

## Oliver Cromwell at Kilkenny

### Civil War in England

In August 1642 a civil war broke out in England between the supporters of King Charles I, known as the Royalists, and the supporters of Parliament, known as Parliamentarians. By 1645, after the Parliamentarians had defeated the Royalists at the Battle of Naseby, it was obvious that the King could not win the war. He threw himself on the mercy of the Scots Covenanters in 1646, but in 1647 they handed him over as a prisoner to the Parliamentarians. He remained a prisoner for the rest of his life. In 1648 a second civil war broke out in England. It was clear that the King was behind the risings that took place, and that he had been negotiating with Parliament at the same time. The army now expelled from parliament any members who were in favour of making peace with the king. The new parliament decided to try the King, and he was condemned to death. His execution took place in January 1649. The man who took control of the country was Oliver Cromwell, a successful Parliamentary general in the civil wars.

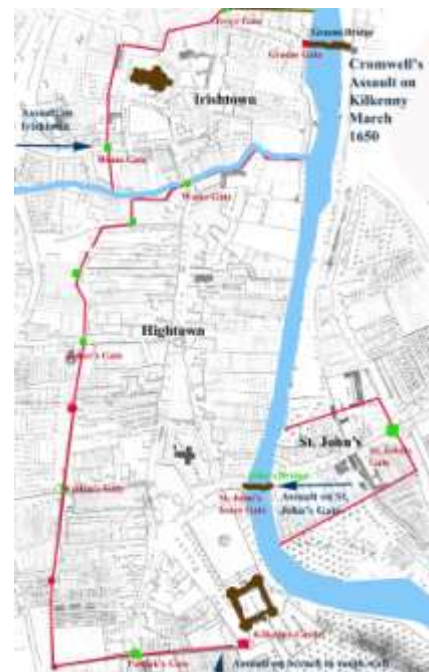


### Cromwell in Ireland

Cromwell arrived in Ireland on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1649. He brought with him 20,000 troops and enough artillery to ensure that he could batter the walls of towns which opposed him. Against him were the troops commanded by the Marquis of Ormonde. These consisted of former confederates and their former royalist opponents. In September he made a breach in the walls of Drogheda and took the town by storm, killing the garrison who surrendered, as well as about a thousand civilians. In October there was a similar massacre in Wexford. In December he was forced to abandon the siege of Waterford.

### The Siege of Kilkenny

On 20<sup>th</sup> March 1650 Oliver Cromwell began the siege of Kilkenny by calling on the commander of the Garrison, Sir Walter Butler, to surrender. On the following morning the fighting began. Kilkenny had three walled areas; the Hightown, with the Castle at one corner having its own defences; the Irishtown to the North; the suburb of St. John's to the east. An attack on Irishtown was thrown back, but at the other end of town Cromwell succeeded in taking St. Patrick's church, and in planting cannon there which could batter the wall of the city. The picture below, taken from St. Patrick's Graveyard shows how close to the castle his cannon were. On the 25<sup>th</sup> the cannon began to pound the walls, and eventually made a breach through troops poured. Inside they met resistance from the garrison, who had put up defences inside the breach. The Cromwellian troops were driven back with some losses.



The defence of Irishtown had been entrusted to the townsmen. There had been plague in Kilkenny for some months. A lot of people had died and of the 1,200 soldiers sent to garrison the city, only 400 were still alive. When Dean's Gate was attacked, the Cromwellians gained entry and the townsmen fled. Negotiations began for the surrender of the city. In the meantime, the Cromwellian troops in Irishtown crossed the Nore and took St. John's with little difficulty, and prepared to attack John's



Bridge. Their first attack failed, but they moved cannon into position to batter the wall. By the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> March, a breach had been made, and Sir Walter Butler and the Mayor were willing to surrender the city. Cromwell agreed to protect the citizens and their property from his men. Sir Walter Butler and the garrison were allowed to leave the city still bearing their weapons.



The bishop of Ossory, David Rothe, fled from Kilkenny, but was attacked and robbed some way outside the city. He was allowed back into the city by Cromwell, and died there. The Cathedral of St. Canice was greatly damaged, with the great stained glass window being shattered, and damage done to monuments.

#### **Bishop Rothe**

While Cromwell was in power James Butler, Duke of Ormonde had to live in exile with King Charles II. His lands in Ireland, were seized, although his wife was allowed to keep the lands which she had inherited from her father. Many other landowners in County Kilkenny lost their lands because of their support for the Confederation, or their support for the King. Many important Kilkenny City families were ordered to remove themselves to Connaught. Cromwellian settlers moved in and by the 1660s they formed a majority of the population. On the Restoration of the monarchy Ormonde recovered his lands, and was able to get some lands back for some of the gentry in Kilkenny.



#### **The Corporation**

The occupation of Kilkenny City had a great effect on the running of the city. In the half century before the siege, the office of mayor was held by the group of families who had controlled Kilkenny for at least two centuries. The post was occupied by a Shee on eleven occasions, by an Archer nine times, by a Rothe eight times, and by the names Raggett, Cowley, Langton, Lawless, Knaresborough and Archdekin also appear in the record. In 1654 and 1655, there was no mayor, and the city was governed by the Cromwellian Daniel Axtell. When the corporation was restored in 1656 the names of the mayors show a completely new group in charge – Warren, Adams, Evans, Gaynor, Butler, Warden, Goodwin, Burrell, Haydock, Rowledge, Helsham. Some were followers of Cromwell, some were royalists who got back into favour after the Restoration, when Charles II returned from exile to become king of England. All were Protestant, and no Catholic was mayor of Kilkenny until 1687.