

# Cromwell in Ireland: an honourable enemy?

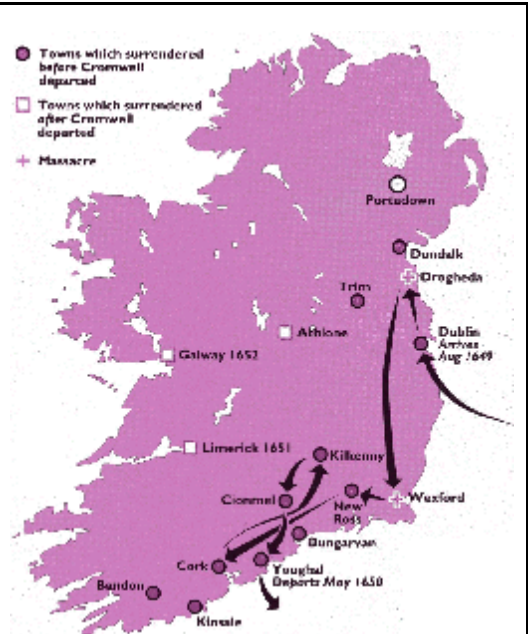
Taken from 'Cromwellian conquest of Ireland', [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cromwellian\\_conquest\\_of\\_Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cromwellian_conquest_of_Ireland); Eugene Coyle's review of Tom Reilly's *Cromwell, an honourable enemy. The untold story of the Cromwellian invasion of Ireland*, Phoenix Press, 1999, 1-84212-080-8 in *History Ireland*, Vol. 7, No. 4, Winter 1999, pp 50-2; and Martyn Bennett's review of James Scott Wheeler's *Cromwell in Ireland*, New York: St. Martin's Press and Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1999, 978-0-7171-2884-6, <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=10442965145368>

## When did Cromwell become such a villain in Ireland?

The Parliamentary campaign in Ireland was the most ruthless of the Civil War period. In particular, Cromwell's actions at Drogheda and Wexford earned him a reputation for cruelty. Although his Irish campaign raised questions about the extent of its brutality at the time - in Gaelic poetry and in contemporary accounts, there was no strong hostility to Cromwell among literate Irish Catholics until the middle of the nineteenth century.

According to Jim McElligot (St Anne's College, Oxford), Gaelic nationalists, as part of the new Irish historical imagination, which continued as orthodox history well into the twentieth century, demonised Cromwell. The new Irish State after 1922 inherited and cultivated a cult of violence in Irish history, which praised nationalist violence as inherently 'good' and British violence as inherently 'bad'. These myths were perpetuated in the primary and secondary school approved history textbooks up to recent times. (See Note 1 below for a succinct account of Cromwell & Ireland.)

Although revisionist historians prompted a reassessment of nearly every aspect of Irish history, they never attempted to alter Cromwell's reputation as a war criminal in Ireland.



Cromwell's campaign in Ireland  
*The Race to Rule. Ireland and Europe 1570-1700*  
by A. Hodge, Colourpoint Books, 1-89839-249-8, p. 62

## Traditional view of Cromwell

The classic account is Dennis Murphy, *Cromwell in Ireland* (Dublin, 1883), and the view of Cromwell as a war criminal has not been softened or abandoned in most Irish accounts ever since.

In 1998, one of the most magisterial surveys of Irish history (James Lydon's *The Making of Ireland. From ancient times to the present*, Routledge, 1998, 0-41501-348-8, pp 191-3) relates (see Note 2 below for a longer extract):

Cromwell to this day is a dominant figure in the popular mythology of Ireland. He left an imprint on the Irish imagination which has never been exorcized. 'Cromwell came over and like a lightning passed through the land', wrote Bishop French of Ferns in exile. With probably the finest body of professional soldiers in Europe, each man driven by a fanatical hatred of popery, and with his own proven military skills, there was no doubt that a speedy campaign of attrition was going to bring the rebels to heel. After landing Cromwell made a speech to the people of Dublin in which he announced his purpose as 'the great work against the barbarous and bloodthirsty Irish, and all their adherents and confederates, for the propagating of the gospel of Christ, the establishing of truth and peace, and restoring that bleeding nation to its former happiness and tranquillity'....

