

## Ireland in the 11th and 12th Centuries

### 11th Century Ireland



The XIth century in Ireland saw much upheaval. There were eight major kingdoms in Ireland at this time, and most of them spent their time warring with their neighbours. During this time, Viking control over limited but important seaports on the east coast of Ireland (Dublin, Wexford and Waterford) complicated the internal battles between the native Irish. These seaports were centres of trade and manufacture, and as such were highly important to those who controlled them. The kings of Leinster were particularly interested in these ports, as most of them were in or close to Leinster<sup>1</sup>. However, in attempting to unite Ireland, Brian Boru did not try to evict the Norsemen who were firmly installed in some of these East coast towns. Strangely enough, the warlike Vikings slowly converted to Christianity, and merged with the Irish, taking their customs and their language. In the early XIth Century, they had already been assimilated into Ireland, sometimes fighting against, sometimes making alliances, with their new neighbours.

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<sup>1</sup> Waterford, although in a small kingdom to the south of Leinster, had been controlled by Leinster since the late Xth century.

## Synopsis of events in the XIth Century



And so the aube of the XIth century saw Ireland in continuous internal war. In the kingdom of Munster, a certain Brian Boru was permanently occupied in defending his territories against Mael Sechnaill, King of Mide and High-King of Ireland.

997 - Mael was forced to acknowledge Brian Boru's authority over the south of Ireland, and they agreed to divide Ireland between them. However, this agreement was broken when Brian turned against Mael, and within a short time had forced him to submit. Brian then claimed kingship over the whole of Ireland. Although faced with rebellions in

conquered territory, Brian finally forced every major regional king into submission, and became the first real High-King of Ireland. Brian died in 1022, killed by a Viking chief who was fleeing from battle. He was succeeded by Diarmait mac Mail na mBo.

1039 - King Iago of Gwynedd (Northern Wales) was killed by Gruffydd ap Llewelyn but his family escaped to Dublin. Iago's son Cynan prepared two unsuccessful campaigns to try and recover his father's kingdom. Cynan's son, Gruffydd, born years later (about 1054), also vowed to succeed where his father had failed. After a few unsuccessful attempts, Gruffydd sailed from Waterford to South Wales in 1081, and with the help of Rhys ap Tewdwr, king of Deheubarth (Southern Wales), he succeeded in recovering the title of king of Gwynedd for his family, but his success was short-lived. In 1099 Gruffydd again returned from Ireland, this time to succeed in his final attempt to regain Gwynedd. He managed to keep a hold on his kingdom until his death in 1137.

1044 - Hywel ap Edwin, king of Deheubarth, was expelled by Gruffydd ap Llewelyn, and sought refuge in Ireland. He raised a fleet there and attempted to retake Deheubarth, but he and a large number of his Irish mercenaries were killed in battle by Gruffydd.

1051 - Godwin, Earl of Essex, and his sons, rivals of King Edward the Confessor, were banished from England and sought the aid of Diarmait Mac Máel, king of Uí Chennselaig and of Leinster (1042-1072), who was grandfather of Diarmat Mac Murchada (above). They raised a fleet to launch attacks on the Devonshire, Somersetshire and Kentish coasts.

1055 - Aelfgar, earl of Anglia, Earl of Mercia, was banished for treason from England by Edward the Confessor. He went to Ireland where he raised a fleet, formed an alliance with Gruffydd ap Llewelyn, king of Gwynedd, and led their combined forces in an attack on the city of Hereford. As a result King Edward was obliged to restore him to the Earldom of East Anglia.

1066 - Two surviving sons of King Harold Godwinson had escaped to Ireland after the battle of Hastings. They were given sanctuary by Diarmait mac Mail na mBo, who eventually lent them a fleet of ships from Dublin, which they used in their invasions of England, in their sterile attempts to return to power.

1070 - Diarmait was one of the most important kings in Ireland. His influence was felt as far away as the Hebrides, the Isle of Man and Wales. He installed his son Murchadas as King of Dublin. However, Murchadas died in 1070, before his father. Diarmait died in 1072, and was succeeded, as King of Leinster by his son, Domnaill mac Murchada. Now that Brian Boru and his son were both dead, Ireland sank into a state of disorder.

1088 - Rhys ap Tewdwr, King of Deheubarth (Southern Wales), was expelled by the sons of Bleddyn, King of Powys (Southern Wales), and he fled to Ireland, raised a fleet in Dublin and returned to defeat them and retake his kingdom. Gruffydd, son of Rhys, was fostered in Ireland, and it was from Ireland that he returned to Wales about 1113 in a bid to regain his father's kingdom. He was partially successful in his attempt, with the help of King Henry I, but in 1127 he was obliged to flee to Ireland once more.



