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Ethnic Identities and the Outbreak of the 1641 Rebellion in Antrim

Eamon Darcy

Facing two Cromwellian interrogators George Tomson, a Highlander living in Antrim, recounted his actions after the outbreak of rebellion in Ireland on 23 October 1641. What follows requires the reader to take into account that Tomson, who had fought with Irish rebels, hoped to avoid punishment for his actions in the 1640s. He began by explaining that in February 1642, after many of the native Irish had abandoned the town of Ballyrashane near Coleraine, he tried to recover goods that he had hidden there. A cohort of rebels led by Donnell Gorme McDonnell apprehended Tomson and his companion, William Loggan, took their clothes and decided to execute them. Having hanged Loggan, Tomson stood on the makeshift gallows awaiting his fate. Before the cart below him was released, Donnell Gorme McDonnell rushed to his aid and claimed that his life was to be spared for Tomson knew of weaknesses in Coleraine's defences. McDonnell returned his clothes, a distinctive cloak and targe or Highland shield, and sheltered Tomson at his house where McDonnell's Scottish wife took care of him. The arrival of the General Robert Monro's troops from Scotland in April 1642, however, sparked widespread fears among the native Irish, many of whom immediately took flight and settled west of the river Bann, joining the forces of Sir Phelim O'Neill. Tomson explained that he fought with O'Neill's forces until his capture by Monro shortly afterwards.¹

Tomson's examination reveals a great deal about the complexities of the 1641 rebellion. Having nearly lost his life, he survived as he knew matters of strategic importance that could assist the rebels. After joining the rebellion his interrogators viewed Tomson as a potential suspect; hence his assertion that he had been forced to join the rebel ranks. A key question remains: were there other factors at play here? Could Tomson, a Highlander, identify with the native Irish who had supposedly taken up arms against the colonial order? The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries witnessed the forging of close alliances

¹ Examination of George Tomson, 8 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 69v–70v); much of his testimony is corroborated by Donnell Gorme McDonnell, 11 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, ff 30v–31).

between native Irish and Highland Scots, which reflected a common Gaelic identity.² Is there, therefore, a forgotten dimension to 1641; namely, its ethnic character? Consequently, this article will address the following issues. First, how did the medley of ethnic communities that existed in Antrim in 1641 respond to the outbreak of rebellion? Second, how did individuals survive the 1641 rebellion and the wars of the three kingdoms in Ireland? Third, why did combatants participate in the rebellion: was it through coercion or consent?

Antrim has been chosen for a case study for a number of reasons. Its close proximity to Scotland meant that it became an entrepôt for potential Scottish settlers in Ireland who then moved west of the Bann.³ Highland (Highlanders) and Lowland Scots (referred to as Scots from now on) arrived in Antrim and began to establish settlements across Ulster. Close linguistic and cultural links shaped clan and kin networks between Highland and Irish communities. By the late middle ages it appeared that Gaelic (Irish and Highlander) communities in Ireland and the Western Isles of Scotland envisaged 'the emergence of a consolidated Gaelic kingdom spanning the North Channel rather than a revived kingship of Ireland'.⁴ Furthermore, Antrim became both a launch pad, and a venue, for Scottish baronial wars throughout the late-medieval and early-modern periods, particularly when it concerned the rivalry between the MacDonnells of Antrim and the Campbells of Scotland that lasted for generations.⁵ Furthermore, when the Bishops' Wars erupted in Scotland in 1639, both Gaelic and Scottish communities distrusted one another fearing the onset of ethnic violence motivated by sectarianism. Matters were further complicated by the actions of the lord lieutenant, Thomas Wentworth, who imposed the 'Black Oath', which rejected the Scottish National Covenant.⁶ This forced many Scots to leave Antrim fearing religious persecution. The

² Wilson McLeod, *Divided Gaels: Gaelic Cultural Identities in Scotland and Ireland c.1200–c.1650* (Oxford, 200), 14–54

³ Michael Hill, 'The Origins of the Scottish Plantations in Ulster to 1625: A Reinterpretation', *The Journal of British Studies*, 32 (1993), 24–43, 28–29.

⁴ Steven Ellis, 'The Collapse of the Gaelic World, 1450–1650', *Irish Historical Studies*, 31 (1999), 449–469, 453.

⁵ Jane Ohlmeyer, *Civil War and Restoration in the Three Stuart Kingdoms: The Career of Randal MacDonnell, Marquis of Antrim, 1609–1683* (Dublin, 2001), 18–48; John Robert, *Feuds, Forays and Rebellions: History of the Highland Clans 1475–1625* (Edinburgh, 1999); David Stevenson, *Highland Warrior: Alasdair MacColla and the Civil Wars* (Edinburgh, 2003), 6–31.

⁶ Nicholas Canny, *Making Ireland British 1580–1650* (Oxford, 2001), 478–482; Austin Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution 1625–1660* (Oxford, 2002), 189–95; Aidan Clarke, 'Ireland and the General Crisis', *Past and Present*, 48 (1970), 93–98.

outbreak of the 1641 rebellion and the Wars of the Three Kingdoms amounted to the latest instalment of the dynastic rivalry between the Campbells and the MacDonnells, this time fought by Archibald Campbell, earl of Argyll and Randal MacDonnell, earl of Antrim and triggered an ethnic war between the Gaelic Irish and Highlanders and their Lowland Scottish counterparts. Yet, according to Steven Ellis, by 1650 Gaelic communities in Ulster and Scotland no longer spoke of their cultural similarities and were divided along lines of faith and fatherland.⁷ So how did these Gaelic clans in Antrim respond to the crisis of the 1640s? Did they rely on formerly strong allegiances, marriage alliances and cultural ties with one another or did they foster their new 'national', as opposed to Gaelic, identities?

Historiographically, Antrim has been treated as a slight anomaly in narratives of the rebellion. Michael Perceval-Maxwell's account focused more on the main thrust of the rising in Ulster, west of the river Bann, organised by Sir Phelim O'Neill.⁸ Nicholas Canny selectively drew upon events from Antrim to illustrate wider provincial trends in Ulster. For example, while attempting to understand tensions between English and Scottish settlers, he cited the deposition of Henry Maxwell (incorrectly referenced as the deposition of Robert Maxwell). Maxwell claimed that many of the MacDonnells of Antrim had joined in the rebellion.⁹ Apart from this, Canny paid little attention to events in Antrim. Jane Ohlmeyer's biography of Randal MacDonnell, earl of Antrim, was more concerned with the earl's response to the rising as opposed to the nature of the rising in his patrimony.¹⁰ In a similar manner, David Stevenson's analysis of Alasdair MacColla's career in the mid-seventeenth century focused on the Highlander's experience of the rebellion, while his study *Scottish Covenanters and Irish Confederates* is more concerned with Monro's military exchanges in Antrim after his arrival there in 1642.¹¹ There is no dedicated account of what happened in Antrim after 23 October 1641 that investigates the responses of local residents to the threat of rebellion and considers the character of rebellion that occurred there. Studies of earlier

⁷ Ellis, 'The Collapse of the Gaelic World', 469.

