

Henry VIII and Ireland

A new policy?

What was Ireland like in 1509?

At the beginning of his reign Henry VIII was Lord of Ireland but, in fact, had little power in Ireland. The area he controlled was really confined to a small area around Dublin and to a few towns on the coast. Elsewhere power was held by old Irish families or the Anglo-Irish, who were descendants of Norman families that had first settled in Ireland in the reign of Henry II.

Even in the Pale, the Crown's authority was being challenged by one of the most powerful of the Anglo-Irish barons, the Fitzgeralds of Kildare. Matters came to a head in the 1530s when one of the Fitzgeralds, Lord Offaly (**Silken Thomas**, as he was known) openly challenged the royal authority and won widespread support in Ireland.

How did Henry VIII try to assert his authority in Ireland?

Apart from sending a large army of 2,300 to Ireland, Henry tried to assert control over Ireland with four measures. **First**, he sent a large army of 2,300 to Ireland. **Secondly**, he tried to break the power of the Fitzgeralds. He confiscated their land and killed all male members of the family - except one, an infant half-brother to Lord Offaly. **Thirdly**, in 1536, he introduced the Reformation into Ireland, hoping to make Ireland a Protestant county loyal to the Crown. **Finally**, in 1541, he declared himself King of Ireland. He declared that all lands in Ireland were to be surrendered to the Crown and would only be returned if the owners pledged their loyalty. The Irish and Anglo-Irish were horrified.

Why did Henry act so decisively in the 1530s?

Henry was forced into taking decisive action. He could not ignore such widespread rebellion led by a leading noble family. What is more Silken Thomas called Henry a heretic and declared himself champion of the Pope and the Spanish emperor. This would certainly have angered the king, who was very sensitive about his position as Head of the church following his divorce and his recent break with Rome. It became clear to Henry that he had to put down the rebellion with brutal force and get the Irish parliament to agree to his changes as the English parliament had done.

How successful was Henry's policy in controlling Ireland?

Henry VIII's policy not successful, partly because most Irish people refused to adopt Protestantism, and partly because it was too expensive to be carried out in full. Despite being called King of Ireland, Henry actually ruled only a small part of the country. Very many years passed before other kings and queens could claim to be rulers of all Ireland.

How important was Henry VIII's policy in Anglo-Irish relations?

Henry VIII's Irish policy marked a turning point in the history of relations between England and Ireland:

1. It added religion to the problems already faced by English kings in Ireland. To be regarded as truly loyal, Irish Catholics would have to change their religion.
2. It introduced a new fierceness and lack of tolerance in the conduct of relations with Ireland. Executions were now commonplace.
3. Its expense forced English rulers to look for cheaper alternatives to controlling Ireland, thus paving the way for the policy of plantation or settling Protestants in Ireland.
4. It began a train of events which transformed Ireland. In 1500 royal authority was feeble and mainly confined to the Pale. By 1700 royal authority was extended to all parts of the country.

Henry VIII and Ireland

Images



Silken Thomas
P. Cremin, *Footprints 3*, C.J. Fallon, Dublin 1987, p. 101

Gaelic and Anglo-Irish lordships in the late fifteenth century
M.E. Collins et al., *New History in Context 1*, The Educational Company, Dublin, 1995, p. 147



An Irish coin of the time of Henry VIII.
P. Cremin, *Footprints 3*, C.J. Fallon, Dublin 1987, p. 102



The lands of the Fitzgeralds or Geraldines. The area of Ireland is almost 85,000 square km. Can you estimate what portion of Ireland was ruled by the Geraldines?
P. Cremin, *Footprints 3*, C.J. Fallon, Dublin 1987, p.88

Henry VIII and Ireland

Prompt questions

1. Look at the maps of Ireland.

- a. *If you were Henry VIII would you be happy with the amount of land you really controlled in Ireland.? Explain your answer.*
- b. *Why do you think that Henry regarded the Fitzgeralds (or Geraldines) as a threat to his control?*

2. Look at the portrait of Silken Thomas.

- a. *We do not know who painted this portrait. How useful is this portrait as evidence about Silken Thomas? Think about what we learn from the portrait and why we might question its accuracy.*
- b. *How did Silken Thomas threaten Henry? How successful was Henry in dealing with him?*

3. Look at the Irish coin. The harp is the symbol of Ireland.

- a. *What impression do you think Henry VIII was trying to give with this coin?*
- b. *Do you think that this was an accurate impression of Henry VIII's policy in Ireland? Explain your answer.*

Protestants and Catholics in Ireland

Reformation and Counter-Reformation

When did England first try to make Ireland a Protestant country?

