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Tipperary Historical Journal
2002

https://tipperarystudies.ie/tipperaryhistoricaljournal/
society@tipperarycoco.ie

ISSN 0791-0655

The weavers of Shronell – 250 years ago

By John Heuston

Introduction

In the course of his tour of Ireland in 1775, Dr. Thomas Campbell visited the town of Tipperary, a place he described as "a small but thriving village with little or no manufacture". He wrote: "an effort was made to establish the linen manufacture in the locality and for this purpose a colony of northern weavers was settled there about forty years ago. But this proved ineffectual, for the children of those weavers, like the other natives, neither weave nor spin, and in everything but religion are indistinguishable from the general mass".[1]

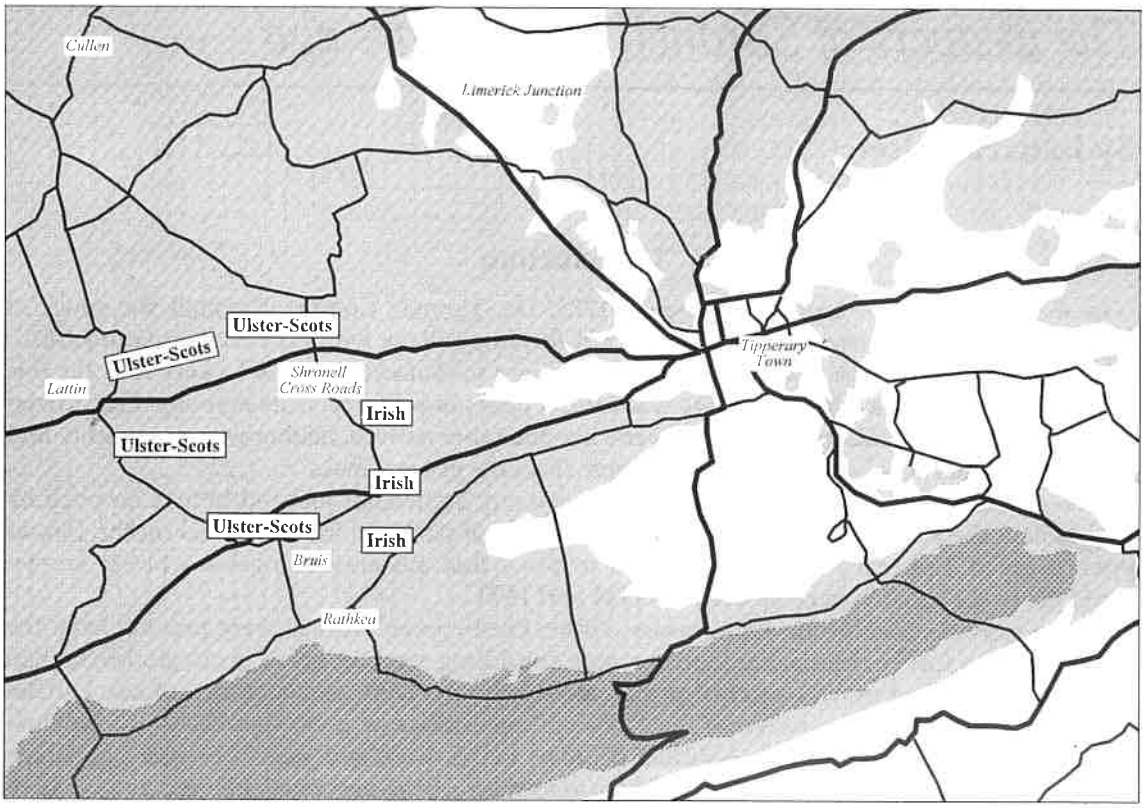
This article sets out to tell the story of the Tipperary settlement referred to by Campbell by marshalling the evidence for the existence of a colony of northern linen weavers on the Damer estate west of Tipperary Town. It attempts to place that evidence alongside what is known about life in the locality roughly between 1740 and 1800.

By the early decades of the 18th century, Ulster Presbyterian farmers were moving from the north-east into Cavan, Monaghan and the area straddling the borders of Armagh, Monaghan and Louth. They had moved into Longford and Sligo by the 1750s and later moved into Leitrim and Mayo.[2] The received wisdom of the 1700s optimistically saw great significance in the flow of these textile workers from the northern counties to the south and west.[3] The practice, which became widespread during the 1700s, was a reflection of the sustained interest among Irish landlords in attracting outsiders to their estates. The outsiders sought were Protestant tenant farmers and artisans who were prized for their skills both in farming and in textiles. The hope was that they would at one stroke people underpopulated estates and make good the shortage of Protestant inhabitants.[4]

The phenomenal development of the linen industry in Ulster in the 1720s and 1730s contributed to the widespread hope that its success in the North might be replicated throughout the whole of Ireland. In much the same way as modern Irish communities consider the establishment of the computer industry as being highly desirable, so the 18th century saw great hope in the success of the linen trade in the North of Ireland. It was widely believed that the linen manufacture would lead to prosperity in the south and west, as it had done in the north.[5]

As the 18th century progressed, interest in establishing colonies of northern artisans grew among landlords in the west and south. At Newport , Co. Mayo, Capt. Prat established a textile village in 1728 by settling Quaker families from Moate, Co. Westmeath. These subsequently migrated to Co. Roscommon in the 1740s. A village built by a landlord named Brown at Manulla in 1733 housed 80 Presbyterian linen weavers from the North. John Daly settled 50 Protestant families on his estate at Mounthshannon, Co. Clare.

