster, approached Edward the Bruce (Robert's brother) to become High King. To extend the title of the High Kingship to a foreigner did have a precedent as in 1263, Haakon, King of Norway, had been made a similar offer. Edward accepted the offer made to him with the backing of his more famous brother.

The adventures of Edward in Ireland make for fascinating reading. Looking at the position in 1315, the date of Edward's arrival in Ireland, it appears that the combined strength of a rebellion against English dominance in Scotland and in Ireland, led by the two Bruces, could seriously, if not irrecoverably, damage the settler community in Ireland. In contrast with these hopeful beginnings for a combined Gaelic onslaught against English power, the actual story of Edward ended in failure, and eventual rejection by the Irish.

Edward landed in Ireland in May 1315 at Larne. His force was one of the largest that had ever gathered in Ireland, and numbered in excess of 6000 soldiers, supported by the gallowglasses who were already in Ireland, and by the native Irish. Unlike the invasions which had been ongoing since the first of the Viking incursions, the aim of Edward's expedition was to place the Irish back in a position of primacy and to drive out the English. The justiciar demanded that all allies of the English and the barons rise to resist the invasion. Nevertheless, the forces under Edward's control seemingly could not be halted. They won immediate victories in Ulster, took and burned Dundalk,

before moving to Meath. They swept through Meath and had arrived in Leinster by the start of 1316.

In the face of Edward's force, the rulers of Ireland were seemingly powerless. All the failures to invest in and impose a central control over the whole of Ireland and her people, became apparent, and all the problems came home to roost. Without central control and an ability to conduct a sustained and co-ordinated defence of the country, the official government was as good as powerless to do anything. It could not coerce the different barons into defending the country against Edward as they were weak, divided and self-interested. They would rather come to an accommodation with Edward, thereby preserving their lands and titles, than risk a humiliating defeat. The Irish were as belligerent as the English were weak; after years of English interference, they finally had the opportunity, and more importantly the means, to rise up.

Edward did not press home his obvious advantage of 1316 and returned to Ulster to be crowned. He established his court at Carrickfergus in September 1316 and consolidated his position by establishing a rule of law. In 1317, he journeyed back to Scotland and persuaded his brother Robert to join him for a tour round Ireland, during which they would establish their position over the kings of Ireland so that Edward could emerge as the undisputed High King. The tour, rather than being a triumphal procession, was in fact a desperate rout. Ireland, as with much of Europe, suffered from dreadful famine during 1317 and the Scots, rather than winning over the Irish, abused their power and took animals, crops and money from them. While this may have shown the strength of their authority, such actions, at a time of famine, distanced the cause of Edward and the dream of a Gaelic alliance.

In the early summer of 1317, Robert the Bruce and many of his followers returned to Scotland, while Edward and his supporters went back to Ulster. The combined weight of the Scots invasion and the famine had destroyed Ireland financially. The government in Dublin could no longer afford to run the campaign against Edward, and could raise no further money from those barons who remained, to start a campaign afresh. England finally stepped in, and dispatched a new justiciar, Roger Mortimer, to take control. Mortimer was successful in returning Meath, Leinster and Munster to Crown control and in 1318,

English forces under John de Bermingham defeated Edward the Bruce in a battle at Faughart in Ulster.

Edward's time was not favourably remembered by the Irish. Their supposed saviour had in fact overseen a period of war and famine which was to the detriment, not the benefit, of the Irish. More profoundly than Irish disappointment at the failure of their saviour, the Scottish invasion fully revealed the inadequate nature of English rule over Ireland. Although Mortimer had been successful in restoring Crown rule over most of the country, this was as tenuous as it had been before 1315. Mortimer had ensured that those Irish kings who had fought for Edward made their peace and those few Irish-English who had sided with the Scots returned, albeit chastised, to the fold. The greatest difficulty was that, despite any wavering loyalties to the Crown amongst the different residents of Ireland, there was simply no infrastructure through which the English could confidently see Ireland defended or administered. The lack of control had been exacerbated by the effects of the famine, and the financial insecurities of the country had prior roots, dating back to the Anglo-Scottish wars of two decades earlier. Revenue from Ireland collapsed after the Scottish invasions; land values fell to a fraction of their previous worth and customs duties became almost non-existent. Because of the lack of revenue, government officials took to supplementing their income with bribes and fraudulent activity, which only served to make a bad situation worse. Put simply, Ireland in 1317 was a mess.