But the deliberate massacre of the Drogheda garrison in September, followed by the slaughter of many innocent civilians, quickly revealed the ruthless side of Cromwell.

## Traditional view challenged 1: local history perspective

In *Cromwell, an honourable enemy. The untold story of the Cromwellian invasion of Ireland* (Phoenix Press, 1999, 1-84212-080-8), Tom Reilly looked at Cromwell from the perspective as an amateur local historian. He came to a very different view, arguing that Cromwell 'was not the monster that we had once thought' and that there is not local archaeological evidence of the massacre of civilians in Drogheda. The fifth annual symposium of the Old Drogheda Society on 12 September 1999 recorded Reilly's view as follows:

Cromwell was a 'decent human being' and should not be judged for war crimes against the Irish people because he

followed the strict protocols of seventeenth-century siege warfare honourably.... Cromwell had a 'profound religious experience' which greatly influenced his military behaviour during his campaigns and was greatly affected by the Irish massacre stories of 1641. Reilly asserted that from his own interpretation of contemporary primary sources there was no massacre of civilians in Drogheda but a discriminate policy of butchering Royalist combatants. At Wexford, the slaughter got out of control when Parliamentary troops entered the town after the hand-over of Wexford Castle. Claiming that he had no particular political axe to grind, Reilly blamed Cromwell's bad press on modern day 'partisan nationalist elements'.

What is the basis of Reilly's re-interpretation?

The following passage from the book underlines Reilly's perspective as a local historian using local sources.

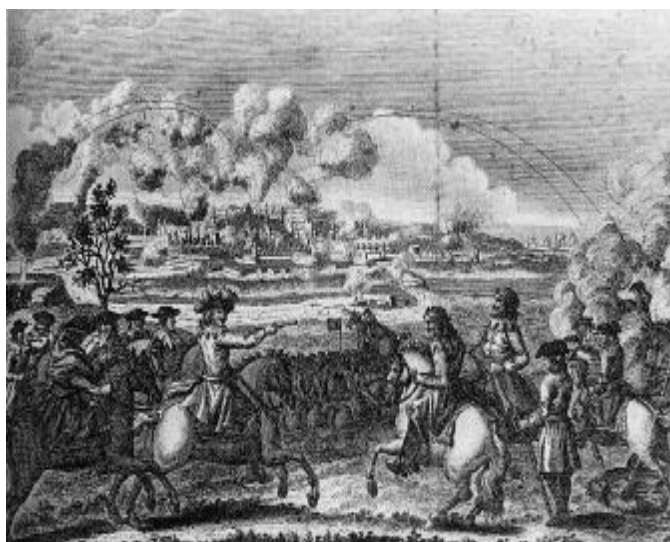
Despite the fact that 3,000 men lay on the streets of Drogheda after the departure of the Roundheads, few traces of these bodies have ever been located. Anne Hughes in her *History of Drogheda* of 1893 gives us an idea where some of the skeletons may still lie. Houses that would be eventually given the name of St Mary's Cottages were being built on the site of Cromwell's eastern battery at that time:

On Saturday 31st of October 1891 the workmen employed by F. Gogarty, the contractor of the houses, designed by the late P. J. Dodd, in the course of excavating, discovered a lot of human skeletons, supposed to be the remains of Cromwellian soldiers shot down after scaling the walls. There were five complete skeletons with the skulls, of which the teeth were in a perfect state of preservation. Some musket balls and buttons were also discovered. One skull was found remarkably well preserved and complete in all its bones, except in one region where its wall had been driven in. On examination, out of it dropped a conical bullet, which presumably carried with it that soldier's death warrant. The skeletons appeared to be those of men of about five feet eight inches to five feet nine inches in height. When the small tumulus, known as Cromwell's mount, was being disturbed in the course of excavations half a century since, it was found to be choke full of mortal remains of the Cromwellian soldiery 'in one red burial blent'. The quality of human remains turned up from time to time in and around this historic locality testifies as to how stoutly the walls were defended during the two days siege, and the deadly execution of the small arms of the brave defenders (*see Note 3 below for a fuller extract*).

## Traditional view questioned 2: a military history perspective

James Scott Wheeler is a professional military historian. His *Cromwell in Ireland* (New York: St. Martin's Press and Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1999, 978-0-7171-2884-6) is a full-length, well-paced study of Cromwell's campaign, set against the context of the twelve years of war in Ireland.