The Crosbies of Ballyheige, Co. Kerry received a proposal in 1733 for the rent of their King's County estate from a Dublin man so that he could plant a colony of artisans from the North.[6] The linen industry established by Richard Cox on his Dunmanway estate also dates from this period, as does the colony settled by the Villiers family at Villierstown, Co. Waterford. Robert French of Monivea, Co. Galway brought linen weavers to his estate in the 1750s.[7]



Location Pattern of 18c. Ulster Scots settlement in Shronell, Lattin and Brus.

"Age of Improvement"

This was the "age of improvement", when landowners became increasingly aware of their role as economic and social improvers in rural Irish society. The great houses of the 1700s have been described as "mini-courts", with the landowner playing a role equivalent to that of the TD in modern society. In addition to substantial economic power in the locality, the landlord was the bestower of patronage and the one who articulated the economic and social needs of the community.[8]

The Damers were among the most prominent "improving landlords" in the south of Ireland during the late 17th and early 18th centuries. The Damer estate in question in this article lay due west and north-west of the present town of Tipperary, then as now the largest urban centre in the barony of Clanwilliam. It was one of two Damer estates in Tipperary between the 1670s and the 1850s; the other was in the town of Roscrea.[9]

In the decade following the Restoration Joseph Damer, a former officer in the Parliamentary army, acquired extensive lands in County Tipperary. He is a notable example of an English immigrant attracted to the rich grazing lands of the Golden Vale by the commercial opportunities afforded by the expanding demand for mutton and wool in the closing decades of the 17th century. Damer invested the monies he derived from sheep farming in the purchase

of large amounts of land in other counties as well as Tipperary. By the time of his death in 1720, he had amassed a fortune of over £300,000, a vast amount of wealth for the time.[10]

His Tipperary lands were inherited by his two nephews, John and Joseph Damer of Came in Dorset. Joseph inherited the lands at Roscrea while John succeeded to the lands west of Tipperary town. This latter estate comprised some 15,000 acres in the civil parishes of Bruis, Lattin, Shronell, Cullen, Emly, Glenbane, Solloghedbeg, Solloghedmore, Donohill, Toem, Doon and Kilcommon. There were also Damer lands east of Tipperary town in the parishes of Dangandargan, Kilcornan, Relickmurray and Athassel, Templeneiry and Templenoe, as well as a small amount of land within the civil parish of Tipperary town.[11]

The estate core was centred on Damer's Court, the mansion at Shronell built by John Damer. The building of Damer's Court was started in the 1730s but it was never completed. It began to fall into disrepair shortly after John Damer's death in 1768. Today, little more than a fragment of the original front wall of the building remains.

In the 1930s Damer was still remembered in west Tipperary as an improving landlord. It was also said that he had envisaged Shronell developing into a substantial and prosperous settlement to the point that it would eventually rival the nearby town of Tipperary as the largest urban centre in the district. It was recalled that he had brought over "600 Scotch Presbyterian workers to build his mansion at Shronell". In reality, the figure was closer to 60; but the passage of time helped to multiply the number by a factor of ten![12]

Who were these "Scotch" immigrants to west Tipperary? What were the contemporary local factors that stimulated Damer to sponsor the settlement of 60 families from the North of Ireland in the heartland of Munster in the middle of the 18th century? What was the experience of this sponsored migration of northern Presbyterian settlers in the Tipperary of the mid-1700s and later?

It seems that Damer's decision to bring northerners to his estate was triggered by the catastrophic famine which occurred in 1740/41. Out of a population of about two million, it is believed that between 200,000 and 400,000 people died of hunger, typhus and dysentery during the year – a year that was remembered for generations afterwards as *Bliain an Áir*, "the year of slaughter". In a pamphlet printed in Cashel in May of 1741, "a gentleman in the Province of Munster" wrote an impassioned plea to the Church of Ireland Primate under the name Publicola.[13] It is likely that the author was Thomas Dawson of the Ballynacourty estate in the Glen of Aherlow, a neighbour of John Damer.

Dawson described the appalling conditions in West Tipperary in that year in what is one of the very few detailed accounts of the effects of the 1740/41 famine to have survived. "The great Frost last season destroyed almost all their Plantations of Potatoes which had so long been the Principal, if not only, Subsistence of the poor of this Province; Multitudes have perished and are daily perishing under hedges and ditches, some by fevers, some by fluxes and some through cruel Want, in the utmost agonies of Despair".[14]

Dawson calls for the establishment of colonies of Northern Protestants in Tipperary:

> Since by a Moderate Computation, very near one-third of the Poor Cottiers of Munster have perished by Fevers, Fluxes and downright Want, would not this be a very proper time for the Gentlemen of this Province to give due encouragement to Colonies from the North of Ireland, which abounds with people, to come and settle in their Room? Would not this turn greatly to the advantage of these Gentlemen, by improving their estates, as well as to the good of the public, by carrying on the Linen Manufacture?
>
> Would not this serve to strengthen the Protestant interest in this Province and prevent

many from going to America, to the great Detriment of the whole Kingdom? I know a Popish Lord, who intends at a considerable expense, to bring a Colony from the North, and give them good encouragement to settle on his estate; And I hope Protestant Noblemen and Gentlemen will not be more blind to their own interests, as well as to the general good of their Country.[15]

As well-informed landowners of their day, both Dawson and Damer would have been acquainted with the contemporary wisdom favouring the establishment of the linen manufacture and the introduction of northern textile workers to landed estates. It is likely that Dawson, who lived no more than five miles from Damer, would in all probability have discussed the desirability of settling northerners in the the locality. Damer and Dawson would have been convinced that an influx of northern Protestants would help improve the local economy as well as help to redress the religious imbalance in west Tipperary at the time.

