

King Richard II's Two Visits to Kilkenny (1395 & 1399)

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THIS is a glance at two Kings, one Irish, one English, two countries, Ireland and England, two civilizations, Gaelic and Norman. Art McMurrugh, King of Leinster, direct descendant of Dermot McMurrugh (through Dermot's illegitimate son Donal Kavanagh) came into his inheritance in 1377, he was 20. Richard, King of England, son of the Black Prince and grandson of King Edward III came into his inheritance in the same year 1377; he was but 11 years old. Both felt strongly their royal blood, the pride of lineage. Shakespeare was to make Richard say "There is not enough water in the rough rude sea can wash the balm from an anointed King." Art felt this pride too, perhaps even more strongly.

During the 14th century, England's efforts to rule Ireland were met with failure on every side — and little wonder. The Norman rule in Ireland was very different from that in England, there was no effort to involve the Gaelic chiefs in councils or parliaments, there was no fair dealing with them in matters of land. Promises were made to be broken. The English effort at ruling was to send over for brief periods justiciars who did not want to stay, only wished to draw money out, and had no interest in fair administration. The Anglo Irish lords followed this example and were largely absentees — the king was an absentee. Those who remained in Ireland succumbed to the charm of the Irish, began to adopt their life-style in clothes, language, customs. England countered this trend by the infamous Statute of Kilkenny (1366) which directly forbade such fraternising and imposed severe penalties for it. Large wedges were driven between Gael and Norman, where integration could have solved the problems. Edward III sent two of his sons as Lords lieutenant, Lionel of Clarence, William of Windsor, but the loyal English colony called for the king himself, and early in 1394, Richard decided to come. He was 28 years of age. The Norman Invasion was more than 200 years old. No King had come since John in 1210.

Richard, who had been born in Bordeaux during the interminable wars of the period, was cast in a different world from that of his Plantaganet forbears. His grand-

father, Edward III, had seven sons. His father, The Black Prince, died young so Richard had many young critical censorious uncles who made life difficult for him, in particularly York, Gaunt and Gloucester. He does not appear to have been as warlike as they were. He detested the wars with France, was a patron of the arts, friend of Chaucer, interested in architecture, designed Westminster Hall. In appearance tall, golden haired, effeminate looking, he could not be separated from his embroiderer, he invented the handkerchief. Curtis says he was "a true Renaissance Prince, brilliant and subtle." He had studied the Irish problem closely, realised the unfairness under which Ireland had suffered, and according to both Curtis and Lydon, was anxious to help the country, not only his liege lords but also the Gaelic chiefs and population. But first he must have peace, show his military strength and subdue McMurrough for McMurrough was the big stumbling block to all these plans.

And so to the other King, Art McMurrough. Froissart was chronicler of both campaigns, and his description of Art survives, riding down a hill at Arklow, bare back, fleet as a deer, his horse worth 400 cows. He is truly one of the great men of Irish history, determined, successful, ruthless and politic. In the years before Richard's coming, Art had strengthened his position by marrying Elizabeth de Valle, Norman heiress of barony of Norragh, Co. Kildare, and by acquiring the barony of Idrone along the banks of the Barrow (after the Carews had petered out). Thus, he held the approaches to Munster and South Leinster. There is no doubt that, in Richard's mind Art was the supreme enemy, he must be quenched before Ireland as a whole could be dealt with. The English in Art's area could only live in peace by paying Art the infamous "Black rent."

In the summer of 1394, on getting ready for the Irish expedition, Richard ordered back to Ireland its many absentee lords and craftsmen and enforced this order very strongly. He caused the shifting to Ireland of the King's privy wardrobe which contains the many instruments of warfare. (these usually were in the Tower of London) and he arranged very carefully and meticulously the food for the troops when they would land in Ireland. The boats for carrying the troops (500—it is thought) had to be specially castellated fore and aft to defend the archers, and the stalls and hurdles for the horses very carefully made. Horses were the heart of the army, large and expensive, they had to be transplanted with great care,

for a sick or irritable animal was useless. Horses were more important than men and treated with much more care and respect.