Despite Mortimer retaking those areas lost to the Scottish invaders, the number of settlers was now so depleted that the native Irish were steadily regaining the initiative. The English were spread too thinly and were too weak to continue to occupy unchallenged the parts of Ireland which they held. The Black Death of 1350 further depleted their number, while the growing fragility of the Irish situation convinced others that they were better off back in England. The case for the weakened position of the settlers is shown by the events of 1316. It is widely accepted that the de Burgh victory over the O'Connors of Connacht that year was the final victory by the English leading to the holding of new land. Although Mortimer was successful in defeating combined Scots-Irish forces after this date, his campaign produced only a re-annexing of lands previously held.

For the Irish, the problem of the settlers holding their lands was exacerbated by the effects of absenteeism. Absentee landlords had begun establishing land holdings soon after the first incursions into Ireland, and this problem, in various forms, would haunt the Irish landscape and affect politics into the early twentieth century. The major English figures that involved themselves with Ireland were also likely to have land interests in England and France. The prestige of their other holdings was far greater than those in Ireland and it became common practice to leave the Irish properties and run them from afar. This created problems locally as the infrastructure which supported the land was allowed to decay: garrisons were not kept in a good condition, and, without this support, the baron's tenants were left to fend for themselves. Once alone, the tenants were likely to come under threat from the local Irish, or else had to come to accommodations with them. This process fundamentally undermined the whole English annexation of Ireland. Without strong central landowners who were prepared to stay in residence to run their estates, thereby providing support for their tenants, English rule, and the application of its laws and customs, would always be weak. Those tenants left behind, poorly served and defended, would have little time for their overlords and little affinity with central administration.

The powers in England attempted to halt the process of absenteeism through legislation, such as that enacted in 1297 which made it an offence for absentees to continue neglecting the defence of their lands. This legislation, as with all subsequent laws which were applied to the absentees, was difficult to enforce and certainly did little to effect a change in the situation. Similar laws in 1380, which demanded that all absentees return to their land in Ireland, merely encouraged many landowners to jettison their interests altogether. They sold their lands to local Irish kings. The laws had forced them into a position where crown control, rather than being reinforced by the return of absentees, was weakened.

The difficulties which absenteeism caused were added to by the actions of those English who actually remained in the country. Following the Scottish invasions the power situation in Ireland was highly fluid. Boundaries between the holdings of different barons were challenged as families sought to gain more

lands and influence. In the 1330s, the de Burgh family who controlled Connacht and Ulster slipped into an acrimonious row over who should control the destiny of the family lands. Cousins locked into battle with cousin, until one of their number, William, the Brown Earl, was murdered. His lack of a male heir meant that the de Burgh lands were split between different sections of the now divided family. The effects of the breakup of so dominant a family were disastrous for the Crown, which should have been looking to families such as the de Burgh's to ensure a continuity of power in Ireland that afforded a degree of strength and stability; such fracturing brought only division and weakness.

The paucity of the situation of the English colonisers was exacerbated by the Black Death, which ravaged Europe during the fourteenth century. All Ireland suffered, but it was the settlers, living as they did at close quarters with each other in towns, who lost most. Nearly 40 per cent of the colonising population is reputed to have died. By contrast, the Irish, living in the open in less densely populated groups, were less affected. The colonisers were losing the numbers game badly.

