



EYE-WITNESS AND CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNTS:

INTRODUCTION BY LARRY WALSH

The events of 1689-91 in Ireland have had a lasting effect on folk memory, and are viewed still with a great degree of partisanship, even among professional historians. There are strong traditions connected with persons, places, events and objects of the time, the historical authenticity of all of which it is difficult to verify or contradict. The presentation of a selection of eye-witness and contemporary accounts of the siege will enable readers to make up their own minds on the importance to be attached to each, and to judge the work of later historians, who have used the same raw material. In addition, the original accounts provide details of great interest to the local historian which may be of little importance in the national and international context.

The nature of the evidence is highly variable, including letters written on the spot, valuable for their immediacy and detail; recollections of old soldiers, written many years later, usually from memory; diaries, which may or may not have been intended for publication; printed and manuscript newsletters, with their own bias; propaganda tracts; and narratives written soon afterwards from memory, from daily journals or from the testimony of eye-witnesses.

On the Williamite side, one is left with a vivid impression of the varied reactions to the failure of the siege, and of the rivalry, even animosity, between the English and other nationalities, whose casualties are generally glossed over as unimportant in the English accounts. The shame of failure and its reflection on William as a commander must have been strongly felt, particularly as Cork and Kinsale were efficiently captured shortly afterwards. The propaganda machine went into operation immediately to lay sole blame on the weather, most pointedly stated in the diary of William's Dutch private secretary, Heugens, while the letters, later memoirs and some printed accounts leave no doubt that the shortage of ammunition as a result of Sarsfield's raid was the principal cause, with the weather undoubtedly a contributing factor. William admitted this in his letter of 12 September to Waldeck, referring to the raid as 'the little misfortune which may not be written', a precaution against capture by the enemy of the correspondence. Poor judgement by William on 27 August was an additional factor.

For military detail, Würtemberg's letters and journal are best. As commander of the Danish force on hire, he is objective and critical, careful of the reputation of his force, without personal

animosity towards the Irish, anxious to get the job finished and precise and meticulous in quantifying casualties and arms. He is the only one, in the face of the carnage and destruction at Ballyneely, that notes and seems aware of the significance for the soldier of the loss of the three regimental standards there. His difficulty in understanding orders, given in English and French, after the loss of his adjutant-general, emphasises the international make-up of the army. Also of note is his exasperation with the failure to end the war after the siege by granting acceptable terms to the Irish, who, by majority, were ready to submit on terms which were eventually granted the following year under the treaty of Limerick. The impression is given that if he had been in command of the siege, the city would have been taken.

Story's account forms the backbone of later English histories of the war, and may be regarded, in retrospect, as the official Williamite version. He is, in general, fair, criticising the conduct of his own side in plundering, particularly after the amnesty offered to Irish commoners by the Finglas declaration of 7 July, and criticising military decisions, while acknowledging that he is no soldier. He gives the shortage of ammunition ('wasted' on the 27 August), as well as the weather, as the reason for raising the siege, and ruefully describes the wagons being hauled off by oxen due to the loss of the horses to Sarsfield. By the time of publication in April, 1691, the need for the propaganda version may have faded sufficiently to allow this to pass the censor. His observation on the women of Limerick in action at the breach has been taken up with pride by nationalist historians, and with admiration by English historians — its mention by the Danish envoy, Foulereuse, shows that it was widely believed in the Williamite camp, but no Jacobite eye-witness mentions it. The fact that it was omitted from the abridged edition, included with his account of the 1691 campaign, is of no relevance — the abridged edition omits all asides and minor details, and was intended for those reading the 1691 account who did not already have the first part. His observation that those looking on have a better picture than those in the action is well illustrated by Robert Parker's account — he followed the retreating Irish up the countescarp towards St. John's Gate, and was totally unaware of the entry of the breach.

The letters from the camp are of primary importance. Intended for information only and not for publication, they have a frankness and immediacy which makes one feel one is there — Southwell on 22 August, writing in his tent,

straight away notes the great shout outside as the south-east corner tower collapsed on the Black Battery; Foulereuse on the 29th, writing at 10 p.m., notes down that Würtemberg has just sent word to him that the decision to raise the siege has been made; Campbell continually complaining about the scarcity, quality and price of food and drink in the camp, and his initialling, rather than signing, the letter in which he has just let out the secret that the siege is over. Southwell's correspondence is the principal source for the government accounts in the *London Gazette*. Mullenau's diary, formerly accepted as the account of an eye-witness, is now shown to be one of the many propaganda tracts, written, as Story notes, by people who never saw Ireland, designed to counter the failure by promoting William to the company of the greatest generals since Alexander and Caesar, and based largely on the *London Gazette*. The Dutch pamphlet, *Ireland Rescued and Delivered*, too, is again based on the *Gazette*.

