



Why did people go to war in 1642?

Case study 2: 1640-42 - Source 5

Report of rebellion in Ireland, November 1641

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What is this source?

This extract comes from a letter written by a gentleman called Thomas Wiseman to Sir John Penington, a senior commander in Charles I's navy.

The State Papers for this period, held in the National Archives, contain many letters. The great majority of them mention the rebellion in Ireland. It was a very shocking and disturbing event.

What's the background to this source?

Charles I was ruler of England, Scotland and Ireland. English rulers had struggled to control Ireland for many years. In the early 1600s James I got Protestant settlers to live in Ireland and help him control the Irish, who were Catholics. These settlers had good land and many other privileges. Catholics faced discrimination and laws restricting their rights. The Catholic Irish resented the new settlers and in October 1641 they rebelled. Around 2000 Protestant settlers were killed, mainly in the north of Ireland.

Ireland was always a concern for English rulers and for English Protestants. The fact that the Irish were Catholics made Protestants suspect them of plotting against them. Also, Ireland was seen as a possible base for England's Catholic enemies, particularly France and Spain. The chance of a rebellion that left Catholics in charge of Ireland was very worrying.

It's worth knowing that ...

The rebellion in Ireland horrified all English Protestants. Charles and his MPs agreed that an army had to be sent to Ireland. However, this soon became a difficult issue. Leading opponents of Charles, such as John Pym, did not trust the king. Pym feared that Charles would use the new army to crush people like him, rather than the rebels in Ireland. He demanded that Parliament should be in charge of the new army and not the king. The argument was



never solved. By the time the civil war started in 1642 Ireland was still in the hands of the Catholic rebels.

As well as the dispute over the army, wild rumours began to spread about Catholic plots inside England to murder key officials, take over important buildings and link up with the Irish rebels. Most of the alleged plots were nonsense. However, they made relations between Charles and his opponents even worse. Charles's ministers were seen as too pro-Catholic. Charles was even married to a Catholic.

Your turn: What can we learn from this source?

1. What events were described in this source?
2. What was the reaction of the writer to these events?
3. What were his main concerns?
4. Did he feel that Parliament acted properly?
5. Why did the Irish rebel?
6. Does this source give us any clues about why the kingdom went to war in 1642?

Source 5

late Tyranny of the Lord of Strafford
upon you moved them to it, and that
by the example of the Scots; they
hoped to purchase such priviledges; by
this means in these Religions, and
otherwise they would ^{expect} ~~hope~~ to have
granted to them