

# Sir George Thornton

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*The career of an Elizabethan soldier and adventurer in Munster is discussed. Thornton, who acquired considerable estates in county Limerick under the Munster plantation, was Provost Marshall of the province from 1583 to 1604. He served on the Council of the Lord President 1593-1604 and was Vice-President 1597-9. Details on his children and grandchildren are also provided.*

George Thornton,<sup>1</sup> by his own admission, arrived in Ireland circa 1569<sup>2</sup>. He was a young man about 19 years of age, looking to make a career for himself, unmarried and most likely a younger son who had very little opportunities open to him in England. His background is unknown though it was claimed in a later century that his uncle was the Count of Esper<sup>3</sup>. The time of his arrival coincides with the outbreak of the first Desmond Rebellion so he could have been amongst the followers of some senior military figure, Sir Humphrey Gilbert perhaps or Sir John Perrot. From the letters he wrote he was obviously well educated and since there is no evidence of land being granted to him in the early 1570s he must have either had with him, enough money or had received sufficient in pay, to buy or lease himself some land without which it is unlikely that he would have decided to marry. At some time in the late 1570s he married Elinor Lacy of Athlacca in the Barony of Coshma, Co. Limerick and he spent the rest of his life at various addresses in that neighbourhood. They had many children, one of whom, Margaret was definitely born in the year 1583 as her Transplanters Certificate,<sup>4</sup> written when she was banished to Connought in 1653 by the Cromwellians, states that she was then aged seventy. Thomas, his son and heir was born circa 1590.<sup>5</sup> The same pedigree chart that states he was the nephew of the Count of Esper gives Elinor Lacy as the daughter of John Lacy of Athlacka.

In a list of the freeholders and gentlemen of Co Limerick for 1570<sup>6</sup> 'David Leashe of Alleckaghe' i.e. David Lacy of Athlacca is mentioned. In February 1571 Sheriff William Lacy of Bruff obtained a pardon for himself and the eighteen men who made up his posse one of whom was John Lacy of Athlacka.<sup>7</sup> The next sheriff Peter Walsh, in his turn also obtained a pardon and John Lacy of Athlacka is again listed with the word 'Horseman' added.<sup>8</sup> In June 1573 John Lacy FitzDavid,

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<sup>1</sup> Two men of this name served in Ireland in this period but are easily distinguishable as the other was a sea captain and all references to him have a naval context.

<sup>2</sup> Sir George Thornton to Sir Robert Cecil, 1 Nov. 1599 (*Calendar of the State Papers relating to Ireland 1599-1600*) p. 225.

<sup>3</sup> DeLacy - Bellingari, *The Roll of the House of Lacy* (Baltimore 1928) p. 352.

<sup>4</sup> J.G.Barry, 'The Bourkes of Clanwilliam', *Journal of the Royal Historical and Archaeological Association of Ireland*, vol. ix, 4 series (1890) p. 199; S. C. O'Mahony, 'Cromwellian Transplantation from Limerick, 1653' *NMAJ* 40 (2000) pp 29-51.

<sup>5</sup> *Cal. S.P. Ire., 1608-10*, pp 487, 493 and 494 for evidence of Thomas coming of age.

<sup>6</sup> J.H.Pierce, 'List of Freeholders and Gentlemen in Co. Limerick in 1570', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal* 9, no. 3 (1964) pp 108-12; 108.

<sup>7</sup> Éamonn de Búrca, *The Irish Fiant of the Tudor Sovereigns* (Dublin 1994) Fiant Eliz. 1694 p. 226.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Fiant Eliz. 1765 p. 237.



gentleman, is mentioned though without an address<sup>9</sup>. In Sept. 1574 we find a John FitzDavy Lacy of Rathcannon, an 800 acre ploughland adjoining the 600 acres of Athlacka<sup>10</sup>. Jumping forward to Mar. 1584 we find a pardon written out for George Thornton the Provost Marshall, of Kilmallock, John Lacy of Rathcannon, gent. and Thomas Storey of Kilmallock, horseman<sup>11</sup>. Going back to 1573, an Oliver Lacy FitzDavid of Athlacka was pardoned<sup>12</sup> and again in 1576, Oliver Lacy, horseman, one of John of Desmond's men is in Desmond's pardon<sup>13</sup>. If a man was a land owner he would always be called a gentleman while his sons, obviously young adults, would supply the horsemen followers of what ever person needed a group of armed men to assist them. Oliver it would seem was heir to David and inherited the lands of Athlacka, leaving John to lease the lands of Rathcannon from the Earl of Kildare. The Casey family were the next tenants of Rathcannon, so it looks like John Lacy had no sons. This could have been the main reason that Thornton selected Elinor, a potential heiress, as a suitable bride for himself.

