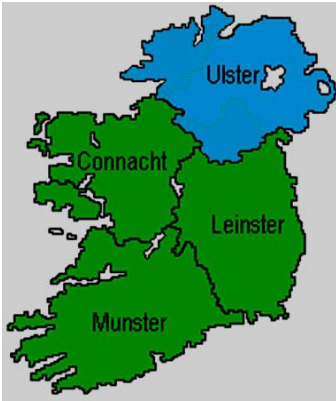


The Confederation of Kilkenny



In October of 1641, a group of Irish Catholic landowners in Ulster decided to rise up against the English and Scottish settlers in that province. They were unhappy about a number of things:

1. Thirty years earlier, large areas of land in Ulster were given to English and Scottish people. This was known as 'The Plantation of Ulster.' The land had been owned by native Irish people before that.

2. Only a small group of native Irish landowners held onto their land after the

plantation. A bitter feeling towards the new settlers lingered from this time.



Sir Arthur Chichester, the man in charge of the Plantation of Ulster

3. There were bad harvests in Ulster since the late 1630s. Many of the landowners were in debt.

4. Some of the leaders, such as Phelim O'Neill and Philip O'Reilly were members of parliament in Dublin. They had witnessed how the parliament in England had over-ruled many of their suggestions for change in Ireland. 5. The English parliament was anti-Catholic and was becoming very powerful. It was even challenging King Charles I.

6. Other native Irish leaders had worked abroad as soldiers and came home to Ulster in 1640 when the royal army was looking for new recruits to fight in Scotland. As it happened, most of the soldiers didn't leave Ulster and this meant that men with experience were available to take part in the Rising.



*Slaughter of Ulster
Protestants by
Catholic Rebels 1641*

It would seem that their plan was to move quickly and take over the key positions in Ulster and negotiate a peace deal with the King - the rebels always claimed to be faithful to the King, but not to the laws of parliament. By the end of November the rebels had moved down as far as Drogheda in County Louth. Reports of their brutality to Protestant settlers spread quickly. Unlike the speedy war what was planned, the fighting continued for years.

Owen Roe O'Neill was a professional soldier, he left Ireland as a young boy in the 'Flight of the Earls.' He served for forty years in the Irish Regiment of the Spanish Army and returned to Ulster in 1642 to take part in the Rising.



When the Members of Parliament in Dublin found out about the Rising, they became very alarmed. Not alone was the unrest happening in Ulster, but other areas of Ireland as well. The Lords Justices responded by declaring that Irish Catholics were evil and disloyal to the King. Catholics in parliament were very insulted by this. Some of these men were from native Irish families; others belonged to a group known as 'The Old English.' Their families came over from England in the 12th Century and had remained loyal to the King or Queen of England.

Nearly all of the 'Old English' remained Catholic. Some of the MPs for Kilkenny belonged to this group. In the 1640 Parliament there were Peter Butler, Henry Archer, Peter Rothe and Edward Comerford, all Catholics.



*Rothe House, home of
Peter Rothe, M.P*

The Earl of Ormond, James Butler - of Kilkenny Castle - was also 'Old English' but he had converted to the Protestant faith as a child in England. He was appointed acting supreme commander of the Royal Army in Ireland.

The Old English Catholics asked the Irish parliament - where there was a majority of Protestant members - to provide them with guns and ammunition to fight the rebels. They also offered to meet the rebels to discuss their grievances. The Parliament wouldn't agree to take any action. This worried the Old English M.P.s - were they not to be trusted? They had seen a number of changes in parliament over the last few years and had become more anxious themselves about the way Catholics were being treated. Rules for elections had been changed during the 1630s and this meant that the number of Catholics in the 1640 Irish parliament was down one-third since the parliament of 1634. Like the native Ulster Irish, they were keeping an eye on what was happening in the English parliament.

Apart from the anti-Catholic outlook, the way in which the English parliament had reduced the power of the King was very worrying, as it was to the King this group looked for protection. The time seemed ripe for the Old English to meet the leaders of the Rising. Two

meetings with the leaders were arranged, the second one on the ancient Hill of Tara. From this point onwards, the Old English and the Ulster Irish were fighting on the same side.

