The Londonderry Plantation from 1641 until the Disengagement at the end of the Nineteenth Century

Transcript

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It is an unfortunate fact that Irish history tends to be bedevilled by cherished beliefs rather than coolly informed by dispassionate examinations of facts: added to this distressing state of affairs, commentators on the eastern side of the Irish Sea seem to lose their senses when dealing with any aspects of Ireland whatsoever, or (and I do not hazard a view as to which is worse) ignore the place entirely, expunging it from the record. For example, if we take the Londonderry Plantation, misrepresentation and confusion are beyond belief: some pretend it never happened; some hold fast to absurd notions about it, even denouncing it as the source of all the so-called ‘Troubles’ ever since; some, secure in their fortresses of invincible ignorance, have never heard about it at all; and very few, from any background, seem able to grasp the truth that nothing occurs in a vacuum, for events in Ireland were always part of a much wider series of historical upheavals, almost invariably closely connected with uproar on the European Continent, especially power-struggles, and in the seventeenth century context, this should be glaringly obvious, even to the most myopic. Yet Anglocentric historians, even in recent times, completely miss the importance of the Londonderry Plantation in shaping events of the 1640s and 1650s in British history, or take the path, not of the myopic, but of the blind. In my own experience, when I first proposed a major book dealing with the Londonderry Plantation to an English University Press in the early 1980s, and sent in a carefully composed synopsis with chapter breakdowns clearly setting out the structure and content, I received a brusque response stating that Forestry in Northern Ireland would not ‘fit within the current interests or list of the Press’: that says it all. The neglect of the Londonderry Plantation is very odd, because the treatment of the City of London by the Crown unquestionably played no small part in the destabilisation of Charles I’s reign, despite the fact the more perceptive of the King’s advisers had warned him that to antagonise the City was, to put it at its mildest, unwise. The King was not the only casualty.

Thomas Wentworth (1593-1641) had accepted the poisoned chalice as Lord Deputy of Ireland in 1632, and attempted to put to rights a situation in which the King had been defrauded of income by his own office-holders; ecclesiastical property had been alienated on a massive scale to laymen, mostly ‘New English’ Protestants; many Protestant office-holders and planters put their own interests before those of the Crown and State; and much more besides, not least the deplorable condition of the Established Church of Ireland. Wentworth clearly saw (something that has been grossly underestimated) that secular and ecclesiastical authority stood or fell together. However, when the City of London’s Estates in County Londonderry (there never was a ‘County Derry’ at any time in the whole of history, despite the efforts of fantasists with axes to grind [such as deliberately expunging the name of London from any consideration of events in Ulster], for the County was created out of Coleraine to which a large chunk of County Tyrone and parts of Counties Antrim and Donegal had been added specifically for the Londoners) were forfeited and surrendered to the Crown as the result of the Court of the Star Chamber findings in 1635, and the City, having paid out the equivalent of billions in a venture with which it was extremely reluctant to be involved in the first place, was fined a huge sum as well, contemporaries had no doubts about the ‘busynesse’ being of ‘great consequence’, for the ‘eyes of all men’ had been ‘fixed upon it’. There is no doubt that, at the time, the huge significance of the case was fully understood by a great many perceptive minds.

The King’s subsequent actions spoke volumes. First, he looked for syndicates which would ‘farm’ the lands at the highest rents. One offer came from Randal MacDonnell (1609-83—Second Earl from 1636 and from 1645 First Marquess of Antrim), backed by James Hamilton (1606-49—Third Marquess of Hamilton from 1625), and another from Sir John Clotworthy (fl.1626-65—First Viscount Massereene from 1660): the first suggested Roman Catholic interests, and the second Presbyterian concerns, but neither found favour with Wentworth who had ambitions then to become the principal ‘farmer’ himself as well as to nobble the Customs revenues of Londonderry and Coleraine which had been granted to The Irish Society as the City’s body in charge of the Plantation. Even Wentworth, however, acknowledged that the City had paid out ‘great sums’ for the Plantation venture, and that there were pitfalls ahead if the matter were not handled with care.