⁸ Michael Perceval-Maxwell, *The Outbreak of the Irish Rebellion of 1641* (London, 1994), 213–239.

⁹ Canny, *Making Ireland British*. 481; Deposition of Henry Maxwell, 7 July 1643 (I.C.D., MS 836, f. 118).

¹⁰ Ohlmeyer, *Civil War and Restoration*, 100–113.

¹¹ Stevenson, *Highland Warrior*, 73–95; David Stevenson, *Scottish Covenanters and Irish Confederates: Scottish-Irish Relations in the Mid-Seventeenth Century* (Belfast, 2004), 103–118.

conspiracies in the north of Ireland in the early-seventeenth century illustrate how Gaelic allegiances were invoked in order to foster closer ties between Irish and Highlander communities in the face of an increasingly aggressive colonial order. For example, in 1615 a Hiberno-Highlander alliance attempted to wrest control in east Ulster away from the English Crown.¹² Despite this, historians have yet to discuss this Gaelic dimension to the 1641 rebellion in greater detail.

The bulk of evidence for what happened in Antrim during the 1640s is contained in the 1641 depositions, a body of 8,000 witness statements that describe the outbreak and course of the Irish rebellion. Most of the testimonies that record events in Antrim were collected during the 1650s as part of the Cromwellian investigation into crimes committed during the 1640s. Their use as a historical source is highly problematic, particularly in Antrim's context.¹³ Many of those questioned were under suspicion and many tried to exonerate themselves from any blame. Furthermore, separated from the events by a decade or more, the 1650s statements lack the detail that characterise the 1640s examinations. Depositions taken during the 1640s from other counties contained alleged quotes from rebels as deponents tried to explain why they thought Irish rebels had taken arms. In the Antrim depositions, however, it is difficult to capture exactly why people took arms as there are so few statements taken from 1641–1649 that relate to Antrim.

Of the few depositions that mention Antrim during the 1640s most relate to the transportation of Irish Catholics to Scotland to fight against the king. These testimonies reflected royalist concerns of the invigorated Covenanting movement that had allied with the English parliament under the Solemn League and Covenant. Two Irish Royalists, James Ware and Wentworth Dillon, the earl of Roscommon, investigated this matter further and examined six people about Scottish movements in Antrim during the early months of 1644. According to Arthur Gore, three regiments of Irish people that he recognised 'by their habit and language' were sent into Scotland under the command of the Covenanters.¹⁴ Ware and Roscommon discovered that Covenanters recruited

¹² Raymond Gillespie, *Conspiracy: Ulster Plots and Plotters in 1615* (Belfast, 1987).

¹³ The best discussion on the methodological issues regarding the use of the depositions remains Aidan Clarke, 'The 1641 Depositions' in P. Fox (ed.) *Treasures of the Library, Trinity College Dublin* (Dublin, 1986), 111–122.

¹⁴ Examination of Arthur Gore, 3 June 1644 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 3); David Stevenson, 'Campbell, Archibald, marquess of Argyll (1605x7–1661)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2006, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4472> [accessed 29 February 2012].

Irish people who were allegedly guilty of murdering Protestant settlers to fight in Scotland against the Royalists, and that they had sworn to abide by the Solemn League and Covenant. In the words of Randall Dumvil, 'they take on men promiscuously for recruiting their regiments without examining of what country or nation or religion they are soe as they [have] taken the covenant'. As a result, Ware and Roscommon were concerned about the growth of Presbyterianism in the region and the recruitment of anti-Royalist forces there.¹⁵ Those Catholic and native Irish therefore cast ethnic, religious and communal ties aside to fight with the Covenanters. What factors motivated others to partake in the crisis that had erupted in the Three Kingdoms?

I: The Outbreak of Rebellion in Antrim

Whispers that the O'Neills had risen in Armagh and Derry reached Gilduffe O Catháin, a Dunseverick community leader, at Dunluce on 23 October 1641.¹⁶ Many Highlander and Irish natives who identified with the MacDonnells were concerned about what Argyll would do. They feared that Argyll would launch a campaign against the MacDonnells in Ireland. As a result O Catháin and Alexander MacColla, a newly-arrived commander from the Highlands, decided to seize Dunluce Castle in a pre-emptive strike against the Campbells.¹⁷ Gaelic ties between Highlanders and Irishmen were evoked to organise resistance to a potential invasion from Scotland that stoked fears of the Lowland Scots. Traditional power structures, however, prevented an outbreak of violence. The earl of Antrim, trying to show his loyalty to the lords justices, demanded that this Gaelic troop should hand over Dunluce Castle to two of his clients, his brother Alexander McDonnell and Archibald Stewart, a Protestant.¹⁸ Thus ended the first, albeit brief, phase of the rebellion in Antrim. Although evidence is sketchy it appears that this network of Antrim's tenants, clansmen,

¹⁵ Deposition of Randall Dumvil, 3 June 1644 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 9v); see also, examination of Arthur Gore (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 3v); examination of Theophilus Jones, 3 June 1644 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 6v); Examination of Thomas Theaker, 18 July 1644 (T.C.D., MS 838, ff 7–8); Stevenson, *Scottish Covenanters*, 165–190.

¹⁶ Examination of Gilduffe O Catháin, 10 March 1654 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 24).

¹⁷ Examination of Gilduffe O Catháin, 10 March 1654 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 24v); Stevenson, *Highland Warrior*, 75.

¹⁸ Examination of Gilduffe O Catháin, 10 March 1654 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 24v); examination of Henry McHenry, 11 March 1654 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 27v); examination of William MacPheadress, 8 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 72); Stevenson, *Highland Warrior*, 75.

and clients, which transcended ethnic and religious divisions, maintained the peace in the area for a considerable amount of time, at least up until Christmas 1641. In the first days of 1642, however, this alliance appeared increasingly unsteady and many of Antrim's tenants and clients took up arms. Jane Ohlmeyer suggested that Antrim's Catholic tenants delayed their involvement awaiting sanction from their lord and that their eventual participation grew out of their desire for toleration of the Catholic faith.¹⁹ David Stevenson blamed other factors for the outbreak of rebellion in Antrim, arguing that the influx of refugees from over the river Bann exacerbated sectarian tensions in east Ulster and prompted Catholics to take arms.²⁰ On closer inspection, however, very few of the examinations from the 1650s mentioned religious grievances or sectarian tensions as causes for the outbreak of rebellion in Antrim. Instead, they alluded to age-old ethnic tensions between Gaelic Highlander and native Irish on one side, and Lowland Scottish and English on the other.