Another ongoing problem for the English trying to control their colonisers in Ireland was the increasingly common process of Gaelicisation. This began, as has been explained, with Strongbow's marriage into the MacMurrough family, but by the fourteenth century, the process was not only taking place more often, but was becoming irreversible. A classic example of the Gaelicisation process is again the de Burgh family. Defying the English law that stated that all lands and titles should pass to the eldest son, two brothers opted instead to divide the family lands between them. They also changed their name to a Gaelic form, spoke the Irish language and intermarried with local Irish royalty. Their houses were open to poets, harpists and other forms of Irish cultural expression that distanced them further from their own heritage. In effect the de Burgh's of Connacht, who should have been bastions of the English order in Ireland, became Irish. Once transformed, their allegiances would be to the Irish way of life, Irish customs and their Irish allies, rather than to the authority of the justiciar in Ireland and the English Crown. Such transformations were completely undermining any remaining vestiges of Crown authority in Ireland. The situation

in the first half of the fourteenth century was bad enough as it was, but for some of those remaining settlers to Gaelicise themselves in this way was the last straw. Royal intervention was needed to save Crown authority in Ireland. It was accepted that, for various historic reasons, the whole of Ireland could not be conquered as that opportunity had been missed centuries earlier, but the Crown had to try and maintain what was still held there.

It fell to Edward III (reigned 1327–77) to rescue some semblance of Crown authority in Ireland. He accepted that Ireland could not be conquered, and that the Lordship of Ireland could only be maintained by constant military intervention. This recognition of the true state of affairs also implicitly recognised that the loyalty of many of the original settlers could no longer be relied on. Rather than the Irish assimilating into and accepting English norms and the letter of the English law, many of the settlers were assimilating in the opposite direction. This offered succour to the Irish and strengthened their resolve to oppose the English. By the time of Edward III, the area of Crown influence in Ireland was reduced to approximately one-third of the country, surrounding Dublin. To protect the influence of the Crown and to save the remaining parts of English Ireland, the reign of Henry III witnessed the passage of the infamous statutes of Kilkenny.

In 1361, Henry III had sent his son Lionel, duke of Clarence, to Ireland to act as justiciar. Clarence's role was to act as a strong English leader in Ireland, something which had been lacking for years. He was given the task of retaking lands that had been lost to the Irish, preventing warfare between the loyal settlers, improving and regulating the balance of trade in Ireland, and ensuring that the long-term defence of the Crown's authority in Ireland was secured. Clarence took his forces to Ulster, Leinster and Munster in an attempt to regain lost lands and to stem the advance of the Irish. He found it incredibly difficult to gain the support of the English settlers in his wars against the Irish. As a result, any lands he did win back were only held in the short term, and he could not make his victories permanent. Militarily Clarence was a failure. He could not carry out the king's wishes. The parts of Ireland which had been lost to the Irish could not be recovered, and the defence of those areas still held by the English could not be ensured. Despite the interven-

tion of Clarence, the Crown control of Ireland was contracting daily.

In a major attempt to restore order, the statutes of Kilkenny were passed at a parliament held in Kilkenny, called by Clarence. The idea underpinning the statutes was simple: if Ireland could not be held militarily, then the two parts of Ireland (Irish and English-settler) had to be kept separate. In ensuring a level of purity, the advance of the Irish into Crown-held lands by the process of assimilation could be halted. The statutes recognised that the ideal process of assimilation (from the point of view of the English) would have resulted in the Irish copying English forms of behaviour and obeying English law. This would have created an Ireland that was governed by the English crown. The process had been supplanted however, and reversed so that the Norman colonisers were now integrating into Irish customs and adopting Irish ways. This current practice of reverse assimilation was challenging the future stability of Crown control in Ireland. The statutes introduced a whole swathe of legislation designed to reverse this process. The English in Ireland would have to return fully to the control of English law. They were no longer allowed to settle disputes through recourse to the Irish *brehon* laws. They were forbidden to marry the Irish, they could not adopt their own children born to the Irish, and they were prohibited from sponsoring Irish children at baptism. They must retain the English version of their names and not convert to the Gaelicised form. Likewise all Irish in their service must adopt English forms. The common language would have to be English in future. This was seen as a vitally important statute in the context of retaining a common identity between the colonisers and their home across the water. It has many fascinating allusions to the notions of common identity and nationhood, as would be advanced by the Gaelic League and others in their battle to preserve the Irish language and culture in the nineteenth century. In the aim of practical defence of the Crown areas, the English were forbidden from selling horses and armour to the Irish; they could not employ poets and other Irish artists, as these were allegedly often spies, and they were to practise archery regularly so as to be ready for war. Anyone who broke the statutes would not only suffer the full force of law, but would also be excommunicated.