Both would have been aware of similar settlements on other estates in the region. Some forty miles to the west, the Palatines had been successfully settled some three decades earlier on estates in the vicinity of Rathkeale, Co. Limerick. By the early 1740s these German settlers had become renowned for their industry and good agricultural practices and the beneficial impact on the estates on which they had settled was widely acknowledged by landlords.[16] Given Dawson's reference in his pamphlet to dispossessed cottiers turning into "Vagabounds, Thieves and Robbers" throughout the Tipperary lowlands, such a settlement would help improve the precarious security situation of the small community of Protestant settlers already in the district.

Protestants in 18th century Tipperary

Although lasting Protestant communities had developed in the north of Co. Tipperary as a result of the 17th century land settlement, in the rest of the county Protestants were concentrated in the towns, but were thin on the ground in rural areas.[17] A number of censuses were taken in the county at times when Protestants felt threatened. For example, in 1731, at a time of fear for the settlers, a census was taken which gave a ratio of ten Catholics to every one Protestant in Co. Tipperary. There is ample evidence that Damer, in common with other landowners in Clanwilliam barony, favoured the settlement of Protestants on his estate.[18] Following the Williamite Settlement it was a decided preference of landowners in Clanwilliam to advance Protestant tenants where possible.

Between 1746 and 1768, of 80 deeds registered between Damer and tenants, he granted leases to only six Catholic tenants.[19] Most of the Protestant tenants on the Damer estate before that time had surnames which point to English origins and suggest immigration to Ireland in the 17th century. John Damer rented large tracts of his estate, usually on a townland basis, on long leases to tenants such as Bradshaw of Ayle, Chadwick of Ballynilard, Smithwick of Ballyconree, Vere Hunt of Clonganagh, Evans of Cullen and Pope of Sologhead.[20]

Apart from Campbell's reference in 1775 to a colony of northerners having been settled in west Tipperary "about forty years" previously, we have no precise date for the settlement's foundation. However, it is likely that the settlers arrived in the locality in the early 1740s. Analysis of the settler surnames in the later 1766 Religious Census, which survives for most of Co. Tipperary, suggest that many of the settlers came from the neighbourhood of Maghera in south Co. Derry.[21]

It is likely that the settlers were Presbyterian tenant farmers and weavers attracted by the prospect of favourable leases on the Damer estate. From the 1690s to the 1740s, Ulster had been stricken at various times by disease and famine. Thousands of Presbyterian tenant farmers and artisans were leaving the northern counties for the American colonies, many so poor that they could not afford the passage money to the New World. In order to pay for their fares they became indentured to landowners in America, repaying their passage in unpaid labour that lasted for several years.[22] Settling in the rich lands of west Tipperary at the invitation of a prosperous benefactor like John Damer would have been an attractive proposition for such tenant farmers from Ulster. Their only alternative may well have been a perilous, three-month voyage to America, followed by years of near slavery as indentured servants.

How the prospective settlers learned of Damer's offer to sponsor migration to Tipperary estate is not clear. He may well have advertised in a northern newspaper or have used contacts with other landowners. It is possible that the [Royal] Dublin Society helped to put him in touch with interested inividuals or even Presbyterian clergy in the South Derry area. Like several of the largest landowners in Co. Tipperary during the 18th century, Damer was a Unitarian. Unitarianism is a dissenting sect closer to Presbyterianism than any other branch of Protestantism, and it is therefore conceivable that he made contact through his own Unitarian/Presbyterian connections or those of other landlords in Co. Tipperary who had similar connections – Bagwell, Jacob or Roe of Roesborough, his neighbour and in-law.[23]

A notable feature of sponsored migration was a tendency by landlords to house settlers in close proximity to the big house. This happened in the case of the Palatines in Limerick, where local sponsoring landlords settled the new arrivals on the perimeter of the estate core.[24] There are several references to the Scots in Shronell in folklore collected in the locality in the 1930s. Although folklore references must be used with caution, these references do throw some light on the establishment of the northern colony on the Damer estate. It was recalled that Damer had built cabins for the Scots when they arrived on the estate. In a reference to the building of Damer's Court an informant in the 1930s said: "He [Damer] brought over men from Scotland to build it. He had to build houses outside the Court for them to live in."[25]

Evidence contained in the 1766 Religious Census for the Church of Ireland Archdiocese of Cashel and Emly supports the recollection that the settlers' cabins were clustered round the estate core at Shronell.[26] The census enumerator was the Rev. Robert Baillie, the local Church of Ireland clergyman, who then lived at the Glebe at Shronell Cross. Baillie headed the Shronell census – "a distinct list of all the Protestant and Popish families and of the Popish priests and Friars in the united parishes of Latin, Bruis, Shronill *(sic)*, Corrogue, Clonpet and Cordangan in the County of Tipperary and the Diocese of Cashell."

He records 82 Protestant families and 291 "Popish families" in the union of six civil parishes. This would give a ratio of some 400 Protestants to about 1,600 Catholics on the part of the estate covered by the above parishes, using a multiplier of 5.5 persons per family. Baillie began his enumeration by listing the prominent Protestant residents – John Damer, Thomas Bunbury, Dr. Edward Moore of Mooresfort, Richard Chadwick of Ballinard and Richard Waller of Bruis. These are followed on the census by two separate lists of names, Protestant and Catholic. Unfortunately, names are given without locations; but by using other surviving documentary sources (such as land deeds, vestry minutes and an estate rent roll) it is possible to identify the townlands in which the settlers' homes were clustered.