At the beginning of Henry VIII's reign Ireland was a Catholic country. However, Henry wanted Ireland to follow the religious changes which he was making in England. In 1536, the Dublin parliament passed an Act of Supremacy, just like the English one. It made Henry Supreme Head of the Church of Ireland. Henry also closed down the Irish monasteries and ordered the Bible and all prayers to be in English.

These changes dealt mainly with the way the Church was run. Later rulers tried to change people's religious beliefs. Elizabeth I was particularly keen to do this after Mary (1553-58) had restored Catholicism. The Elizabethan religious settlement of 1560 (the Act of Supremacy and the Act of Uniformity) declared the English monarch to be the supreme governor of the Church of Ireland. It also required all citizens to attend their parish church on Sunday where they were to worship according to the Book of Common Prayer or face a fine.

How successful was the Protestant Reformation in Ireland - 1?

The Reformation had some success. By the reign of James I the Church of Ireland finally established a presence throughout the whole of Ireland with a more clearly Protestant ministry. This 'Second Reformation', as it is sometimes called, was made possible by the increase in royal power after the defeat of Hugh O'Neill, by the plantation of Ulster and the arrival of Protestant settlers from England and Scotland, and by the creation of the Protestant seminary, training college for priests in 1592, Trinity College in Dublin.

How successful was the Reformation in Ireland - 2?

However, the Reformation did not succeed in making Ireland a Protestant nation. Protestants were mainly the New English and Scottish settlers. Most Irish people remained loyal to the Catholic Church and the Pope as its head.

Why did the Reformation fail to make Ireland a Protestant nation?

There were three main reasons for the failures of the Protestant Reformation in Ireland. First, the policy of reform was not followed consistently or thoroughly. England was more concerned to control Ireland than reform it and did not spend enough time, money or thought on the policy of conversion. For example, most people spoke Irish but few Protestant preachers could speak the language.

Secondly, the policies designed to control Ireland (colonisation and Anglicanisation) made the Dublin government very unpopular with both the Anglo-Irish and native populations.

Thirdly, Catholic reformers were better organised than Protestant reformers in Ireland. By the 1560s, in Europe the popes and the Catholic Church had begun their own reforms called the Catholic Reformation or Counter-Reformation. Irishmen who were influenced by the Catholic Reformation in Europe returned to Ireland. They worked hard. They preached to the people in Irish, their own language, and distributed literature telling them about Catholic doctrine as newly defined by the Counter-Reformation. By these means Catholic Reformers won Irish people for Catholicism.

Were the failures of the Protestant Reformation in Ireland unique?

The English experience in Ireland was not unique. Resistance to religious change imposed 'from above' was not unusual in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A good example of such resistance is the German state of Brandenburg. There Elector John Sigismund failed to convert his territory to Calvinism. On the other hand, there are examples of a foreign power with a foreign language imposing religious change on a dependent territory. In 1536 the Danish king imposed Lutheranism upon Catholic Norway.

What is the importance of the Reformation in Ireland?

The Reformation divided Ireland and made it more difficult to govern. There were two distinct confessional camps. The Reformation was seen as English and foreign. Catholicism became identified with the native culture and people of Ireland.

Protestants and Catholics in Ireland

Images and sources

1 [The whole country] does swarm with Jesuits, seminaries, and massing priests, yea, the friars, and these do keep such continual and daily buzzing in the poor people's ears that they are not only led from all duty and obedience of their prince, but also drawn from God by superstitious idolatry and so brought headlong by heaps into hell.