The first military encounter between Gaelic forces and colonial troops occurred at Portnaw, a garrison beside the river Bann on the Antrim/Derry border. Fearing the arrival of Monro's army from Scotland, the O Catháins and MacColla planned a surprise attack on one of Archibald Stewart's 'British regiment' stationed there. The force consisted of the O Catháins of Antrim and the O Catháins of Armagh who had sent on a number of recruits. Then Alexander MacColla and Tirlagh Óg O Catháin (Gilduffe's son) called upon Highland and Irish soldiers fighting in Archibald Stewart's militia for reinforcements. To avoid detection these Gaelic troops wore 'British' military colours as a disguise. They then launched a pre-emptive strike on the garrison at Portnaw, which comprised of English and Scottish soldiers.²¹ In the middle of the night they descended upon the camp and began killing soldiers stationed there. Estimates vary, but most agree that sixty to eighty people lost their lives during this assault.²²

Why did the massacre at Portnaw occur? Coll McAllester, who did not participate in the attack, argued that after the Portnaw massacre:

The Irish being jealous of the English & Scotts and the English & Scotts iealous of the Irish, without any difference or distincion the Irish

¹⁹ Ohlmeyer, *Civil War and Restoration*, 100–103.

²⁰ Stevenson, *Highland Warrior*, 77.

²¹ Examination of Fergus Fullerton, 1 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 56); Examination of Robert Futhy, 2 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 59v).

²² Examination of Robert Hammill, 4 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 64); examination of Donnell Crone McCart, 15 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 78).

kill'd all the English & Scotts they could lay hands on, & the English & Scotts did the like vnto the Irish, except some few Irishmen who shewed mercy vnto the English & Scotts.²³

In reality, however, distrust between various ethnic groups had existed prior to this moment. McAllester later claimed that he always feared the 'British' as 'the British & Irish durst not trust one another'.²⁴ As recorded in the examination of Neil Óg O'Quinn: 'And being demanded why the Irish & Brittish at that tyme quarrelled he saith he did not much enquire but heard that it was by reason the Irish would not pay for drink.'²⁵ Magdalen Guillyme, who considered herself English, alleged that Irish people envied Protestant wealth.²⁶ Surprisingly, religious identifiers are rarely used in the Antrim depositions. Many examinants blamed deep-seated ethnic tensions as opposed to religious hatred. Participants in the Portnaw massacre all confirmed this point. For example, Brian O'Haggan claimed that he and his cousins, 'were afraid of the Scots' stationed at Portnaw and so his kinsmen took part in the raid.²⁷ James MacDonnell, a Catholic officer, later blamed Archibald Stewart's 'cowboy' Scottish commanders for jeopardising ethnic relations in the area.²⁸ Evidence would suggest, however, that MacColla and the O Catháins evoked Gaelic identities to rally troops to their cause. MacColla's troops spared Highlanders stationed at Portnaw in the hope that they would join the rebellion.²⁹ Ethnic tensions in Ireland and baronial rivalries that spanned the three kingdoms were clearly influencing the outbreak of violence in east Ulster.

One deponent suspected that Archibald Stewart positioned a garrison at Portnaw to protect English and Scottish settlers in the area, suggesting his awareness of the fraught ethnic situation.³⁰ After Portnaw the rebels allegedly published a proclamation banning the use of English, thereby raising the Gaelic standard.³¹ It appears that Portnaw provided the catalyst for further butchery on the behalf of MacColla's and O Catháin's troops. This Gaelic alliance

²³ Examination of Coll McAllester, 14 March 1654 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 32v).

²⁴ *ibid.*, f. 33.

²⁵ Examination of Neil Óg O'Quinn, 17 March 1654 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 38v).

²⁶ Examination of Magdalen Guillyme, 8 May 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 145).

²⁷ Examination of Brian O'Haggan, 12 March 1654 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 31v); Examination of William O'Sheile, 16 March 1654 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 36).

²⁸ David Stevenson, *Scottish Covenanters and Irish Confederates: Scottish-Irish Relations in the Mid-Seventeenth Century* (Belfast, 2004), 100.

²⁹ Examination of Donnell Crone McCart, 15 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 78).

³⁰ Examination of James McConnell, 12 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 75v).

³¹ Examination of Fergus Fullerton, 1 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 56v).

was spurred on by the belief that Stewart's retribution would be particularly bloody and violent. From Portnaw, their forces moved through Antrim, burning Ballymena, Ballymoney and Cross and allegedly murdered many innocent men, women and children. Jennett Neaven witnessed MacColla's assault on the parish of Billy where 'they muredred [sic] all the Brittish they could lay handes on'. Neaven may have been exaggerating here but there is evidence to suggest that some people were murdered. For example, Phelomy Boyle witnessed the murders of Marian Campbell and Jennett McCormack.³² James McConnell claimed that they 'killed all the British they could lay their hands on' in Ballymoney.³³ From here MacColla and his fellow commanders regrouped at Dunseverick and attempted to seize Ballintoy, which housed a Scottish garrison and a church full of Scottish settlers. The O Catháins, largely armed with sledges, pick axes and other agricultural implements, failed to storm the church at Ballintoy. One of the occupants within managed to hit Gilduffe O Catháin with a stone and frightened him away. His later efforts to seize Ballintoy house were even less successful. Despite having a cannon, Gilduffe's forces were deterred by a barrage of musket shot.³⁴

After Ballintoy, the force of Highland and Irish troops made another attempt to seize Dunluce Castle. This required further reinforcements, which duly arrived from the O Catháins in Armagh.³⁵ At this moment, in the first two weeks of January 1642, Captain Digby and Archibald Stewart commanded Dunluce.³⁶ Digby, understandably, refused to hand the castle over to MacColla and O Catháin. In retaliation Gilduffe ordered the firing of the town of Dunluce, a move that caused considerable tension among the Gaelic coalition. Calls from the O Catháins to burn Dunluce town and to prohibit the speaking of English irritated MacColla, although he urged those under his protection to obey it despite 'being ready to fall out with the Irish that such a proclamacion was made'. The rift was short lived as soon after both the O Catháins and MacColla's Highlanders marched side-by-side to

³² Examination of Jennett Neaven, 9 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 74v); Examination of Phelomy Boyle, 9 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 75); see also, Stevenson, *Highland Warrior*, 79.

³³ Examination of James McConnell, 12 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, ff 75v–76).

³⁴ Examination of John Kidd, 28 February 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 45); examination of Isabell Kerr, 1 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 51); examination of David Gray, 1 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 52); examination of Thomas Boyd, 1 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 52v).

³⁵ Examination of Gilduffe O Catháin, 10 March 1654 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 25v).

³⁶ Ohlmeyer, *Civil War and Restoration*, 106.

