



English Soldiers from Derricke's Image of Ireland

The Plantation

The Crown's response to the Rebellion was uncompromising. James I embarked on a colonial experiment, designed to break decisively the Gaelic order's hold on the land and the culture of Ulster. The rebels' land was confiscated and the ancient brehon laws which structured Gaelic society were revoked. A new elite of English and Scottish colonists was planted at the top of Ulster society. Conor Rua Maguire, of the senior branch, retained most of the land in the Barony of Magherasteffany, but he had lost much more than he held. The junior branch of the Maguires was granted a large estate which included Tempo and Tullyweel near Fivemiletown. The remainder of Fermanagh was apportioned to English and Scots undertakers and to servitors – British soldiers rewarded for their part in the campaign against the Rebellion. Plantation estates over 2,000 acres were to be protected by a strong castle and bawn and to include a village in an imitation of the English settlement pattern. Estates over 1,000 acres were to be overseen from a large fortified house.

This colonial experiment installed some of the family names which were to comprise Fermanagh's 18th century planter gentry: Atkinson, Cole, Blennerhasset, Archdale, Hume, Balfour. But the experiment was only a fitful success. It was surrounded by the resentment and discontent of the dispossessed. Conor Rua Maguire became embittered and began to court the rebel cause. The Gaelic culture survived, though it went partially underground. Fermanagh had been renowned in the Gaelic world as a seat of learning. That devotion to Gaelic literature and culture continued. The 'Four Masters' worked at Lisgoole Abbey from September to December 1631 to complete 'The Book of Invasions'. The Plantation was compromised too by the planter population, which began to merge into the primordial Gaelic background: intermarriage between the two communities became common. Many of the original Planter undertakers became absentee landlords.

Ironically, the Plantation was consolidated by the actions of Charles I. His exchequer demanded revenue and Charles attempted to squeeze the Planters. They agreed to pay an increase in dues to the Crown in exchange for perpetual title to their land.

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