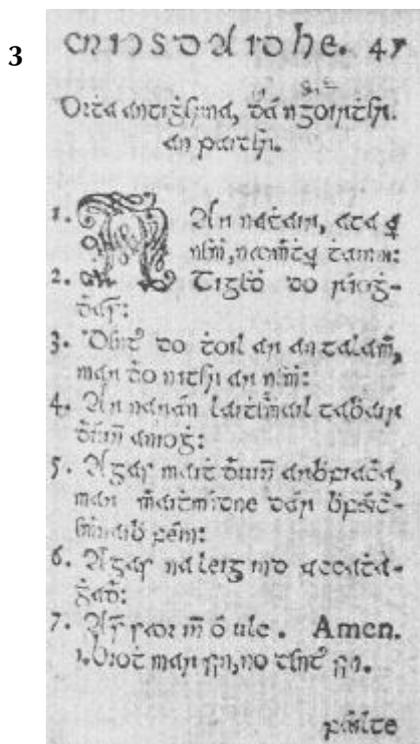
Report in 1580 by a Protestant fanatic, Barnaby Rudge

J. Lydon, *The Making of Ireland from Ancient Times to the Present*, Routledge, London 1998, p. 141

2 The popish clergy is double to us in number, having the advantage of the tongue, of the love of the people, of our extortions on them, of the very inborn hatred of subdued people to their conquerors, they hold them still in blindness and superstition, ourselves being the chiefest impediment to the work that we pretend to set forward.

William Bedell, Protestant Bishop of Kilmore, assessing the missionary failure of the Protestant church in 1634

'The Reformation in Ireland', S.J. Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, OUP, Oxford 1998, p. 476-7



The Lord's Prayer in the Irish language, printed at Antwerp.

R. F. Foster (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland*, OUP, Oxford 1989 p. 119



Illustration showing how the sacrament of Extreme Unction, the last rites, should be administered.

R. F. Foster (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland*, OUP, Oxford 1989 p. 119

1. Look at sources 1 and 2.

- What reasons do the writers give for the failure of the Reformation to convert more Catholics to Protestantism?
- What do you think William Bedell means in source 2 when he writes 'ourselves being the chiefest impediment to the work that we pretend to set forward'.

2. Look at all the sources.

Do they show that the Catholic Reformers 'worked hard' to keep Ireland Catholic? Explain your answer.

Elizabeth I and the threat from Ireland

What was Ireland like in 1590?

By the year 1590 Queen Elizabeth I was in control of most of Ireland. At that time Ulster was the only area in Ireland still ruled by Irish chieftains. The two most powerful families in Ulster at the time were the **O'Neills** of Tyrone and the **O'Donnells** of Donegal. They led a rebellion against English rule in Ireland.

Hugh O'Donnell, the young man destined to become chief of Tir Chonaill (Donegal), was held as a hostage in Dublin Castle for four years. In 1591, when he was nineteen years old, he escaped and managed to return to Donegal. Once back in Donegal he became an ally of **Hugh O'Neill**, and together they fought the English for nine years. Other Irish chieftains joined them.

How successful were the Irish armies at first?

The Irish enjoyed three major victories. In 1594 O'Donnell joined Maguire of Fermanagh and they defeated the English at the Battle of the Ford of the Biscuits. In 1595 O'Neill defeated the English under Marshal Bagenal at Clontibret. In 1598 an English army, again led by Bagenal, was crushingly defeated at the Yellow Ford, and Bagenal himself was killed in the battle.

How did Elizabeth respond to these defeats?

Queen Elizabeth was enraged at the defeats suffered by her armies and feared that Ireland would join with Spain against her. The Irish were fighting for their laws, customs and Catholic faith and often looked to Catholic Spain for support and leadership. In 1695, Hugh O'Neill actually wrote to Philip II of Spain for help:

'Our only hope of re-establishing the Catholic religion rests on your assistance ... We therefore beg you to send us 2,000 or 3,000 soldiers with money and arms... With such aid, we hope to restore the faith of the Church, and to secure you a kingdom.'

Even at this stage England was still at war with Spain and Ireland could be a backdoor to an invasion. As a result, she sent Lord Mountjoy as viceroy in 1600 to deal with her Irish problem. Mountjoy was more successful than those who had come before him.

What happened at the Battle of Kinsale, 1601?

The Irish were promised help from the Spaniards who were at war at that time with the English. A Spanish force under Don Juan Del Aquila arrived in Kinsale in October 1601. The Irish leaders marched from the north to join with the Spaniards in Kinsale. The march was made in the heart of winter, the worst time of the year for such a long march. The Irish and the Spaniards were defeated by the forces of Mountjoy at the Battle of Kinsale in December 1601 and the Irish signed the **Treaty of Mellifont** by which they promised to be subject to the English king and to adopt English customs and language. O'Neill was given the title of Earl of Tyrone and O'Donnell became Earl of Tyrconnell.