On the Jacobite side, the most detailed account (which was not available to Maurice Lenihan) is that of John Stevens, who deliberately related only what he saw himself. The account of the assault on the breach by Boisseleau adds important detail, and the best description of the walls in 1690 is given by the French engineer, La Vigne. It is unfortunate that the plan accompanying his letter became separated from it in the archive. We do not know the movements of Col. Charles O'Kelly at the time, but from his account it seems that he may have been in Limerick before the arrival of the Williamites, and was probably at Galway afterwards — he provides Jacobite confirmation of Sarsfield's presence there in the week preceding the assault on the breach. If Nicholas Plunket of Dunsoghly was the author of *A Jacobite Narrative*, it is second-hand — he was in France for the duration of the war. Both of these accounts are more valuable for the politics of the Jacobite dissensions than for military detail. The most charitable thing that can be said of the Duke of Berwick's memoirs in relation to the siege is that his memory was at fault.

The accounts given here are a fair cross-section of the material available. In time, they could be added to — manuscript commission reports are mainly summaries, and in some cases, where the collection described is large and previously unsorted, they are merely lists. A number of near-contemporary histories are occasionally quoted as if they provide additional eye-witness evidence. Notably, Paul Rapin de Thoyras, a Huguenot in William's army who was

wounded at Limerick, is quoted by Lenihan, ps. 244-245, as giving 'a most favourable picture of the siege ... Story, too, admits the truth'. In fact, Rapin's 15-volume *History of England* stopped short of the Jacobite-Williamite war. The 2-volume continuation was written by his translator, Rev. Nicholas Tindal, the account of the siege being taken from Story. William Harris, author of the *Life of William III*, was four years old at the time of the siege (his father, from Mountmellick, Co. Laois, was a lieutenant in the Williamite militia during the war). His text on the siege is taken from printed accounts, again principally Story's, although he does give a reason, not seen in the contemporary accounts given here, for the order on August 27 to take and hold the counterscarp, rather than to storm the breach: *On the 26th, the engineers having assured the king that a sufficient breach was made and could not be enlarged for want of bullets, he resolved to take the town by mines, and with that in view, commanded the covered way or counterscarp (which here was almost the same with the ditch) and two towers on each side the breach to be attacked the next day, and that the men should advance no further, but secure themselves there.* In other words, having been urged by some officers to postpone an assault on the town until the breach was

widened (Württemberg specifying that it be wide enough to allow 16 men to enter abreast), he hoped to accomplish this by undermining the wall. The author of Dalrymple's *Memoirs of Great Britain and Ireland*, much footnoted in Lenihan, was Sir John Dalrymple, fourth baronet of Cranston, Scotland, who was born in 1726. His account of the siege is, again, a summary of Story's.

A word of caution – the majority of the accounts are taken from edited and printed sources. In any process of transcription errors can occur, but without examining the original manuscript, one is not sure whether or not an apparent contradiction is due to a proof-reading/transcription error. As an example, the Williamite army camped at Singland on 9 August, and at 6 o'clock that evening Southwell sent a summons to Boisseleau, and he replied. Inexplicably, in the text given in the Historical Manuscripts Commission's *Finch MSS.*, II, (1922) of Southwell's copy of each document sent to secretary of state Nottingham at Whitehall, the summons is dated 7 August and the reply 8/18 August, although the covering letter states that the notes were exchanged on the 9th. In Southwell's letterbook – his copy of outgoing correspondence – (British Library Add. Ms. 38146, ps. 404-405), itself a transcript, the

summons is correctly dated the 9th, while the reply remains dated the previous day, 8/18th. Boisseleau's account of the siege (Sheila Mulloy, this *Journal*) dates the exchange the 9/19th. Without examining the original of the reply, one wonders was Boisseleau so busy at the time that he did not know what day it was!

Throughout the texts, spelling is modernised unless doubtful, and, in the case of manuscript commission reports, summary and quotation are undifferentiated. Occasionally, for effect or to illustrate how an Irish name sounded to an English ear, the given spelling is retained in quotation marks. The spelling of personal names varies greatly from text to text, even between modern works by the same author. Where possible, the spellings have been standardised to those given in J.G. Simms *Jacobite Ireland*, 1685-91 (London, 1969). The placename Sallywood, Co. Tipperary, where William's army camped on its way to Limerick, does not now exist as a town or townland name. It is marked on A.H. Jalliot's map of Ireland, c1693, after N. Sanson (died 1667) as 'Sallowood', two miles ENE of Cullen, 3 1/4 miles NW of Tipperary, on the then existing road from Golden to Cullen and Limerick. Rowland Davies' journal gives it as 'Sola Wood More'. It is probably the modern Monard in the parish of Solloghmore.

A NOTE ON THE CALENDAR

Problems exist in dating events in the later 17th century due to a lack of uniformity in reckoning time both within the three kingdoms of Britain, Scotland and Ireland, and between them and many Continental countries. Only on the 7-day week, with the same church-prescribed day of rest, was there complete uniformity.