A side-effect is that the book also re-addresses Cromwell's brutality, not head on as Reilly, but by clearly locating Cromwell's campaign within the context of the twelve years war. Drogheda and Wexford did witness horrible brutality; civilians and clerics were murdered alongside disarmed and defenceless soldiers. At Drogheda, Cromwell was responsible by commission. At Wexford, he lost control of his men. 'Terrible actions indeed but they sit alongside the brutalities of Lord Inchiquin, Sir Charles Coote, Henry Ireton and Lord Broghill, a collection of English, Anglo-Irish, and Gaelic Irish commanders who all behaved at least as barbarously.' Wheeler is able to go beyond the military narrative, demonstrating why Cromwell was a man of his times with regard to his brutality and how the war linked into the politics of Charles I's three kingdoms and the emergence of the first British and Irish Republic.



Commenting on criticisms of Cromwell's actions, Wheeler maintains that while 'some of this blame is appropriate, much of it is not, and concludes that his campaign in Ireland 'proved that he was a great military commander, but not a great man'.

## How have the new views of Cromwell been received?

*History Ireland*

*History Ireland* reviewers have accepted Wheeler's book as a serious study of the sources, 'a solid base for future work' and 'a welcome addition to the rejuvenated field of seventeenth-century Irish studies' (Vol.8, No. 1, Spring 2000, pp 52-3).

One the other had they have contemptuously dismissed Reilly's account as a 'ludicrously overblown' attempt at rehabilitation' Another reviewer concluded (*see Note 4 below for the full review*):

The author's style is often superficial, volatile, tendentious and partisan in the face of known historical evidence. The book adds little to our understanding of the actions of Cromwell at Drogheda or at Wexford. His general thesis that Cromwell may well have had no moral right to take the lives at Drogheda or Wexford 'but he certainly had the law firmly on his side' does not stand up to examination. There is a need for a new book on the Irish Cromwellian campaign but unfortunately but this is not it.

Ruth Dudley Edwards

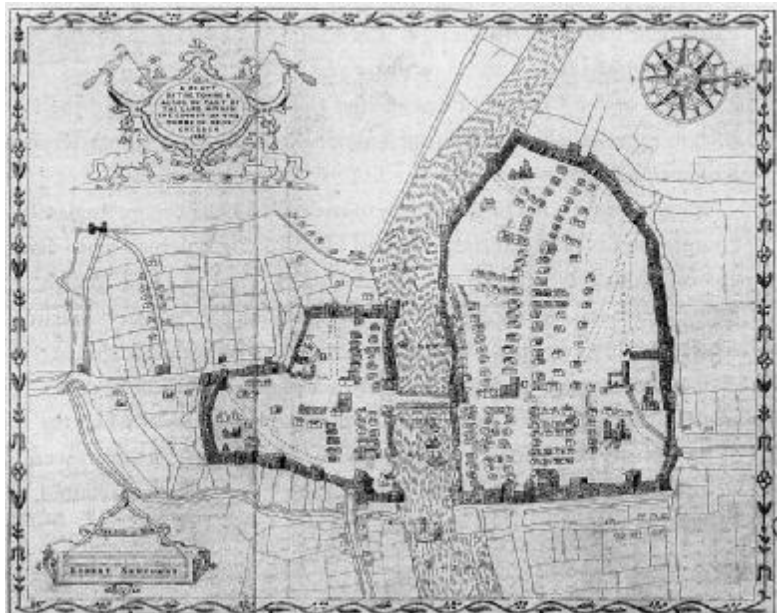
Views outside Ireland are more generous. The historian and novelist, Ruth Dudley Edwards, a Dubliner living in London, is impatient with the nationalist view of Ireland. Much to her surprise, she welcomed Reilly's rehabilitation of Cromwell:

Hard though I've tried, I still have blind spots and lapses. A few weeks ago, *The Sunday Times* asked me to review *Cromwell: An Honourable Enemy*. Now I have cherished my antipathy to Cromwell (damn it, one has to be allowed some prejudices), not only because of the massacres in Drogheda and Wexford, but because I have visited innumerable great cathedrals and village churches in England where headless statues and ruined wall-paintings are a testimony to puritan excesses. But - as I admitted in the review - Reilly, a Drogheda amateur historian, turned my preconceptions upside-down and forced me to accept that Cromwell's reputation had fallen victim to royalist and nationalist propagandists and that by contemporary standards he had behaved rather well in Ireland.