How far did Elizabeth's policies change Ireland?

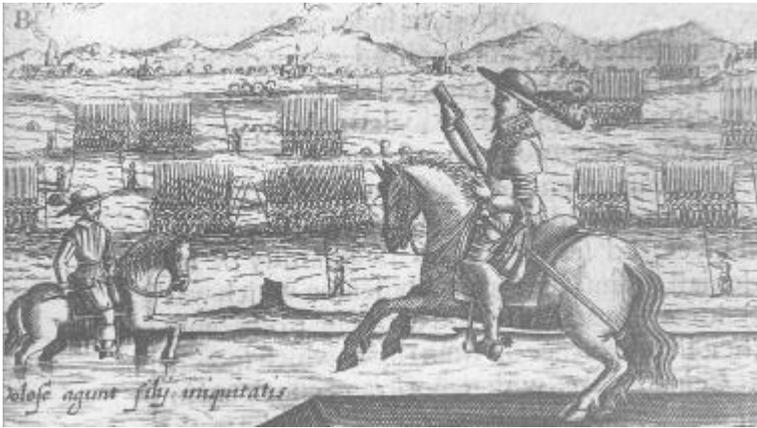
It changed Ireland greatly by prompting O'Neill and other leading Irish chieftains to leave Ireland fearing for their safety in 1607. The 'Flight of the Earls' created an opportunity for the English government to introduce a large-scale policy of plantation to control Ireland. English and Scottish Protestants were encouraged to take over the land left by the earls and settle in Ireland. This scheme, the Plantation of Ulster, did not succeed in its aim of driving the Irish out of the planted counties of Ulster, but enough planters settled there to change the face of the north of Ireland. The effects are still felt today.

What was the cost of Elizabeth's victory?

The price of Elizabeth's victory was high. First, it was a brutal war which damaged Anglo-Irish relations. Secondly, the cost of war almost bankrupted Elizabeth. Ireland became Elizabethan England's Vietnam.

Elizabeth and the threat from Ireland

Sources



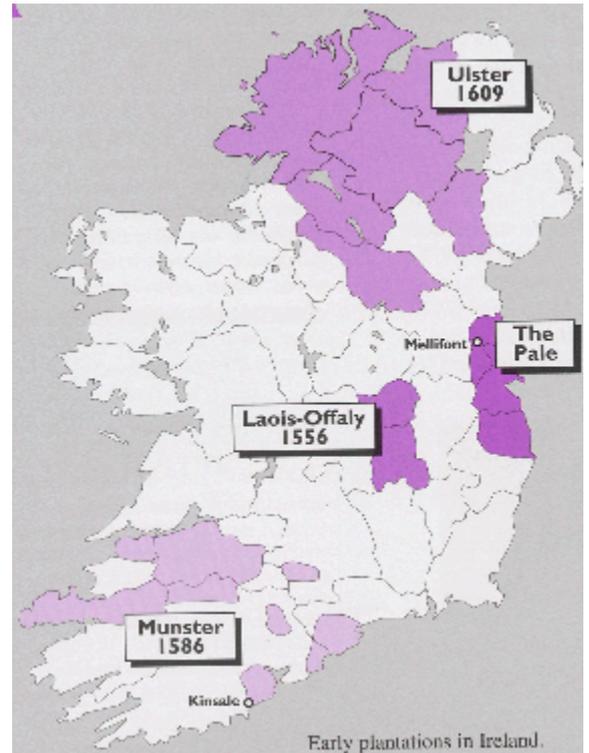
O'Neill approaching the English commander before battle

A.M. Hodge, *The Race to Rule. Ireland and Europe 1570-1700*, Colourpoint, Newtownards 1998. p. 39

Educated, more disciplined and naturally valiant, he is worthily reputed the best man of war of his nation. Most of his followers are well-trained soldiers, using our weapons; and he is the greatest man of territory and revenue within that kingdom, and is absolute commander of the north of Ireland

Contemporary account of O'Neill

J. Lydon, *The Making of Ireland*, Routledge, London 1998, p144



A.M. Hodge, *The Race to Rule. Ireland and Europe 1570-1700*, Colourpoint, Newtownards 1998. p. 38

1. Look at the map of Ireland.

How far did the policy of plantations increase English control over Ireland?

