

# The battle of the boyne



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The Battle of the Boyne (Irish: Cath na Boinne) was a turning point in the Williamite claim on the English throne. The deposed King James VII of Scotland and James II of England and Ireland and his Jacobite supporters were defeated by James' nephew and son-in-law, William III and his supporters. By the invitation of Parliament, William had deposed James in 1688. Both kings acted as commander of their respective armies. The battle took place on July 1, 1690 (Old Style) just outside the town of Drogheda on Ireland's east coast. Each army stood on opposing sides of the River Boyne. William's forces easily defeated those of James who led an army of mostly raw recruits. The symbolic importance of this battle has made it one of the best-known battles in British and Irish history and a key part in Irish Protestant folklore. It is still commemorated today, principally by the Orange Institution. As a consequence of the adoption of the Gregorian calendar ("New Style" dating), the battle is now commemorated on July 12 each year. A sectarian battle? The battle of the Boyne is seen as the decisive encounter in a war that was primarily about James' attempt to regain the thrones of England and Scotland and was the result of Parliament's move to put William on the throne, but is especially widely remembered as a crucial moment in the struggle between Irish Protestant and Catholic interests. Recent analyses have played down the religious aspect of the conflict.

In fact, both armies were religiously mixed; William of Orange's own elite force — the Dutch Blue Guards — had a papal banner with them on that day, many of them being Dutch Catholics. They were part of the League of Augsburg, a cross-Christian alliance designed to stop a French conquest of Europe, supported by the Vatican. The war in Ireland was also the beginning

of a long-running but ultimately unsuccessful campaign by James' Jacobite supporters to restore the Stuarts to the British thrones. While most Jacobites in Ireland were indeed Catholics hoping to have their seized lands given back to them, many English and Scottish Jacobites were Protestants and were motivated by loyalty to the principle of monarchy (considering James to have been illegally deposed in a coup) or to the Stuart dynasty in particular, rather than by religion. A handful of English Jacobites fought with James at the Boyne. In addition, some French regiments fighting with the Jacobites were composed of German Protestants.

In a European context, therefore, the battle was not a religiously motivated one, but part of a complicated political, dynastic and strategic conflict. In an Irish context, however, the war was a sectarian and ethnic conflict, in many ways a re-run of the Irish Confederate Wars of 50 years earlier. For the Jacobites, the war was fought for Irish sovereignty, religious toleration for Catholicism, and land ownership. The Catholic upper classes had lost almost all their lands after Cromwell's conquest, as well as the right to hold public office, practice their religion, and sit in the Irish Parliament. They saw the Catholic King James as a means of redressing these grievances and securing the autonomy of Ireland from the English Parliament. To these ends, under Richard Talbot, 1st Earl of Tyrconnel, they had raised an army to restore James to his throne after the Glorious Revolution.

By 1690, they controlled all of Ireland except for the province of Ulster. Most of James II's troops at the Boyne were Irish Catholics. Conversely, for the Williamites, the war was about maintaining Protestant and English rule in

Ireland. They feared for both their lives and their property if James and his Catholic supporters were to rule Ireland.

In particular, they dreaded a repeat of the Irish Rebellion of 1641, which had been marked by widespread killings, including of Protestant planters. For these reasons, Protestants fought en masse for William III. Many Williamite troops at the Boyne, including their very effective irregular cavalry, were Protestants from Ulster, who called themselves “Inniskillingers” and were referred to by contemporaries as “Scots-Irish”. [edit]The competing sides James VII and II King of England, Scotland and Ireland [edit]CommandersThe opposing armies in the battle were led by the Roman Catholic former King James II of England and Scotland and King of Ireland and opposing him, his nephew and son-in-law the Protestant William III (“William of Orange”) who had deposed James from his English and Scottish thrones in the previous year. James’s supporters still controlled much of Ireland and the Irish Parliament.

