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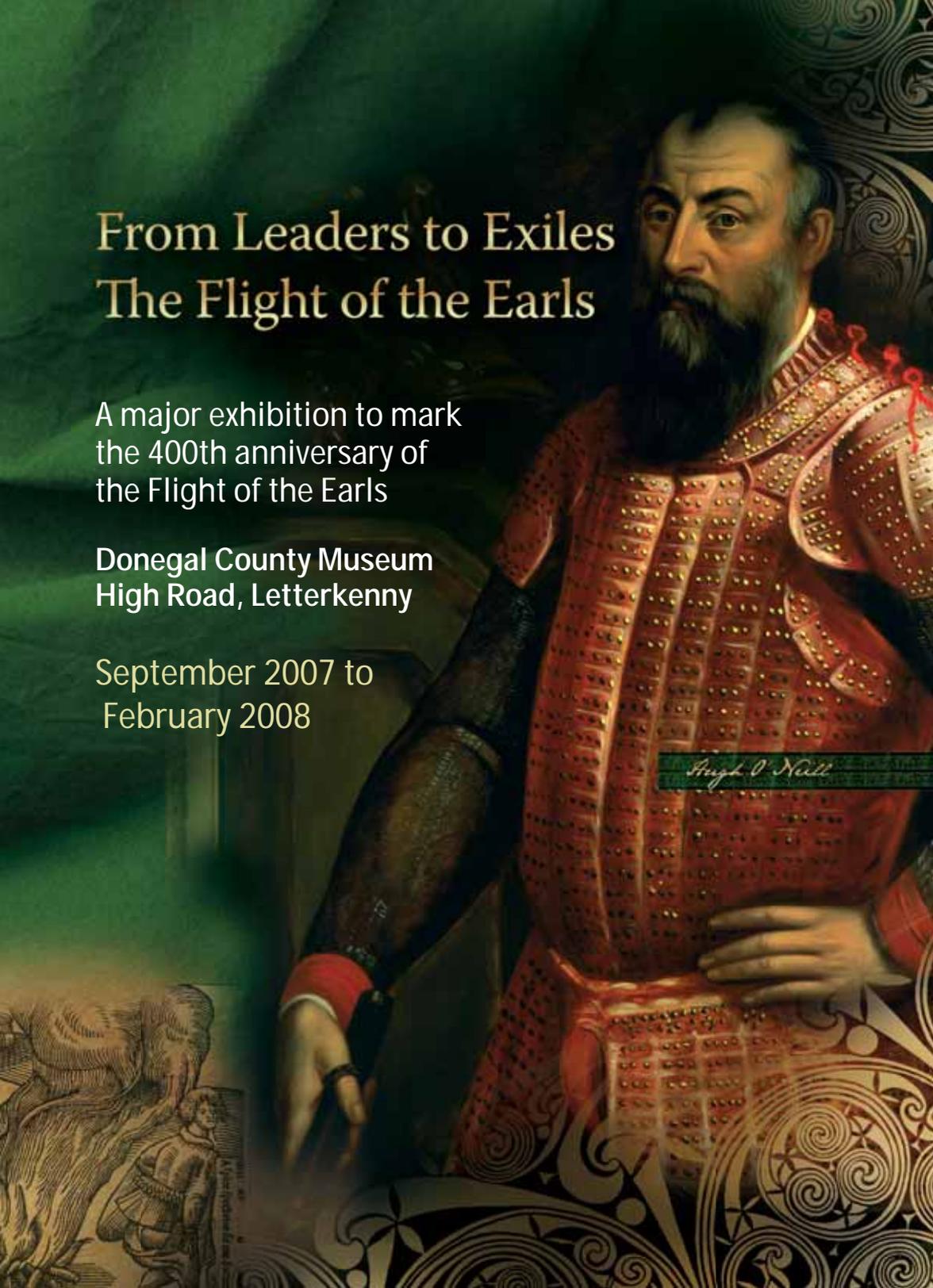


# From Leaders to Exiles The Flight of the Earls

A major exhibition to mark  
the 400th anniversary of  
the Flight of the Earls

Donegal County Museum  
High Road, Letterkenny

September 2007 to  
February 2008





# 'From Leaders to Exiles The Flight of the Earls'

## Introduction

Donegal County Council Museum and Archives Services in conjunction with Derry City Council Heritage and Museum Service present this major exhibition entitled **From Leaders to Exiles – The Flight of the Earls**. The exhibition officially opened on the 12th September 2007 and continues until February 2008.