2. Read again O'Neill's letter to Philip II of Spain in 1695 on the previous page.

What did he want?

What did he promise in return?

3. Look at the image and written source on O'Neill.

How far was O'Neill a worthy opponent for Elizabeth?

4. Use all the sources and your own knowledge.

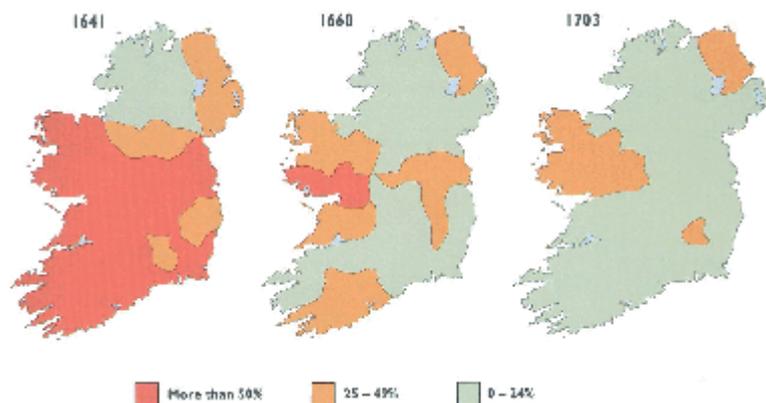
Do you think that Elizabeth's policy in Ireland was successful? Explain your answer and consider both England and Ireland.

King William III and Ireland

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, there was no one source of political power in Ireland and most of the land was held by Catholics.

By the end of the century, the English Crown was acknowledged throughout Ireland and most of the land was owned by Protestants.

It was William III's invasion of Ireland and defeat of James II that brought about these changes.



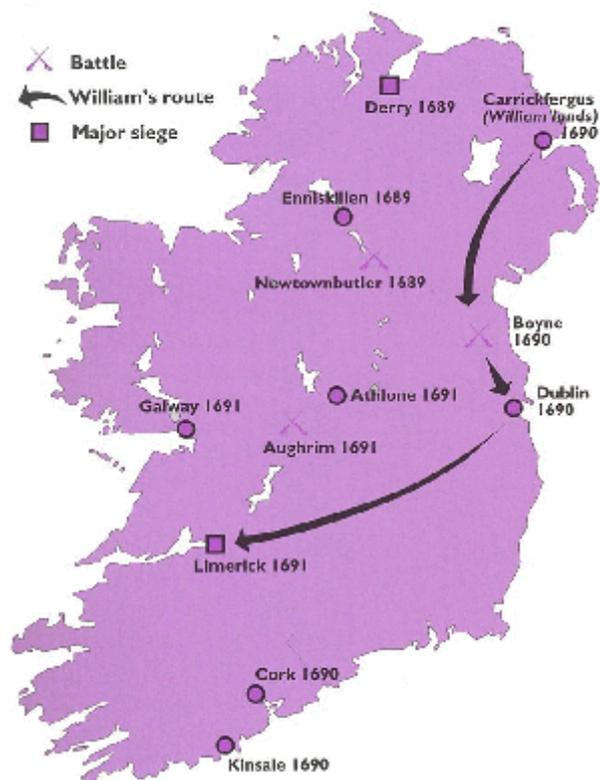
Maps showing lands owned by Catholics in 1641, 1660 and 1703

A.M. Hodge, *The Race to Rule. Ireland and Europe 1570-1700*, Colourpoint, Newtownards 1998, p. 65



The Battle of the Boyne, 1689, painting by a Dutch artist, Jan Wyck. The battle was not of any great military significance but it became of prime symbolic importance.

A. Logan & K. Gormley, *Rivalry and Conflict*, Colourpoint, Newtownards 1995, p. 59



Sieges and battles in the Williamite wars

A.M. Hodge, *The Race to Rule. Ireland and Europe 1570-1700*, Colourpoint, Newtownards 1998, p. 65

The story of King Billy Part 1 1688-89

The full story of William III's intervention in Ireland begins in England in 1688. The Catholic King of England, James II, was causing great concern to his mainly Protestant subjects. Most Protestants felt that the Catholic Church threatened both political and religious liberty. People in the seventeenth century did not separate these two ideas. They believed the Church would not tolerate any religious ideas other than its own. They also felt that in Catholic countries the Church had too much political power.

