

PLATFORM



Historian **Dr John McCavitt** looks back at the impact of the settlement of 10,000 Scots into counties Down and Antrim four years before the Plantation of Ulster



■ **FOREFATHERS:** James Hamilton, left, and Hugh Montgomery, who pioneered the settlement of Scottish lowlanders in north Down and Antrim, landing at Donaghadee in 1606 and, below, their lands

Celebrations mark the arrival of first Ulster Scots in Ireland

COMMEMORATIONS of formative historical events are increasingly common. As it happens, 400 years ago this month, shiploads of Scottish lowlanders (Protestants) descended on the shores of north Down, inaugurating a hugely successful private settlement scheme that rapidly resulted in as many as 10,000 Scots setting up home in counties Antrim and Down.

Described as the 'Dawn of the Ulster Scots', the project was pioneered by Hugh Montgomery and James Hamilton.

In recognition of the role played by their forefathers in transforming the north into an industrial powerhouse, the Ulster-Scots Agency intends to acknowledge this important anniversary by reconstructing the initial landings at Donaghadee tomorrow evening and also by launching a series of publications, a travelling exhibition and a website (www.HamiltonMontgomery1606.com).

Migration back and forth across the narrow North Channel between Scotland and Ireland, of course, has been ongoing from time immemorial. Famously, during the 14th century, Edward the Bruce, brother of Robert, became High King of Ireland in 1316.

Slain in battle a couple of years later, Edward's grave can be seen to this day nestled on the hillside of Faughart overlooking Dundalk Bay.

A new era in Scottish migration to Ireland was inaugurated, however, at the beginning of the 17th century.

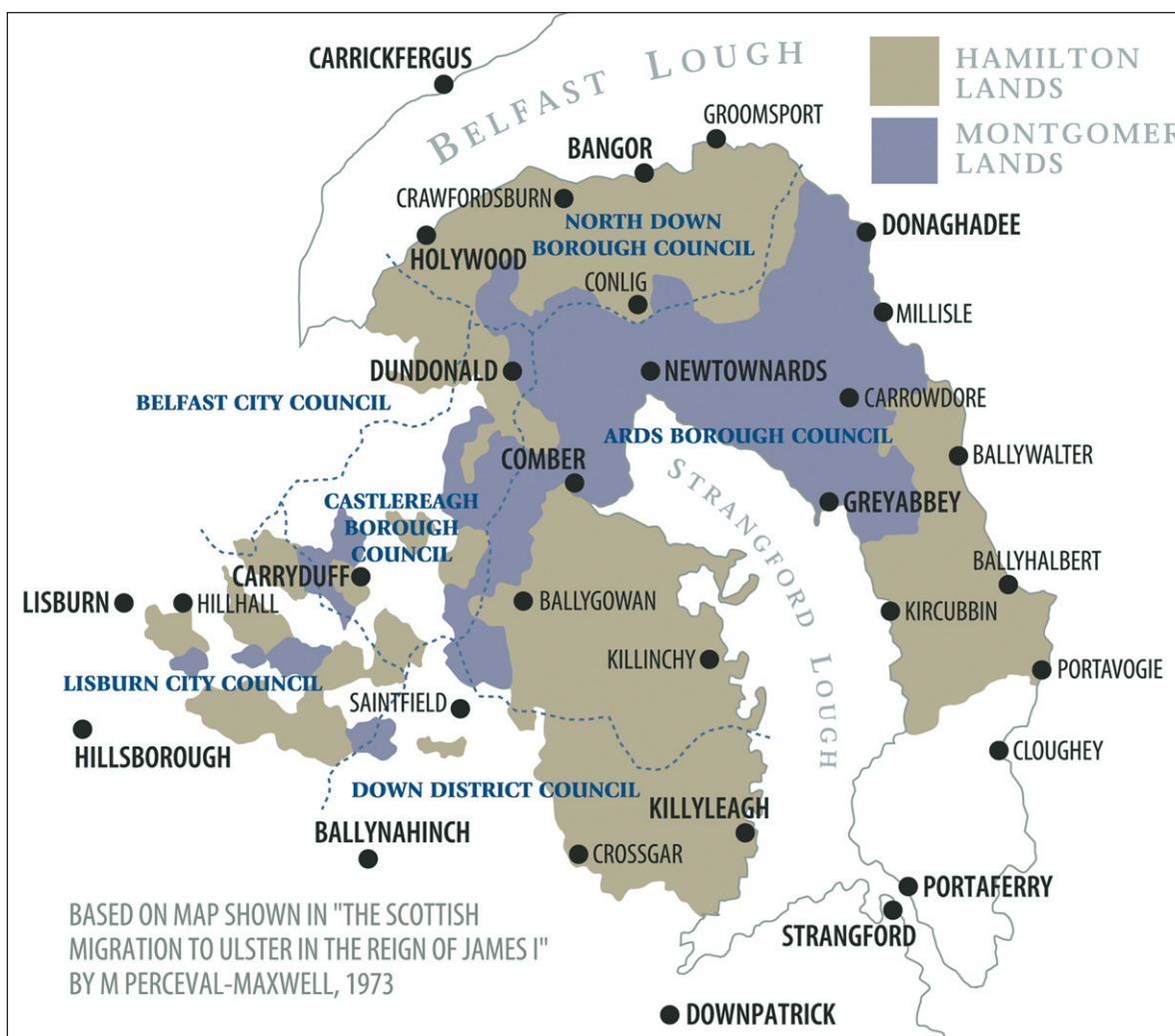
It coincided with the conclusion of the Nine Years War (1594-1603) in Ireland and the start of the Stuart dynasty.