The City, reeling from the Star Chamber verdict, held that, had it not been for the continual sniping and the final catastrophe of the mid-1630s, its Londonderry Estates could have been starting to show a small financial return after some 30 years of heavy expenditure of capital. Unsurprisingly, the City showed great reluctance to lend any more money to the Crown, specifying, in regard to appeals for funds to prosecute the Bishop’s Wars in 1639, the loss of lands in Londonderry. In 1640, when Charles turned to the Livery Companies of the City of London for financial help, most claimed they could not do so because the Plantation had ‘consumed’ their resources, and that the whole ‘busynesse’ had ‘much exhausted the City’. In that year Wentworth was elevated as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and created an Earl, taking the title of Strafford, but there were storm-clouds ahead, for by then the settlers, ruinously rack-rented by the Crown and its agents, were giving up and returning to England (or emigrating to New England, which by then looked more promising than Ulster); the City of London was completely antagonised: Strafford’s standing was becoming shakier by the moment (his nickname by then was ‘Black Tom Tyrant’, and his handling of the military campaign against the Scots was nigh-on disastrous); and in due course Strafford was impeached, the
Commons and Lords passed a Bill of Attainder, and in 1641 he was beheaded, having been spared hanging, drawing, and quartering. ‘Put not your trust in princes’, he is supposed to have said, and he was not alone, for by then the policies of Charles I were leading to the abyss.

Meanwhile, the City counter-attacked, claiming the Star Chamber verdict was based upon proceedings both illegal and irregular, and Parliament supported the City, ordered the fine and rents should be repaid, and the properties restored to the ownership of the Londoners. Towards the end of 1641 the King attempted to mend fences with the City by offering the Plantation lands back to the City, even though he had to admit he would have to ‘recover’ them first, for the situation in Ireland had changed for the worse. The City was unreceptive: it had had its position vindicated by Parliament, and was not likely to forget who had taken its Estates away and treated it so shabbily in the first place. The Plantation affair greatly damaged the King’s standing, but in Ulster the repercussions were enormous: the King’s representatives had pushed rents ever upwards and called in the leases of several landholders, events referred to by contemporaries as ‘extreme and cruel usage’. By sequestrating the City’s holdings, then attempting to extract the maximum profits from them, completely ignoring the security aspects, the King dragged what might have seemed to be peripheral issues into the limelight of centre-stage, and the whole sorry business destabilised his Government in Dublin, Edinburgh, and London at a time when he could not afford such massive setbacks. These matters played no small part in Strafford’s downfall, and were major factors in bringing the King himself to the scaffold.

It is an historical fact that the scheme of Plantation in County Londonderry actually survived for 33 years without any serious problems, though there were isolated incidents, atrocities, and the ever-present threat of a large native-Irish population greatly outnumbering the settlers. When the Great Rebellion of 1641 broke out it was really a conservative affair, seeking a return to the state of affairs prior to Wentworth’s appointment in 1632, and indeed the policy of granting lands to the native Irish ‘so that the contentment of the greater number [of Irish would] outweigh the displeasure and dissatisfaction of the smaller number of better blood’ would appear to have been a correct diagnosis.

It is hardly surprising that the native Irish viewed matters in County Londonderry with more than a passing interest, for the frictions between Wentworth’s policies, the Presbyterians, and the Low-Church Anglicans were just one glaringly obvious problem: the demoralisation of the settlers and the alienation of the powerful City of London were also of considerable import. Clearly, English rule in Ireland was in disarray, and in October 1641 ominous news reached London: a great rebellion had broken out, which transmogrified into the Eleven Years’ War or War of the Confederation (1641-53), part of the so-called ‘general crisis’ linked to the Civil Wars in Great Britain (1642-52) and to some extent to the Continental Thirty Years’ War (1618-48), but the Continental powers were far too preoccupied to intervene in Ireland, though several Irishmen serving in European armies returned to take part in the fighting. Unlike events in the Elizabethan Nine Years’ War (1594-1603), the fact that the ‘Old English’ joined their Irish co-religionists demonstrated the seriousness of the Rebellion, otherwise the ‘Wars of the Three Kingdoms’ (1639-51). There can be no question that the ‘New English’ planters used their powers to the disadvantage of the ‘Old English’ as well as the native Irish, especially in Leinster and Munster.