This exhibition focuses on the major events of the period, including the Nine Years War, the departure of the Ulster Earls and the subsequent Plantation of Ulster. On display are original 16th and 17th century documents, written and signed by Hugh O'Neill, Red Hugh O'Donnell and Rory O'Donnell. It is a unique opportunity to see these historic archives on loan to the Museum from the Archivo General de Simancas in Spain and the National Archives of the UK. A selection of artefacts dating from the period on loan from the Hunt Museum, Limerick, Limerick City Museum and the Pearse Museum, Dublin are also on display.

The interpretative panels from this exhibition will form part of a travelling exhibition, which will tour to venues throughout Northern Ireland, beginning in October 2007 in the Tower Museum.

The exhibition and associated education programme have been part funded by the European Union under Interreg IIIA through the North West Region Cross Border Group and the International Fund for Ireland. The exhibition is part of the national celebration of Shared Histories under the aegis of the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism.

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# Before the Flight

## Late Medieval Ireland

Late Medieval Ireland was made up of three distinct cultures: Gaelic Ireland, the Anglo-Normans or old English and those who had recently arrived and lived in the Pale

Medieval Gaelic society was a clan or lineage based society. The economy was based on farming. Barter, especially in cattle, was the common method of business transaction. Settlements were mostly scattered either in isolated farmsteads or in house clusters.

Gaelic society had its own system of law, known as Brehon Law. Brehons (or brithem) preserved and interpreted the law that had developed from customs passed on orally from one generation to the next.

Under Brehon Law children who were born outside marriage were entitled to a share in their fathers' property and any male relative of the chieftain could succeed to the leadership. This often led to many heirs in matters of land and lordship which gave rise to the political instability common in Medieval Ireland.

## Ulster Before the Flight

In the 16th century Ulster was ruled primarily by Old Gaelic and Anglo-Norman families.

The O'Neill dynasty dominated Ulster from their base in Tir Eoghain, which consisted of modern Tyrone, as well as parts of Counties Derry, Donegal, Fermanagh, Monaghan and Armagh.





By the 15th century the political influence of the O'Donnell family, lords of Tir Chonaill, had spread from Donegal across the territories of Fermanagh, Sligo and Leitrim. They were supported by subchieftains such as the O'Dohertys, the Mc Sweeneys and the O'Boyles.

In 1541 Henry VIII introduced a scheme of "surrender and re-grant" in an effort to control the Irish lords. If the Gaelic Chieftains surrendered their land to the King and promised to recognise English laws and customs, they were allowed to hold their lands forever from the monarch and were granted titles. Under this scheme Henry VIII granted the O'Neills the title of Earls of Tyrone.

Throughout the 16th century various attempts were made to control the Gaelic chieftains and English power slowly advanced in Ulster.

*Hugh O'Neill*

# Conflict

## The Nine Years War

In the last decade of the 16th century the Gaelic lords felt increasingly threatened by the growing power of the English crown in Ulster. In 1593 Hugh Maguire led a revolt following the appointment of an English sheriff to Fermanagh. Other chieftains supported him and the Nine Years War began. O'Neill secretly supported the rebels but kept up the appearance of loyalty to the Crown until 1595. Following a number of military successes the chieftains sought foreign aid. The Spanish were interested in helping England's enemy and several meetings took place in Donegal.

## Battle of Kinsale 1601

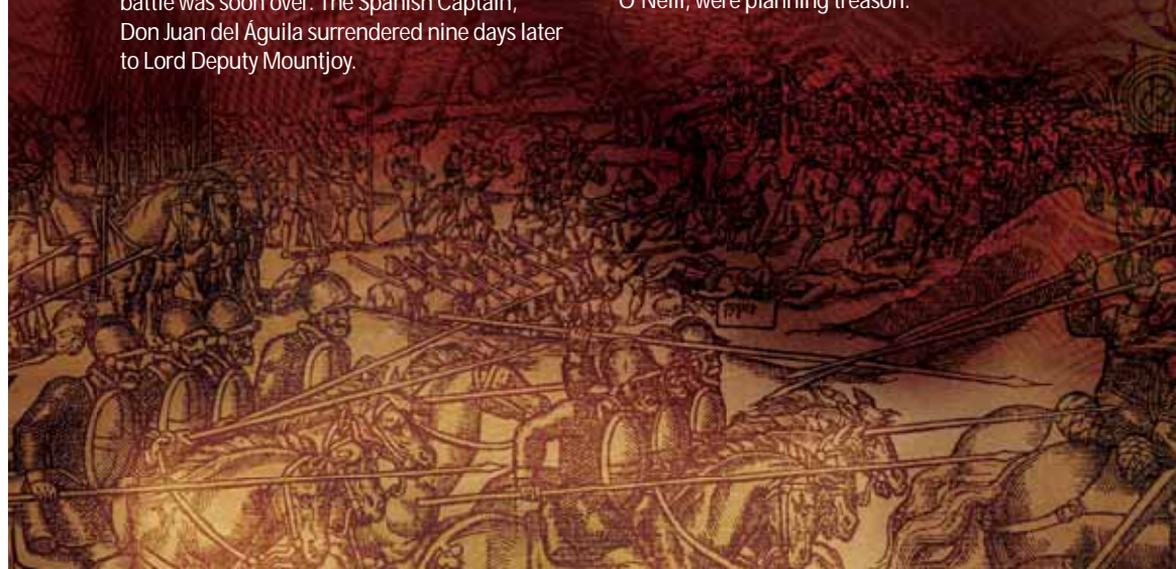
The Spanish finally arrived in Kinsale, County Cork, in September 1601. Following a difficult journey from the north, O'Donnell and O'Neill attacked the English force in December. O'Neill's forces however did not surprise the English and they were forced to retreat while the advancing English cavalry attacked them. The battle was soon over. The Spanish Captain, Don Juan del Águila surrendered nine days later to Lord Deputy Mountjoy.