He technically took a risk by marrying an Irish woman as this was not approved of by the establishment in those times. Marriage to the Irish was forbidden by Statute Law and although this law was flaunted universally the ban was reiterated in the conditions of tenure for the Undertakers in the Munster Plantation. However he doesn't seem to have suffered any repercussions for so doing and neither did a fellow military man, Capt. William Apsley of Hospital who married Annabelle Browne, daughter of John Browne, one of the principal advisors of the Earl of Desmond in the second Desmond Rebellion<sup>14</sup>. Nor does it seem to have harmed the career of Lt. Thomas Spring when he married Annabelle in 1582<sup>15</sup> mere months after William was killed in action<sup>16</sup>. Richard Boyle, the Great Earl of Cork, married as his first wife Joan Apsley, daughter of the deceased William, but it must be remembered she and her sister were then heirs to their father's Hospital estates. Their marriages were approved by their indulgent step-father, Thomas Spring.

Thornton is first mentioned as a Captain in January 1582 when he was part of the garrison of Kilmallock along with Capt. John Dowdall and Capt. Bangor. Between them they had many skirmishes with the fugitive Earl of Desmond. In March 1583 he informed his superiors in Dublin that 'Desmond and the Countess are gone into Kerry' and on the 11 November the fugitive Earl was finally caught and killed, bringing an end to the second Desmond rebellion which had devastated Munster since 1579.

On 2 August 1583, two *fiant*s<sup>17</sup> were issue, one was a commission to Captain Warham St. Leger 'to execute martial law in the Co. of Liex' and the other was a commission to George Thornton, gent., Provost- Marshall and commissioner of Munster, to execute martial law in that province:

with power to search out, after the order of martial law, all disorders committed in the province, and on finding any persons to be felons, rebels, enemies, or notorious evil-doers, to punish them by death or otherwise. This power not to extend against any having 40s.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, *Fiant Eliz.* 2304 p. 301.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, *Fiant Eliz.* 2467 p. 328.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, *Fiant Eliz.* 4337 p. 610.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, *Fiant Eliz.* 2271 p. 296.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, *Fiant Eliz.* 2784 p. 369.

<sup>14</sup> Treasurer Wallop to Walsyngham, 9 August 1580 (*Cal. S.P. Ire. 1574-85* p. 242).

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Spring, Gent. to the Privy Council. June 1583 (*ibid.*, p. 454).

<sup>16</sup> Wallop to Walsyngham. March 1582 (*ibid.*, p. 354).

<sup>17</sup> *Fiant*s were warrants to Chancery authorising the issue of letters patent under the great seal and took their name from the first word of the usual Latin form '*fiant literae patentis*'.



a-year freehold, or £10 in chattels, or any of honest name, unless taken in the act or duly convicted. With power also to treat with rebels and enemies, and for that purpose to grant safe conducts, and to conclude good orders with them under the instructions of the lord deputy.

Warham St. Leger had been Provost Marshall of Munster but was now moving to a new command as Governor of Laois and Thornton had been chosen as his successor in Munster. Captain Warham St. Leger, the nephew of Sir Warham St. Leger a previous Provost Marshall, was also knighted, in 1597 following the death of his uncle. This office had been created in 1570 as part of the structure of the Presidency of Munster, designed to increase royal and government control in the province. It gave Thornton a small but permanent force of 25 horsemen as his guard to help him enforce the law. The position also brought with it a salary of 2/- (two shillings) per day and 1/- per day, sterling, for each of the horseman. The total sum was paid to him and he was responsible for passing their wages to his men minus deductions for their uniforms and food.

In the Peyton Survey,<sup>18</sup> which lists all the confiscated lands of the attainted earl, it gives the following 'The Earl of Desmond held in Tuath Bruree, Ballynaughte with castle and 2 quarters of land, presently let to George Thornton, Marshall of Munster.' This means that the lands and castle of Ballyhinnaught near Bruree were placed in the custody of Thornton to use as he pleased until a more permanent disposal of the property could be decided on. (It was later included in the seignory granted to the undertaker Henry Ughtred)<sup>19</sup>. Thornton did not lose out, as he was granted 'the Castle and lands of Ballyruscan otherwise Downemeane'. The Carew MSS contain the certificate, dated September 1587, 'of the lands in the County of Limerick and Coshmay allotted to George Thornteton; sc., Uregare, Ballenvolen, Carrowreogh, Ballenstoneybegg, Ballenstoneymore, Ardekellymartye, Downemand, Ballecory, making in all 572 [recte. 1572] acres, viz., 3 ploughlands, 12 acres Irish'. His Patent continues on in a more grandiose style<sup>20</sup>, 'to hold forever, subject to the conditions of the plantation; her Majesty – being minded to have the province of Munster repopled and inhabited with civil, loyal and dutiful subjects, to be accomplished according to her Majesties intention declared in certain articles under the Great Seal, bearing date at Westminster 27<sup>th</sup> June – and in consideration of the great charge and trouble which George Thornton sustained in transporting and planting English people within that province.' The Patent confirms the 1500 acres as against the 572 in his certificate.