In preparing the census Baillie moved in an anti-clockwise direction from the Cross of Shronell towards Lattin, then southwards towards Mount Bruis and finally eastwards towards Clonpet and Cordangan. It is probable that some of the settlers lived on the road that runs

Graveyard at Shronell Cross.

northwards from the Cross of Shronell, on the opposite side of the road to the perimeter wall of the deerpark (today the townland of Deerpark), on lands leased by two of Damer's most prominent head-tenants, White of Ballycohy and Chadwick of Ballinard, who leased 434 Irish acres from Damer.

The following northern settlers can be identified at this location: John Haslit, James Haslit, David Patin, Ann Huston, Alexander Fordice, John Mikeleland, Margaret Mikile and Ellenor Delap. The John Haslit (or Hazlett) listed on the census was the grandfather of William Hazlitt, the celebrated essayist. John Hazlitt of Shronell is believed to have been born in Co. Antrim *c.* 1710. His son William, who was born in April 1737 and who migrated with his father and uncle to west Tipperary, later read Divinity at the University of Glasgow. On enrolment there, he gave as his father's occupation the term "mercator" – a merchant or general dealer. A later biographer referred to his father having been associated with the linen manufacture.[27]

In the next townland of Ballyconree, largely farmed by Peter Smithwick (135 Irish acres) , the following six households can be located: William Maunsell, George McFarren, James Proud, Francis Williams, Robert Gogin, Michael Nowlan. Further west, in the townland of Ballynadruckilly (the present-day village of Lattin), where Clement Sadlier was head-tenant, there were 22 settler households: Robert Mikleland, James Fryday, Archbold Huston, Andrew Reid, George Evans, William Gogin, Robert Delap, James Collins, Edmund Hore, William Huston, Joseph Blun, Ann Langly, Robin Williams, William Davise, William Brien, James Walsh, Anne Bleane, William McBride, John Napper, Matthew Howard, John Campbell and Ann Bruce.

Moving southwards towards the civil parish of Bruis, Baillie listed Richard Waller and Stephen Cradock, both of whom were head tenants. Here, 28 families of northern origin were

located: Robert Rawlins, James Barlow, Margaret Cross, Ann Brown, John Blakney, James Johnson, Joseph Norris, David Nugent, John Bourke, John Armstrong, Edmund Cooper, John Green, John Gillespy, James Simpson, James Napper, David Wilkinson, John Howard, Samuel Wilson, Elizabeth Cox, William Wilson, Nicholas Carroll, Richard Orangy, John Keif, Ann Cooney, James Napper and Ann Fleming.

The large concentration of Scots in Bruis parish is supported by folklore collected in 1938: "[Damer] brought over six hundred men from Scotland to work for him and they lived at Mount Bruis and every day they would come across the Ara and the bridge was known as Scotsman's Bridge"[28] Finally, in the civil parish of Cordangan, there were relatively few Protestant families, most of whom appear to have been English in origin: Joseph Cooke, John Clarke, James Edmonds, John Bourk, John White, Edmund Walsh, Robert Edmunds, John Rumbold.

Impact on Locality

We can only guess as to what impact the arrival of some 60 settler families would have made on the local population. These strangers differed in religion, language and culture from the local population, most of whom were desperately poor Catholics – the herdsmen, shepherds and poor cottiers and their numerous families described by Dawson in his letter to the Primate in 1741. It can be assumed that the new settlers were as culturally insulated from the native Irish of West Tipperary as they had been from their Irish Catholic neighbours in south-east Derry prior to migration.

For this cohesive group, integration with the native population of Tipperary was as remote a possibility as that of their contemporary kinsfolk in North America with their French Catholic or native American neighbours. Everything in their culture would have underlined their separateness, their position as a people set apart: their language and religion, their farming practices, their methods of growing and processing flax, their skills in spinning and weaving, the homemaking practices of their women folk, the games played by their children. In all of these they differed from the native people of West Tipperary.

It is evident that the new settlers and the Irish lived physically apart from each other on the Damer estate. This is a reflection of the experience of settlers in Ireland in the 17th and 18th centuries, and is an indication of the desire of the incoming group to retain its identity and its cohesiveness in the face of real and/or perceived threats posed by the host population. Again in the 1930s it was recalled: "the road from the Cross of Shronell to *Botharín Buidhe* was almost a village in Damer's time and there the Irish lived".[29]

The *Botharín Buidhe* is the road that leads southwards from the present-day Cross of Shronell. Local lore attributes the name to the primroses that even today grow along the road, but it may well have derived its name from the colour of the mud cabins found there in pre-famine times. It is likely that the cabins on this road housed the cottiers who worked directly for Damer and those who worked on the nearby lands of the large head tenants of the estate.

Another folklore reference points to the existence of at least two schools in this locality, one at Shronell Cross, the other by the river, further down the *Botharín Buidhe:*

> When John Damer lived at Damer's Court he wanted a school, so he got one built a little bit above the Cross of Shronell where Deeres now live. All his workmen could send their

children, and Presbyterians and Catholics could go to that school. He gave the Master a small plot of land to live on.