*Historians argue about the size of the army but agree that the Cheshire archers formed a very important part. In those days they were the trump card of every English army and were especially useful against the Irish, their long bow preventing the Irish getting near enough to use their fearsome axe and scian. The English troops were household troops, wearing the king's livery, with the badge of the white hart. They had a loyalty to the person of the king not shared by contract troops employed by previous King Edward III. All the supporters, including the five great peers who led the army were Richard's friends (except perhaps Gloucester, his uncle). It was a romantic thrilling adventure (backed up by a tremendous army) to sail with the king to Ireland. Setting out from Milford Haven, on October 1st, 1394, blessed with a calm and wonderful crossing and flying the standard of Edward the Confessor (a cross patence on a field gules with four doves argent), Richard arrived in Waterford October 2nd. The very time of coming was unusual, the whole expedition planned with great care.

Richard delayed in Waterford a fortnight to receive the admiration, advice and homage of his liege lords, and to allow the leaves to fall still further from the trees, an essential for his archers. Art McMurogh greeted Richard's coming by burning the town of New Ross, a great centre of Norman strength, and thus making his stand very evident. Evident too it was to Richard that if he was to have any success in Ireland, he must begin by subjecting McMurogh.

We may be sure that foremost among those who greeted Richard at Waterford was James 3rd, Earl of Ormonde, who had been Lord Lieutenant many times and who was devoted to the King's interest in Ireland, yet was very popular with the Irish. He had lately bought (1391) Kilkenny Castle (Price was £1,000 but on certain re-arrangements he got a full release of £200 in the New Temple, London).¹ When Richard's army marched out from Waterford, the Earl of Ormonde may have suggested a stop at Knocktopher where tradition puts one and where the Butlers had endowed a Carmelite Priory in 1379. There was certainly a rest at Jerpoint Abbey, this is

*Froissart, the chronicler who accompanied the army says 30,000 archers and 4,000 men at arms.

¹James Grave's "King's Council in Ireland," p. xiii. introduction.

historically documented and Gloucester joined the forces there. Tradition again takes over and relates an amusing incident at Grennan Castle, Thomastown, the home of the Denny.² Then on to Leighlin where a bridge had been built over the Barrow by Maurice Jacque in 1320 and which made for easy access for the army into McMurrough's country and the woods that extended east from Leighlin to Myshall, i.e. the land between the rivers Barrow and Burren. This march could hardly have taken longer than a week and was about 50 miles.

The land here was McMurrough's stronghold, very heavily wooded, hilly, boggy, and so far it had proved impenetrable to English warfare. Not so this time, not so for Richard's campaign and herein lies his achievement. Using the ancient Irish method of warding or placing guards at strategic positions, he encircled McMurrough's country and made sweeping raids on McMurrough's allies, the O'Nolans, the O'Tooles and O'Byrnes. He laid waste the land from the Barrow to the Burren, or as the ancient story says from the woods of Laveroc to the woods of Garryhill (McMurrough's own stronghold).

The ill armed Irish suffered dreadfully. The Cheshire archers were very successful in picking off the Irish and then these Irish were ridden down by the English cavalry. More than 4,000 cattle were taken by the raiders. Art and his wife were almost captured in their bed. It was warm from their bodies when the Lord Marshall, Thomas Mowbray, Earl of Nottingham, arrived at the home of Art. It is said he was very disappointed at not capturing his prey. This home of Art was Garryhill which is mentioned often in Richard's letters from Ireland but which today has no stone castle of the 14th century to tell us of its proud and ancient owner. What is still there is a fine hill top with ancient surrounding wall. Probably on this hill top stood Art's Castle of wood and wattle. It has a really commanding view over the fair and fertile land of Leinster, so earnestly desired by the English King and so highly extolled by him.

Before the vigorous combination of foraging, fighting, burning and killing, Art McMurrough and his followers were forced to submit. The horrible campaign lasted only six days, then a victorious Richard was ready to march to Dublin. With him he took a representative of the O'Nolans, O'Tooles and O'Byrnes. Art was surprisingly not taken. left perhaps to arrange the peace terms with the clans. These terms were made on the staff of Jesus at

²Healy's "History of Kilkenny," p. 402.

Ballygorey, a place recently identified by Edward O'Toole as Baunogephlore in the parish of Grangeford, Co. Carlow.

The peace terms made on the Staff of Jesus at Ballygorey bound the Irish to be peaceful subjects, to move out of Leinster and their ancient inheritance, to leave that to be developed for English settlers and to conquer lands in other parts of Ireland, where their conquest in these parts would be confirmed by English law. Until such time they (the rebels) were to have a money dole to cover the interlude. Art was to have Barony of Norragh, his wife's inheritance and forbidden to Art till now by Statutes of Kilkenny.