As far as the Londonderry Plantation was concerned, settlements such as Moneymore (Drapers’ Company), Magherafelt (Salters’ Company), and others quickly fell to the insurgents, and there was massive destruction of property and considerable loss of life, apart from those settlers who managed to seek protection within the ramparts of Coleraine (designed by Sir Josias Bodley [c.1550-1617—brother of Sir Thomas Bodley [1545-1613], founder of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford) or the walls of Londonderry. Although the King, true to form, promised to restore the Londoners’ lands to the City, the damage was done, and the Londoners had to provide relief for the settlers as well as arms for defence. It was Parliament which called upon the City for the ‘relief and preservation’ of Ireland, and this time London obliged. The King had shot his bolt. His beheading in 1649, following the destruction and horrors of the Civil War, it would be no exaggeration to claim, would not have occurred had he not behaved so badly and unfairly towards the City of London.

In a short paper such as this it is not possible to describe the convoluted enmities and alliances of Presbyterians, Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Covenanters, Republicans, Monarchists, and so on, but the Eleven Years’ War was extremely complex, and its aftermath should not be underestimated. By 1653 Ireland had been bought to heel by Cromwell’s forces, and detailed surveys were made, after which the Privy Council ordered that all rights in the Londonderry Plantation should be restored to the reconstituted Irish Society, and in 1657 they were granted to the City under a Charter renewing that of James I and VI. In 1658 new conveyances were made to the 12 Great Livery Companies, but there was a huge amount of reconstruction to be done as well, even after bureaucratic and legal matters had been sorted out.

With the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660 the Cromwellian settlements had to be confirmed by the new régime, and a Charter of 1662 confirmed all rights and privileges granted to the City by James I and VI. In the following year the Proportions were transferred to the 12 Great Companies and their Associates, and slow restoration began. However, in 1665 Plague caused havoc in London and elsewhere, and the following year fire devastated much of the City of London. The greater part of Londonderry was burned in 1668, so it is remarkable that The Irish Society was able to rebuild its Ulster city, supply timber for a new bridge over the Bann at Coleraine, and even pay dividends to the Companies in 1676. A new quay was also constructed at Coleraine in 1679.
When Richard Talbot (1630-91—created Earl of Tyrconnell in 1685) became Lord Deputy under James II and VII in 1687, instability again was rife, as settlers lost confidence, and it was said Tyrconnell reduced Ireland from a ‘place of briskest trade…to ruin and desolation’ in record time. The tiny City of Londonderry, with its population of around 2,000, was about to experience its greatest trial, and was to enter the world stage. In 1688 the apprentices of Londonderry shut the gates against the bare-legged Highlanders, known as ‘Redshanks’, commanded by Alexander MacDonnell (1615-99—Third Earl of Antrim from 1683), who had come to claim Londonderry for James II and VII (deposed in England, but not in Ireland). In 1689 William III and Mary II became joint Monarchs, and the citizens of Londonderry, mindful of how they had been treated by Charles I, were in no mood to support the Jacobites and their French allies, so refused James entry to Londonderry in April 1689, signalling the beginning of the Siege. Captain Francis Nevill’s (c.1648-1727) map of the Siege is important as a complete impression of the outworks as well as providing an outline of the mediaeval Great Church, to the left of the walled city. That Siege was eventually raised in July, not without immense suffering, but again it must be seen as part of events in Europe, dominated by the policies of Louis XIV (r.1643-1715). After all, the Edict of Nantes had been revoked in 1685, causing many thousands of French Protestants to seek asylum in other countries, and it had not been long since Ottoman Turks invaded Europe, laying siege to Vienna in 1683, an event not unconnected with France’s ambitions to threaten the western frontiers of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. Significantly, the Papacy, under Benedetto Odescalchi (1611-89—Pope Innocent XI from 1676) did not support Louis, not least because of the French Monarch’s insistence on Gallican Liberties (1682) giving Church Councils in France jurisdiction over the Papacy. The Pope was also appalled by France’s persecution of Protestants, and regarded the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes as the greatest of follies, so supported the anti-French League of Augsburg (1686) which aimed to check French aggression in Western Europe. He regarded James II and VII as Louis’s puppet.

The Plantation was in a poor state after the Williamite cause was triumphant in 1691, and many distressed citizens travelled to London to attempt to claim financial help for themselves and their city, but often ended up in debtors’ prisons for their pains. For many years royal promises, official commissions, and endless reports were made, shuffled, passed on, and never acted upon. One thing became painfully clear: by the end of the 17th century every settler must have realised that he or she was on his or her own, and that any help from the State would always be too little and too late. In Londonderry poverty and isolation were obvious to any reasonable observer, a fact confirmed by two 17th-century funerary monuments of wondrous crudity on the wall of the north aisle of the Cathedral of St Columb. When the Siege was over, County Londonderry was a backwater, and a ruined one as well. It also became clear that the ravages of war would have to be made good by the Londoners, as no reliance could be placed on fickle State aid.