With the statutes in place, Clarence left Ireland to seek greater victories in England and France. What effect would the legislation he left in place have? Could it possibly secure the future safety of the lordship of Ireland as his military campaigns had been unable to do? Despite the threatened weight of legal and spiritual sanction against those who defied the statutes, they were, even from the day of their inception, unenforceable. In parts of Connacht and Ulster the levels of assimilation between the Normans and Irish were so far advanced that the application of the laws, even if the people involved had wished to be compliant, would have been impossible. Across Ireland, even in those areas which could still be considered to be under Crown authority, the development of close relationships between settler and settled had proved in the long term to be mutually beneficial. To destroy those links by obeying the statutes would only have caused the colonisers to suffer. Admittedly they would have been in step with the wishes of their monarch, but their monarch and the semblance of his power were distant and abstract ideas that had little or no impact on their daily lives. The reality was that they had to live with their Irish neighbours, and seek accommodation accordingly. They did not have to live with the power of their monarch and so this could be easily ignored.

The less than positive reaction of the colonisers to the laws was reinforced by the historical problem of central authority in Ireland. As the actual ability of the justiciar to enforce English law in Ireland was profoundly weak, and as a strong central administration, commonly respected, had never developed, so the ability to enforce the statutes was missing. From the inception of the statutes in 1366 and into the next century, the level of English control and the presence of English laws and customs in Ireland diminished. By 1500, English control could only be exerted in a small area surrounding Dublin, known as the Pale. As the fifteenth century progressed, the statutes, although remaining part of the law, became a total irrelevance. The ways of the Irish, their language, their laws and their customs came to dominate. The statutes of Kilkenny were as ineffective in saving Ireland for the Crown as Clarence's attempt at military intervention had been.

### THE SHRINKING PALE

The continuing loss of influence in Ireland prompted Edward III's successor, Richard II (reigned 1377–99), to travel to Ireland in 1394. Richard's stated aim for his visit was to reassure the colonisers, as well as the Irish, that Ireland was of importance to him, and not merely a neglected outpost of the Crown. Richard travelled to Ireland with over six thousand troops and forced many of Ireland's absentee landlords to accompany him. While in residence in Dublin Castle, Richard was visited by some eighty Irish kings, who all paid him tribute and accepted his power in Ireland. In return for their tribute, Richard agreed to honour and recognise all land titles held by the Irish, with the exception of those lands between Dundalk to the north of Dublin, and Waterford to the south. This strip of land, the English land, was known as the Pale. Richard's vision was that the Pale would be a specific English area, where the power of the Crown, conducted through the justiciar and English law, was recognised and undisputed. The Pale, once functioning in this fashion, would serve as a launching pad for the reassertion of Crown authority over the rest of Ireland. Essentially Richard envisaged the Pale as the basis on which the successful conquest of Ireland could finally be completed.