The review came up in conversation with David Trimble, who was grinning when he told me that a protester outside Boston College objecting to his honorary degree had a placard reading: 'WHO NEXT? CROMWELL?'

'Mind you,' he said rather sniffily, 'I don't know why Reilly's book was such a revelation to you. I realised all that when I was doing my A-levels and compared the storming of Drogheda with the sack of Magdeburg\* where tens of thousands of Protestants were murdered by a Catholic army; it put the two events in perspective.'

<http://www.ruthdudleyedwards.co.uk/nonfiction/RDE-writingTribe.html>



A plan of Drogheda in the mid-seventeenth century

\* The Sack of Magdeburg refers to the siege and subsequent plundering of the Protestant city of Magdeburg by Catholic Imperial troops during the Thirty Years' War. The siege lasted from November 1630 until 20 May 1631. On the latter date Gottfried Heinrich Graf zu Pappenheim, together with Johann Tserclaes, Count of Tilly, attacked Magdeburg for its rich stores of goods and the city fell. Subsequently the Imperial soldiers rapidly went out of control and started to massacre the inhabitants and set fire to the city in twelve different locations. Of the 30,000 citizens, only 5,000 survived. For fourteen days, charred bodies were carried to the Elbe River to be dumped to prevent plague.

## Cromwell in Ireland

taken from *The Oxford Companion to Irish History* edited by S. J. Connolly, OUP, 1998, 0-19866-240-8, 3127-9

Ireland's first and only commoner lord lieutenant, Oliver Cromwell (1600-58) campaigned in Ireland between 15 August 1649 and 26 May 1650. Backed by a 20,000 strong army, a huge artillery train, and a large navy, Cromwell projected himself as a providential liberator from Irish barbarism, royalist misrule, and Catholic hypocrisy.

His best remembered actions were the sieges of Drogheda (11 Sept. 1649<sup>1</sup>) and Wexford (11 Oct. 1649). Giving no quarter to garrisons refusing to surrender was in line with contemporary European practice. However, Cromwell's own explanation of the massacre at Drogheda, which had never been under Confederate Catholic control, was plainly influenced by religious convictions and propaganda about the 1641 massacres. In Wexford the New Model Army ran amok - killing 2,000 in the market place after an outpost had surrendered whilst a parley was still in progress. Though not responsible, Cromwell once more justified his army's action with reference to massacres of Protestants in the vicinity.

Cromwell's campaign was quickly running out of steam. Sickness and the need to man garrisons reduced his army's size and on 2 December 1649 he was forced to abandon the siege of Waterford. He resumed the next year, as a string of towns surrendered with good terms offered to inhabitants and defenders, only to meet disaster at Clonmel (17 May 1650). When his men poured through the breached walls, they were trapped in a killing ground prepared by Hugh Dubh O'Neill. Estimated losses of 1,000-2,500 were the heaviest the New Model Army had experienced anywhere. Cromwell was conspicuously silent about Clonmel in his dispatches to parliament.

Cromwell's success lay as much with the Old Protestants as with the legendary efficiency of his army. Michael Jones's victory at Rathmines provided him with Dublin as a bridgehead; subsequently the victories and influence of Charles Coote and Roger Boyle secured Ulster, Connacht, and south Munster. More generally Protestant royalists began deserting in increasing numbers, culminating in significant submissions in April 1650. Nevertheless Cromwell's triumphant return from Ireland, coupled with the revolutionary situation in England, gave him the opportunity for political power that some previous lord lieutenants had merely contemplated and he ruled England as lord protector from 1653 until his death. He continued to exercise influence in Ireland through his sons-in-law Ireton and Fleetwood, and later through his younger son Henry Cromwell.