During the long 18th century there were disputes between the Bishop of Derry and The Irish Society over fishing-rights and other matters, and there were countless irritations making the Londoners’ lot wearisome, but, thanks to the influx of Huguenots, attempts were made to introduce a viable linen industry, and that proved to be a godsend for the County. By 1802 George Vaughan Sampson (1762-1827) could claim that the ‘staple of the county is the linen manufacture’. However, the Londoners did not benefit from the grants of forfeited estates in Ireland, and resources were again diverted by the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1713/14), once more concerned with containing the ambitions of Louis XIV.

In 1705 a free school was established at Coleraine, and reconstruction of the shattered fabric in Londonderry proceeded: Sir Thomas Molyneux (1661-1733) was struck, in 1708, by the new and restored buildings, but noted that prosperity had not returned. As if these problems were not enough, a financial disaster of the greatest magnitude almost overwhelmed the City of London in 1720, all the stranger as it followed from the French financial crisis of 1719 occasioned by the Mississippi Company mania and collapse. When the War of the Spanish Succession ended, it was hoped to establish a flourishing trade (mainly in slaves) with Spanish America, and a South Sea Company was formed with this end in view. The bursting of the Bubble caused immense problems: many Liverymen were ruined, and the records of some Companies make sober reading. Throughout the century, beginning seriously in 1718, many Ulster-Scots left for North America, thereby undoing one of the main aims of the Plantation. Although linen had seemed to be Ulster’s salvation, the tenant-farmers benefited but little, for the landlords increased rents, and the price of land ‘kept pace with the linen manufacture’. One of the worst aspects of the time was that the Companies, strapped for cash after the disasters of 1635-60, 1665-6, 1668, 1688-91, and the Bubble, sublet their Estates to middlemen who, for the most part, were only interested in profit, and cared nothing for the aims of the Plantation. Furthermore, about a third of all the rents in the whole of Ireland were siphoned off to Great Britain in 1729 alone, so there was resentment against absentee landlords who appeared to ‘pillage’ the country to spend money on ‘vanity and luxury’ in the fleshsots of Bath.

There were also several years of abnormal weather-conditions that ruined crops and reduced tenants to penury. In 1729 alone, 1,155 emigrants from Ulster landed in Philadelphia, many of them having sailed from Londonderry. Contrary to popular belief, most 18th-century emigrants were of Ulster-Scots Protestant stock. It is beyond the bounds of possibility that the Americans would have won their independence without the determined Ulster-Scots, still smarting from memories and handed-down tales of their treatment in the North of Ireland. And it should be remembered that most of them were Presbyterians and their departure from Ulster was not much regretted by the powers-that-were, a short-sighted Establishment largely Anglican in its complexion.
Slowly and painfully, The Irish Society effected improvements on its lands. Not the least of these was the granting of leases to Lemuel Cox (1736-1806) and Jonathan Thompson (fl.1780s/90s) of Boston, Massachusetts, to contrive a bridge over the Foyle (1789-91), one of the ‘luminous ideas’ of Frederick Augustus Hervey (1730-1803—Bishop of Derry from 1768 and 4th Earl of Bristol from 1779). However, virtually nothing could be done on the Company Estates: following the financial disasters, many Companies leased their lands for ‘Three Lives’ in the 1750s. That meant that three names were selected for the leases, so properties would only revert to the owners when the holder of the last name had died. Unfortunately for the Companies, many of them opted to nominate George William Frederick (1738-1820—Prince of Wales from 1751, who reigned from 1760 to 1820 as King George III), so it was not until after the Napoleonic Wars that the Companies were able to get back full control of their lands and, with evangelical fervour, start a process of improvement, prompted by Sampson’s works of 1802 and 1814.