And in another reference: "Hoey's pub was built [originally] by John Damer as a school; Catholics and Protestants attended it, the children of his workers."[30]

It was also recalled that local poet Liam Dall Ó hIffernáin taught in a hedge school where the *Botharín Buidhe* bridge is today. Before the 1850s there was only a ford of stepping stones at this point but the fact that the townland is called Baile na hAbhann, "the town of the river", indicates the existence of a settlement at this location, a place where there was an ample supply of water. This is also mentioned by a local respondent in the 1930s.[31] It was also recalled that the settlers crossed over the River Ara further upstream from where the Irish lived, using a small bridge still remembered today as "Scotsman's Bridge". This may be an oblique reference to tension between the Scots and Irish on the estate. It suggests a separate pathway leading from Mount Bruis to the estate core at Shronell which enabled the settlers make their way to and from the estate core without having to pass through the the Irish settlement on the *Botharín Buidhe.*

The foregoing provides evidence for the belief that there was a substantial settlement of native Irish within half a mile or so of the estate core. In this regard, it was recalled that Damer had a dream of building an urban settlement that would rival the town of Tipperary: "Damer intended to build the town of Tipperary around the Court but he changed his mind after his wife ran away."[32]

The popular recollection of Damer's intention to build a substantial settlement is supported by the prevailing wisdom of the 18th century. At this time, the recently-founded Dublin Society was encouraging the establishment of villages as a vital element in the development of estates:

> If gentlemen could once be persuaded to build little towns on their lands . . . they would in the best manner possible improve the circumstances of their own fortunes. We should in time see those parts of the Kingdom well peopled, not only with Protestants, but weavers, spinners and bleachers like the North.[33]

Wesley's Visits

In the course of 22 visits to Ireland over a period of 40 years, John Wesley, the 18th century evangelist and founder of Methodism, preached to isolated Protestant communities in the midlands as well as those in more populated centres such as Dublin, Cork and Limerick. In his Journals Wesley records four visits to Shronell between 1750 and 1767. In June of 1750, having ridden over the mountains from Rathcormack in Co. Cork, he wrote: "at Shronell I found a handful of serious, loving people to whom I preached that evening and the following morning".[37]

Regrettably, Wesley's accounts of his visit to Shronell are extremely perfunctory and contrast greatly with his far more detailed observations of life on the Palatine settlements in Limerick. However, shortly after Wesley's first visit to Shronell, he appointed a young Catholic convert to Methodism named Thomas Walshe as an itinerant preacher to the Shronell settlers. That Wesley should ensure that Shronell was on Walshe's circuit is indicative of the impact which the little community had on the evangelist.

It also points to the fact that the Presbyterians of Shronell were more than likely without a pastor of their own dissenting confession. Given the inevitable social gulf between them and the Church of Ireland community already well established in the locality, the genuine concern of the charismatic Wesley for the pastoral well-being of the northerners would have been a welcome development.[35]

Sectarian tensions

As already indicated, the Scots appear to have lived in separate settlement clusters from their arrival on the Damer estate in the early 1740s. Although there had been no increase in tension in Ireland in response to the events in Scotland in 1745, there is evidence of increasing friction between Catholics and Protestants on the estate by the mid-1750s. An incident which received widespread publicity at the time gives some indication of the level of animosity between settler and native in the locality in that period. In 1753 a Miss Susannah Grove had been abducted by one Henry Grady in an incident that had caused a sensation. Grady and his accomplices had walked into the Anglican church in Tipperary town one Sunday morning and had forcibly abducted the young woman in the middle of the service. Having locked the doors, Susannah Grove was taken away by her abductors and was married to Grady in a ceremony allegedly performed by Daniel O'Neill, a curate who lived in the Cullen/Oola district of the Damer estate. In August of 1753 O'Neill was arrested, charged with having performed the marriage ceremony and was remanded in Clonmel gaol. Six months later in late March 1754 the authorities arranged for a detachment of a dozen soldiers to convey O'Neill from Clonmel to Limerick.[36]

To reach Limerick, the prisoner would have to be escorted through the Damer estate. However, a crowd of 3,000 local people are said to have gathered at Cullen, where they stopped and searched every coach and chair that passed, to find Susannah Grove whom they meant to murder to silence her. In his subsequent report of events at Longstone near Cullen the High Sheriff of the county Jonathan Lovett wrote:

> . . . a very great number of people pelted the soldiers with stones in such a manner that they were rendered incapable of charging their pieces after they had made some shots. Two of the soldiers were greatly hurt and the Sub-Sheriff. One of the mob is dead and several wounded. I must observe that five times the number of soldiers would not take a priest to Gaol through that country when his life was supposed to be in the least danger.[37]

O'Neill was rescued, and even though the government later offered £100 reward for his capture and a further £40 for anyone who would identify the principal participants in the rescue, he was never subsequently re-arrested.[38] Interestingly, in the early years of this century a local inhabitant of the district claimed that the mob which rescued the priest at Cullen had been incited and led by a Protestant weaver. It was said that the weaver had told the crowd that " if he were our pastor, I'd lose the last drop of my blood before I'd allow him to be dragged like that." The people replied that they had no leader and the weaver agreed to lead them "though he was of a different religion."[39]

It is possible that this folklore reference points to tension and even animosity between the presbyterian settlers on the estate and the local Anglican establishment. The settlers differed in religion and social status from the small, Anglican, "New English" community already settled

in the district for up to two or three generations. This was a time when dissenters were commonly dismissed by Anglicans as inferior in understanding, wealth and status.[40] It is likely that the Anglican head-tenants of the Damer estate would have looked on the arrival of the "Scots" with a mixture of emotions. They would have viewed the "Scots" as socially inferior, but at the same time they would have seen the new settlers as constituting a useful buffer between them and the increasingly restless and resentful Catholic population.

In times of turbulence for the small and vulnerable Protestant settlement of west Tipperary, the loyalty of the northern settlers would have been expected, in contrast to native servants and retainers whose loyalty in times of crisis might well be in doubt. The Scots had acted as a buffer between English and native Irish in Ulster in the 17th century and between English settlers and French and native Americans in the North American colonies in the 18th century.[41] Any deviation on the part of the settlers from this "buffer" role would have been alarming for the tiny Anglican establishment in the district.