#### OLD AND NEW SPELLING<sup>21</sup>

<i>Elizabethan spelling</i>	<i>Modern spelling</i>
<i>Downemeane</i>	<i>Dunnaman</i>
<i>Uregare</i>	<i>Uregare</i>
<i>Ballenvolen</i>	<i>Milltown</i>
<i>Carrowreogh</i>	<i>Carrow</i>
<i>Ballenstoneybegg/more</i>	<i>Ballinstona North and South.</i>
<i>Ardekellymartye</i>	<i>Ardkillmartin</i>
<i>Ballecory</i>	<i>Ballincurra</i>

<sup>18</sup> J. Begley, *The Diocese of Limerick in the 16th and 17th Centuries* (Dublin 1927) p. 99.

<sup>19</sup> de Búrca, *Irish Fiantis*, Fiant Eliz. 5782 p. 203.

<sup>20</sup> *Calender of Patent and Close Rolls, Elizabeth*, p. 116, item 5.

<sup>21</sup> A. Ó Maolfabhail, *Logainmneacha na hEireann: Contae Luimnigh* (Dublin 1990).



Fiant 5052 Anno 1587 gives the following additional information 'all Co. Limerick, late possessions of John FitzWilliam Lacy. To hold by the name of Mylott for ever in fee farm by fealty in common socage. Rent £15-12-6, if more acres then at 2 1/2d. for each English acre. Houses for 12 families, 1 for self, 2 for freeholders, 1 for a farmer, 2 for copyholders'.<sup>22</sup> Repopulating Munster with English people was the prime reason behind these land grants to the chief Undertakers. In fact this is the reason for their title, they 'undertook' to settle their lands with English followers. The change over to English language, laws, customs and English religious practice was then expected to follow.

Thornton lost Ardkillmartin straight away as it was church land and his rental was reduced by £2 16s. 0d. In September 1588 one Edmund Kearney of Kilmallock claimed the lands of 'Ballyscony, or Ballysconymore of which George Thorington of the Broffe Co. Limerick has obtained a grant'.<sup>23</sup> The claim was denied but it shows that in 1588 George was living in Bruff. A statement in 1598 says that George was leasing Bruff castle from Piers Lacy.<sup>24</sup>

In 1589 Thornton was still living in Bruff as a muster of his soldiers was taken there on the 5 April.<sup>25</sup> In June or July of that year he sailed to England and one of the tasks he had to pursue, was to seek the restoration of his horsemen's wages to the 12d. per day which they originally received, as this had been cut to 6 3/4d, on which they could not maintain themselves. A compromise was reached, by which their number was reduced to 12 and these would receive the shilling per day. A new patent was issued authorising this arrangement.<sup>26</sup>

From a list taken in 1592 it appears that there was a sting in his land grant for now we learn that approximately £6 was payable in rents per year to the Earl of Kildare on top of the £15 due to the Queen.<sup>27</sup> It also appears from the same list that Thornton had managed to add new townlands to his holdings i.e. Karowe, Ballintraslaine and Ballynehoaw. He, along with all the other Undertakers, was only liable for half rent from the time they received their grants and this period of grace was to continue until Michaelmas 1594 when the full rent would come into force. In 1592 he claimed to have six English inhabitants settled on his estate.<sup>28</sup>

On the 29 July 1593, instructions were given that George Thornton be sworn in as one of the Council of Munster,<sup>29</sup> the body of assistants and advisers to the Lord President. During the summer of 1595, with the outbreak of the Nine Years War he went back into active service, campaigning in the north of Ireland with his friend, Sir Thomas Norris, the vice-president of Munster, against the Earl of Tyrone<sup>30</sup>. They were both serving under Thomas's brother, Sir John Norris, who was the titular President of Munster, as well as being Queen Elizabeth's commander of her army in Ireland. Sir John was newly arrived from the Netherlands where he had been posted by the Queen in her struggle against the King of Spain. In October 1597 Sir Thomas Norris succeeded his brother John, who had just died, as President of Munster he immediately appointed Thornton as his Vice-President.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>22</sup> The remaining houses were for cottiers.