So who was George Vaughan Sampson? He was Rector of Aghanloo until his translation to Errigal, and was Agent of the Fishmongers from 1820-24: under his régime a Dispensary and a Model Farm were erected, part of the products of a new sense of responsibility towards tenants on the part of landlords. This Model Farm, like other buildings on the Estate, was designed by the Company’s Surveyor, Richard Suter (1797-1883), and was intended to encourage the building of further farmhouses and outbuildings to suitable architectural standards. Excessive subdivision of farms and the process of rack-renting were stopped: rents were reduced to reasonable levels, and where expense and labour were involved in effecting improvements, leases were extended to encourage, not punish, tenants. Small farms were amalgamated to form establishments of 20 to 200 acres, with diversified crops to avoid certain disaster should one-crop farms (especially those dependent on the potato) fail. The upshot was that when Potato Blight made its baleful impact in the 1840s, the better-managed Company Estates in County Londonderry (such as those of the Fishmongers) fared reasonably well. Industry was also encouraged, the slob-lands (that is, mud-flats) by Lough Foyle were reclaimed, the fisheries were properly regulated, and much else was done to improve the Estate and the lot of its inhabitants. Nurseries were established for forest trees, boglands were planted to create new woodlands, and programmes of draining and enclosing lands by means of walls, fences, and horn-quicks to improve and protect them were set in motion. Rocky knolls were planted with hardy trees, and peat-mosses were drained to convert them to arable land. Some 12,000 acres of slob-lands by the southern shore of Lough Foyle were to be reclaimed, involving joint efforts by The Irish Society, the Company, proprietors, and freeholders (interestingly, some of those lands became the airfields into which men and matériel poured from across the Atlantic after 1941, and the importance of Ulster generally in the war-effort of 1939-45 should never be underestimated or forgotten. Waste lands were also reclaimed.

Model schools were built, to decent architectural standards, schoolteachers appointed and paid, and books and equipment provided by the Company. All roads, bridges, and other infrastructure were improved, and mills were erected. Encouragement of the industrious to stay rather than emigrate was given, but in areas where there was obvious rural overcrowding, assisted passage was provided to enable emigrants to go to North America or elsewhere. Thin soils were planted with rape to provide Spring food for sheep, and later oil, involving the provision of mills or processing the rape. In addition, two Presbyterian churches were built to designs by Suter, even though the Companies were originally only to provide for Anglicans: and very handsome they are too. The Company also built and supported schools throughout its Proportion, and built houses for its tenants as well. A model of the settlement at Ballykelly was made for Fishmongers’ Hall in London, added to each time new buildings went up. Unfortunately that model does not appear to have survived, and much of the built fabric of the Estate has been deplorably treated, with hamfisted alterations, vilely inappropriate details, and unassailable aesthetic insensitivity.

The Drapers also put up numerous buildings to designs by Jesse Gibson (c.1748-1828) and William Joseph Booth (c.1796-1871), the Company Surveyors, including schools, an inn, churches (e.g. the Romanesque Revival Parish Church at Moneymore), houses, a Common Barn, and much else, at the two settlements of Moneymore and Draperstown. (Fig.27) One of Booth’s most ambitious works at Moneymore was the Corn Store, which was redundant almost as soon as it was completed, thanks to the repeal of the Corn Laws as a direct result of the famine caused by Potato Blight in the 1840s. Again, Ireland impacted hugely on the rest of these islands, because the repeal of laws intended to protect national agriculture had a profound effect on the rural economy, especially in England, and the importation of cheap foreign corn altered things so drastically that there was a huge population shift into the towns, so that by the 1850s the Census returns showed, for the first time, a majority in England living in towns and cities.

