

## **The Blackwater Heritage Tour.**

The tour will travel from the borders of Kerry to Mallow and back, taking in places of interest north and south of the river.

We will visit:

### A. Three castles.

**Dromsicane** - associated with O'Sullivan Beare and Rinuccini.

**Dromagh** - stronghold of the O'Keeffe, where the army of Muskerry assembled before the Battle of Knockbrack.

**Dromineen** - stronghold of the O'Callaghan.

### B. Two Battle Sites

**Knockanuss** - where Lord Inchiquin defeated the Confederate forces under Lord Taffe in 1647. Alastair McDonald fought on the Irish side.

**Knockbrack** - 26<sup>th</sup> July 1651 (also known as Knocknaclashy) which signalled the final collapse of the Confederate forces prior to the surrender to Lord Broghil at Ross Castle, the following year.

The Irish forces were led by Lord Muskerry and the Parliamentary forces were led by Lord Broghil, who was trying to block Muskerry and his forces on their journey to Limerick to relieve the city, which was being taken by Ireton.

### C. Some early Ecclesiastical Sites.

**Nohoval** - cemetery, holy well, and former Round Tower (1844 O.S map) and monastic foundation of St Finian. Eoghan, son of Godfraidh Fionn O'Dalaigh, is buried here.

**Dromtarrif** - Ruined church and cemetery where inhabitants were burned to death by Butcher Maxwell after the Battle of Knockbrack. Adjacent Holy Well in honour of St Inion Baoith (Bui). Feast day 6<sup>th</sup> May.

**Clonmeen** - Monastery of Austin Friars founded here by O'Callaghan in medieval times - according to Colgan.

According to tradition Alastair McDonald is buried here. A well in honour of St Fursey is located nearby.

### D Important Personages associated with the area.

**O'Sullivan Beare** - crossed the Blackwater at the Boinn on his march to Co. Leitrim.

**Rinuccini** - was hosted by the McCarthys at Dromsicane and the O'Callaghans at Clonmeen on route to Kilkenny 1645.

**Lord Inchiquin** - who allied himself with Parliamentarians in the Confederate wars. He earned the nickname Murcha na dToitean, when he ranged through Munster, burning churches and

homes. His terrible cruelty was engraved in the minds of people for generations. Proverbially people would say of a frightened child or of someone in hardship “He saw Murcha”

**Maired ni Cheallaigh** - betrayed her lover Art O’Keeffe as he hid in Gortmore caves. For this foul deed she was stabbed to death.

**Alastair McDonald** - Colourful Scottish soldier who fought and was killed at Knockanuss. Has a famous march, Mc Allistrim’s March, named after him.

#### E. Period Homes.

Assolas House and Longueville.

#### F. Industrial Remains.

The Navigational Canal near Mallow.

Dromagh Coal Mines.

#### **Brief Historical Background to the Tour.**

The decade 1641 - 1652 was a remarkable one in Irish History and yet we know little about it. It began with the Insurrection of 1641 which Catholic bishops declared to be just and lawful (James Carty Irish History Bk 3 p. 29). By the end of 1642 all Ireland except Dublin, East Ulster and a few other districts were in the hands of the Insurgents. Meanwhile a civil war had broken out in England between the King and Parliament which ended with the beheading of Charles 1<sup>st</sup> in 1649. English forces in Ireland were divided. George Munroe in Ulster was on the side of the Parliamentarians and those in Dublin remained loyal to the King. The Irish, which included the old Gaelic leaders and those of Anglo Norman stock, saw that measures were needed to defend the country and preserve order. An assembly was convened in Kilkenny which met in October 1642 and became known as the “Confederation of Kilkenny”. A supreme council was elected, composed of 6 from each of the four provinces. The assembly functioned from 1642 to 1649 and was a radical experiment in self government.

For the first time since the Norman Invasion the native population established a recognisably national government - a sovereign parliament which could make laws, maintain an army and send and receive envoys from abroad. There was some discord among the supporters. The old Gaelic Party wanted restoration of lands and religious freedom. The Anglo Irish Party wanted security of lands and property but remained loyal to the king. Ormond persuaded the Confederates to agree a truce with King Charles in 1643. In return they expected he would grant religious freedom and repeal Poyning’s Law. (1494). The Confederation placed their military forces under a leader from each province. Eoghan Rua O’Neill in Ulster, Colonel Preston in Leinster and Lord Muskerry in Munster.

In March 1645 the Papal Nuncio arrived in Kenmare. On his way through Munster via Ballyvourney, Dromsicane, Clonmeen and Kilmallock he was accompanied by several squadrons of cavalry and received hospitality from McCarthy of Dromsicane and O'Callaghan of Clonmeen. His closest allies were the native Irish. He had differences with the Royalists, led by the Marquis of Ormond. His visit revived the failing spirits of the Confederates and this was consolidated by the victory of Eoghan Rua at Benburb in 1646. Encouraged by the deiscord amongst the Confederates and reinforced by a new troop of Scottish soldiers, Munroe planned to head southward and take Kilkenny and to ally himself with Lord Inchiquin a Parliamentarian supporter. He was intercepted by the forces of Eoghan Rua, whose victory at Benburb was a source of national rejoicing.

In 1647 Lord Inchiquin defeated the Irish forces at Knockanuss near Kilbrin and the final nail in the coffin came at the Battle of Knockbrack on 26<sup>th</sup> July 1651, which heralded the final defeat of the Confederate hopes. Lord Muskerry led the Irish and Lord Broghil the Parliamentary forces. The surrender of Dromagh Castle took place in May 1652 and Captain Hugh O'Keefe was allowed to march out and join forces with Muskerry. The brutal and pitiless treatment of the Irish by Cromwell and his fanatical hatred of Catholics has forever seared itself into their historical memory. He saw himself on a Godsend mission to Ireland. His son-in-law Ireton seized Limerick.

One question that has often puzzled me is this "What were such important and significant events as the 2 battles in this area and the other events excluded from our

School history textbooks" ? One reason is, that the achievements of the Confederates are largely unknown due to the fact that the vast bulk of their records were destroyed in a fire in Dublin in 1711. The remainder of the surviving documents were lost in the bombardment of the Four Courts by the Free State forces in June 1922. We are reliant on the study of this period on English State papers and on the private collection of the Ormond Papers.

A commentary on Rinuccini visit was written in Florence between 1661 -6 by two Franciscan Capuchins. This is a key historical document which up till now has been available only in Latin but is now being translated into English.