



A prospect of Limerick by Thomas Phillips, 1685. National Library of Ireland.

REPORT ON THE FORTIFICATIONS OF LIMERICK, 1685

BY THOMAS PHILLIPS

INTRODUCTION

In 1685, Lord Dartmouth was directed by Charles II to produce rules, orders and directions for regulating the office of the ordnance in Ireland, together with exact surveys of the chief harbours, forts and fortifications in Ireland, and estimates of the charge for fortifying the most important of them, the work to be carried out by Thomas Phillips.

Phillips (1635?-1693) is first mentioned in a letter from James, Duke of York, appointing him master-gunner of the ship *Portsmouth* in 1661. In 1672, after passing examination by the master-gunner of England, he became one of the gunners of the Tower of London. In 1679-80, he was in the Channel Islands as military engineer, making maps and plans of bays, landing places, and existing and proposed fortifications. In 1683, he did the same for the Isle of Wight, and, in 1683-84, was on an expedition to demolish the defences at Tangier. In March, 1684, he was promoted to third royal engineer, and, in August, visited Portsmouth to continue fortifications there. On 23 December, 1685, he was made second royal engineer by James II, and remained in London at the board of ordnance, visiting places as required to

inspect and advise on the defences. His royal warrant was renewed by William and Mary, but he declined to accompany Schomberg to Ireland, and was dismissed from his offices. In 1690, he invented a new gun carriage, with which the guns of the ship *Royal Sovereign* were supplied, and, in September, he was Marlborough's engineer at the sieges of Cork and Kinsale. He was reinstated as second engineer on 8 May, 1691. In November, 1693, he was in charge of the bomb-vessels in the naval expedition against St. Malo, and, on the 19th, he himself took *Ye Infernal*, loaded with powder and carcasses, to the foot of the sea-wall and fired it, he escaping to his ship. The massive explosion shook the town like an earthquake, damaged hundreds of houses and brought down the sea-wall. Whether Phillips was hurt or became ill from anxiety or excitement is not known, but he died on the return voyage on 22 November, 1693.

The report was presented to James II on 24 March, 1686, and was referred to the Earl of Clarendon, Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, for his consideration and recommendations. As Clarendon was snubbed in June, 1686, by the appointment of Tyrconnell to the command of the army in Ireland, a

post traditionally held by the viceroy, and was effectively undermined from then, it is unlikely that he gave the report much consideration. The manuscript passed into the Ormond archives at Kilkenny Castle, and was published in *Historical Manuscripts Commission, Ormonde Mss*, ii, 1899.

The report listed Limerick among the six or seven places found capable of being fortified so as to be able to resist a considerable army, and recommended that, until other places could be fortified, Limerick and Dublin be made chief magazines, and that the trains of artillery, mortar pieces and stores for land service be brought to these two places.

Jacobite sources invariably describe Limerick's fortifications as weak, while Williamite sources, with the exception of the Danish envoy, Foulereuse, describe them as strong. Phillips' verdict, that of a professional in peacetime, supports Lauzun's reported remark that they could be brought down with roasted apples, to the extent even of recommending that Limerick Corporation be brought to book for their neglect of maintenance.

Sources: *Dictionary of National Biography; Kings in Conflict*, (Ulster Museum, 1990).