A remarkable building by Booth was the Presbyterian meeting-house at Draperstown, a Neo-Classical temple of 1843 stripped to the bare minimum. The Grocers had done their bit as well, not least with their Agricultural College so admired by William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-63), and the charming Court- and Market-House by James Bridger of 1823-6 at what is now Eglinton. The arcades on the lower floor were originally open. The Clothworkers had even built a holiday resort (this is the former bathing-lodge) at Castlerock to designs by the Company’s Surveyor, Samuel Angell (1800-66), when the railways came, linking Belfast with Londonderry via the north coast. As for the Vintners, they sold out lock, stock, and barrel in the 18th century, and the Skinners, with a Proportion not only land-locked (with much poor, mountainous terrain), but hopelessly fragmented, did not participate in the general 19th-century improvements so evident on some of the Estates. And on The Irish Society’s lands themselves in around around Londonderry and Coleraine, efforts were also made to improve
The hostility had permeated sensibilities, the Clothworkers (who had dispensed largesse with liberality from 1840 to impossible demands, pleasing nobody. To give some idea of how deeply the sense of betrayal, exasperation, and bemused regret, exasperated relief, and more than a touch of righteous indignation. For the Companies the connections with Proportions were finally severed, the papers of the Companies reveal degrees of Company did not manage to extricate themselves until just before the catastrophe of 1914-18, and when Londoners, so contributions to dispensaries, charities, individuals, and churches, unsurprisingly, ceased. Some (which had been treated with open-handed generosity in most cases) and its political manipulators alienated the confidence made its presence felt in squalor, failure, and decay. The tactics, for the most part, of the tenantry end of the 1880s, hatred was whipped up by agitators, rents were permanently in arrears, and a general lack of to the City of London did not help. In nearly every case where the Companies were still owners of Estates by the badly drafted Acts, tardy bureaucrats, ‘unsettled’, easily-led, greedy tenantry, and politicians and Press inimical to the Companies, despite the fact that their positions were really quite clear under the various charters. The Irish Society erected The Irish Chamber in Guildhall Yard, City of London, designed 1821 by Joseph Walker (fl.1815-c.1834), built 1824-5. It was from this little building that the serious business of managing the Irish Estates took place in th teeth of countless problems. In particular, the long-drawn-out suit begun by the Skinners in 1832 consumed huge amounts of money, and did not end until 1845: it was reminiscent of Jarndyce versus Jarndyce in Dickens’s Bleak House (1852-3) when the costs absorbed the whole of the estate in dispute. There was a Royal Commission in 1853-4 which enquired into the Corporation of the City of London, and sundry irritations for the Society and the Companies, all of which cost money to defend, money which would have been far better spent on the infrastructure in Ulster.

Despite all these tribulations, Londonderry was not an insignificant place in the 1880s, as this view up Shipquay Street suggests, and when the Guildhall in the city was burned down in 1908, The Irish Society found the erection of the present handsome work of architecture, designed by Matthew Alexander Robinson (1872-1929), in a free Gothic Revival style that is wholly admirable: the gable contains heraldic devices connecting Londonderry, London, and The Irish Society. A commemorative stone records the rebuilding of 1909.

Of course, the writing had been on the wall for some time, starting with the Church Temporalities (Ireland) Act of 1833 which abolished 10 Anglican Bishoprics, 2 Archbishopsrics, and included other measures which severely weakened the Church of Ireland, and enraged opinion, prompting John Keble (1792-1866) to preach his famous sermon on ‘National Apostasy’ in Oxford, thereby sparking the Movement which reinvigorated the Anglican Communion. The Liberals, under William Ewart Gladstone (1809-98) (who deluded himself into imagining he was the man to ‘pacify’ Ireland) passed the Irish Church Act in 1869 (effective from 1871), which disestablished the Anglican Church in Ireland and removed its privileged position. The whole question of land and ownership led to further parliamentary inquiries of 1889-91. It had only been a few years before (1820, to be precise) when many Companies regained direct control of their Estates, and set about improving them with evangelical zeal. However, the concerted (and futile) attempts by Liberal Governments to ‘pacify’ Ireland by giving more and more concessions to appease Irish Nationalism led some Companies to give up in the 1870s, soon after Disestablishment. The Grocers, for example, sold to a wealthy Glaswegian in 1877, and at once all allowances and grants ceased. The Drapers had a great deal of trouble in the 1880s during the land agitation, and income virtually dried up, which did not encourage the Company to hand out large charitable sums to its belligerent tenants. The Fishmongers, who had been among the most benevolent of landlords, also found themselves in a pickle when tenants resented to pay rents, settle arrears, or buy out their holdings from the Company. The Fishmongers’ Agent of the time observed that the tenants were ‘an awful lot of ungrateful blackguards’. The Clothworkers and the Merchant Taylors were more fortunate, for, like the Grocers, they sold their holdings in the 1870s.