<sup>23</sup> Book of the Proceedings in Munster by the Lord Chief Justice Anderson *et al*, item 3, 3 September-1588 (*Cal.S.P. Ire.*, 1588-92), p. 15.

<sup>24</sup> Memoranda concerning certain rebels of Munster, 12 October 1598 (*Cal.S.P. Ire.*, 1598-99) p. 286.

<sup>25</sup> Book of the Proceedings in Munster, item 4, 5 April 1589 (*ibid.*, 1588-92 p. 141).

<sup>26</sup> J.Morrin (ed.), *Calendar of the Patent and Close Rolls of Chancery* (London 1862), vol. 2 p.186.

<sup>27</sup> Sir R. Gardiner and R. Wilbraham to Burghley, 31 December 1592 (*Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1592-96) p. 58.

<sup>28</sup> An Abstract of the proceedings of the Undertakers in Munster. 1592 (*Ibid.*, p. 59).

<sup>29</sup> Sir Thomas Norreys to Burghley 29 July 1593 (*Ibid.*, p. 132).

<sup>30</sup> Declaration of Capt. Francis Stafford, 12 September 1595 (*Ibid.*, p. 389).

<sup>31</sup> Sir Thomas Norreys to Sir Robert Cecil, 31 October 1597 (*Ibid.*, p. 432).



In 1596, Capt. Warham St. Leger refers to 'the treachery of Purcells people, in Co. Limerick and the killing of them by George Thornton the Provost Marshall'.<sup>32</sup> In a muster list dated April 1598, drawn up by Ralph Lane showing the entire English army then present in Ireland, George and his twelve Horse are given, consisting of five English-born, four Pale-born and three 'meer' Irish.<sup>33</sup> The term 'meer' is used here in a descriptive, not derogatory; sense.

On Friday 6 October 1598 Thornton's, and indeed every other Englishman in Munster's world collapsed around them when the Munster Irish rose in rebellion spurred on by a force of 2000 mercenaries sent by Tyrone to aid and encourage them.<sup>34</sup> Nearly all the places of residence of the English Undertakers and their tenants were abandoned and a mad dash was made by the terrified settlers for the nearest town or fortification. George thought he had left Adare Abbey properly defended by 30 shot i.e. soldiers armed with muskets or a lighter type of musket called a caliver, but his garrison ran away. Adare Abbey belonged to Sir Tom Norris, the President, who also sanctioned 18 wardens for Thornton to protect his castle of Bruff, which he had on lease from Piers Lacy. They also fled for their lives, allowing Lacy to re-occupy his own castle.

Piers Lacy of Bruff, had taken part in the second Desmond rebellion but was pardoned and thereby held onto all his castles and lands.<sup>35</sup> During the next 15 years he behaved himself loyally, being a justice of the peace, Captain of 60 Kern and even High Sheriff of Co. Limerick. In the middle of August 1598, he went to the Earl of Ormond to complain about his treatment by Norris and Thornton, his own tenant<sup>36</sup>. Ormond promised to get him a pardon but Norris at Thornton's behest tried to stop a pardon being issued. This interference delayed the pardon and it was issued after Lacy had committed himself to the rebellion. When Essex arrived in Munster Lacy again tried to submit but Norris advised against it, saying he would shortly 'fetch him in by the ears.'<sup>37</sup>

Thornton, as vice-President, Provost Marshall and right-hand man to Norris, accompanied him in all his travels during this turbulent period while they awaited the arrival of massive manpower from England. Norris had only 240 soldiers available to him in all of Munster when the rebellion broke out. He gathered his small force together at Kilmallock, plus the forces of the Irish Lords who had decided to stay loyal to the Crown. When Norris was advised that these Irish forces might, in battle, defect to their rebel friends, should the outcome be in any doubt, he wisely decided not to put them to the test and leaving a garrison force of some 100 foot to defend Kilmallock he headed for the safety of Cork, stopping off at Mallow to leave a smaller force there to guard his own newly constructed castle.<sup>38</sup> It was imperative for him to be at Cork when reinforcements arrived there or else some other officer would undoubtedly use the force for something other than the relief of Kilmallock.

Early in December a force of 2000 foot arrived in Munster, 400 put in at Waterford and were immediately commandeered by the Earl of Ormond for the defence of his Palatinate. 1000 made it into Cork harbour where Norris and Thornton eagerly awaited them and the remaining 600 landed at Kinsale.<sup>39</sup> On the 13 Dec. Norris wrote to England saying he was setting out from Cork to relieve Kilmallock which had been under siege for the past 20 days, he also wanted Thornton's horsemen to

<sup>32</sup> [Capt. Warham] St. Leger to [Burghley] (*Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1596-97 p. 198).