James also enjoyed the support of the French king, Louis XIV, who did not want to see a hostile monarch, such as William, on the throne of England. To support James’s restoration, Louis sent 6,000 French troops to Ireland to support the Irish Jacobites. William was already Stadtholder of the Netherlands and was able to call on Dutch and allied troops from continental Europe as well as from Great Britain. James was a seasoned general who had proven his bravery when fighting for his brother — King Charles II — in Europe, notably at the Battle of the Dunes (1658).

However, recent historians have noted that he was prone to panicking under pressure and to making rash decisions, probably due to the onset of dementia which was to overtake him completely in later years. William, although a seasoned commander was hardly one of history's great generals and had yet to win a major battle. Many of his battles ended in bloody stalemates, prompting at least one modern historian to argue that William lacked an ability to manage armies in the thick of conflict. William's success against the French had been reliant upon tactical manoeuvres and good diplomacy rather than force. His diplomacy had assembled the League of Augsburg — a multi-national coalition formed to resist French aggression in Europe. From William's point of view, his takeover of power in England and the ensuing campaign in Ireland was just another front in the war against King Louis XIV of France.

James II's subordinate commanders were Richard Talbot, 1st Earl of Tyrconnel, who was the Lord Deputy of Ireland and James's most powerful supporter in that country; and the French general Lauzun. William's second in command was Duke of Schomberg, a 75-year-old professional soldier. Born in Heidelberg, Germany, Schomberg had formerly been a Marshal of France, but, being a Huguenot, was compelled to leave his adopted country in 1685 because of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. [edit]Armies The Williamite army at the Boyne was about 36, 000 strong, composed of troops from many countries. Around 20, 000 had been in Ireland since 1689, commanded by Schomberg.

William himself arrived with 16, 000 more in June 1690. William's troops were generally far better trained and equipped than James's. The best

Williamite infantry were from Denmark and the Netherlands, professional soldiers equipped with the latest flintlock muskets. There was also a large contingent of French Huguenot troops fighting with the Williamites. William did not have a high opinion of his British troops, with the exception of the Ulster Protestant irregulars who had held Ulster in the previous year.

The English and Scottish troops were felt to be politically unreliable, since James had been their legitimate monarch up to a year before. Moreover, they had only been raised recently and had seen little battle action. The Jacobites were 23, 500 strong. James had several regiments of French troops, but most of his manpower was provided by Irish Catholics. The Jacobites' Irish cavalry, who were recruited from among the dispossessed Irish gentry, proved themselves to be high calibre troops during the course of the battle. However, the Irish infantry, predominantly peasants who had been pressed into service, were not trained soldiers.

They had been hastily trained, poorly equipped, and only a minority of them had functional muskets. In fact, some of them carried only farm implements such as scythes at the Boyne. On top of that, the Jacobite infantry who actually had firearms were all equipped with the obsolete matchlock musket. [edit]The battle Battle of the Boyne between James II and William III, 11 June 1690, Jan van Huchtenburg. William had landed in Carrickfergus in Ulster on June 14, 1690 and marched south to take Dublin. It has been argued that the Jacobites should have tried to block this advance in rugged country around Newry, on the present day Irish Republic/Northern Ireland border.

However, James only fought a delaying action there and chose instead to place his line of defence on the River Boyne, around 30 miles from Dublin. The Williamites reached the Boyne on 29 June. The day before the battle, William himself had a narrow escape when he was wounded by Jacobite artillery while surveying the fords over which his troops would cross the Boyne. The battle itself was fought on July 1 for control of a ford on the Boyne at Oldbridge, near Drogheda. William sent about a quarter of his men to cross at a place called Roughgrange, near Slane, about 6 miles from Oldbridge.

The Duke of Schomberg's son Meinhardt led this crossing, which Irish dragoons in picquet under Neil O'Neill unsuccessfully opposed. James panicked when he saw that he might be outflanked and sent half his troops, along with most of his cannon, to counter this move. What neither side had realised was that there was a deep ravine at Roughgrange, so that the forces there could not engage each other, but literally sat out the battle. The Williamites there went on a long detour march which, late in the day, almost saw them cut off the Jacobite retreat at the village of Naul. At the main ford at Oldbridge, William's infantry led by the elite Dutch Blue Guards forced their way across the river, using their superior firepower to slowly drive back the enemy foot-soldiers, but were pinned down when the Jacobite cavalry counter-attacked. Having secured the village of Oldbridge, some Williamite infantry held off successive cavalry attacks with disciplined volley fire while others were driven into the river.