The arrangement i.e. the peace terms were completely impossible. How for instance, could Art get out of Leinster and still have possession of Norragh. It is a measure of his desperation that he agreed at all, as it is a measure of Richard's triumph that Art and later the Irish chiefs "came into his house" as the annals say and submitted to him. There is no doubt that they did, all the five bloods, O'Neill, O'Brien, O'Connor, McLeighlin and McMurrugh. Thomas Darcy McGee does not admit this, and the Annals of The Four Masters are strangely silent about it, but the letters from Ireland of Richard survive and the descriptions of the submission called notarial instruments are preserved in the Public Record Office, London. They have been read and printed by Curtis in his "Richard II in Ireland" in 1926. They leave no doubt.

Richard was in Dublin for November and December of 1394 and during these two months he tried to evolve a plan to bring the Gaelic chiefs into submission. Besides his English peers, he had the advice of Earls of Ormonde, Desmond and Kildare, the four Archbishops (and John Colton of Armagh was specially useful in dealing with O'Neill) and the bishops of Meath, Leighlin and Ossory. The last named, Richard Northalis was an Englishman, but well versed in Irish ways. The advice, apparently was to secure submission of the five Kings (or Bloods) who would bring in their urraghts (or vassels) too. Some captains of their nations (i.e. Gaelic Chiefs) were no longer subjects of any of the five Bloods and their submissions had to be sought separately. The terms were that they (the chiefs) be confirmed in their lands, but not in any they had "usurped" from the Anglo Irish (e.g. barony of Idrone from Carew). Too, the chiefs were subjects of Earls of Ulster, Earls of Desmond and Ormonde, so these lords were sent to bring in their Irishmen. Ormonde, a fluent Irish speaker was sent to North Munster. He was

particularly successful and diplomatic in all these policies of Richard II, and a very vital force in getting the submissions.

The first to submit was Art McMurrough, and we have already seen how he submitted after the guerilla warfare of October. Now on January 7th near Tullow, the Earl Marshall and Lord of Carlow received his reiteration of promises of October i.e. to get out of Leinster and to conquer lands elsewhere, and to be a peaceful subject. He undertook to do all this by February 28th, 1st Sunday in Lent. There was a meeting again on February 16th between McMurrough and Nottingham, all the vassals came in as well.

On this second occasion, many lesser chieftains also submitted, notably Fineen McGillpatrick, Geoffrey O'Brenan and Maurice Boy O'Moore of Slievemargy.

(Notarial Instruments III and IV)

During February and March 1395, Richard received many submissions in Drogheda, including that of O'Neill, afterwards Richard planned to march south.

Before leaving Dublin on March 25th, 1395, Richard II, according to Froissart knighted the four Irish Kings, O'Neill, O'Brien, O'Connor and McMurrough. The Irishmen insisted that this honour had been conferred on them, as is the Irish custom when they were 7 years old. Nevertheless they were assured it was an added honour to be knighted after the English manner.

In the march south Richard was at Old Connell Abbey, Co. Kildare on March 28th, 30th March at Carlow, and on April 3rd at Kilkenny when Tobin made the first submission in the Black Abbey.

Richard was in Kilkenny from beginning to end of April 1395. This was the time he was godfather to James Butler's son, Ormonde's second son, Richard, from whom sprang the line of the McRichard Butlers and which line is the line of the Butlers, Earls of Ormonde, to this present day.

What was Kilkenny like in 1395 when Richard made that month long visit and where were all his retinue disposed? The 30,000 archers that Froissart speaks of as well as the peers, the churchmen, the whole prestigious company? Of this we know nothing. It was the first time that a Butler had been host in the Castle of Kilkenny to a member of the Royal family, not to mention the King himself. The castle must have had the same shape as it has today, but it would have had its fourth tower in the S.E. angle, but the walls connecting tower and tower

would have been different and much more defensive. Maybe the tents of the army were pitched in what was later the bowling green, or even in what is now the children's playground or perhaps on the land where the Design Centre now stands.