Oldcastle.³⁷ Other local leaders buoyed by MacColla's and O Catháin's initial successes launched further assaults on Scottish and English settlers. Neil Óg O'Quinn rallied to the Gaelic banner and captured Sir Thomas Staple's house and the town of Lissan, and defeated 'British' troops at Garvagh.³⁸ Staple's house contained considerable stores of ammunition and goods and its capture probably victualled most of O'Quinn's troops.³⁹

The massacre at Portnaw set a precedent for the butchery that was to follow. It further complicated the already fraught ethnic situation. Irish and Highlanders feared the arrival of Scottish forces who would seek vengeance: 'After that murder [at Portnaw] the Irish heareing of the newes were flying to & fro, lest the Scotch should fall vpon them & revenge that Murder & that the Irish heareing that the Scots had kill'd many Irish in the upper & lower Claneboyes they durst not trust one another.'⁴⁰ Rumours abounded of a proclamation from Scottish forces that allegedly sanctioned the 'slaying of all Irish papists'; this encouraged local militias to engage in a campaign of extirpation of Irish soldiers and civilians.⁴¹ Near Templepatrick Lieutenant Henry Upton sought vengeance against the native Irish. Prior to this Upton had commanded a militia of both Scottish and Irish troops (many of whom were his tenants) but ordered his native Irish to stay behind prior to an ethnically motivated assault.⁴² Garvin's men attacked Ballymartin, near Templepatrick and killed the Irish occupants of four houses leaving one survivor who hid under a tree and witnessed the atrocity.⁴³ The attack on Islandmagee eclipsed that on Ballymartin, however, as an estimated 100 native Irish people were murdered. William Graham, a Scottish settler, avoided Islandmagee having been warned that 'strangers' would descend upon the area to 'murther' the Irish.⁴⁴ Despite this, survivors of the atrocity could identify some of the leaders. John O'Shiel, the son of an Irish landlord, remembered his father being disturbed by the sound of shot outside their house. His father accompanied the local constable to investigate. They were then killed by a group of 'Scotch men' known to

³⁷ Examination of Fergus Fullerton, 1 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 56v); Stevenson, *Highland Warrior*, 79.

³⁸ Examination of Margaret Armstrong, 18 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 80v).

³⁹ Examination of Lawrence O'Cullen, 7 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 66v).

⁴⁰ Examination of Donnell O'Cahan, 14 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 33v).

⁴¹ Examination of Brian Magee, 27 May 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 200); Examination of James Mitchell, 1 June 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 223).

⁴² Examination of Daniel McIlmartin, 31 May 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 179); examination of Brian Mulhallen, 9 June 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 181).

⁴³ Examination of Knougher O'Greene, 31 May 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 183).

⁴⁴ Examination of William Graham, 1 June 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 213).

O'Shiel.⁴⁵ Brian Magee an inhabitant of Islandmagee, blamed some of his Scottish neighbours for murdering members of his family. After the Scots had left Magee returned to find 'women and children and found their all killed and weltring in there blood and wounded in seuerall places'.⁴⁶

In 1662 a pamphlet published to discredit the Restoration land settlement claimed that Islandmagee witnessed 'the first massacre committed in Ireland on either side'. Evidence for this is scant, as many survivors date the massacre to early January 1642 and after the massacre at Portadown (November 1641).⁴⁷ Either way this pamphlet estimated that 'all the Inhabitants of the territory of island Mc Gee to the number of above 3,000 men women and children, all innocent persons, in a time when none of the Catholicks of that County were in Armes or Rebellion' were 'murdered in one night'.⁴⁸ Several of those who managed to escape the initial attack were pursued through the Antrim countryside by Scottish soldiers. Bryan Boy Magee died at Carrickfergus after been beaten with a cudgel.⁴⁹ A corporal at Carrickfergus witnessed an attack on a group of survivors from Islandmagee by Scottish soldiers who had chased them out of the area.⁵⁰ The slaughter of civilians prompted the Gaelic camp to begin negotiations about the conduct of war. James MacDonnell, a kinsman to Randal MacDonnell and MacColla, wrote to Archibald Stewart, complaining that 'as for the killing of women none of my soldiers dare doe as for his life but the comon people that are not vnder rule doth it in in spight of our teeth'.⁵¹ Stewart's reply does not survive, yet MacDonnell's next letter suggests that Stewart denied such killings occurred. MacDonnell retaliated by blaming 'those captains of yours (whom you may call rather cowboys) were euery day vexinge our selves and our tennents of purpose to pick quarrells'.⁵²

⁴⁵ Examination of John O'Sheale, 21 April 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, ff 151–151v); examination of Richard Magee, 22 April 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 156).

⁴⁶ Examination of Bryan McGee, 21 April 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 198).

⁴⁷ Kenneth Nicholls, 'English Killings of Irish, 1641–2' in David Edwards, Pádraig Lenihan and Clodagh Tait (eds), *Age of Atrocity: Violence and Political Conflict in Early-Modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2007), 176–191; (T.C.D., MS 838, ff 198–223).

⁴⁸ R.S., *A Collection of some of the Murthers and Massacres Committed on the Irish in Ireland since the 23d of October 1641 with some Observations and Falsification on a late Printed Abstract of Murthers said to be Committed by the Irish. Now published by R..S.* (London, 1662), 1.

⁴⁹ Examination of Elizabeth O'Gormelly, 31 May 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 214); examination of Elizabeth Gormally (presumably the same person), 3 May 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 235) confirms she witnessed the murder; confession of John McOwen (denies this), 3 April 1643 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 215).

⁵⁰ Examination of Richard Kelly, 31 May 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, ff 216–216v).

⁵¹ James McDonnell to Archibald Stewart, 11 Jan 1642 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 240v).

⁵² James McDonnell to Archibald Stewart, undated (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 241).

None the less, some examnants believed that the use of excessive force by the native Irish was meant to intimidate English and Scottish forces.⁵³

On 11 February 1642 the Highland and Irish forces scored further successes against the 'British party'; locals later referred to this battle as 'Black Friday'. George McLaughlin, an Irish soldier who fought in Archibald Stewart's army, narrowly avoided death after his troop were routed, losing up to 600 men.⁵⁴ One of the main reasons for MacColla's and O Catháin's success was the deployment of the 'Highland Charge', a devastatingly effective military tactic. When faced with an approaching army they fired a volley shot, dropped their muskets and charged their opponents with sword and shield to engage in hand-to-hand combat.⁵⁵ 'Black Friday' therefore witnessed a 'Celtic' effort with a Highland commander in charge of a troop of Irish forces who employed a Gaelic-style military tactic.⁵⁶ It is clear that close Gaelic ties that bound the Highlanders and native Irish together gave the rising in Antrim a distinctive ethnic dimension. Many of the Antrim examnants believed that Portnaw signalled the ethnic cleansing of Scottish settlers from the region, not a purging of 'heretical' Protestants.⁵⁷ Without the arrival of further aid settlers had two choices: flee or work for the rebels. The arrival of Monro's forces, however, began a period of reprisals and tit-for-tat atrocities that took considerable time to abate.⁵⁸ For the second phase of the war close ethnic ties between the Gaelic Irish and the Highland Scottish facilitated the success of the rebel movement up until the spring of 1642. That said, the rebels failed to possess Carrickfergus, Coleraine and Dunluce, which would have provided much needed additional cover now that reinforcements from Scotland were on their way. Monro, a veteran of European wars and versed in European codes of military conduct, stationed his forces at Carrickfergus and over the course of the 1640s he was *de facto* commander of the Scottish forces. In

⁵³ Examination of Brian Modder McHenry O'Cahan, 11 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 29v).