There was serious divergence in reckoning days of the month because two different calendars were in widespread use. In England, Scotland and Ireland, as well as in all Orthodox and some Protestant countries of Europe, the calendar used was the old Julian calendar, instituted by Julius Caesar in 45 B.C., while all Catholic and a few Protestant countries had adopted the more accurate Gregorian calendar introduced by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582. The only difference between the two was in the provision made for leap-year, which in the Julian calendar came every fourth year, and in the Gregorian every fourth year with the exception of most of the even centuries. By the 17th century, the divergence produced amounted to 10 days, and in the 18th century became 11 days, so that what a British or Irish person would call 9 August was 19 August in France before 1700, and 20 August after 1700. To prevent confusion, the practice was sometimes adopted of distinguishing dates

as Old Style (O.S.) and New Style (N.S.), or of writing them in the form 9/19 August. Old Style is used here.

Regarding the year, in England and Ireland the official calendar year began, not on 1 January, but on Lady Day, the feast of the Annunciation, 25 March. The official financial year still begins on Lady Day, which, with the reform of the calendar in 1752, fell 11 days later, 5 April, and now falls 12 days later, on 6 April, instead of 25 March. In Scotland and generally on the Continent, the year began on 1 January, and this method was coming into favour in England among private individuals. So, what to an English or Irish official was 4 February, 1690, was in Scotland 4 February, 1691, and in France was 14 February, 1691. In dealing with English or Irish documents, it is often difficult to say with certainty to what year dates in January, February or March really belong, unless the year is given in the form 1690/1. It is usual practice in modern publications to correct dates to 1 January new year, rather than 25 March.

SOURCE:

A. Browning (ed.), *English Historical Documents*, viii, appendix 1 (London, 1953)

CALENDAR 1690

	JULY					AUGUST					SEPTEMBER					OCTOBER							
Su		6 <small>16</small>	13 <small>23</small>	20 <small>30</small>	27 <small>6 Au</small>		3 <small>13</small>	10 <small>20</small>	17 <small>27</small>	24 <small>3 Se</small>	31 <small>10 Se</small>			7 <small>17</small>	14 <small>24</small>	21 <small>1 Oc</small>	28 <small>8 Oc</small>			5 <small>15</small>	12 <small>22</small>	19 <small>29</small>	26 <small>5 No</small>
M		7 <small>17</small>	14 <small>24</small>	21 <small>31</small>	28 <small>7 Au</small>		4 <small>14</small>	11 <small>21</small>	18 <small>28</small>	25 <small>4 Se</small>	**		1 <small>11</small>	8 <small>18</small>	15 <small>25</small>	22 <small>2 Oc</small>	29 <small>9 Oc</small>			6 <small>16</small>	13 <small>23</small>	20 <small>30</small>	27 <small>6 No</small>
Tu	1 <small>11</small>	8 <small>18</small>	15 <small>25</small>	22 <small>1 Au</small>	29 <small>8 Au</small>		5 <small>15</small>	12 <small>22</small>	19 <small>29</small>	26 <small>5 Se</small>	**		2 <small>12</small>	9 <small>19</small>	16 <small>26</small>	23 <small>3 Oc</small>	30 <small>10 Oc</small>			7 <small>17</small>	14 <small>24</small>	21 <small>31</small>	28 <small>7 No</small>
W	2 <small>12</small>	9 <small>19</small>	16 <small>26</small>	23 <small>2 Au</small>	30 <small>9 Au</small>		6 <small>16</small>	13 <small>23</small>	20 <small>30</small>	27 <small>6 Se</small>	**		3 <small>13</small>	10 <small>20</small>	17 <small>27</small>	24 <small>4 Oc</small>	**		1 <small>11</small>	8 <small>18</small>	15 <small>25</small>	22 <small>1 No</small>	29 <small>8 No</small>
Th	3 <small>13</small>	10 <small>20</small>	17 <small>27</small>	24 <small>3 Au</small>	31 <small>10 Au</small>		7 <small>17</small>	14 <small>24</small>	21 <small>31</small>	28 <small>7 Se</small>	**		4 <small>14</small>	11 <small>21</small>	18 <small>28</small>	25 <small>5 Oc</small>	**		2 <small>12</small>	9 <small>19</small>	16 <small>26</small>	23 <small>2 No</small>	30 <small>9 No</small>
F	4 <small>14</small>	11 <small>21</small>	18 <small>28</small>	25 <small>4 Au</small>	**	1 <small>11</small>	8 <small>18</small>	15 <small>25</small>	22 <small>1 Se</small>	29 <small>8 Se</small>	**		5 <small>15</small>	12 <small>22</small>	19 <small>29</small>	26 <small>6 Oc</small>	**		3 <small>13</small>	10 <small>20</small>	17 <small>27</small>	24 <small>3 No</small>	31 <small>10 No</small>
Sa	5 <small>15</small>	12 <small>22</small>	19 <small>29</small>	26 <small>5 Au</small>	**	2 <small>12</small>	9 <small>19</small>	16 <small>26</small>	23 <small>2 Se</small>	30 <small>9 Se</small>	**		6 <small>16</small>	13 <small>23</small>	20 <small>30</small>	27 <small>7 Oc</small>	**		4 <small>14</small>	11 <small>21</small>	18 <small>28</small>	25 <small>4 No</small>	**