<sup>33</sup> R. Lane, 'Muster List of the Army in Ireland for April 1598' (National Library Ireland, MS 2559).

<sup>34</sup> Memoranda concerning certain rebels of Munster, 12 October 1598 (*Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1598-99 p. 286).

<sup>35</sup> de Burca, *Irish Fiants*, Fiant Eliz. 4369 p. 615.

<sup>36</sup> *Cal. S.P. Ire.* 1598-9, p. 286.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287.

<sup>38</sup> 'A discourse delivered by William Farmer touching the proceedings of the rebels of Munster' (*Ibid.*, p. 316).

<sup>39</sup> Sir Thomas Norreys to the Privy Council, 9 December 1598 (*Ibid.*, p. 399).



be increased to 25 in number as it was intended to leave him in command at Kilmallock.<sup>40</sup> However the next mention of the horsemen gives them as still being only 12 in number.

Kilmallock, before Norris arrived, was being defended by the Undertaker Hugh Cuffe, who had fled there with his wife, his only son and 2 daughters and some 80 able bodied settlers from his seignory in north Co. Cork.<sup>41</sup> Hugh was one of the Council of Munster, so command of the garrison of 180 foot fell to him although there were other army captains there. Thornton as Provost Marshall and Council member would be automatically entitled to assume command if he were resident in the town. Cuffe's son died in the defence of Kilmallock and his two daughters Elizabeth and Dorathea became his co-heirs. Late in the following year, 1599, Cuffe allowed Elizabeth to marry Captain Francis Slingsby who had been placed in garrison in Kilmallock by the Earl of Essex.

The next mention of Thornton is in April 1599 when we find him delivering letters from Tom Norris to the new Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, the Earl of Essex, at Dublin<sup>42</sup>. He was well rewarded by the Earl of Essex who not only knighted him but also appointed him Governor of Kilmallock which should have paid him 6s. per day.<sup>43</sup> Instructions were also given that he should be made Captain of the next band of 100 Foot available. By October that year it became apparent that the Paymaster was refusing to pay him, quoting a lack of written instructions from an official source.<sup>44</sup> Indeed Cecil in London, wrote 'a needless office'<sup>45</sup> when presented with a list of new officers that Essex had appointed during his highhanded and extravagant sojourn in Ireland. Essex was well on his way to the execution block at this time. Thornton had to wait nearly two years before he got command of his own band of 100 Foot, from the new President of Munster, Sir George Carew.<sup>46</sup> Captaincy of a 100 Foot company paid 4s. per day, 150 Foot paid 6s. and a 200 man company paid 8s. A disappointed George wrote to Sir Robert Cecil citing his '30 years experience in Ireland, poor wife and many poor children, no reward and looking for a company'.<sup>47</sup>

Sir Thomas Norris died on the 21 August 1599<sup>48</sup> and with the death of the President went Thornton's post of Vice-President and his position in the pecking order of the world in which he existed. For instance, one day in October, 'being at dinner and in council, all seated, Chief Justice Saxey entered but taking offence at George not giving up his place at table, stormed out'.<sup>49</sup>

With Essex, the commander-in-chief, back in England, Norris, the commander in Munster dead and winter coming on it suited both sides to declare a truce for the remainder of 1599. At the end of December, Thornton wrote to the Earl of Ormond, telling of a meeting he had on the 19 December with James FitzThomas, the "Sugane Earl" at which it was agreed to continue the truce for the time being. He also reported the loss of the Castle of Lough Gur which now had Piers Lacy as constable.<sup>50</sup> Thornton never missed an opportunity to show Piers in a bad light as he had designs on his lands.

On the death of Tom Norris, Essex had appointed Warham St.Leger and Sir Henry Power joint

<sup>40</sup> Sir Thomas Norreys to Sir Robert Cecil, 13 December 1598 (*Ibid.*, p. 405).

<sup>41</sup> 'Portions of some manuscript history of the time, Oct. 1598' (*Ibid.*, p. 325).

<sup>42</sup> Earl of Essex to Sir Robert Cecil. 28 April 1599 (*Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1599-1600 p. 20).

<sup>43</sup> Commissioners of Munster to the Earl of Essex 12 October 1599 (*Ibid.*, p. 186).

<sup>44</sup> Sir George Thornton to the Earl of Essex. 15 October 1599 (*Ibid.*, p. 189).

<sup>45</sup> A Book of ConcordatMS. Mar-Nov. 1599; endorsed by Sir Robert Cecil, 10 Oct. 1599 (*Ibid.*, p. 239).

<sup>46</sup> Privy Council to Lord Deputy Mountjoy. 13 March 1601 (*Cal. Carew MSS*, vol. 4, p. 32).