William's second-in-command, the Duke of Schomberg and George Walker were killed in this phase of the battle. The Williamites were not able to

resume their advance until their own horsemen managed to cross the river and, after being badly mauled, held off the Jacobite cavalry, who retired and regrouped at Donore, where they once again put up stiff resistance before retiring. The Jacobites retired in good order. William had a chance to trap them as they retreated across the River Nanny at Duleek, but his troops were held up by a successful rear-guard action.

The casualty figures of the battle were quite low for a battle of such a scale — of the 50, 000 or so participants, about 2, 000 died, three-quarters of whom were Jacobites. The reason for the low death toll was that in contemporary warfare, most of the casualties tended to be inflicted in the pursuit of an already-beaten enemy. This did not happen at the Boyne, as the counter-attacks of the Jacobite cavalry screened the retreat of the rest of their army. The Jacobites were badly demoralised by their defeat, however, and many of the Irish infantrymen deserted. The Williamites triumphantly marched into Dublin two days after the battle. The Jacobite army abandoned the city and marched to Limerick, behind the River Shannon, where they were besieged.

After his defeat, James did not stay in Dublin, but rode with a small escort to Duncannon and returned to exile in France, even though his army left the field relatively unscathed. James's loss of nerve and speedy exit from the battlefield enraged his Irish supporters, who fought on until the Treaty of Limerick in 1691. In Irish folk memory, James was derisively nick-named Seamus a' chaca — a title that translates literally to " Shitty James" or " James the shit. " [edit]AftermathThe battle was overshadowed in its time in Great Britain by the defeat by the French of an Anglo-Dutch fleet two days



later at the Battle of Beachy Head, a far more serious event in the short term; only on the continent was the Boyne treated as a major victory.

Its importance lay in the fact that it was the first proper victory for the League of Augsburg, the first-ever alliance between Catholic and Protestant countries, and in achieving it William of Orange and Pope Alexander VIII (the League's prime movers) counteracted the myth, which emanated particularly from Sweden, that such an alliance was blasphemous. Thus the victory motivated more nations to join the alliance and in effect ended the very real danger of a French conquest of Europe. The Boyne was not without strategic significance for both Great Britain and Ireland, however. It marked the end of James's hope of regaining his throne by military means and virtually assured the triumph of the Glorious Revolution. In Scotland, news of this defeat moved the Highlanders to gradually abandon the Jacobite Rising which Bonnie Dundee had led.

In Ireland, the Boyne was the beginning of the Williamite victory over the Jacobites by which British and Protestant dominance over the country was maintained. For this reason, the Boyne is still celebrated by the Protestant Orange Order on the Twelfth of July. [edit]Commemoration of the battle Originally, Irish Protestants commemorated the Battle of Aughrim on the 12 July, as symbolising their victory in the Williamite war in Ireland. At Aughrim, which took place a year after the Boyne, virtually all of the Irish Catholic and old English aristocracies (dispossessed of lands to accommodate the plantations under Elizabeth I and Oliver Cromwell) were wiped out.

The Boyne, which in the old Julian calendar, took place on 1 July, was treated as less important, third in commemorative value after Aughrim and the anniversary of the Irish Rebellion of 1641 on 23 October. What was celebrated on “The Twelfth” was not William’s “victory over Popery at the Battle of the Boyne”, but the extermination of the elite of the Catholic Irish at Aughrim, thereby ending the fear of having to surrender the planted lands. In 1752, the Gregorian calendar was adopted in Ireland, which placed the Boyne on the 12th of July instead of Aughrim. However, even after this date, “The Twelfth” still commemorated Aughrim. But after the Orange Order was founded in 1795 amid sectarian violence in Armagh, the focus of parades on July 12 switched to the Battle of the Boyne.