History books tell us that James VI of Scotland succeeded Elizabeth I on the English throne as James I in 1603 but it was far from a foregone conclusion at the time.

The prospect of a Scottish 'interloper' on the throne of England did not meet with universal approval. As it happened, two astute Scottish rivals, James Hamilton and Hugh Montgomery, played key roles in securing the succession.

Owing them a debt of gratitude, James I rewarded Hamilton and Montgomery with enormous grants of land in Ulster. The circumstances in which this occurred were extraordinary.

Shortly before the end of the Nine Years War, Conn O'Neill, chieftain of upper Clondeboy (roughly equivalent to north Down and parts of south Antrim) and a crown ally, queered his pitch with the formidable English commander Sir Arthur Chichester, (founder of modern Belfast).



For a time, the Scots settlement flourished. It was a 'golden peaceable age' when harvests were bountiful and freedom of worship for the Presbyterian-inclined settlers prevailed. Circumstances soon contrived to shatter the idyll.

The introduction of the 'Black Oath' in the 1630s resulted in many of them fleeing Ulster.

Denied religious liberty and freedom of trade, Presbyterians became strongly republican at the time of the United Irishmen.

As it transpired, the situation changed following the Act of Union in 1800. When the penal laws were abolished and restrictions lifted on trade, the descendants of the Hamilton and Montgomery settlement prospered in the United Kingdom.

In sum, while Scots were beneficiaries of James I's legendary favouritism towards his countrymen, not all Ulster Scots look back with rose-tinted glasses to his reign.

Scots borderers, after all, had been 'transported' to Co Roscommon, while many others were pressurised into service in foreign armies.

Ironically, many saw action in Sweden and Poland, theatres of war to which up to 6,000 Irish swordsmen were transported following the Flight of the Earls in 1607.

The 400th anniversary of the Hamilton and Montgomery settlement, therefore, affords an opportunity to look anew at the complex events of the early 17th century that have done so much to mould the subsequent history of Northern Ireland.

Dr John McCavitt is a teacher from Rostrevor, Co Down and author of *Sir Arthur Chichester, Lord Deputy of Ireland, 1605-16 and The Flight of the Earls.*

■ **The Hamilton and Montgomery settlement will be reenacted at a 'Dawn of the Ulster-Scots' festival at Donaghadee harbour tomorrow from 6.30pm – a free evening of music, dance and fireworks organised by the Ulster-Scots Agency, with concerts from the Field Marshall Montgomery Pipe Band and Scots folk group Beggars Row.**

A hotly disputed 'incident' occurred involving the seizure of wine by English troops.

When Conn O'Neill retaliated by despatching his forces to recover it, an English soldier was killed.

Chichester seized the Gaelic chieftain and imprisoned him at Carrickfergus castle. Before long, however, in a quite remarkable turn of events,

Hugh Montgomery was instrumental in orchestrating his jailbreak.

In a tale steeped in intrigue, with all sorts of twists and turns, Conn O'Neill ended up agreeing to allocate half his lands to Montgomery.

The plan was scuppered at the last minute, however, when a powerful courtier intervened on behalf of James Hamilton. In the end, Conn's

lands were divided into three portions with Conn himself retaining Castlereagh, the 'Connswater' river providing a tenuous connection to those distant days.

By contrast, the enduring impact of the subsequent influx of Scottish settlers into north Down and south Antrim has been enormous, resulting in the creation of a 'Scottish Pale'.

The concluding years of the Nine Years War (1594-1603) witnessed English troops adopting scorched-earth tactics to bring the rebels led by Hugh O'Neill and Red Hugh O'Donnell to heel.

When the Scots arrived in such large numbers shortly afterwards, the demographic complexion of the devastated north Down and south Antrim region was to change dramatically.

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■ **JAILBREAK:** Carrickfergus Castle, where Gaelic chieftain of Upper Clondeboy Conn O'Neill was imprisoned by Belfast's founder, Sir Arthur Chichester after a row over wine. Hugh Montgomery was instrumental in breaking him out of the castle