The vision for the Pale, despite the warm reception which the Irish afforded Richard, was never realised. By the 1450s the area covered by the Pale, rather than expanding into Ireland as envisaged by Richard, had actually shrunk back towards Dublin. The reasons for this failure were many, but Richard's own actions contributed. Rather than remaining in Ireland and making his vision work, Richard, as other monarchs before him, hurried back to England. He did not summon a parliament to discuss his plans, and as had happened before, the justiciar was left with a mammoth task, but no real authority to complete it. External events also added to the difficulties of the Pale and its relationship with the rest of Ireland. Throughout the 1400s, England was locked into an almost perpetual state of war with France and was suffering major upheavals domestically as epitomised by the Wars of the Roses. English finances were in a state of chaos, and against this backdrop, the dreams and desires of Richard for Ireland had little chance of realisation. How could any English

monarch be that interested in Ireland, a problematic and expensive lordship with an aggressive native population, when he had problems of such magnitude to deal with at home?

Against these wider themes of the fifteenth century, events in Ireland were largely allowed to follow their own course. There was no major intervention from England, and thus Ireland became a battleground between the forces of the Pale, representing the seemingly distant and uninterested monarchy, and the forces of the various Anglo-Irish kings and chieftains. The many Englishmen who travelled to Ireland to take up the post of justiciar had a difficult time. The government in England was demanding increased revenues to fight foreign wars, while the justiciar was finding it harder to collect taxes in Ireland. Those people who worked on Crown projects, such as the soldiers and artisans, found themselves unpaid. The Irish who lived on the fringes of the Pale could not be controlled, and those who lived within the Pale were forced to pay black rents (protection money) to the Irish to ensure their safety. The only strong figure to appear from England during the fifteenth century was Richard, duke of York, who arrived in Ireland as lord lieutenant in 1447, a post he would hold until 1460. Richard's main desire, however, was to overthrow Henry VI, the Lancastrian king, and Ireland was to form the launching pad for his campaign.

Richard gained much support in Ireland for the Yorkist cause. He was drawn from Anglo-Irish and Irish families, and as such commanded much respect. He was not very active in Irish affairs in their own right, as he was always driven by the bigger goal of securing the crown for the House of York. In 1460, however, the activities of Richard brought about a declaration from an Irish parliament which served to illustrate how far the Pale experiment had failed and how far Ireland had moved away from England. Richard summoned an Irish parliament to Drogheda, where it gathered in early 1460. The parliament first granted Richard sovereign powers, an act which clearly allied Ireland behind the Yorkist cause and further distanced it from the English crown. More important than this, however, was a constitutional declaration by the parliament of Ireland's position with relation to England. The parliament declared its legislative and judicial independence from the English crown, choosing to recognise instead the compromise system of law and culture developed

under the process of assimilation between coloniser and native Irish, which had produced, by this date, an Anglo-Irish elite. This process of assimilation, having followed invasion, now produced a situation of resistance. The Anglo-Irish were choosing to define themselves as distinct from the English and were recognising their land, Ireland, as removed from English jurisdiction. Importantly, Richard, although a contender for the English crown, supported the claims of the Irish parliament.

Richard died at the Battle of Wakefield in England at the end of 1460, but his Yorkist campaign was ultimately successful, as 1461 saw the coronation of his son, Edward IV (reigned 1461–83), as king. At first it appeared that Richard's support for the declaration of the Irish parliament might be honoured by his son. One of his first actions was to remove land and titles from all those families in Ireland who had backed the Lancastrian cause. It seemed as though Edward, in remembering the loyalty of those who had favoured his father's cause and actively punishing those who had digressed, was aware of the events which had taken place in Ireland.