Although Cromwell's direct connection with Ireland lasted only nine months, his dominance in England has meant that his name is associated with the events of the whole period 1649-58, which saw the ruthless suppression of Catholic and royalist resistance, the execution, transportation, or imprisonment of substantial numbers of Catholic clergy, and the wholesale confiscation of Catholic lands.<sup>2</sup> Barnard suggests that the black legend of Cromwell the oppressor took its present form only in the 19th century. However, his campaign was evidently controversial at the time, and he himself published an extraordinary defence of his policies in response to the decrees of a Catholic ecclesiastical assembly at Clonmacnoise in December 1649. Gaelic poets of the 17th century already associated his name with the destruction of the Catholic elite and their replacement by newcomers of lowly social origins. Hence the ironic picture in *Pairlement Chloinne Tomais* of churls hailing Cromwell as their liberator, and the poet Daithi Ó Bruadair's references to 'Cromwellian dogs'.

<sup>1</sup> This was Oliver Cromwell's first major, and most infamous, action in Ireland. The parliamentarians were anxious to re-capture Drogheda, wrested from them the previous July, to prevent a possible juncture between Ormond and Owen Roe O'Neill. The royalist-Confederate Catholic garrison under Sir Arthur Aston defended stoutly until Cromwell's artillery began a bombardment on 9 September. The walls were breached on the third day, the Boyne draw-bridge taken, and Aston overwhelmed in a last-ditch stand on the Millmount.

Official figures were 3,500 slain. The quarter given to the Millmount's defenders was ignored. Cromwell tried to vindicate the killing of civilians, of whom possibly 1,000 were slaughtered, on the erroneous grounds of their involvement in the massacres accompanying the rising of 1641. His other claim, that the action was an expedient to win the war quickly by terrifying other towns into submission, was borne out only in the case of nearby garrisons.

<sup>2</sup> This was the greatest early modern transformation in Irish landownership, creating an estate system which lasted with minor adjustments until the late 19th century. Indeed it is no accident that J. P. Prendergast's pioneer study, *The Cromwellian Settlement of Ireland* (1865), coincided with the emergence of the Irish land question as a contentious political issue.

Although the Act for Adventurers had raised only £306,718, the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland had cost an estimated £3.5 million. Other state creditors, and arrears of pay due to 35,000 soldiers, had thus to be satisfied out of Irish land. The first object under the 1652 act for the settling of Ireland was to identify 'rebel' landowners for clearance. The most guilty, including 105 named chief rebels, were subject to execution, banishment, and transportation, while others who had not shown 'constant good affection' to parliament were subject to various levels of forfeiture and transplantation to Connacht.

In September 1653 the English parliament set aside four counties (Dublin, Kildare, Carlow, and Cork) for the government, and ten counties (Armagh, Down, Antrim, Laois, Offaly, Meath, Westmeath, Limerick, Tipperary, and Waterford) for division between the adventurers and soldiers, with more land to be provided out of other counties if necessary. A tripartite Civil Survey, by jury inquisition, 'gross' estimation, and mapping supervised by William Petty, was ordered. In January 1654 1,500 adventurers began dividing their halves of the ten counties by lot. In this way 1,043 adventurers were eventually assigned 1.1 million acres, 5 per cent of total profitable land, the biggest beneficiaries being London merchants who had recently bought out other investors at knock-down prices. The 33,419 debentures issued to disbanding soldiers, theoretically convertible into Irish land at the same 'act-rates' as the adventurers, were worth only 12s. 6d. in the pound after the adventurers' share-out. More land had to be made available but only 11,804 certificates of possession were taken out, most soldiers having sold their debentures cheaply to their land-hungry officers. Some soldiers, particularly Munster Protestants who had turned coat late in the day, got nothing, as indeed did some adventurers because of the inaccuracies of the 'gross' survey. Petty reckoned that 11 million of Ireland's 20 million acres had been confiscated, but Henry Cromwell complained that the land and debt problems were still not fully resolved in 1659. The post-Restoration books of Survey and Distribution show that Charles II confirmed 7,500 soldiers and 500 adventurers in their lands. In the interim land speculation had continued with Old Protestants in particular rounding off their estates.

The Cromwellian land settlement saw no new wave of immigration. Bottigheimer claims 'that the adventurers were more interested in a return on their investment than in bringing over English yeomen. By 1657 Catholic tenantry had drifted back into many confiscated territories or had never left, and the 1659 'census' indicates that they still composed three-quarters of the population. However, Catholic landowners had been displaced from Ulster, Munster, and Leinster by victorious army officers and opportunistic Old Protestants.