The tension became so acute that Damer wrote to the authorities with the news that "the common papists are insolent and provide themselves with arms".[42] He also reported that the feeling of animosity against Lovett was so great that the High Sheriff had to leave his house at Kingswell near Tipperary and go into the town for sanctuary. Damer concluded that "No Protestant in the country, who sleeps in a thatched house, dares speak or act in such matters...."[43]

Lovett later wrote to Dublin: "If you was here you would see it was not in my power to get [information] at present, for the priests have such an influence on the people that time must be the only thing that gives me hope..."[44] It is not surprising that Damer was alarmed at events on his estate. A Catholic mob had been mobilised, violence had been used openly against the forces of the crown, the authority of the magistrates had been flouted and the Popish priest O'Neill had escaped the retribution of the authorities and had continued to minister to his flock at Cullen.

Damer himself lived in his Court, a strong, if unfinished, Palladian edifice surrounded by a deerpark which was itself enclosed by an eight foot high wall. It is also said that a "dragoon barracks" was located opposite the entrance to Damers Court at this time.[45] There can be little doubt that the northern settlers were far less secure in their flimsy cabins in a climate of rising tension. It can be assumed that Damer's mention of Protestants living in thatched houses who "dared not speak or act " is a direct reference to the settlers on his estate. They and other Protestant estate workers would have lived in simple thatched cabins, like most of their Catholic neighbours. In the mid-1700s, it is likely that only prosperous head-tenants would have lived in strong, slated houses, a type of dwelling that could be more easily defended if attacked than an extremely vunerable thatched *bothán* or cabin.

If tensions were high in the 1750s, the following decade saw even greater animosity between Catholics and Protestants in Co. Tipperary. Not for the first time (or the last), Tipperary Protestants felt threatened by their own minority position in the county and by a new assertiveness on the part of Catholics. A visitor to Co. Tipperary in 1760 remarked: "The Protestants here are what we should call in England red-hot Protestants, the smallness of their number makes it necessary politically to be so".[46]

Political rivalry between two Tipperary political factions, the Maudes and Mathew factions, in the 1761 election laid the foundations for subsequent events in the mid-1760s when relations between Catholics and Protestants in the county were characterised by acute bitterness.[47] When Mathew was declared the winner of the 1761 election, Maude claimed that Catholics not only influenced the election but actually voted or attempted to vote. Mathew counterclaimed that the sheriff, Richard Waller, had acted "illegally, arbitrarily and partially" in prejudice of himself and in favour of Maude.[48]

This is the same Richard Waller listed in the 1766 Census as a prominent Protestant resident on the Damer estate. Waller is known to have resided at Mount Bruis and it is likely that at least some of the northern settlers lived either on or near his land. Given the role he played as a member of the "red-hot Protestant" faction in Tipperary politics, it can be assumed that he would have had good reason to appreciate the presence of a sizable body of Protestant neighbours during the turbulent years of the 1760s.[49]

Another local Protestant identifed with the extremist faction was Thomas Bunbury, also listed in the census as being resident in Shronell. He was a close associate of the Damers and is mentioned as having been present at the reading of John Damer's will in August 1768.[50] Bunbury was one of the ultra-Protestant Bunbury family of Kilfeacle, a close relative of Matthew Bunbury, a member of the infamous Tipperary Grand Jury of the 1760s.[51] In March 1763, when over 14,000 Whiteboys were said to be in arms in Co. Tipperary, William Chadwick, a prominent head-tenant and close neighbour of Damer's at Ballinard, reported Whiteboy activity in the neighbourhood and called on Lord Drogheda's regiment quartered in Tipperary town to take action. Six suspects were arrested and taken to Clonmel gaol.[52]

There can be little doubt that the 1760s were years of acute tension between settler and native on the Damer estate. There was a substantial increase in rents and the fact that tithe was payable on potatoes by the poorest cottier, while local grazier farmers leasing hundreds of acres were exempt from tithe, caused deep resentment towards the Protestant population. Needless to mention, Presbyterians as well as Catholics resented the payment of tithes for the upkeep of the Church of Ireland clergy in the district. This may have contributed to some sense of common grievance on the part of Presbyterians and Catholics.

By the mid 1760s the ultra-Protestant gentry of the county were faced with the spectre of resurgent Catholicism in various forms. They had little confidence in the motives of government, as witnessed by the leniency shown to Whiteboys at the Clonmel trials of 1762 and the failure to apprehend O'Neill. They feared that the Whiteboys were in league with the French and were intent on the overthrow of the state and the ending of Protestant hegemony in Ireland. All of this contributed to the traumatic events in 1765/66 when the nerve of the Protestant gentry broke and they engineered the judicial execution of the Tipperary priest Nicholas Sheehy.[53]

Though documentary evidence is not available, there can be little doubt that the settlers on the Damer estate would have felt the full force of Catholic anger following the execution of the priest and his associates. It may be no coincidence that Wesley's visit to Shronell in 1767 was notable for an unprecedentedly large attendance. "I rode to Shronell and preached at twelve to the largest congregation I have ever seen there", Wesley recorded in his joural entry of June 25th.[54]

Settlers' Social Status

In the barony of Clanwilliam throughout the 18th century a small number of resident and non-resident landowners occupied the apex of the societal pyramid: the Damers of Shronell, Maudes of Dundrum, Mathews of Thomastown and Dawsons of Ballynacourty in the Glen of Aherlow. These were the descendants of people who had acquired land in Tipperary in the second half of the 17th century, descendants either of those who had profited from the Cromwellian wars or immigrants who had been attracted by the commercial opportunities afforded by the upsurge in economic activity in the late 1600s.