## Treaty of Mellifont 1603

O'Neill returned to Ulster. Reluctantly the Queen authorised Mountjoy to open negotiations with O'Neill. The Treaty of Mellifont was signed on the 31st March 1603. O'Neill swore to be loyal to the crown and not seek further help from foreign powers. In return he was granted pardon and was restored as the Earl of Tyrone. Rory O'Donnell was created the Earl of Tir Chonnaill.

## After the Treaty

Rory O'Donnell had to renounce the O'Donnells claims to overlordships west and south of Lough Swilly. Niall Garbh O'Donnell continued to challenge his leadership. There was also ongoing tension over land between O'Donnell and other Donegal families. Between 1603 and 1605 O'Neill slowly began to regain control over his territories. However, in 1605 Chichester was appointed as Lord Deputy. Chichester was determined to prove that the northern chieftains, in particular O'Neill, were planning treason.



Throughout 1606 rumours persisted that an Ulster presidency was to be set up with Chichester appointed as the royal governor of the north. Furthermore royal officials supported the O’Cahan chieftain’s claim to an area of O’Neill’s estate. Finally in 1607 O’Neill and O’Cahan were summoned to London by King James I to settle their dispute. It was believed that O’Neill and O’Donnell were to be arrested for treason. O’Neill considered that he had no option but to leave Ireland for the continent.



# Flight, Exile and Death

## The Flight of the Earls

On the 6th September 1607 Hugh O'Neill heard that Cúchonnacht Maguire had arrived with a French ship, hired to bring the Irish Earls to Spain. The ship was harboured in Lough Swilly near Rathmullan.

O'Neill travelled from Slane, Co. Meath to his home in Dungannon, County Tyrone. From there he travelled over the Sperrin Mountains and was met in Ballindrait in County Donegal by Cathbharr O'Donnell. Together they travelled to Rathmullan where Rory O'Donnell and others were waiting.

Ninety-nine people in total departed for the continent on the 14th of September from Portnamurray near Rathmullan. Following heavy storms the ship was diverted from its course and on the 4th of October they landed at Quilleboeuf near Rouen, France.

*King Philip III*

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## Exile and Death

The Earls arrived in Louvain, Belgium in November 1607. They stayed at the Irish Franciscan College, waiting for news from the Spanish King. Having received no word by February the Earls set out for Rome. They arrived there on the 29th of April 1608.

Cahir O'Doherty's rebellion in Inishowen in the summer of 1608 encouraged O'Neill to write to Philip III for assistance. The King was slow to commit Spain to open support for the Irish rebels. O'Doherty's death in July and the suppression of the rebellion put an end to O'Neill's efforts to return to Ireland at this time.

By the end of the summer of 1608 Rory and Cathbharr O'Donnell and Cúchonnacht Maguire had died from fever. The O'Donnell brothers were buried in the Church of San Pietro Montorio in Rome.

O'Neill continued to write to the King of Spain up until the year before his death. He died of a fever on the 20th July 1616 and was buried along with the O'Donnells in Rome.