Kilkenny would have had many of the familiar buildings we look at today, in ruin now but then in their heyday. The three great mediaeval Abbeys of St. Dominic, St. Francis and St. John were flourishing with students from every part of Europe. Old St. Mary's with its merchant congregation and St. Canice's with its great lords were of course fully functioning. The Market Cross had been erected 50 years beforehand and was probably visited by Richard who was religious and devout. Did he visit too St. Canice's Well and wonder about the round tower and the Gaelic civilization that they presented? We do not know. The houses in the streets would have been of wood, the bridges are not recorded as early as 1395. The walls may have been commenced though our idea is that they were not built till 1400.

There is a great sense of continuity in a town that has so long preserved its ancient image.

The documents that contain the submissions of the Gaelic chiefs are now in the Public Record Office in London, and they had never been printed or published from 1405 when they were made till late Prof. Curtis printed and translated them in 1927. They were called "notarial instruments" and there are thirty of them all written in Latin, though submissions were made in Irish too. I am about to list those that were made in Kilkenny and to give the appropriate number of the instrument or document.

All the submissions in Kilkenny (i.e. all but one) were made at the Black Abbey before the King, his peers, his clerks and the Bishops. Here on six separate days in April 1395, the King received not only the submissions of the Gaelic chiefs but also pardoned his own degenerate English subjects. The mode of submission is interesting, the person involved removing his girdle, dagger and cap, going on his knees at the feet of the King, raising his two hands, palms together, holding his hands between the hands of the King and then taking a long and detailed oath of loyalty to the person of the King and his successors. These oaths were invariable in Irish or Latin and were translated into English often by Ormonde, sometimes by Talbot and others.

On 3rd of April, 1395, then the first pardon was

granted to Richard St. Aubin (i.e. Tobin) in a dry place within the house of the Friars Preachers, an Englishman of Ireland and a rebel. (Notarial Instrument XI)

On 6th April, 1395, Morris FitzMorris, Thomas MacShane, William and Maedoc Barrett, English knights and rebels submitted. On the same day too Tadhg McCarthy Mor and Donal McCarthy submitted.

(Notarial Instrument XII)

Then on the 14th April at Brennans Cross before notary and the Bishop of Ossory near Castlecomer, not coerced nor induced by fear, Art Mac Murrough swore to observe all his promises up to date. This meeting is of great interest, because already Art was more than a month late in getting out of Leinster and it may have been mounted to assure Art that his promises had to be kept. The place of the meeting is interesting and the two Castlecomer historians Tom Hoyne and Tom Lyng tell me that the "cross" is not called after the Brennan dynasty but after St. Brendan who is the patron of the area (patron of Muckalee and Dysart) and who may have had a church at the spot. It certainly was Richard's custom to arrange meetings and rests in churches and monasteries. Brennans Cross is a name of townland still in use today.

(Notarial Instrument XXII)

On 16th April

In presence of King Richard, Dermot O'Connor of Offaly and Cormac O'McLaghlin of Meath made submission in Black Abbey. (Notarial Instrument XXVII)

On the same day, again in presence of the King Tadhg O'Meaghair and Turlough O'Connor of Connaught made submission. (Notarial Instrument VI)

On 20th April

A long letter of submission from Tadhg O'Carroll (given at Roscrea) sealed with red wax was received by King Richard in person at the Black Abbey.

(Notarial Instrument XX)

(On this same day i.e. April 20, Richard also seems to have been in Waterford and received submission of O'Connor Don of Connaught and two O'Briens of Thomond, the Earl of Ormonde acting as interpreter. Not possible?

(Notarial Instrument XVII)

On April 21st

Tadhg O'Carroll of Munster and Tadhg O'Kelly of Connaught became liegemen of Richard (in presence of King. (Notarial Instrument XIX)

Art O'Dempsey also.

(Notarial Instrument IV)

Letter too from Turlogh O'Connor of Connaught sealed with red wax. (Notarial Instrument XXXV)

On April 25th

Turlogh O'Brien of Munster, later same day — Thomas O'Dwyer, Philip Mahon, Don O'Kennedy, Nial O'Molloy son of Rory of Meath. (Notarial Instrument XXXIII)

So on these April days in 1395, Richard in Kilkenny received the above submissions. Later he moved to Waterford with his large army and all his staff and peers. The last submissions were made on board the ship Trinity at Waterford on May 1st, when O'Connor Don, William de Burgo and Walter Bermingham submitted, one ancient Irish King and two important English rebels. Lying prone they made obeisance.