Beneath the large resident proprietors at the apex of the pyramid were a small group of very large landowners, beneath them a larger body of lesser landlords and finally a wide base of freeholders. The bottom of the social pyramid was occupied by large numbers of cottiers and landless labourers. From Campbell's remark in 1775 that "in everything but religion [the northerners] were undistinguishable from the general mass", we can assume that the vast majority of the settler families were poor, landless cottiers by that date.

However, from evidence contained in the surviving 18th century vestry minute book for the parish of Shronell, it is clear that a small number of the settlers eventually achieved some social standing in the community.[55] The civil parish was not only an ecclesiastical division but was also a local government area until well into the 19th century. The parish vestry held meetings at regular intervals to transact local government business in much the same way as urban or county councils do today. A rate or *cess* was levied on the inhabitants of the parish for repairs to parish roads, relief of the poor, care of foundlings and orphans and a number of other tasks either laid down by statute or assumed voluntarily.

The vestry minutes which survive for Shronell for the year 1758 show that the members of the vestry for that year included local head-tenants Richard Chadwick and Nicholas Carroll, as well as Thomas Bunbury, who was probably a longstanding retainer of John Damer. However, Archibold Houston, Alexander Fordice and Robert McClelland, all of northern settler origin, are also signatories to the vestry minutes. This would tend to indicate that they were elders of the settler community.

No Catholics are listed as signatories until 1765, when the signature of William Mullaly of Cordangan and the "x" of John Hickey appear on the minutes. However, no other Catholic names appear thereafter. The absence of Catholics is a reflection of a period when even poor Protestants were considered socially and economically superior to Catholics. It may also be an indication of sectarian tension in the locality caused by the execution of Fr. Sheehy. Whether it reflects a deliberate policy on the part of the Protestant establishment to exclude Catholics from local administration one cannot say for certain.

Until the early decades of the following century, a small number of settler names are listed as members of the vestry – Houston, Hazlitt, McClelland, McBride, Simpson, Proud, Goggin and Hoare. In 1764 James Hazlitt of Shronell, Andrew Reid and William McBride of Lattin are listed as "overseers of the high-roads". It is interesting to note that only northern settler names are listed in the vestry minutes from 1776 onwards, with no head-tenants listed after that date.

There is a curious reference in the 1777 minutes to the effect that no cess had been collected since 1775 "because of objections that the church had been illegally built", and none in 1776 because "it was supposed the church was to be removed to Lattin". These tantalising references may point to a conflict of interests between the dissenters and the Anglican establishment in the locality in the 1770s but, given the lack of additional evidence, it is difficult to deduce just what the basis of the conflict might have been. Northern settler names are to be found on a freeholder list of the Corporation of Fethard in 1774 – Robert Houston Senior and Junior, and William Houston of Ballytruckle (sic); Robert McLennon (sic) of Shronell and Joseph Norris of Fawnagown.

Failure of Linen Industry

Campbell's 1775 mention of the settling of northern weavers in the locality some forty years before is a clear indication that the attempt to establish a linen industry had not succeeded: ". . . the effort proved ineffectual, for the children of the those weavers, like the other natives neither weave

nor spin and in everything but religion are undistinguishable from the general mass."[56] Damer had originally envisaged a thriving linen industry on his estate, but in this he was to be disappointed.

A number of reasons can be identified for the failure of the linen industry, not least the fact that there was considerable difficulty in acquiring quality flax seed outside the northern counties. The amount of flax sown was insufficient and tended to be of poor quality. Further, the industry in the south of Ireland was imposed from the top down, encouraged by a central Linen Board, in contrast to the North where the linen manufacture grew rapidly from the grass roots in response to steadily rising demand. It is also known that outside the North employment in linen was unreliable and offered poor wages compared with worsted spinning. All of these factors militated against the "take-off" of the industry in the South.[57]

Whatever the reasons for the failure of the Tipperary settlement, it has been noted that in many instances of sponsored migration of linen-weavers from the north, enthusiasm for the project did not survive long after the passing of the sponsoring landlord.[58] With the death of John Damer of Shronell in August 1768, the settlers lost their benefactor and protector – the one who had brought them to the locality, who had provided them with homes and small plots of land, and who had encouraged them in their efforts to make a success of an industry that had seen phenomenal growth in the North.

By the 1770s, however, the experiment had ended. When the weaving or spinning ceased cannot be stated for certain. In order to continue weaving, some capital would have been required to maintain looms or to buy new ones. Without Damer's patronage, the Shronell weavers were too poor even to afford the small amount of capital required. The significance of Damer's passing is emphasised by the fact that Maude of Ballintemple, an improving landlord less than ten miles from Shronell, had settled linen weavers on his estate in 1771. Indeed, at least one family from the Damer estate, the Frydays, are known to have settled on the Maude estate in the 1770s.[59]

In 1773 the linen trade slumped nationally and it is known that many of the weavers, unable to sell their cloth, reverted to weaving bandle linen which they knew they could sell locally. The crisis of 1773 marked the end of the attempt to commercialise linen weaving on a countrywide scale. In years of harvest failure, which usually coincided with recession in the textile trade, textile workers were especially vulnerable because they had to purchase part of their food.[60]

The acute crisis in Munster in the 1770s and 1780s is recorded in the observation of Robert Stephenson in 1784:

> The manufacture [of linen] in the South is almost totally lost, the lower class of people unable to pay rents, by want of employment for their families; migration has become alarming at Cork, Waterford and all ports on those coasts . . . a circumstance not much known before the present time. And as the provision trade is likely to be transferred too, or shared by other countries, if the South is stripped of its scanty number of starving inhabitants, estates will become of much less value.[61]

In the increasingly competitive scramble for land during the closing decades of the 18th century , the weavers in Shronell, Lattin and Mount Bruis had no advantage over their Catholic neighbours. Their distinctive religious identity would have made little difference to their status following Damer's death. The Chadwicks became land agents to Lord Milton who inherited all of his uncle's land in south Tipperary in 1768, and there is no evidence to suggest that the Chadwicks made any concessions to the settlers after Damer had passed away.