## **Extract from James Lydon, *The Making of Ireland. From ancient times to the present***

Routledge, 1998, 0-41501-348-8, pp 191-3

Cromwell to this day is a dominant figure in the popular mythology of Ireland. He left an imprint on the Irish imagination which has never been exorcized. 'Cromwell came over and like a lightning passed through the land', wrote Bishop French of Ferns in exile. With probably the finest body of professional soldiers in Europe, each man driven by a fanatical hatred of popery, and with his own proven military skills, there was no doubt that a speedy campaign of attrition was going to bring the rebels to heel. After landing Cromwell made a speech to the people of Dublin in which he announced his purpose as 'the great work against the barbarous and bloodthirsty Irish, and all their adherents and confederates, for the propagating of the gospel of Christ, the establishing of truth and peace, and restoring that bleeding nation to its former happiness and tranquillity'.

Belief in providence was fundamental. God would always look after his own, which is why the army was distressed later when a plague which had hitherto been confined to the Irish struck them, thus removing 'that distinction and difference which formerly He . . . kept between us and the people of this nation'. Still, when they 'thought fit to take the field', it was 'to attempt such things as God by His providence should lead us to upon the enemy'. In coming to Ireland Cromwell followed providence. He wrote to a friend that 'truly our work is neither from our brains nor from our courage and strength, but we follow the Lord who goeth before, and gather what He scattereth, that so all may appear to be from Him'.

But the deliberate massacre of the Drogheda garrison in September, followed by the slaughter of many innocent civilians, quickly revealed the ruthless side of Cromwell. It was partly justified by him as a necessary demonstration of severity which would 'tend to prevent the effusion of blood for the future' - as dubious an excuse as the one made centuries later when the first atom bombs were dropped on more innocent civilians. Cromwell revealed a more likely motive for his action when he wrote that it was 'a righteous judgement of God upon these barbarous wretches, who have imbrued their hands in so much innocent blood'. Simple revenge was one motive and God was on his side. Recounting how in St Peter's church, where mass had been celebrated the previous Sunday, 'in this very place near 1,000 of them were put to the sword, fleeing thither for safety', he wrote that this 'great thing should be done, not by power or might, but by the Spirit of God' and 'therefore it is good that God alone should have all the glory'. That the people of Drogheda could not have been involved in the earlier massacre of Protestants was beside the point; all Catholics shared in the collective guilt and deserved punishment. Later, in October, his army ran amok in Wexford and as Cromwell wrote

put all to the sword that came in their way . . . not many less than two thousand'. He informed parliament that he had hoped to take the town without ruining it 'hoping the town might be of more use to you and your army, yet God would not have it so, but, by an unexpected providence, in His righteous justice, brought a just judgement upon them, causing them to become a prey to the soldier, who in their piracies made a prey of so many families, and made with their bloods to answer the cruelties which they had exercised upon the lives of divers poor Protestants.

There was little of the same indiscriminate killing subsequently, though no priest was safe. During the winter months a succession of towns surrendered to Cromwell's army - New Ross, Cork, Kinsale and Bandon. Then in March Kilkenny yielded and on 9 May Clonmel. When, after nine months in Ireland, Cromwell sailed to England on 26 May 1650 he had broken the back of the rebellion and left it to Henry Ireton, his son-in-law, to complete the new conquest of Ireland.

## Extracts from Tom Reilly's *Cromwell. An honourable enemy*

Phoenix Press, 1999, 1-84212-080-8, pp 115-17

Despite the fact that 3,000 men lay on the streets of Drogheda after the departure of the Roundheads, few traces of these bodies have ever been located. Anne Hughes in her *History of Drogheda* of 1893 gives us an idea where some of the skeletons may still lie. Houses that would be eventually given the name of St Mary's Cottages were being built on the site of Cromwell's eastern battery at that time:

On Saturday 31st of October 1891 the workmen employed by F. Gogarty, the contractor of the houses, designed by the late P. J. Dodd, in the course of excavating, discovered a lot of human skeletons, supposed to be the remains of Cromwellian soldiers shot down after scaling the walls. There were five complete skeletons with the skulls, of which the teeth were in a perfect state of preservation. Some musket balls and buttons were also discovered. One skull was found remarkably well preserved and complete in all its bones, except in one region where its wall had been driven in. On examination, out of it dropped a conical bullet, which presumably carried with it that soldier's death warrant. The skeletons appeared to be those of men of about five feet eight inches to five feet nine inches in height. When the small tumulous, known as Cromwell's mound, was being disturbed in the course of excavations half a century since, it was found to be choke full of mortal remains of the Cromwellian soldiery 'in one red burial blent'. The quality of human remains turned up from time to time in and around this historic locality testifies as to how stoutly the walls were defended during the two days siege, and the deadly execution of the small arms of the brave defenders.