<sup>47</sup> Sir George Thornton to Sir Robert Cecil 1 Nov. 1599 (*Ca. S.P. Ire.*, 1599-1600 p. 225).

<sup>48</sup> Capt. Francis Kingsmill to Sir Robert Cecil 22 August 1599 (*Ibid.*, p. 128).

<sup>49</sup> Sir Warham SentLeger and William, Bishop of Cork and Ross to the Earl of Essex 1 Nov. 1599 (*Ibid.*, p. 224).

<sup>50</sup> Sir George Thornton to the Earl of Ormond 30 Dec. 1599 (*Cal. S.P. Ire.* 1599-1600 p. 416).



commissioners to govern Munster until a new man should be appointed to the post.<sup>51</sup> Early the following year St. Leger was killed in an encounter with the rebels and Sir George immediately wrote asking that he might have Sir Warham's place until the arrival of Sir George Carew, the new Lord President.<sup>52</sup> His request must have been ignored. However Carew did use him by sending him to parley with the White Knight to try and get him to submit.<sup>53</sup> George was successful: the White Knight surrendered on 23 May 1600 at Kilmallock.

Carew's campaign in Munster was successful, an uneasy peace reigned after each rebel leader surrendered when his own territory and living became the front line in the fighting that swept across Munster in the summer of 1600. Thornton, still the Provost Marshall was back doing what he had done 20 years earlier, hunting and hounding the fugitive Geraldine leader, until his eventual capture. George was in command at Kilmallock when he received word that the White Knight had captured the Sugán Earl and was holding him prisoner in Kilbeheny Castle. Fearing an attempt to rescue the prisoner would be organised, he immediately set out for Kilbeheny with the largest company of soldiers at his disposal, this was Carew's own company of 200 footmen under their Lt., Captain Francis Slingsby. Thornton and Slingsby escorted the prisoner directly to Cork city where he was lodged under close guard at Shandon Castle, Carew's residence in Cork.

On the 13 March 1601 The Privy Council in London wrote to the Lord Deputy Mountjoy:

Whereas Sir George Thornton Knt., Provost Marshall of Munster hath no entertainment but of 12 Horse that are allowed to his place, being a gentleman that had followed long time the services of the wars in that realm and was by the late Earl of Essex appointed one of the Commissioners for that province, wherein he discharged the trust reposed in him with great care and endeavour to Her Majesties good liking, Her Majesty is pleased that he shall have the next company of foot in Munster.<sup>54</sup>

He received his 100 man foot company on 4 September 1601. His men were lucky enough to be left in garrison at Kilmallock while the siege of Kinsale was in progress.<sup>55</sup> It is not clear if he was present at the siege of Kinsale but he was definitely at the siege of Dunboy where as Provost-Marshall it fell to his lot to hang all fifty-eight prisoners who had surrendered to Carew. This was done by bringing a long beam of floor timber from the castle, drilling enough holes at an angle into it, hammering pegs into each hole, then fixing it upright into a hole in the ground and then looping all fifty-eight hanging ropes onto the pegs sticking out of the beam. All the men were taken up a ladder, had nooses fitted around their necks then, having been tumbled off the ladder, were left to strangle slowly to death.<sup>56</sup>

On 27 June 1602 Sir George and the Earl of Thomond embarked on the Queen's Pinnace, 'The Merlin', for England, from Bantry bay.<sup>57</sup> They were given a warm reception at the royal court as a reward for their role in the war.<sup>58</sup> This was probably the only time that Thornton came face to face with his royal mistress. On his way back to Ireland, from the port of Bristol, in Sept. 1602, he was in charge of conducting some 900 new troops to Munster.

<sup>51</sup> Essex's report on how he left the government of Ireland when he departed. Sept. 1599 (*ibid.*, p.160).

<sup>52</sup> The Commissioners of Munster to the Lords Chief Justices Loftus and Carey 5 March 1600 (*Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1600 p.36).

<sup>53</sup> S.O'Grady, (ed.), *Pacata Hibernia*. (London 1896) vol. 1. pp 38, 52.

<sup>54</sup> Privy Council to Lord Deputy Mountjoy. 13 March 1601 (*Calendar of the Carew Manuscripts 1601-1603*, p. 32).

<sup>55</sup> Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary* (London 1617, reprint Glasgow 1907/8).

<sup>56</sup> C. L. Falkiner, (ed.), 'William Farmers Chronicles of Ireland from 1594 to 1613' *English Historical Review*, xxii(1907).

<sup>57</sup> *Pacata Hibernia*, vol. 2, p. 210.

<sup>58</sup> Sir Robert Cecil to Sir George Carew, 7 Aug. 1602 (*Cal. Carew MSS* vol. 4. p. 295).