⁵⁴ Examination of George McLaughlin, 3 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 61v).

⁵⁵ Pádraig Lenihan, "'Celtic' Warfare in the 1640s' in John Young (ed.), *Celtic Dimensions of the British Civil Wars* (Edinburgh, 1997), 116–140; Stevenson, *Scottish Covenanters*, 102.

⁵⁶ Examination of William O'Sheile, 16 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 26v).

⁵⁷ Examination of Elizabeth Campbell, 7 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 68); examination of Ellen McRee Cart, 9 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 73); examination of James McConnell, 12 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 76); examination of Margaret Armstrong, 18 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 80v).

⁵⁸ Micheál Ó Siochrú, 'Atrocity, Codes of Conduct and the Irish in the British Civil Wars 1641–1653', *Past and Present*, 195 (2007), 61–63.

August 1642, Monro held command over 10,000 men and by the end of 1643 he controlled large parts of east Ulster with the help of local militias.⁵⁹

The arrival of Monro's forces precipitated retaliatory attacks on the Gaelic community in Antrim and prompted their exodus west, across the river Bann. Alice, countess dowager of Antrim, and the mother of the earl of Antrim, claimed that Monro's troops were her enemies, 'because the Scotts Army took her sonne Randell Earle of Antrim Prisoner out of his own house of Dunluce'. Troops sent by the earl of Argyll, her family's archenemy in Scotland, to Ireland forced her to abandon her home at Ballycastle as they 'were always Enemies to the McDonnells'.⁶⁰ Clearly the 1641 rebellion offered an opportunity for dynastic rivalries to be played out, which had drastic effects on the local Irish population in Antrim. Henry McHenry one of the leading insurgents, however hinted at ethnic tensions when he pointed to the march of Monro's forces toward Coleraine as the reason for his flight: 'Upon the Scotch Armyes March in May 1642 Into the Root towards Colerane, all the Irish fled over the Bann'.⁶¹ Donnell Gorme McDonnell similarly fled 'feareing they would revenge themselves for the said Blood fled vp to the woods'. Most of the Irish who had fled into west Ulster joined forces with Sir Phelim O'Neill.⁶² Ferdoragh Magee stayed in his house until he learned that the Scots had 'killed all the Irish as they came all along, and for that the Scotts had kill'd 500 Irish or thereabouts in Island Magee whereof the most part were Magees'.⁶³ Many left because they feared that 'there was noe pardon of proteccion for any of the Irish'.⁶⁴ Art McCormacke believed that Phelim O'Neill ordered Irish natives to move west of the Bann to protect them from becoming embroiled in a Scottish war.⁶⁵

The bulk of those who partook in the rebellion in Antrim did so under a broad Gaelic alliance between the native Irish and Highlander communities.

⁵⁹ Robert Armstrong, 'Monro (Munro), Robert' in James McGuire and James Quinn. (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009) www.dib.cambridge.org [accessed on 1 March 2012]; David Stevenson, 'Monro, Robert (d. 1675?)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004); www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18978 [accessed 1 March 2012].

⁶⁰ Examination of Alice Countesse Dowager of Antrim, 9 February 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 22); see also examination of Shane McVickar who also blamed the McCallsins for the flight of the Irish across the Bann, 14 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 34).

⁶¹ Examination of Henry McHenry, 11 March 1654 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 28v); see also the examination of Brian O'Haggan, 12 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 31v).

⁶² Examination of Donnell Gorme McDonnell, 11 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, ff 30–1).

⁶³ Examination of Ferdoragh Magee, 15 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 35).

⁶⁴ Examination of Alexander McKay, 16 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 36).

⁶⁵ Examination of Art McCormack, 23 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 41).

The violent campaigns they conducted in January 1642 against their Scottish rivals revealed the fraught ethnic situation in east Ulster prior to the rebellion as well as the feud between the MacDonnells and the Campbells. Despite the fact that the mid-seventeenth century witnessed a conflict that encompassed various political and religious movements across the three kingdoms, this was lost on Lady MacDonnell. She still interpreted the rising as the latest bout in the Campbell/MacDonnell rivalry and supported those who had rallied to the Gaelic cause. A question remains, however: in the midst of this exodus of native Irish and Highlander communities, what about those who remained behind enemy lines? How did they survive?

II: Surviving the 1641 Rebellion

The outbreak of rebellion exacerbated ethnic tensions, Scottish rivalries or religious hatred; however, whole populations were not cleansed from the Antrim countryside. People, families, and communities survived.⁶⁶ On the one hand, Gaelic, English and Scottish leaders were honour bound to protect their tenants. Patrick Modder O'Donnelly, an Irish landlord who claimed to defend the lives of many 'British' settlers, negotiated the safety of this 'poore tenants & followers' with local militias under Lord Conway's command. O'Donnelly also maintained that he served as a negotiator between Conway's agents and those of Phelim O'Neill.⁶⁷ For much of her interrogation Lady McDonnell defended her record during the 1640s and maintained that she consistently protected her tenants and local residents. That said, she curtly reminded her inquisitors that 'she was no soldier to defend them'.⁶⁸ On the other hand, settlers were not always adequately protected. Andrew Stewart sheltered '24 British young & old' in his house. Two of Stewart's servants, 'Irish boyes' betrayed their hideout to the local rebels, who duly 'robbed the British of their packs & fardells & all of their goods & moneys whatsoever to the Clothes vpon their backs'.⁶⁹ Similarly, Ann O'Kelly collected rent on Lord Caulfield's estates and maintained many 'Englishe' in her house until she grew 'wearie of them, and hearing that her brother was killed at Lisnegarvie, she caused

⁶⁶ Joseph Cope, 'The Experience of Survival in the 1641 Rebellion', *The Historical Journal*, 46 (2003), 295–316.

⁶⁷ Examination of Patrick Modder O'Donnelly, 30 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 42).

⁶⁸ Examination of Alice Countesse Dowager of Antrim, 9 February 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 22v).

⁶⁹ Examination of Andrew Stewart, 4 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 63).

her servants [to] take them & drowne them'.⁷⁰ The statements of those who claimed to have protected settlers must be treated with caution, however. They may have exaggerated the role they played in saving settlers in order to exonerate themselves in the eyes of the Cromwellian authorities.

Some of those who could not rely on their masters for protection left Ireland. After the massacre at Portnaw a party of refugees attempted to get a boat from Antrim, but were accosted.⁷¹ William Graham escorted one of his friend's daughters late at night to Islandmagee so that she could sail to Scotland.⁷² A group of Scots who were attacked in Andrew Stewart's house later fled to Scotland.⁷³ Both Gaelic and Scottish families in Antrim exhausted clan, kin and local networks to secure their own safety. Donnell Magee an Irish gentleman reported that after Portnaw numerous 'Scotchmen' fled to his house '& told him that the Irish were killing the Scotch all along through the Country'. Upon hearing of an assault on Old Castle he attempted to 'save some Brittish acquaintance of his who [had] departed the place before he came thither'. Throughout the 1640s, Magee claimed he stayed in his house and 'never joined with the Irish in besieging or assaulting any Townes or holds held by the Brittish'. Magee's brother, Ferdoragh, corroborated his claims and insisted that he had helped 'to preserve the British who fled thither for succour'.⁷⁴ If Magee's account of his actions is true, it is significant that Scottish settlers fled to his house for protection, suggesting prior acquaintance.