By December 1641, the rebels had taken over Kilkenny City. The local leader was Richard Butler, or Viscount Mountgarret. He was a great-uncle of the Earl of Ormond. He tried to keep the rebels from murdering the local Protestants or 'English' as they were known. However, Protestants were attacked and their houses looted in the city and throughout the county. There were similar scenes taking place in other areas of Ireland.

The Catholic bishops were in favour of the rebels' aims, but were alarmed at the brutality and lack of organisation. They held a meeting in Kells, County Meath in March 1642. The bishops suggested that a council consisting of lay people and clergy should be formed to enforce law and order. This is how the Confederation of Kilkenny came about. It was decided between the bishops and the Old English gentry that a type of parliament would be held in Kilkenny. Representatives would come from the four provinces. It couldn't be called a parliament, because it wasn't called by the king, so it was known as an 'assembly'. The members of this assembly called themselves *confederates* 'because, it was a coming together of Old



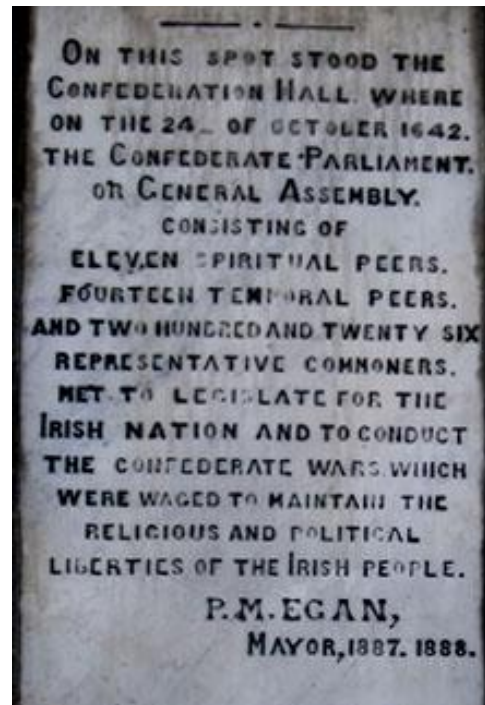
Confederation Banner showing the Coronation of Mary by the Holy Trinity

English, Native Irish and some New English Catholics.' The first assembly was held on 24th October 1642.

Between that date and 1650, eight more assemblies were held in Kilkenny. Robert Shee's house, which stood where the road goes from Parliament Street down to The Market Yard car park, had thirty-five rooms and it was here that the assembly met.

The fact that James Butler, Earl of Ormond, was on the side fighting against the Confederates made the situation in Kilkenny very strange. He had to remain in Dublin. His wife stayed in Kilkenny Castle for a while, but when she left, Viscount Mountgarret moved in. James was related to many of the Confederates. Apart from Mountgarret, his brother-in-law Viscount Muskerry was also an assembly member, not to mention several Butler cousins.

Even though the Assembly clearly stated that it wasn't a parliament, it performed many of the functions of parliament such as organising its own



Plaque on wall of Bank Of Ireland

army, sending ambassadors abroad, minting its own coinage and starting up its own printing press to publish pamphlets and leaflets. One of the most famous visitors to Kilkenny during this time was Archbishop Rinuccini, who came as a representative of the Pope.

It continued until January 1649 when a peace settlement was made between King Charles and the Confederates. However, later that same month, the King was executed by the parliamentarians. Ormond escaped to France with the king's family. By August 1649, Oliver Cromwell had arrived in Ireland. He came to Kilkenny in March 1650.

The Countess of Ormond

The Countess of Ormond helped refugees in the winter of 1641/42

The following account was given by Thomas Davis, Jan 1, 1652/3. He is describing the situation in Kilkenny in December 1641, when the Irish rebels took over the city.

“...almost all the pillaged and stripped English came to the Castle of Kilkenny, some of them naked, others hiding their nakedness with thumb ropes of straw or hay, some in old rags which the Irish in derision had thrown to them, in which condition they were by her ladyship received into the castle, and provision made for them with all the care and speed that possibly could be.”

There was a constant flow of 'poor distressed persons' coming to the castle to the countess, looking for help. She looked after them all.