The practical embodiment of Edward's removal of land from the Irish Lancastrians came in 1463, when Thomas, earl of Desmond, a Yorkist, defeated Butler of Ormond in battle. Desmond, now all-powerful, took the job of deputy for Ireland. Edward, however, was not prepared to sit idly by and allow the Irish to think of themselves as independent and he called a parliament to Drogheda in 1468 with the aim of tackling that preconception. Desmond, as the most powerful man in Ireland, arrived at Drogheda only to be arrested and charged with breaking the statute of Kilkenny. He was found guilty and beheaded. The aim of this charge, and the subsequent execution of Desmond, was to break the grip that the biggest Anglo-Irish families had on power. Edward was attempting to destroy them and thereby reinforce royal control over Ireland. As with the machinations of so many holders of the English crown before him, Edward demonstrated a woeful ignorance through his actions. Desmond's son James, rather than bowing down to the might of the English crown, rose against Edward, attacked royal lands and refused to attend parliament ever again. Effectively, Edward had forced one of the most important Anglo-Irish families away from the English crown and into the opposing Irish camp by executing Desmond.

### THE HOUSE OF KILDARE AND THE DOMINATION OF GEARÓID MÓR

The vacuum left by the execution of Desmond was filled by the earl of Kildare, who was appointed as justiciar, and then deputy in 1470. Kildare's role, as with deputies before him, was to run Ireland on behalf of the King. It was a post he would hold for seven years, and one his family would retain until the time of Henry VIII's intervention in Irish affairs. Despite Edward's attempt to remove the overbearing influence of a sole Anglo-Irish earl in the shape of Desmond, he effectively made the way clear for one more powerful and enduring.

When the earl of Kildare died in 1477 he was succeeded by his son Gearóid Mór, who was confirmed by the Irish Council as justiciar and deputy. The new Kildare, although only twenty-one, was immensely powerful and highly regarded by his fellow Anglo-Irish. His extensive family connections that linked him to many of the major Irish and Anglo-Irish families of the time, the immense wealth his family possessed, his influence, which spanned both the Pale and beyond, and his private military strength made Gearóid powerful. Edward was aware of the level of Gearóid's popularity and sent Lord Grey to Ireland to replace him as deputy in 1478. Gearóid refused to step down, and in the face of his intransigence Grey returned to England. Gearóid, having successfully rebuffed Edward's attempt at replacing him, was left unmolested and unchallenged as the sole effective power in Ireland.

The course of English politics conspired to reinforce Gearóid's position as court intrigue turned English eyes away from Ireland. The death of Edward in 1483 was followed by the murder of his successor, the twelve-year-old Edward V, by his uncle Richard who then acceded to the throne as Richard III (reigned 1483–5). He in turn was killed in battle and the victorious Henry VII (reigned 1485–1509), a Lancastrian, took the throne. The whole period left the English crown in a position of relative weakness. On the back of such division and infighting within England, which had to be smoothed over by Henry, it was initially easier for him to allow Gearóid to continue in his position of deputy unmolested. This was far less problematic than attempting to remove him by force.

Gearóid fed off Henry VII's initial reticence to immerse himself in Irish affairs. He involved himself in a plot to replace Henry with a Yorkist in 1487, and in 1488 treated the King's envoy with utter contempt. The message which was emanating from Gearóid, for which he received great support and popularity in Ireland, was that the declaration of 1460 was still operating. Ireland under Gearóid, it seemed, could not be dictated to or controlled by the English crown. Henry decided to take action against Gearóid. In 1494, he chose the military option and sent Sir Edward Poynings to Ireland to replace Gearóid as deputy. Poynings was initially successful; he arrested Gearóid and forced English rule on the Pale and certain areas beyond by military force. The problem however, as had so often been the case before, was cost. Although Henry wanted to control Ireland, the threat of James IV in Scotland was far greater and more immediate. To waste money on a man such as Gearóid, who in comparison with James was a minor irritation, was pointless. The Poynings experiment was brought to a close in 1496, and Gearóid was reinstated as deputy.

For Gearóid, however, the departure of Poynings did not mean a return to business as usual. Before he left, Poynings had called together a parliament at Drogheda at the end of 1494, and passed the Poynings' laws. These laws removed the legal rights of Ireland to legislate for itself and to control its own destiny. In future, any meeting of the Irish parliament had to be sanctioned by the English monarch and his council. All laws to be put before that parliament had to be approved in a similar fashion. Finally it was made clear that English law had to prevail in Ireland. The basis of Poynings' laws, and the level of control this allowed the English monarch over Irish affairs, remained largely unchanged until the late eighteenth century.