Gaelic and Scottish people utilised friendships and social networks that transcended ethnic and religious divides to survive. Many of the native Irish, fearing reprisals from Scotland, escaped to Derry, Tyrone and Armagh for protection and relied upon their extended family networks. Those who stayed behind exploited local connections. James McIveagh, after learning of the outbreak of rebellion in Tyrone (thanks to his connection with the registrar of the ecclesiastical courts in Armagh), ran to the house of his master, Sir Thomas Staples, for protection and to assure him 'of his innocence'.⁷⁵ Jennett

⁷⁰ Examination of Thirlache O'Hamill, 9 May 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 143).

⁷¹ Examination of Geiles Kellsoe, 28 February 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, ff 45v–6).

⁷² Examination of William Graham, 1 June 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 213).

⁷³ Examination of Andrew Stewart, 4 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 63).

⁷⁴ Examination of Donnell Magee, 15 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 34v); examination of Ferdoragh Magee, 15 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 35).

⁷⁵ It must be pointed out, however, that Lawrence O'Cullen named McIveagh as rebel and claimed he murdered somebody, although Patrick Modder O'Donnelly testified to McIveagh's innocence. Examination of James McIveagh, 17 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 40); examination of Patrick Modder O'Donnelly, 30 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 43); examination of Lawrence O'Cullen, 7 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838,

Service and her husband, John Hunter, a former servant to Lady McDonnell, returned to his former employer for safety.⁷⁶ Thomas Giffen, a settler living in Billy, utilised his brother's connections with Murghy McDuffee to save his life.⁷⁷ Another Scot, Gilcomey McHallgar called upon his family's foster ties with Ferdoragh Magee to save his life, 'he having been fosterer to his Mother's brother and tenant to his Mother's kindred'.⁷⁸

Some of those who managed to survive in Antrim utilised a range of resources that allowed them to survive behind enemy lines. They managed to blend into rival camps by disguising themselves as either Scottish or Irish. John O'Shiel, who lived in Islandmagee, escaped the clutches of the Scottish forces by donning the 'habbitt of a Scotch boy'.⁷⁹ Not all of those who fought in the rebellion let ethnicity dictate their loyalty. Take for example, George McLaughlin, a defeated soldier who fought in Black Friday for the colonial authorities. He subsequently encountered 'a Party of the Irish standing in the way he intended to goe'. They immediately suspected that he formed part of the 'British' troop, but McLaughlin 'having Irish & being an Irishman went forwards coming neere them he mett with one of his acquaintance'. He subsequently wore Irish-style clothes in order to blend in.⁸⁰ This survival strategy was not unique to Antrim. In other parts of Ireland settlers disguised themselves as Irishmen to survive. For example, Raph Griffin, a gentleman from Longford, swapped clothes with his servant as a disguise and thus escaped. Likewise, John Dickenson avoided detection by the rebels by wearing an 'Irish capp'.⁸¹

Skilled workers survived through being forced to work for, or by offering their services to, the rebels. David Gray from Billy parish worked as a miller for Archibald Stewart prior to the rebellion. The O Catháins captured Gray and subsequently offered him an ultimatum: 'goe backe with them ... or be there killed'. Needless to say Gray agreed 'to keepe the said Mill'.⁸² James McColl McDonnell's men captured Murdough O Mullary, part of the garrison

f. 66v).

⁷⁶ Examination of Jennett Service, 28 February 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 46).

⁷⁷ Examination of Thomas Giffen, 1 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 50v).

⁷⁸ Examination of Gilcomey McHallgar, 3 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 61).

⁷⁹ Examination of John O'Sheale, 21 April 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 151).

⁸⁰ Examination of George McLaughlin, 3 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 61v).

⁸¹ Eamon Darcy, 'The Social Order of the 1641 Rebellion' in Eamon Darcy, Annaleigh Margey and Elaine Murphy (eds), *The 1641 Depositions and Irish Rebellion* (London, 2012), 97–112.

⁸² Examination of David Gray, 1 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 52).

at Coleraine that repelled the advances of the MacColla and O Catháin alliance, and set him to work as a ploughman.⁸³ George Tomson, mentioned in the introduction, similarly joined Sir Phelim O'Neill's forces after his capture.⁸⁴ James Steile faced certain death upon the outbreak of rebellion. He and other English and Scottish tenants fled to the woods of Lissan after it became clear that Neil Óg O'Quinn had ordered their executions. Steile had served as a herdsman to Owen O'Cannill until one of the cows he was responsible for drowned. Luckily, 'a Priest called O'Donnelly saved his life to cutt wood, make fires & keepe his coves'. There Steile remained until the arrival of Monro's troops facilitated his escape.⁸⁵ Intriguingly, O'Quinn testified that no threat to settlers existed as they were valued for their ability to work for the Irish. He himself employed 'the fforegemen in making of Iron at Sir Thomas Staples Ironworkes & the Brittish carpenters & Smiths who dwelt at Lissan & in the Countrey about in making pikes & pikeheads'.⁸⁶

To survive the outbreak of violence in Antrim after 23 October 1641 required a craft, powerful social connections, or a route out of the county. As much of the county appeared relatively stable until Christmas of 1641, settlers, natives, Irish, Highlander, Lowland Scot and English pragmatically co-operated, thereby preventing an outbreak of violence as seen west of the Bann and ensuring the maintenance of order. Simmering ethnic tensions and dynastic rivalries undermined this seemingly peaceful equilibrium. When violence erupted and rival ethnicities were identified as targets, civilians had to adopt a range of survival mechanisms to protect themselves and their families. Tomson's apparent loyalty to the native Irish, however, presents another key question about the nature of the uprising in Antrim: to what extent did ethnicity dictate loyalties during the rebellion? Did all Irishmen and Highlanders fight as part of MacColla's and O Catháin's Gaelic alliance?

III: An Ethnic Riot?

Evidence in the 1641 depositions for the rest of Ulster suggests that Irish natives selectively targeted English people during the initial stages of the

⁸³ Examination of Murdough O'Mullary, 4 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 65).

⁸⁴ Examination of George Tomson, 8 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 69v–70v); Donnell Gorme McDonnell, 11 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, ff 30v–31).

⁸⁵ Examination of James Steile, 14 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, ff 76v–77).