Early in 1603 Sir George and Sir Charles Wilmot were appointed joint commissioners for the government of Munster while the Lord President was absent in England.<sup>59</sup> This appointment represented the apex of Thornton's career. Wilmot was absent in Kerry on 11 April when word arrived from the Lord Deputy ordering the proclamation of the new King, James I, in the city of Cork. Thornton immediately summoned the Mayor to join in the proclamation but the Mayor replied by asking for some time so that he could confer with his brethren. This was seen as an insult to the King by George and the council members with him. Hot words were spoken and the Mayor departed to find his officials. George followed him and after pacing the street for some time sent in to the Mayor to know their decision. They answered that they needed another hour. When the hour was past he sent in again but was told he would have to now wait until the next day. He then replied that he would make the proclamation alone but the Mayor forbade it claiming that Thornton had no authority within their Liberties. After losing two days he finally proclaimed the King himself outside the City and the Mayor, later the same day, proclaimed King James within the city.

In a letter on 26 Dec. 1603 Thornton acknowledged that his request for the lands of Piers Lacy had not been successful, they having been given in a general grant to a Mr. Fullerton<sup>60</sup>. He was eventually compensated for this by a new grant consisting of some sixty small parcels of lands and rents scattered throughout Limerick, Cork, Kerry, Dublin, Wexford, Meath and Queen's counties.<sup>61</sup> He was dead by this stage and his heirs don't seem to have benefited from the grant. Whether it was rescinded or cancelled is not known. The lands in Co. Kerry, the Abbey and lands of Kilaha, which were in the hands of Captain Thomas Spring's remained with that family until they lost it to the Cromwellians.

The date of Thornton's death is not clear but as the king granted the office of Provost Marshall of Munster to Capt Ellice Jones on 4 November 1604<sup>62</sup> it is likely that he died sometime around early summer in that year. His son and heir Thomas was about 14 years old and became a ward of Mr. James Casey of Rathcannon<sup>63</sup> and was still a ward in 1611 when Casey produced his Undertakers share of the Militia, being two Horseman and five Footmen.<sup>64</sup> Casey was his brother-in-law as is clear from a petition he made to the Privy Council:

Thomas Thornton an infant, son of the late Sir George alleges by his petition that his father was seized, partly as an Undertaker and partly by purchase, of certain lands in Munster, and that on his fathers decease, the custody of the said infant was granted to his brother-in-law, James Casey. That now advantage is taken of his infancy by one James Ware and others, pleading the benefit of the Collage of Dublin, to withhold from him part of the rents of the said lands. Their Lordships direct that the infant shall be kept in possession of all his rents and other advantages.<sup>65</sup>

Thomas is mentioned a number of times in the state papers as Thomas Thornton of Ballygrennan, Esq., once even as Thomas Trenton, which is obviously a clerical error<sup>66</sup>. This happened in July 1610

<sup>59</sup> Sir Charles Wilmot to Sir George Carew, 26 March 1603 (*Cal. S.P. Ire.* 1603-06, p. 4).

<sup>60</sup> Sir George Thornton to Sir Robert Cecil 26 Dec. 1603 (*Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1603-06 p. 116).

<sup>61</sup> *Calendar of the Irish Patent Rolls of James I* (Facsimile edn., I.M.C., Dublin 196) p. 70, xxvii.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40, vii.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98, xiv.

<sup>64</sup> An Abstract of the Undertakers of Munster etc (*Cal. Carew MSS 1603-24* pp 121, 253).

<sup>65</sup> Privy Council to the Lord Deputy and Council (*Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1608-10, p. 487).

<sup>66</sup> *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1608-10, cf pp 493 and 494.



and Thomas is still definitely a ward. Yet slightly later that year the Thornton lands were re-granted by King James to Thomas indicating that he had reached adulthood.<sup>67</sup>

In the inquisition into the progress of the plantation of Munster in the year 1622 there is the following:

The Seignory of Bally-Ruston alias Downeman, containing 1,500 English acres, granted to Sir George Thornton. For buildings there was a fair castle, as a dwelling house for the principal Undertaker, built by Sir George Thornton, at Balligrenan. There is planted no freeholders, copyholders or any other English tenants.<sup>68</sup>

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of March 1626, Philip Percival was granted the Wardship of George Thornton, son and heir of Thomas Thornton, of Downemanie, Co. Limerick.<sup>69</sup> In 1627 Licence of marriage was granted to Aney Ny Mahon, late wife of John Moore and afterwards wife of Thornton of Downemanie, Co. Limerick.<sup>70</sup> George was then only one year old. George Thornton's Transplanters Certificate,<sup>71</sup> 1653 show: 'George Thornton age 28, married to Catherine, both of Dunnaman and their young children, Daniel, Murtagh, Thomas, Margaret, Martha, Grace, and Joh.'<sup>72</sup> As a ward of Percival he must have been brought up as a Protestant yet he was transplanted as an Irish Papist by the Cromwellions.