By 1784, only one settler family of northern origin is recorded on the rent roll of the estate – that of Robert Houston who leased 33 Irish acres at Ballynadruckilly in partnership with his brother William.[62] Furthermore, no deed between a local head tenant and a settler family can be located for the 1700s. Campbell had indicated that the children of the original settlers were "indistinguishable from the general mass". In other words, they belonged to the class of poor cottiers, mostly landless labourers who relied solely on the work they could obtain from local farmers.

Dispersal of Settlers

In 1766, at least 50 settler families of northern origin lived on the estate. However, by 1831 only 20 Protestant families in all were recorded in Shronell and the five adjoining civil parishes.[63] In that year a small number of settler families are to be found in Bruis: Barlow, Carroll, Collins, Fleming, Green, M'Clure, Simpson; in Clonpet: Clarke and Cross; and in Cullen, Fleming, M'Clure and Nugent.

What happened to the others? It is likely that at least some of the families emigrated. Local lore recalls that they "went back to Scotland"; as Presbyterians, some may well have gravitated back to their spiritual homeland in the way William Hazlitt's father had left Shronell to study at the University of Glasgow. However, it is more likely that as a cohesive religious group, others may have emigrated to America or Canada, as the Palatines emigrated from west Limerick in the same period. It is also possible that some of the male descendents of the settlers joined the British army during the Napoleonic wars and never returned.

In 1833 a Presbyterian missionary from the Synod of Ulster, travelling in the south of Ireland, referred to the fact that there were "a few Presbyterians living in Tipperary town, the remains of a congregation that existed there between twenty and thirty years ago".[64] It is likely that the economic pressures prevailing on the poorest people on the estate in the closing decades of the 18th century contributed to the dispersal of the settlers. There is considerable evidence of migration to other estates in Co. Tipperary and Co. Limerick.

In the Tithe Applotment Books of the 1820s and Griffith's Valuation of 1851, settler surnames are listed on the neighbouring Dawson estate in the Glen of Aherlow (Barlow, Carroll, Earngey, Green, Hore, Wilkinson); on the Hawarden estate at Ballintemple (Green, Johnston, McClelland, Simpson); on the Massey-Dawson estate at Clonbulloge (Brown, Clark, Green, Nugent, Sampson); on the Smith-Barry estate at Cordangan (Browne, Cross, Davis, Dulap, M'Clure, Maunsell and Sampson); in Corrogue, east of Tipperary Town (Armstrong, Brown, Cross, M'Clure, Norris); in Kilshane (Browne, Dunbar, Fleming); and in Relickmurray (Hore, M'Clure, Norris, Nugent).[65]

A small number of names can be found among the shopkeepers and merchants of Tipperary town by the early 1800s: Houston, Earngy, Collins.[66] Over the generations there was also a certain amount of intermarriage with the local population, as was recalled in the figurative language of a folklore informant in the 1930s: "Often the Scots would come over to the Cross and dance and one by one they got married to the Irish.[67]

The following surnames disappeared from the records after 1766: McFarren, Williams, Gogin, Reid, Blun, Bleane, Napper, Campbell, Bruce, Miller, Blakney, Galespy and Cox. Today a small number of settler names can be found in the neighbourhood of Lattin, Shronell and Bruis. There are Greens in Latin, Crosses in Clonpet, Barlows in Mount Bruis; Heustons in Oola; Frydays in Dundrum; and Browns, McBrides and Wilsons in Tipperary town. The fact

that a colony of some 60 Presbyterian linen weavers were settled in West Tipperary by John Damer of Shronell in the mid-1700s is today all but forgotten.

However, among a dwindling number of older inhabitants, it is recalled that those brought to the locality by Damer some two and half centuries ago were "a distinctive ethnic grouping".[68] Up to the early 1990s an older member of one local family recalled: "we were always told that our ancestors were Presbyterians", although when pressed for detail as to the basis of this belief, she could supply no further information.[69] It was this remark which initially stimulated interest in this particular example of an 18th century phenomenon: the sponsored settlement of northern linen-weavers on estates outside of Ulster in the great "age of improvment".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to acknowledge the help and encouragement of Seamus Ó Maitiu, MA, Course Co-ordinator; Dr. Raymond Gillespie, Dept of Modern History, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, and Dr. Thomas Power, University of Toronto, for advice on sources; Mr. Joseph McDermott, MA, Newport, Co. Mayo; Mr. William Vaughan, Shronell, Co. Tipperary and Mr. William Fryday, Dundrum, Co. Tipperary for invaluable local knowledge; Mr. George Cunningham, MA, Roscrea; Ms. Bairbre Ní Fhloinn, Dept. of Irish Folklore, UCD, for access to the Shronell NS folklore copybooks; Ms. M. Darmody, County Library, Thurles, Co. Tipperary; staff at the National Library of Ireland, National Archives and Register of Deeds; Dr. Margaret Treacy for enduring the long gestation period of this project.

FOOTNOTES

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