⁸⁶ Examination of Neil Óg O'Quinn, 17 March 1654 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 39).

rebellion. The fact that MacColla and O Catháin joined forces would suggest that prominent leaders of Catholic society in Antrim exploited traditional Gaelic links to raise support and men for their war effort. MacColla's main interests, however, lay in defending his family and securing their landed interests. After the arrival of Monro's troops, much of Antrim was under the control of their bitter Campbell rivals. He therefore sought out Alexander Leslie, the earl of Leven, to reach an accommodation that protected his estates. He agreed to end his Irish alliance in return for the restoration of his lands and the release of imprisoned members of his family. Despite this, MacColla later had a change of heart and reneged on the agreement.⁸⁷ Just how strong were these ethnic ties and identities?

While Lady MacDonnell acquiesced in this Gaelic alliance some of her servants and clients may not have shared her views. Her two Cromwellian inquisitors believed that she had sanctioned the murder of Jennett Spier in her house at Ballycastle. From an unknown witness her interrogators had heard Spier pleaded for her life by desperately pulling on Lady's MacDonnell's skirt, which she denied. Upon being asked whether she owed Spier money, Lady MacDonnell answered 'shee never in all her life did owe her one penny but that the said Jennett Spier did owe her 15li'.⁸⁸ Ballycastle locals heard of Spier's death but were unsure who killed her and why.⁸⁹ MacDonnell's servants, unsurprisingly, exonerated their mistress from any blame. Her chef claimed that Spier died after being assaulted near Ballycastle, but not in MacDonnell's house.⁹⁰ Jennett Service, the wife of one of MacDonnell's former servants, claimed that Donnough McAlester murdered Spier in the grounds of MacDonnell's house, but that that McAlester's motives were monetary – Spier had £11 hidden in her tights. At some level people were being killed as a result of their wealth, not because of their ethnicity.⁹¹

Frustratingly, many of the Antrim depositions lack the detail contained in accounts from other counties. In statements taken during the 1650s, the

⁸⁷ David Stevenson, 'MacColla, Alasdair [Sir Alexander MacDonald] (d. 1647)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004); www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17420 [accessed 1 March 2012].

⁸⁸ Examination of Alice Countesse Dowager of Antrim, 9 February 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 23v).

⁸⁹ Examination of Edmund O'Haggan, 12 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 32v); examination of James Allen, 1 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 50).

⁹⁰ Examination of Murghy Oge McMurghy, 16 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 38).

⁹¹ Examination of Jennett Service, 28 February 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 46); confirmed by the examination of James Gray, 28 February 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 46v) and the examination of Thomas Giffen, 1 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 50v).

interrogators' remit did not include an investigation of the words, deeds and actions of all the native Irish as had been the case in the 1640s. Instead these later testimonies focus on a small number of named rebels implicated in the slaughter of Protestant settlers. Pieces of the puzzle may be pieced together, but the riddle of why people partook in popular violence during the rebellion in Antrim may never be solved fully. Opportunistic bandits plundered some Scots fleeing the massacre at Portnaw.⁹² Henry O'Haggan allegedly murdered a Scottish man living in Lissan after spending the evening drinking with him.⁹³ Jane Todd accused Rory Duffe McCormack of killing her first husband, John Hilhouse, as Hilhouse was responsible for ensuring McCormack followed the terms of his bail for a crime committed before 1641.⁹⁴ To some extent some of these individual killings were as a result of ethnic rivalries. For example, Toole McAllester and Donnell O Catháin killed Patrick Collier (an Englishman) and his wife.⁹⁵ Gilduffe O Catháin's sons murdered one of their father's Scottish tenants for no apparent reason. This murder was unprovoked and unsanctioned by Gilduffe who 'kneeled downe upon his knees & cursed them for killing his servants' after hearing of this attack.⁹⁶

The tit-for-tat killing of Irish, Highlander, English and Lowland Scottish revealed the extent of ethnic tensions throughout the 1640s and 1650s. In September 1651, John Kennaday refused to give some corn to Rory Duffe McCormack having heard that he had killed John Hilhouse.⁹⁷ Kennaday asked McCormack 'how could he aske a helpe of Corne from a Scotchman when he knocked all Scotchmen in the head'. McCormack denied partaking in any such activities.⁹⁸ As noted earlier, the influx of soldiers from Scotland prompted many Irish people to flee west of the Bann. What of those who remained? Residents of Kilclief in Antrim were exposed to considerable threats from

⁹² Examination of Alexander McKay, 16 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 35v).

⁹³ Examination of James McIveagh, 17 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 40v); Patrick Modder O'Donnelly, 30 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 43). Although Lawrence O'Cullen believed that McIveagh was responsible for Young's murder. Examination of Lawrence O'Cullen, 7 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 66v).

⁹⁴ Examination of Jane Todd, 18 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, ff 79v–80); The petition of Jane Todd, undated (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 81).

⁹⁵ Examination of Robert Futhy, 2 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 59v); examination of Cutbert Fulton, 4 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 64v).

⁹⁶ Examination of Brian Modder McHenry O'Cahan, 11 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 29); examination of Gilduffe O'Cahan, 10 March 1654 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 26).

⁹⁷ Examination of Jane Todd, 18 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, ff 79v–80); The petition of Jane Todd, undated (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 81).

⁹⁸ Examination of John Kennaday, 19 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 82).

soldiers stationed nearby. One of whom, Captain Alexander Adair, regaled local Irish natives with stories of how he had killed innocent Irish civilians during the massacre of Islandmagee. Adair boasted that he murdered a small child by hitting it on the head '[t]his blowe did cause the head of the child fall to the ground lyke a ball'. He justified the slaying of the child by claiming that 'not one of them [Irish was] to be spared, that they would all goe into Rebellion whey they saue [saw] their opportunity'. Adair clearly used this story to frighten Irish locals. A mother of a young child complained that:

oftentymes the sayd Capten Adayre did speak of his killing of the sayd child, upon occasion of his looking upon a young child of this examinats, who the sayd Alex Adaire used to say was very lyke and of the same age vnto the child which he killed as aforesayd And that he was putt in mynd of the sayd Act by looking upon this Examinants child.⁹⁹

A neighbour witnessed Adair promising a soldier of his a shilling for every Irishman he killed but confessed that he knew not whether they 'spoke in jest or in earnest'.¹⁰⁰ Throughout the 1640s, the maintenance of ethnic tensions was paramount and ensured the cooperation of local populations through fear.

Prior to the massacre at Portnaw, Turlogh Óg O Catháin served as part of Archibald Stewart's regiment of English, Scottish, Highlander and Irish soldiers. The decision to attack Portnaw, however, meant that Highland and Irish soldiers formed a Gaelic alliance. Despite this, not all Irishmen and Highlanders joined the Gaelic alliance. Donnell McGilmurtin served in Captain Upton's forces during the winter of 1641. On the night of the massacre at Islandmagee McGilmurtin kept watch. Coming to the end of his shift his fellow soldiers returned with some trophies of war:

The examinent vewing the Cloathes: hee knew his mothers: Coate and her Bracken: & his sisters Bracken: & the cloathes of one Bryan: O Moylon & his wives, & *one* Rore McCarnes: cloathes: with Seuerall others vpon sight whereof the examinant went to the Sergeant Comanding the garde, called Sergeant Wondrum & asked him what the reason was that those cloathes ware taken by the souldiers hee answered him that the parties which [br]ought them ware kild & that soe the examinent &

⁹⁹ Examination of Anne Fitzsymons, 6 June 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 189); examination of Brian O'Kelly, 6 June 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 190).