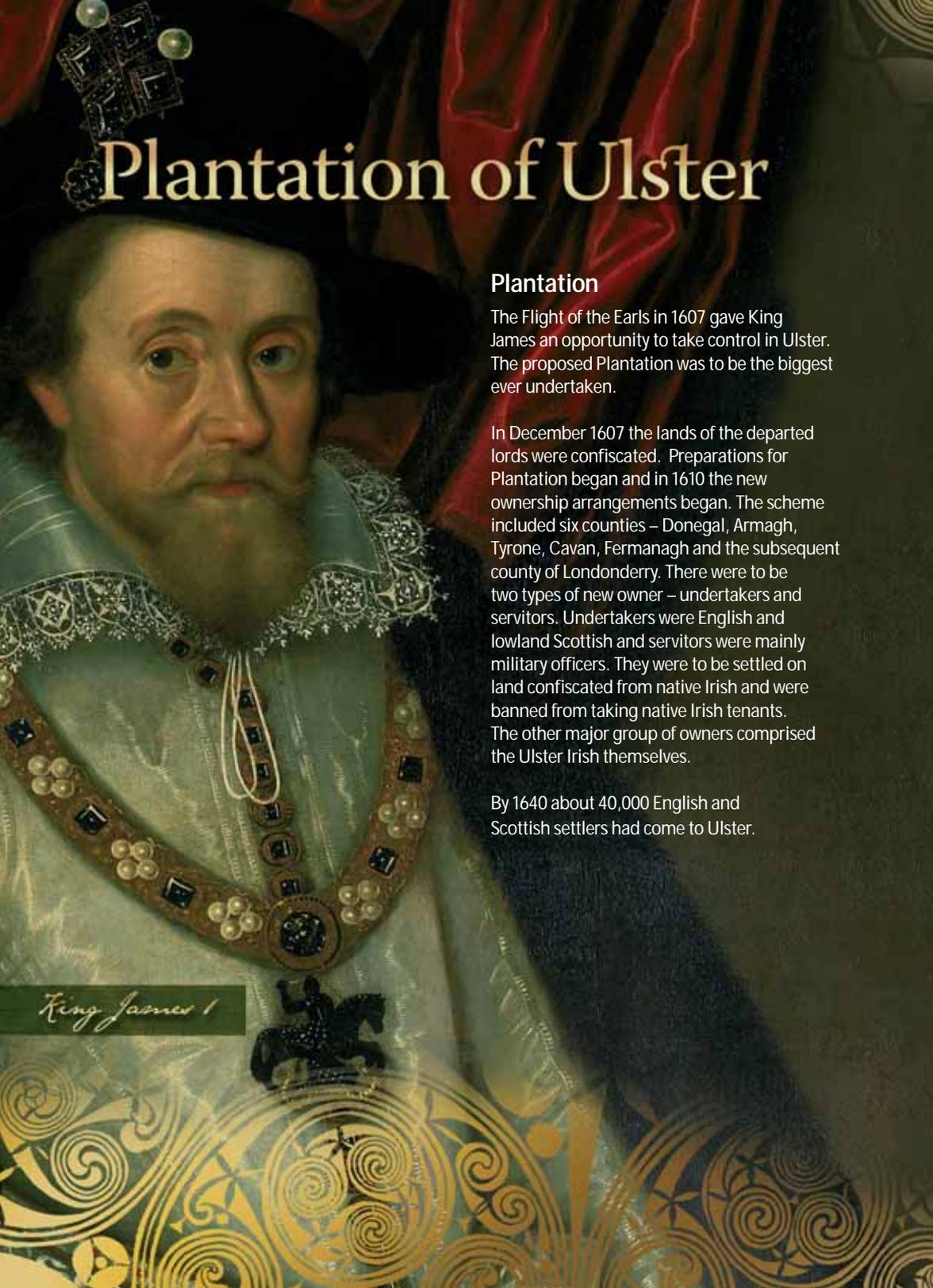
## After the Flight

After the Earls left, Chichester continued to suspect them of plotting rebellion in Ireland through foreign intervention. Sir Donal O'Cahan was imprisoned in the Tower of London following accusations of treason. Brian MacArt O'Neill, O'Neill's nephew was executed. O'Neill's son Conn and O'Neill's brother Sir Cormac O'Neill were imprisoned for life.

Following the suppression of Cahir O'Doherty's rebellion, a scheme was formulated for the plantation of Ulster.



*Hugh O'Neill*

A detailed portrait of King James I, showing him from the chest up. He is wearing a dark cap with a large jewel, a light-colored ruffled collar, and a dark, heavily jeweled necklace. The background is dark with a red curtain on the right. The title 'Plantation of Ulster' is written in a large, gold, serif font across the top.

# Plantation of Ulster

## Plantation

The Flight of the Earls in 1607 gave King James an opportunity to take control in Ulster. The proposed Plantation was to be the biggest ever undertaken.

In December 1607 the lands of the departed lords were confiscated. Preparations for Plantation began and in 1610 the new ownership arrangements began. The scheme included six counties – Donegal, Armagh, Tyrone, Cavan, Fermanagh and the subsequent county of Londonderry. There were to be two types of new owner – undertakers and servitors. Undertakers were English and lowland Scottish and servitors were mainly military officers. They were to be settled on land confiscated from native Irish and were banned from taking native Irish tenants. The other major group of owners comprised the Ulster Irish themselves.

By 1640 about 40,000 English and Scottish settlers had come to Ulster.

*King James I*