More recently, in 1976, during building being carried out at No. 18 St Mary's Cottages, a complete skeleton was discovered. It was reputedly in a sitting position and was extricated from its unofficial grave by local residents. A musket ball that had been flattened on one side was found in its skull. This area is the one that Hughes describes and is the site of the batteries and the assaults on the walls. Due to its irregular elevation, little development has occurred there in the intervening centuries. Perhaps some day more questions will be answered in the event of further discoveries being made in this area. It is highly unlikely, however, that all of the bodies that had been killed throughout the town were brought here for burial. It is more likely that funeral pyres were set and the slain disposed of through the medium of fire.

The 'small tumulous' that Hughes refers to is

believed locally to have been the actual position of the eastern battery. It is located adjoining Cromwell's Lane and comprises an elevated knoll which is about thirty feet in diameter. It has been suggested that the mound itself is an earlier passage grave that at one time overlooked the river.' Aside from local tradition, there is no real evidence to suggest that Cromwell's big guns were sited on this small hill. The likelihood is that they were positioned much closer to the walls, precisely where St Mary's Cottages are situated and directly opposite the churchyard. Cromwell had no fear of Aston's counter battery capability, as Aston did not have sufficient artillery for such activity. Besides, the position of the hill is too far away from its target to have had the effect for which Cromwell's cannons and culverins were responsible.

In Murphy's 1883 book, *Cromwell in Ireland*, he carries a version of the tradition of Drogheda's presently named Scarlet Street. 'The street leading to St. Peter's church retained even within the memory of the present generation the name of Bloody Street; it is the tradition of the place that the blood of those slain in the church formed a regular torrent in this street.' The street that Murphy refers to leading to St Peter's would be Peter Street, which from this remote distance could easily have been commonly called Bloody Street, although there are no records of it ever having been. Local research has repudiated the involvement of today's Scarlet Street in the tradition since it did not exist in 1649. Anyway, the location would have been outside the town walls and well away from the fighting, making its involvement in the myth pure supposition. However, there was a lane that was commonly called Scarlet Lane in the 1650s that may have been the source of this folklore, since it was in the immediate area of the breached walls. The tradition may simply have moved geographically from the former Scarlet Lane to the current Scarlet Street and still exists even today.

To summarise this evaluation of the events at Drogheda, it seems that not only was there no outright slaughter of the defenceless inhabitants, but we now find that there is absolutely no evidence to substantiate the stories of the massacre of even one unarmed person on the streets of Drogheda. It is the words of the actual participants that we have used and not those transcribed years later which Nationalist historians have so far relied upon. Cromwell may well have had no moral right to take the lives of the defending garrison of Drogheda, but he certainly had the law firmly on his side.

## Eugene Coyle's review of Reilly's *Cromwell. An honourable enemy*

*History Ireland*. Vol. 7, No. 4, Winter 1999, pp 50-2

<http://web.archive.org/web/20010221184835/http://www.historyireland.com/resources/reviews/review1.html>

Tom Reilly is a local historian and has published several local history books on Cromwell and Drogheda. This book he claims is a long overdue evaluation of Cromwell's campaign in Ireland and challenges all the conventional interpretations of events. According to the accepted version Cromwell was appointed Commissioner by the English Parliament to seek out and eliminate all Royalists and Catholic Confederates. In September 1649, he ordered the massacre of the Drogheda garrison and most of the civilian populace in a deliberate policy of terror, partly as a response to the governor's refusal to surrender. A month later, the garrison and civilians of Wexford suffered a similar fate. These massacres have passed into resentful Irish folk memory. Reilly claims to reveal the untold story of Cromwell in Ireland, to acquit him of the 'charges of wholesale and indiscriminate slaughter of the ordinary unarmed people of Ireland' and to express 'Cromwell's compassionate policy towards Irish civilians'. Both the Cromwellian and the Interregnum period have been extensively researched and appraised by Irish and English historians since the appearance of Antonia Fraser's *Cromwell, Our Chief of Men* (1973). However, according to Reilly the 'period is left continually unrevised, the dubious traditional viewpoint is now generally accepted as authentic' but he offers little evidence in support of this claim.