Sir George Thornton and Elinor Lacy had a number of daughters.<sup>73</sup> Their daughter Grace married John Bourke of Brittas, who was executed in 1607, at which time Grace was pregnant with their ninth child. John was also Piers Lacy's step-brother.<sup>74</sup> William Lacy, the father of Piers, was killed-in-action against the rebels in 1572. His widow Honora remarried in 1573 Richard Bourke of Brittas and they were the parents of John Bourke their eventual heir who was born circa 1574. John and Grace must have married in the mid-1590s when Grace was in her early teens and John was about 21 years old. She married, secondly, Maurice Hurley of Knocklong but had no further children as is clear from the funeral entry of Maurice, who died in 1632. He had been married to Grania Hogan who was the mother of all his children.

Betham's extracts from the Transplanters Certificates give a Grace Thornton aged 71 (born 1582) married to an unidentified Hurley of Miskenet, probably Liskennet in Ballingarry parish. The Civil Survey records a Grace Hurley, widow, of Kilmallock, owning one of the largest stone houses then in the town. It had 4 lower rooms, 4 middle rooms and 4 upper rooms. The house stood on Water St. and had the town wall at the end of the back garden.<sup>75</sup> All these references to Grace Thornton Bourke Hurley indicate that she was born in 1582, was already married by the summer of 1601 and was pregnant with her ninth child in 1607 and a widow at the age of 25. She remarried some time after to Sir Maurice Hurley of Knocklong who died in 1632 and she lived, at least until 1653, when her Transplanters Certificate was written.

<sup>67</sup> King to Lord Deputy and Council 9 September 1610 (*Calender of the Irish Patent Rolls of James I*, p.188); also *Cal .S.P. Ire.*, 1608-10 p. 494.

<sup>68</sup> R Dunlop. 'An Unpublished Survey of the Plantation of Munster in 1622' *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol. 54 (1924) p. 133.

<sup>69</sup> *Calender of the Patent and Close Rolls of Chancery in Ireland of the reign of Charles I* p. 85, 14 March 1625.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p.248, 22 Feb. 1627.

<sup>71</sup> Betham MSS (Genealogical Office MS 219 pp 270-314.

<sup>72</sup> O'Hart gives this name Joh. as John but contemporary usage gives all male names first, followed by all the females therefore Joh. is short for Johanna.

<sup>73</sup> J. O'Hart *The Irish and Anglo-Irish Landed Gentry when Cromwell came to Ireland* (Shannon 1969) pp. 28, 144, 169

<sup>74</sup> Barry, 'Bourkes of Clanwilliam', p. 198, note 7.

<sup>75</sup> The site can be identified using the Civil Survey information on Kilmallock town.



George Thornton's daughter Margaret married first, Donough O'Brien only son and heir of Brian Duff O'Brien of Carrigogunnell. Donough succeeded his father in 1615 and died in 1632. Donough was succeeded by a cousin, so they must have had no surviving children. She married secondly, Edmond Bourke, Lord Castleconnel, who died in 1638.

Another daughter Martha married Pierce Purcell of Croagh. He married again so Martha must have died young. Pierce died in 1636. Their first son James married Frances, the widow of Ensign Thomas Blaney, and the youngest daughter of Sir Francis Berkeley and Jane Loftus of Askeaton, a fellow undertaker and soldier with Sir George. James died in 1637 and Frances's two daughters by Blaney succeeded to a large section of the Croagh estates. Their mother's jointure was confirmed to her by the Cromwellians. One of the girls married a Walcott and the land was still in Walcott possession until John Walcott stipulated in his will in 1738 that whoever succeeded him would have to take the Walcott name.<sup>76</sup> Both Blaneys were alive in 1631 when Thomas sold Frances's share of Askeaton to the Earl of Cork.

Ellice Thornton married Paul Arundell and they settled in Maine, part of the Courtney estate about Newcastle West Co. Limerick. Paul died in 1636 leaving six sons and five daughters. Paul was one of the captains in garrison at Kilmallock in 1600 under the command of Sir George. Another daughter must have been the wife of James Casey of Rathcannon as can be seen above where James is referred to as Thomas Thornton's brother-in-law.

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<sup>76</sup> 'Limerick Wills' from *Dublin Abstracts of Wills*, vol. 1, 1708 -1745( Reprint. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, Co., Inc. 1996).