“..her ladyship commanding her servants to be as observant and careful of them as of herself and children and providing food for them daily in a plentiful manner, some of them with her at her own table, others at tables on purpose for them, and the rest with her servants. Such apparel as her ladyship and her servants could get hold of, she distributed amongst them according to their necessities and commanded her own servants out of their own chambers and beds to accommodate the distressed English. I am confident the number of persons relieved as above was more than one hundred men, women and children.”



Carrick-on-Suir Castle

The countess arranged for some of the people she had helped to be escorted to Waterford. Later, she feared for her own and her children's safety and went to Carrick-on-Suir to her husband's other great house.

“During her ladyship’s stay at Carrick, which was till about ten days before Easter following, many more distressed, pillaged English, I believe to the number of four score and upwards, came to her for help, whom she relieved and provided for during the space of six weeks or thereabouts in the same manner as for others in the castle of Kilkenny, only some of the said persons were by her ladyship provided for in the town of Carrick and not all in her own house.”

With the permission of the rebels, Lady Ormond was able to hire boats and bring the people she had helped to Waterford. She stayed there two days, and not only provided for the people she had brought with her, but also helped many others who came to her. She hired a ship to take some of them to Dublin, and brought some with her in Captain Bartlett’s ship which had been sent to bring her to Dublin. Some were left behind at Duncannon fort which was held by the King’s forces. These people hoped to get ship from there to England. The countess continued on her voyage, which took five days, and arrived safely at Dublin, which was in the hands of the King’s men. There she rejoined her husband.



Duncannon Fort was an English stronghold built in 1588. In 1642 it was in English hands but in 1645, General Thomas Preston, General of the Army of Leinster, laid siege to the fort, and captured it for the Confederate Catholics.

The following account is given by Sir Richard Butler, Viscount Mountgarret, the local leader of the rebels. He was a great-uncle of James Butler, the Countess of Ormond’s husband.

“The Countess of Ormond in the first year of the Rebellion hath relieved many distressed English that were plundered at Kilkenny, and elsewhere. She arrived with divers others of all sorts, both men and women, to the number of two hundred at least into my house at Knocktopher, on their way to Waterford. She also arranged to send a convoy with them to Waterford, which according to the uttermost of my power, I have performed. I also state that I waited upon the said lady from Kilkenny to Carrick and from thence to Waterford and Passage, until her honour was shipped to go with all her family towards Dublin”

Rinuccini Arrives in Kilkenny

Pope Innocent X saw the war in Ireland as a holy war and contributed £56, 000 for arms and soldiers’ pay to the Confederation of Kilkenny. This was a huge amount of money at the time. In 1645, he sent a special ambassador, known as a Papal Nuncio, to the Confederate Assembly in Kilkenny to ensure that his interests were looked after. Archbishop Rinuccini, arrived at Kenmare in October and came to Kilkenny soon afterwards.

In his own account of his arrival to Kilkenny, he was met by a large group of local people outside St. Patrick’s Church and proceeded through St. Patrick’s Gate into the city. On his

way towards St. Canice's Cathedral he stopped at the Market Cross, where a young man (probably a clerical student) made a speech to him.

The following description was written by Richard Bellings, the secretary to the Supreme Council of the Confederation Assembly. It is taken from a history of the Confederation which he wrote many years afterwards.



“His entrance into the citie, which he made [in November 1645] on horseback under a canopy, was as solemne and magnificent as the cleargy and laitie that strove which of them should doe him the greatest honour could make it. After some days of repose, he had audience given him in the gallery of the Castle, and was conducted from his house by some prelates and noblemen with other persons of quality appointed to attend upon him. He was received at the gate by two of the Councill, and others of the cleargy and nobility of a more eminent degree, and when he came to the place where the Councill sat, he was placed in a chair not farre from the Lord Viscount Mountgarret, the President of the Councill.”

The nuncio presented a letter from the pope saying that Archbishop Rinuccini had been sent into the Kingdom of Ireland to the Confederate Catholics, and that he had sent as much supplies as he could with the nuncio, who would speak on his behalf. The nuncio said that the Pope wished success to their affairs.