

Why did Britain become a republic?

Case study 2: New government - Source 4

Accounts of public money used in Ireland, with the portrait and symbols of Cromwell and the Commonwealth

(Catalogue ref: SP 63/281)

What is this source?

This is an account from the 1650s setting out what public money had been spent in Ireland and how it was spent.

By the time this source was produced Cromwell was Lord Protector, so it must be after 1653.

What's the background to this source?

Through the 1640s Irish Catholics rebelled against English control of their country. As a result, Cromwell led his forces to Ireland and defeated the Irish. Cromwell's main campaigns in Ireland took place in 1649. English control over Ireland became more secure than it had ever been.

- 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 other privileges, and became leading families in Ireland.
- The Catholic Irish resented this and in 1641 they rebelled. This rebellion was one of the key factors that triggered off the Civil War in 1642.
- As the Civil War raged, the Irish Catholics tried to take control of all of Ireland.
- After the king was executed in 1649, the new military government decided that Ireland was a threat. England's Catholic enemies might be able to use Ireland as a base. So Cromwell led his forces to Ireland to get it back under English control.

It's worth knowing that ...

Cromwell is still a hate figure in Ireland today because of the brutal effectiveness of his campaigns in Ireland. Of course, his victories in Ireland made him a hero in Protestant England.

Cromwell's campaigns in Ireland were savage, although many campaigns in Britain and Europe in the 17th century were equally savage. He destroyed the towns of Drogheda and Wexford and killed many of the soldiers and civilians who had been resisting him. He then drew up plans to take land away from Catholic rebels and give it to his soldiers. James I and Charles I had also done this in the past. Many of the Catholic Irish were forced on to poor lands in the west of Ireland.

Your turn: What can we learn from this source?

1. This source gives an account of how public money was spent in Ireland. Do you think it might have had other purposes as well? What?
2. Why do you think the shields were shown down the side of this source?
3. Why was a portrait of Oliver Cromwell put on this document?
4. What impression does the images and the text give you of Oliver Cromwell?



Learning Curve
Civil War



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