And of course, all those attempts at so-called ‘pacification’ of Ireland, leading to Home Rule, had very little to do with altruistic principles: no Party could really govern in Westminster without the support or abstention of Irish Nationalist Members of Parliament numbering around 80, more or less. Parliamentary interference (Liberal-Party inspired, just as the destruction of the country-house in the 20th century may be laid firmly at the door of that Party), Parliamentary Commissioners (which inevitably raised red herrings about whether or not the Companies actually owned their lands or merely held them in trust, though the legal position had been clarified many times), badly drafted Acts, tardy bureaucrats, ‘unsettled’, easily-led, greedy tenantry, and politicians and Press inimical to the City of London did not help. In nearly every case where the Companies were still owners of Estates by the end of the 1880s, hatred was whipped up by agitators, rents were permanently in arrears, and a general lack of confidence made its presence felt in squallor, failure, and decay. The tactics, for the most part, of the tenantry (which had been treated with open-handed generosity in most cases) and its political manipulators alienated the Londoners, so contributions to dispensaries, charities, individuals, and churches, unsurprisingly, ceased. Some Companies did not manage to extricate themselves until just before the catastrophe of 1914-18, and when connections with Proportions were finally severed, the papers of the Companies reveal degrees of bemused regret, exasperated relief, and more than a touch of righteous indignation. For the Companies the Plantation had been a huge imposition in the first place, then three centuries of trouble, expense, bother, and impossible demands, pleasing nobody. To give some idea of how deeply the sense of betrayal, exasperation, and hostility had permeated sensibilities, the Clothworkers (who had dispensed largesse with liberality from 1840 to
1870) refused to send representatives to attend the centenary celebrations of Castlerock Parish Church (designed by Angell's successor, the architect Frederick William Porter [1820-1901]) on its former Proportion in 1970.

Today, four centuries later, The Honourable The Irish Society (shown here about to lay a wreath in Londonderry just before the outbreak of the 1939-45 war) still manages the residue of the Plantation venture, including some remaining interests of The Mercers’ Company in the Kilrea area. The importance of the Londonderry Plantation in the history of these islands should be stressed: to ignore it, as far too many have done, is bad history, irresponsible, and careless, to put it at its mildest. The ways in which the City and its tenants were treated played no small part in events leading to the decapitation of both Strafford and Charles I. In addition, those momentous events pointed to the future, to the supremacy of Parliament, for the City owed the restitution of its lands, not to a capricious Monarch who pretended he was willing and able to do so, but to Parliament, which, in the end, did just that.

It is not an edifying story: that is no excuse for trying to consign it to oblivion.

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Fig.33 Irish Society Schools, Coleraine.
Fig.34 Coleraine Town-Hall.
Fig.35 Escutcheon of The Irish Society on Coleraine Town-Hall.
Fig.36 Irish Chamber, Guildhall Yard, City of London.
Fig.37 Shipquay Street, Londonderry, in the latter part of the 19th Century.
Fig.38 Londonderry’s Guildhall.
Fig.39 Commemorative Inscription at the Guildhall, Londonderry.
Fig.40 Interior of Castlerock Parish Church.
Fig.41 The Irish Society processing to the Diamond, Londonderry, 1939.

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See especially Adamson (2007), Russell (1991), and Sharpe (1992), all of which ignore the significance of the Plantation and the Crown’s treatment of the City of London in events leading to the overthrow of the Monarchy of Charles I, and indeed to that King’s trial and execution, matters which only get casual mention in Brenner (1993), Lindley (1997), and Pearl (1961). This curious tendency to underplay or ignore the connections is mentioned in the corrective views expressed in Ó Ciardha & Ó Siochrú (eds) (2012).

Curl (1986). See also Curl (2000).

Richard Boyle (1566-1643—1st Earl of Cork from 1620) has been included among this group, but this is not absolutely fair, as Boyle realised that in any emergency Protestant planters were dependent on the King for help from England, and himself encouraged the raising of a regiment to assist Charles in his struggle with Scots Covenanters, but nevertheless Wentworth made an enemy of him as, inter alia, the Deputy cut across Boyle’s ambition of creating a Protestant Ireland, and there were other slights and obstructions. See McGuire & Quinn (eds) (2009) i 729-35.

Knowler (ed) (1739) i 374.


In 1635, MacDonnell had married Katherine, née Manners (c.1603-49), daughter of Francis (1578-1632—Sixth Earl of Rutland from 1612), widow of George Villiers (1592-1628—First Duke of Buckingham from 1623). Knowler (ed.) (1739) i 200.

Ibid. ii 25.

Knowler (ed.) (1886-88) iv 16.

Moody (1939) 408.

For Strafford see Asch (1993); Cooper (1983) 148-75; English Historical Review lxxx (1965) 30-50; Gardiner (1883-4); History lxxxiv n.s. (1999) 52-73; Kearney (1989); Merritt (ed.) (1996); O’Grady (1923); Wedgwood (1964).


See Curl (1986) for details.


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