On the back of Poynings' laws and the reinstatement of Gearóid, Ireland was mostly peaceful until the earl's death in 1513. Gearóid, despite earlier misdemeanours, remained unquestioningly loyal to the English crown, in that he did not allow Ireland to be used as a launching pad for challenges to its authority. He also largely managed to abide by Poynings' laws. The area within the Pale, small though it was, remained relatively safe, although the conditions of those living within it were far from pleasant. There were incursions into the Pale by the

Irish, and many Irish chieftains still forced those who lived within the borders of the Pale to pay black rent. Areas beyond the Pale were chaotic and rife with warfare. These Gearóid could not control, nor did he attempt to. He was content, as his successor would be, to remain powerful within the area of the Pale and run it, albeit in the name of the English crown, in his own interest. On his death Gearóid was succeeded by his son Gearóid Óg as deputy. Whereas Gearóid Mór had deterred Henry VIII (reigned 1509–47) from taking too close an interest in Ireland, Gearóid Óg would have no such luxury.

#### THE TUDOR INTERVENTION

Henry VIII's advisor Cardinal Wolsey was not enamoured with Gearóid Óg. He believed that the power the young Gearóid exerted over the Pale was too great and that, in effect, he had become a self-appointed king. Henry VIII was well aware of Wolsey's views and equally concerned that his Irish subject did not become over-powerful to the extent where he could challenge the established order in Ireland.

In 1520, Henry dispatched the earl of Surrey to Ireland in yet another royal-sponsored attempt at bringing the Irish into line. The aim was for Surrey to be seen by the Anglo-Irish and Irish alike as a more impressive figure than Gearóid Óg, so that they would transfer their loyalty to him, and thus to the English crown. Surrey's mission was a partial success. Many Irish chieftains came to Surrey, and the invasion of the Pale by O'Neill from Ulster was repelled by him. Despite the financial difficulties that Surrey himself encountered, he stressed his belief to Henry that a force of 5000 men could take the whole of Ireland for the Crown. Henry was not keen to embark on the expenditure which would accompany a plan to subdue the whole of Ireland. Surrey's smaller trip had been expensive enough. The Irish exchequer was broke and Surrey's own budget was quickly spent. The year of his visit was also a year of plague and famine in the Pale which harmed its fragile economy still further. Surrey asked to be recalled home as he was at his wits' end.

The Surrey excursion made clear three important facts to Henry. First, the power of Gearóid Óg could not be easily

broken. Within two years of Surrey's departure he had to be re-appointed as deputy, as no one else had the ability to make the position work. Secondly, any involvement in a plan to place the whole of Ireland under crown authority would be hugely expensive. Finally, despite Surrey's estimate that only 5000 troops were required to take Ireland, it was evident that such a task could only be accomplished by large-scale military action. In a world of constant warfare on different borders, Henry had to decide whether he could stomach another campaign.

It was the removal of Wolsey from a position of power within the English court in 1529 that would bring about a fundamental change in the fortunes of Ireland. His replacement, Thomas Cromwell, believed that the English monarchy should be as strong as possible. Any force which stepped out of line, or was seen to be operating independently, had to be defeated and brought back into a position of subservience. For Cromwell, Gearóid Óg was such a force. In 1533, the Irish Council had Gearóid Óg imprisoned in Maynooth for stealing Crown property, from where Cromwell had him brought to London and placed in the Tower. In his absence, Gearóid Óg's son, Lord Offaly, popularly known as Silken Thomas, was made deputy. It was Silken Thomas who would face the full force of English power as Cromwell and Henry VIII acted to complete the Norman invasion of Ireland.

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