(Notarial Instrument XXIII)

It is worthy of note that though so many important Gaelic chiefs, and Anglo Irish lords submitted to Richard, the O'Donnells held aloof and forbade their vassals, the Maguires to make submission.

On 15th May, the King and whole army left, he, probably thinking all was right with English power in Ireland and the Irish chiefs breathing freely that he and his powerful and impressive force were gone. To have been really successful, Richard should have stayed longer, or left better lieutenants or firmer arrangements. Mortimer, his heir and lieutenant in Ireland was a disaster, too young and too unfeeling. He was killed in 1398 near Kellistown, Co. Carlow on trying to force allegiance and the fulfilment of Art's promises. The King's presence was again required if any of the arrangements of 1395 were to hold. But the King was harassed on every side in England with many enemies in his own household. The death of John of Gaunt seemed (early in 1399) to remove the worst and on June 1st, 1399, he again arrived in Waterford.

The second expedition of 1399 seems not to be so well documented as the first, not even by the successful Irish side.

Neither was it as well planned, nor the army as big as in 1394 nor does Richard appear to have been as good a general. It was made in the summer in June in a leafy Ireland that Richard had avoided successfully in 1394. He seemed to have forgotten how he worked against McMurrough originally and used other, and for him, not so successful tactics. But he was again accompanied by great pomp, and indeed with a tremendous amount of the paraphernalia of mediaeval warfare, coats of mail, bows and arrows,

lances etc. much of which remained in Dublin Castle when he had gone. Arriving in Waterford he moved to Kilkenny and spend a fortnight there as guest of James 3rd, Earl of Ormonde, and then "on the very morrow of St. John" left to campaign against McMurrough. Sarrey, the commander had a great victory almost immediately but that was the end of Richard's successes. McMurrough had learned many lessons in the campaign of 1394. This time he was not lured into the open, he would not stand and give battle, he learned to keep away from Richard and remaining in the hinterland was to prove very successful in maintaining his position of harrassing the enemy.

The food arrangements to feed Richard's army were very imperfect and inadequate. The army starving for sustenance desperately charged into the sea at Arklow, where ships had arrived with supplies, knights as well as private soldiers quarrelling for food. Here (perhaps at Glenart) McMurrough offered to mediate and here a meeting took place described by Froissart the Chronicler who accompanied the English army and whose description of McMurrough I have already given. This meeting was between Gloucester and Art, and Art, asserting he was King of Leinster, showed he had no intention whatever of fulfilling his earlier promises and vacating Leinster. Richard and army pressed on to Dublin where he heard of the invasion of England by Bolingbroke, his cousin, son of John of Gaunt and later King Henry IV. Richard marched hurriedly back to Waterford not bothering about McMurrough and set sail for Milford Haven on August 13th, 1399, to meet his tragic doom, as Curtis says in England, where he lost his throne and his life.

The second expedition lasted only 10 weeks, was one of defeat and degradation. It had only been four short years after the original triumph of 1395, it ended the great Plantaganet line as well as the King's life, at the early age of 33. It opened the way to the Gaelic revival of next 100 years, and the division of power between the Gaelic chiefs and the resident Anglo Irish Lords, Butlers, Fitzgeralds, Burkes — Art McMurrough had outwitted England's King and ensured for himself and his dynasty the Lordship of Leinster for another 150 years. His triumph this time must have comforted his sore heart for the defeats of 1394. He lived till 1417, a great king and ruler for his people. Then he is believed to have been poisoned in New Ross.

Richard's army had its chroniclers: Froissart, Christede and Creton. I have mentioned them before and from them



the light is poured on these campaigns, so clearly does it shine that it is hard to think that they occurred almost 600 years ago, and that the warfare was made in the mediaeval manner, with bow, arrow, lance and knife. No gun powder was used throughout though some may have been brought here. Kilkenny took part in no small way in the activity, acting as a base in 1399 and being the scene of many of the submissions in 1395. The Lord of the castle, that important man James 3rd, Earl of Ormonde, acted not only as host to the King but as link between the down trodden Irish and the court and this, with great skill and diplomacy. The events took place amid places and buildings well known to us and still standing today. The pomp and circumstances of the two royal visits have faded (though a room in the Black Abbey is still known as the King's chamber) but the fact that they were made here tells us clearly of the mediaeval significance of Kilkenny and its outstanding importance in the world of the 14th century.

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