



The National Archives

For immediate release

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Who did they think there were?

Clans and chiefs: an English view of Ireland seen through early maps

Wild wolves, fearsome chieftains, forts, castles and sea monsters – one could be forgiven for thinking this a fairytale. But it isn't – this was the serious business of State map making – four centuries ago.

Today, for the first time, The National Archives is launching a digitised collection of Early Irish maps (c.1558 – c.1610) from the 'State Papers Ireland' at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/irishmaps.asp>.

The collection comprises more than 70 different maps, amongst the earliest cartographic representations of Ireland, depicting plantations, fortifications and townships during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I. Attractive and colourful, these maps include the famous 1567 map of Hibernia by John Goghe, and are normally held in our safe room. But now, as a result of our digitisation programme, these valuable treasures are accessible to millions globally.

Some are signed by well known mapmakers of the day, such as Robert Lythe, Francis Jobson, Richard Bartlett and John Norden. Others bear annotations and endorsements in the hand of Sir William Cecil, one of Queen Elizabeth I's most important ministers. This indicates how these maps were used to inform and influence at the highest levels of government.

Rose Mitchell, map specialist at The National Archives, said: "These maps were drawn at a time when the English were colonising or 'planting' Ireland. By transferring land

ownership from the native Irish to English settlers, the English were trying to increase the loyalty of Ireland to the English crown.”

The maps were usually made in response to a particular threat, to show a siege or battle, or to help inform defence strategy against a background of ongoing clashes with Irish chieftains. Rose Mitchell adds, “Maps were one of the English colonists’ tools, along with the written survey and the gun. They show information useful for defence, such as the location of castles and forts, difficult terrain for armies such as mountains and lakes, and strategic islands and river crossings.”

The job of map making required quick-witted, brave and determined men who were willing to risk life to paint a picture of the countries beyond the seas from England. The dangers are starkly revealed in an account by the Attorney General* who related that Richard Bartlett, ablest of all the Queen’s Anglo-Irish cartographers, was beheaded in Donegal in 1609 *‘because they would not have their country discovered’*. And if it wasn’t the natives, then it was the arduous work of surveying these wild and woolly lands that challenged the map makers. This was highlighted by the story of Robert Lythe, an English military engineer who almost went blind and lame while serving in Ireland from 1567 to 1571.

Aside from the production of beautiful, hand-drawn parchment maps, the risks endured and efforts made by these early map makers helped to lay the foundations for modern cartography today. Rose Mitchell comments, “The period covered by this collection saw the rise of mapmaking as a profession, and the beginnings of what we now see as prerequisites for a modern map, such as drawing to scale, although not necessarily with north at the top.”

In the main the maps show areas of Ireland from provinces and baronies to towns and forts, however there are a few wider maps of Britain and the Mediterranean. Since sea was the main means of transport, some maps show coasts, harbours and rivers, with drawings of ships and boats. Others show sieges of towns and battles with firing canons. Churches, forests and bogs are also featured along with names of local chiefs and the families dominant in particular areas.

To get an idea of just how beautiful these maps are, The National Archives is offering a free download of the barony map of Tullyhaw, County Cavan and John Norden's survey, 'A Description of Ireland'. The standard charge to download a document from DocumentsOnline is £3.50.

Ends

For images and to arrange an interview with Rose Mitchell on the collection, the dangers of map making and the evolution of cartography, please contact the **Press Office on 0208 392 5332 or press@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk**

Notes to editor:

These maps come from the 'State Papers Ireland', the main record of government business in the early modern period.

*The Attorney General of Ireland at this time was Sir John Davies. See Calendar of State Papers Ireland for his letter to Lord Salisbury, Robert Cecil who was then Secretary of State. Some of the state papers and calendars are available online, for a fee, on the [Gale Cengage](http://www.gale.cengage.co.uk/statepapers/) and [British History Online](http://www.british-history.ac.uk/) websites. <http://www.gale.cengage.co.uk/statepapers/> and <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/>]

If you have problems with the handwriting of the documents or maps, our [palaeography tutorial](#) can help.

Free downloadable map: [Tullyhaw, County Cavan \(MPF 1/58\)](#) 

Free downloadable document: ['A written volume, 'A Description of Ireland', by John Norden. Lists, indexes and notes. Seven copies of plans of forts in Ulster by Richard Bartlett.](#) 

Other maps of interest:

[Map of Hibernia drawn by John Goghe in 1567 \(catalogue reference MPF 1/68\).](#)

[West coast of Great Britain \(MPF 1/65\)](#)

[Mediterranean \(MPF 1/66\).](#)

About The National Archives:

The National Archives, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk, is a government department and an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice. As the official archives of the UK government, it cares for, makes available and 'brings alive' a vast collection of over 1000 years of historical records, including the treasured Domesday Book.

Not only safeguarding historical information, The National Archives also manages current digital information and devises new technological solutions for keeping government records readable now and in the future. It provides world class research facilities and expert advice, publishes all UK legislation and official publications, and is a leading advocate for the archive sector.

At the heart of information policy, The National Archives sets standards of best practice that actively promotes and encourages public access to, and the re-use of information, both online or onsite at Kew. This work helps inform today's decisions and ensures that they become tomorrow's permanent record.

The National Archives brings together the Public Record Office, Historical Manuscripts Commission, the Office of Public Sector Information and Her Majesty's Stationery Office. See also www.opsi.gov.uk