¹⁰⁰ Examination of Brian O'Kelly, 6 June 1653 (T.C.D., Ms 838, f.190).

the rest of the Ierish would bee vnless: they looked well to themselves (which hee was sory forr).¹⁰¹

The fact that clothes became trophies was not unusual in Ireland during the 1640s. John Murghlan testified that after Fearragher McKay and Patrick McAhoey murdered Thomas Robinson, McKay wore Robinson's doublet and McAhoey 'confessed he had bestowed the said Thomas Robinson's breeches upon his whore'.¹⁰² McGillmurtin later managed to escape Upton's company without harm after other commanders tried to purge the troop of Irish soldiers.¹⁰³

McGillmurtin was not the only Highlander or native Irishman who refused to join the Gaelic alliance. Shortly after the assault on Portnaw, Thomas Boyd witnessed the approach of the Irish and Highlander forces to Ballintoy house. Upon their arrival it became clear that the house was resolutely defended and so their offer of quarter to 'all bootemen & highland men' if they surrendered was rejected. Presumably these Highlanders then formed part of the troop that successfully repelled their advances.¹⁰⁴ Similarly Anye ne Mallan's husband fought for Lord Conway's troops against his fellow native Irish and died in his service.¹⁰⁵ It appears that in some cases, not even clan networks could draw upon full co-operation from its members. The alliance of Gilduffe O Catháin and Manus Roe O Catháin formed the backbone of the MacColla–O Catháin force. One of their kin, Donnoghy O Catháin, refused to fight with the rest of his family members, and instead formed part of Sir John Borlase's English company that defended Coleraine. The O Catháins captured Donnoghy while he attempted to gather food supplies. Donnoghy ignored Manus Roe O Catháin's proclamation that 'all the Irish should come & ioyne with them'.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, the earl of Antrim's Protestant tenants turned to Argyll, his greatest enemy, for aid after their Catholic neighbours took arms. Even traditional client networks were abandoned in the hope of survival. For some people the side they chose in the 1641 rebellion was dictated by more than familial, clan or ethnic ties. Some fought perhaps to defend their own possessions, to line their pockets, or because of their loyalty to the colonial order.

¹⁰¹ Examination of Donell McGillmurtin, 6 May 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 139).

¹⁰² Examination of John Murghlan, 28 February 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 47v).

¹⁰³ Examination of Donell McGillmurtin, 6 May 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 139).

¹⁰⁴ Examination of Thomas Boyd, 1 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 52v).

¹⁰⁵ Examination of Anye ne Mallan, 2 May 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 164).

¹⁰⁶ Examination of Donnoghy O'Cahan, 8 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 70v); examination of Donnell O'Cahan, 14 March 1653 (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 33v).

IV: Conclusion

The grievances of Antrim rebels differed considerably from those who partook in the rebellion in west Ulster. The centuries-old feud between the MacDonnells and the Campbells meant that many of the native Irish became embroiled in a dynastic dispute at a time when religious and ethnic relations in east Ulster were particularly tense. Fearing an onslaught from Scotland, the O Catháins joined their Gaelic brothers from the Highlands and to defend against a Scottish invasion force (as opposed to an “English” army sent by the colonial authorities). Not all rallied to the Gaelic banner, however. Many decided to settle old scores, out of sheer opportunism, others joined out of fear or through coercion. This article captures the range of motivations, many of which did not fit neatly into the ethnic grounds for the rebellion advanced by the O Catháins and MacColla. The rebellion in Antrim differed considerably from the national movement in that it was characterised by distinctly Scottish, as opposed to Irish concerns.

Close ties between the Highlanders and native Irish in Antrim suggests that ethnic rivalries between Gaelic, Scottish and English communities were to blame for the outbreak of the rebellion in Antrim. There is a marked difference between the statements of Antrim rebels and the reported speech of rebels from west Ulster. There is no mention of religious grievances as a factor in the forging of this Gaelic alliance in Antrim. Antrim had seen numerous Scottish settlements from the fifteenth century onwards, therefore, native and newcomer societies were more integrated there than anywhere else in Ulster. As a result there is no mention of plantation or new settlements as a cause for the rebellion in Antrim. Irish, Highlander, Scottish and English forces fought side by side in local militias prior to 1641. Fears of a Scottish invasion prompted many native Irishmen to take arms and thus many became involved to protect their lives, their families and their property; put simply they partook in order to survive. To do so they called upon clan and client networks or they manipulated the Campbell/MacDonnell rivalry in order to protect themselves from rebels in their areas. It must not be forgotten, however, that some of the examinations taken in the 1650s from Antrim locals were survival strategies themselves. Many of those who deposed were also under suspicion. Perhaps these prisoners portrayed the rebellion in Antrim as ethnically motivated to deflect attention away from their real grievances. Perhaps Antrim rebels were motivated by an anti-Protestant and anti-colonial agenda, but preferred to manipulate ethnic rivalries and play upon Cromwellian distrust of the Scots in order to survive.

Regrettably, events in Antrim have been lost in broader overviews of the outbreak of rebellion in Ulster. This article suggests that Mark Stoye's characterisation of the wars of the three kingdoms as an ethnic conflict has particular resonances in Antrim.¹⁰⁷ It remains to be seen however, whether further studies of the 1641 rebellion on a national scale can add to our understanding of its ethnic dimension. Furthermore, this article has hinted that Ellis' view that Gaelic ties between the native Irish and Highlander had been dismissed in favour of a prototype 'national' identity of Scottish and Irish may need some revision. The 1640s witnessed an outburst of Gaelic pride in Antrim, which suggests the existence of strong ethnic and cultural ties between these communities that cannot simply have vanished by 1650, as Ellis suggests.¹⁰⁸ Finally this article has shown how the Antrim rebellion may perhaps be better understood in a Scottish, as opposed to an Irish, context. The native Irish who took part cared little for the ideals espoused by Phelim O'Neill and were more concerned about the arrival of troops from Scotland and the earl of Antrim's rivalry with the Campbells which had existed for generations. While they may not have received support from their local lord, this Gaelic alliance fought Randal MacDonnell's war and subscribed to the political, economic and religious goals that he pursued throughout his career. Events that occurred during the 1640s in Antrim, therefore, may be better understood as part of an ancient dynastic rivalry between two Scottish families that spread west from Scotland and as part of Gaelic and Scottish rivalry where locals drew upon a range of strategies to survive the harsh conditions of the wars of the 1640s and the suspicions of Cromwellian interrogators in the 1650s.

NUI, Maynooth

¹⁰⁷ Mark Stoye, *Soldiers and Strangers: An Ethnic History of the English Civil War* (London, 2005).

¹⁰⁸ Ellis, 'The Collapse of the Gaelic World', *passim*.