1. James tended to ignore his Parliament and make decisions on his own.

2. Leading Protestant nobles in England rebelled against James and deposed him. They did this to protect their liberty (as they saw it).

3. The nobles asked James's Protestant daughter Mary and her husband William of Orange (in the Netherlands) to rule instead of James.

4. Meanwhile, James fled to France. Louis XIV was a close friend of James, and the bitter enemy of William of Orange. Louis supplied James with troops and ships to help get his throne back.

5. Instead of invading England, James landed in Ireland in March 1689. He thought he could get the support of Catholics in Ireland to increase his strength.

6. At first, things went well for James and his supporters (Jacobites). Soon only north-west Ulster held out, desperately awaiting aid from William.

7. The key was the city of Londonderry. As James approached the city, it almost fell without a fight. The commander of the city said that the situation was hopeless, and he had to surrender.

8. Then at the last moment thirteen apprentice boys shut the gates of the city as the Jacobites approached.

9. A long siege followed from April to July 1689. Londonderry's citizens suffered terribly, but they held out and in doing so became part of Protestant legend.

The story of King Billy Part 2 1689-95

SOURCE 3 A loyalist mural from the Fountain area of Londonderry, showing the relief of the siege.

10. The siege of Londonderry bought enough time for William to bring his forces to Ireland. These included troops sent by the head of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Alexander.

11. William defeated James at the battle of the Boyne in July 1690. However, the Jacobite forces were not finally defeated until the following year.

12. The war officially ended with the Treaty of Limerick in October 1691. It was extremely generous for the times.

13. However, Protestants in Ireland were unhappy about the Treaty. They forced William to take measures which would make Protestant power in Ireland even more secure.

Treaty

- 15,000 of James's soldiers can go safely to France.
- Catholics in Ireland can keep their lands if they promise to be loyal to William.
- As Catholics have freedom to worship,

William made sure measures to make our power more secure.

14. In the seven years following the war, Protestants were given more land. Over the next 100 years Catholic land holdings fell from about twenty per cent of the land in 1688 to about five per cent in the late eighteenth century.

15. Catholics also came out from the Penal Laws passed in 1685. These restricted Catholic rights to own property, to be educated, to own weapons or to work in the law or government.

Year	% of land owned by Catholics
1688	20%
Late 1700s	5%

1. *Explain why William was keen to take the English throne.*

2. *Explain why James landed in Ireland.*

3. *'The siege of Londonderry is remembered today because it is such a dramatic story.' Do you agree, or is there more to it than this?*

4. *What do the terms of the Treaty of Limerick suggest about William's attitude to Catholics?*

5. *'William's campaigns in Ireland were part of both an Irish conflict and a European conflict.' Do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer by referring to events mentioned in the story strip on the previous page.*

The story of King Billy

Part 3 After 1695

The big questions are how far did the Williamite and the earlier settlements firmly establish English rule in Ireland and how far did it secure the ascendancy of Protestants in Ireland?

Here is what a leading historian says of this eventful period in the history of Ireland and Anglo-Irish relations.

This sequence of defeats prepared the way for the final surrender of the Catholic landed interest; the departure from the country of most Catholic officers who had fought in the Jacobite [King James's] army; and yet another confiscation of Catholic property, consolidating the Protestant interest and facilitating a rigid penal code against Catholics.

However, while the political war was lost, the battle for souls had been won. Ireland at the outset of the eighteenth century was English and Protestant in appearance, but still predominantly Catholic in religion.

N. Canny, in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland*, edited by R.F. Foster, OUP, Oxford 1989, p. 153.

According to another historian, the incompleteness of William's victory stored up trouble for the future.

In view of the size of the Catholic majority in Ireland Protestants could never feel completely secure. In future conflicts, they, therefore, used the images and slogans of the seventeenth century.

Protestants had to remind themselves and the Catholic majority, that the Protestants had been the victors in the battles of the seventeenth century. This is why King Billy became so important to Protestants in Ireland, particularly in Ulster. They claimed King William as a defender of Protestantism and political freedom.

P. Buckland to P. Mulholland, 12 August 2000

1. Explain in your own words, why the Williamite settlement might have stored up trouble for the future.

2. In view of the terms of the Treaty of Limerick, do you think that Protestants are correct in regarding King William as a defender of Protestantism, or are they re-interpreting the past to suit themselves? Give reasons for your answer.