The first hundred pages or so give a fair and reasonably accurate account of Cromwell's early life and his campaign, including the sacking of Drogheda, from a variety of well-known sources. The Wexford, Munster and Clonmel campaigns are adequately covered and give a good balanced local history background. If the book had simply described the Cromwellian campaign in Ireland as a series of battles it would have provided a local history reference book on the Cromwellian campaign. However, it is written in an emotive, excitable style with irrelevant extraneous material. For example, did you know that Drogheda is the European headquarters of Coca-Cola and has a McDonnells? In the case of Wexford, he alleges that the recent 1798 bicentennial commemorations had a definite Irish republican slant.

Where this book disappoints is in the two chapters on the assessment and analysis of the Cromwellian campaign in both Drogheda and Wexford. In the chapter 'Drogheda? An Analysis' the author dismisses both the eyewitness accounts, including that of Cromwell himself, and the contemporary accounts as Royalist propaganda or as having been written for 'dishonest political reasons'. He contradicts what has been established by a large number of modern professional historians such as Michael Burke, Peter Gaunt, John Morrill, Antonia Fraser and others. For example, Cromwell justified the Drogheda massacre in which nearly 3,500 died as 'that this is the righteous judgement of God upon these barbarous wretches who have

imbrued their hands in so much innocent blood'. About 2,800 of these 'wretches' were Royalist soldiers which left between 500 to 700 civilians and clerics. It is Tom Reilly's contention that only clerics and armed civilians died and that Cromwell honoured the military procedures of seventeenth-century siege warfare. He also maintains that 'there is absolutely no evidence to substantiate the stories of the massacre...not those [words] transcribed years later which nationalist historians have so far relied upon'. Yet eyewitnesses record the fate of Drogheda's garrison commander Aston who had his brains beaten out with his own wooden leg. His head and those of his officers were sent to Dublin on poles. Reilly makes reference to what happened in St Peter's church and claims it as a part fabrication. In fact, according to Cromwell himself, a party of eighty sought refuge in the tower of the Protestant St Peter's church and refused to surrender. He ordered that church furniture be piled up and set ablaze. Most died as they tried to escape. It is generally accepted that popular nineteenth century nationalist historians have distorted the accounts. For example, Fr Denis Murphy described tales of young virgins killed by soldiers, Jesuit priests pierced with stakes in the market place and children used as shields during the attack on St Peter's.

Reilly's treatment of the massacre at Drogheda is disingenuous and he ignores the conclusion, long recognised by generations of historians, that Cromwell lost his self-control at Drogheda. When Cromwell landed near Dublin on 15 August 1649, he urged his New Model Army to execute 'the great work against the barbarous and bloodthirsty Irish and the rest of their adherents and confederates'. There may have been good military reasons for behaving as he did, but they were not the motives which encouraged him at Drogheda, during the day and night of organised and approved butchery. Cromwell knew exactly what he was doing at Drogheda whether the order for 'no quarter' was given or not. Burke maintains that there was slaughter of civilians on a large scale to ensure that all the clergy were killed as Cromwell stated that there were 'the satisfactory grounds for such action'.

The historical evidence presented by Reilly is not convincing. He frequently refers to 'respective partisan nationalist elements' who are reluctant to accept 'the rehabilitated version of Oliver Cromwell' who was 'merely one in a long line of English oppressors'. The author's style is often superficial, volatile, tendentious and partisan in the face of known historical evidence. The book adds little to our understanding of the actions of Cromwell at Drogheda or at Wexford. His general thesis that Cromwell may well have had no moral right to take the lives at Drogheda or Wexford 'but he certainly had the law firmly on his side' does not stand up to examination. There is a need for a new book on the Irish Cromwellian campaign but unfortunately but this is not it.