1097 - Cadwgan ap Bleddyn, prince of Powys (Central Wales), fled to Ireland after the Norman victory of Mon in 1097. He returned in 1099 to with the object of making a truce with the Normans. Cadwgan's son, Owain, was forced to flee to Ireland in 1109. On his return from Ireland, Owain mounted a number of expeditions into Dyfed (Southern Wales) taking Norman prisoners, and shipping them as slaves, back to Ireland.

## **XIIth Century Ireland**

An important part of Irish events, that is sometimes omitted by historians, includes the connections between the Irish, Norse and Welsh prior to the arrival of the Normans of 1169. From the 11th century onwards political refugees from Britain gravitated toward Leinster in Ireland, and who sought mercenary fleets from the Hiberno-Norse towns of Dublin, Waterford, and Wexford. We must clarify the reason for this state of affairs. Williams Conquest of England, which began in 1066, met with considerable resistance for many years. In particular, Wales and the north of England represented a hard nut to crack, as they fiercely resisted "The Conqueror". William put his most powerful and faithful followers into the regions which contested his authority, but drove a hard bargain. If his followers could conquer and hold the rebel English and Welsh, they would be significantly rewarded. If they failed, then they would lose everything, especially favour with the new King of England. This state of affairs lasted a long time, with repercussions into the XIIth century. Welsh contestants chose to flee their country, and to install themselves in a more favourable climate, where opposition was mostly formed by Irish farmers with staffs and pitchforks. However, their ultimate object was not to contest any land in Ireland, but to mount an invasion to recover their homeland. The relatively safe havens of Ireland were prime vantage points from which to try and recover kingdoms lost to the powerful Anglo-Norman invaders.

The Welsh and the Scottish were not going to give in so easily to William. It was for this reason that William put his most trusted men close to the Borders, with enticing grants of land, and titles of importance, but only if they managed to hold the lands against the stubborn Celts. In order to build more successful opposition, some Welsh temporarily retreated to Ireland, where they found the possibility to mount minor invasions into their own country, in the hope of evicting the Norman invaders. In actual fact, the situation in Wales was similar to that of Ireland, even before the arrival of the Normans. In both countries, there were small kingdoms in a permanent state of war with their neighbours. Kingdoms were won and lost in Wales and Ireland long before the Normans brought more problems.

### **Synopsis of events in the XIIth Century**

1102 - Arnulf de Montgomery, who had been granted the lordship of Pembroke (South-West Wales) by King William Rufus about 1093, revolted against Henry I. In consequence he sought a marriage alliance with Muirchertach Ua Briain, king of Munster (1086-1119) and high-king of Ireland. Despite his Irish alliance Arnulf forfeited the lordship of Pembroke, and sought temporary haven in Ireland.

1110 - Dermot MacMurrough (Diarmait Mac Murchada) was born, son of Donnchad mac Murchada, King of Leinster and Dublin.

1115 to 1131, Turlough destroyed everything in his path and from 1140 began to emerge as the most powerful, and thus the possible future king of Ireland. When he died in 1156, his power was supplanted by that of the king of the Ui Neill, Muirchertach Mac

Lochlainn.

1140 - Dermot unexpectedly became King of Leinster upon the death of his elder brother Enna mac Donnchada Mac Murchada. The High-King Toirdelbach Ua Conchobair thought that Dermot would become a rival and so instigated plans to drive Dermot from his kingdom. But, until the turn of the century, the most powerful king in Ireland was Dermot MacMurrough (Diarmait Mac Murchada), King of Leinster. Dermot could count on powerful support from the Anglo-Normans and the current Norwegian king, and managed to dominate most of the country. However, he had enemies who were becoming more powerful and who contested his domains. Domnaill Mac Lochlainn, king of the Ui Neill, managed to limit the plans of MacMurrough, until a third contestant, Turlough O'Connor, King of Connacht (1106-1156), arrived on the scene.

1144 - Gruffydd ap Cynan's sons, Cadwalladr and Owain, begin feuding in Wales. Cadwalladr treacherously killed Owain's nephew Anarawd of Deheubarth. Owain was incensed, and sent his son Hywel to invade Cadwalladr's territory. Cadwalladr sent to Ireland for help, resulting in a Norse fleet sailing to Abermenai, led by Þórkell, brother of King Ragnall of Dublin.

1165 - Henry II hired a fleet from Dublin in his Welsh campaign of 1165. The fleet can only have been made available to Henry with the consent of Diarmait Mac Murchada as overlord of Dublin. The following year Diarmait was ousted from his kingship in Ireland and sought aid from Henry II and the Cambro-Normans in Wales. Henry owed a favour to Mac Murchada.

So did the island of Ireland present itself to the world in the XIIth century, much associated with the invaded country of Wales, a turmoil of war, treachery and haegemony which was rife, until Dermot MacMurrough upset the apple-cart. The stage was set for a radical change in the history of Ireland, which was to last for seven centuries.