Usually the dates before the introduction of the calendar on 14 September 1752 are mapped in English language histories directly onto the Julian dates without shifting them by 11 days. [1] Being suspicious of anything with Papist connotations, however, rather than shift the anniversary of the Boyne to the new 1 July or celebrate the new anniversary of Aughrim, the Orangemen continued to march on the 12 July which, in New Style dates marked the battle of the Boyne. Despite this, there are also smaller parades and demonstrations on 1 July, the date which maps the old style date of the Boyne to the new style in the usual manner and which also commemorate the massacre of the 36th (Ulster) Division on the first day of the Battle of the Somme in July, 1916. It has also been suggested that the Boyne was preferred to Aughrim because the Jacobites’ rout there allowed the Irish Catholics to be presented as contemptible cowards, whereas at Aughrim they fought bravely and died in great numbers.

In the context of a resurgent Irish nationalism from the 1790s onwards, it is argued that the narrative of the Boyne was more comforting for Loyalists in Ireland. The commemoration of the Battle of the Boyne therefore has more to do with the politics of the Unionist community than it has to do with the military significance of the battle itself. The memory of the battle also has resonance among Irish nationalists. Most Irish people see the battle as a major step on the road to the complete British colonisation of Ireland. In 1923, IRA members blew up a large monument to the battle on the battlefield site on the Boyne and later destroyed a statue of William III in 1929 that stood outside Trinity College, Dublin in the centre of the Irish capital.

[edit]" The Twelfth" in Ireland today Main article: The Twelfth The Battle of the Boyne remains a controversial topic today, especially in Northern Ireland, where Protestants remember it as the great victory over Catholics that resulted in the sovereignty of Parliament and the Protestant monarchy. In recent years, " The Twelfth" has often been marked by confrontations, as members of the Orange Order attempt to celebrate the date by marching past or through what they see as their traditional route. Some of these areas, however, now have a nationalist majority who object to marches passing through what they see as their areas. This change is mainly due to natural population migrations, whereby rural Irish Catholics have moved to major cities to be closer to potential employers. Each side thus dresses up the disputes in terms of the other's alleged attempts to repress them; Catholics still see Orange Order marches as provocative attempts to show who is boss, while Protestants insist that they have a right to " walk the Queen's

highway” and see any attempt to deny them the right to walk through traditional routes used for centuries as a move to marginalise them and restrict their freedom to celebrate their Protestant identity earned in the Glorious Revolution settlement.

Since the start of The Troubles, the celebrations of the battle have been seen as playing a critical role in the awareness of those involved in the unionist/nationalist tensions in Northern Ireland. [edit]The battlefield today

The site of the Battle of the Boyne sprawls over a wide area west of the town of Drogheda. At the eastern edge of Oldbridge, near the scene of the main Williamite crossing and the western edge of Drogheda town, a planning application for over 700 houses is due to be decided on by An Bord Pleanala in March 2008. The current Interpretive Centre dedicated to informing tourists and other visitors about the battle is about 1 mile to the west of the main crossing point. This facility is currently being redeveloped. The battle’s other main combat areas (at Duleek, Donore and Platin – along the Jacobite line of retreat) are marked with tourist information signs.

On 4 April 2007 in a sign of improving relations between unionist and nationalist groups, the newly-elected First Minister of Northern Ireland, the Reverend Ian Paisley, was invited to visit the battle site by the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Bertie Ahern later in the year. Following the invitation, Paisley commented that “ such a visit would help to demonstrate how far we have come when we can celebrate and learn from the past so the next generation more clearly understands. ” On 10 May the visit took place, where Paisley presented the Taoiseach with a Jacobite musket in return for Ahern’s gift at the St Andrews talks of a walnut bowl made from a tree from

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the site. A new tree was also planted in the grounds of Oldbridge House by the two politicians to mark the occasion.

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