

# PENN'S EXPEDITION TO BONRATTY IN 1646

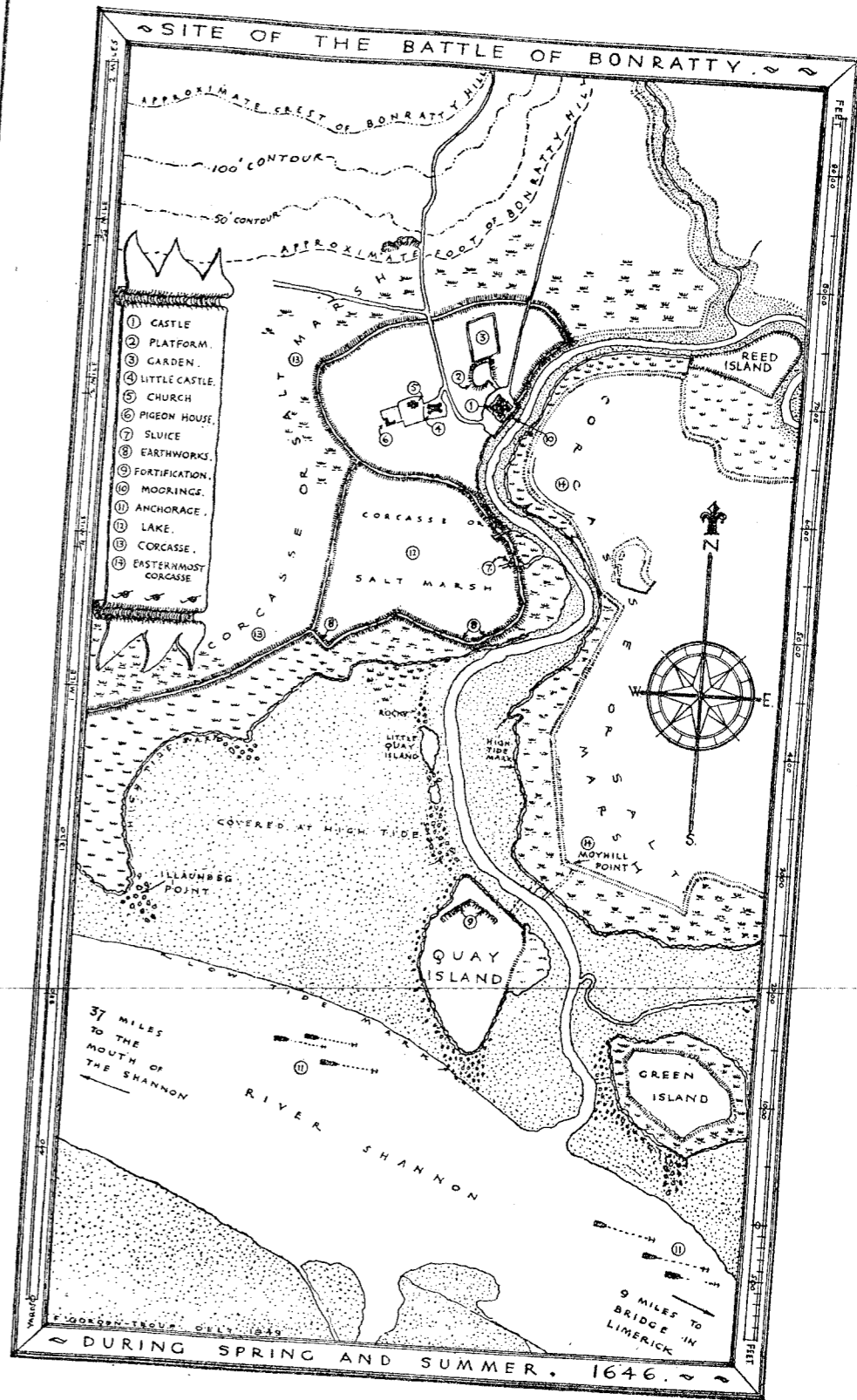
By J. R. Powell

THE collapse of the Royalist cause in England and particularly in South Wales enabled the Irish Guard, for the first time, to devote itself entirely to Irish waters.

In December 1645, Admiral Moulton had discussed at Bristol with Lord Inchiquin a plan whereby he should go 'with some strength of shipping for a design I should understand from Lord Broghill'.<sup>1</sup> This related to the Earl of Thomond, who had tried to remain neutral during the war in Ireland. As a Protestant he leant towards Ormonde, who, however, could give him no protection. The Kilkenny Confederation of Irish Catholics had decided to treat all neutrals as enemies. So to force Thomond to join them they ordered his tenants to pay him no rent, and they sequestered his estates for their own benefit. Thus his position became intolerable and he decided therefore to surrender his Castle of Bonratty, situated in County Clare on the river Orgarney, about a mile from its junction at right-angles with the Shannon, to the Parliament. To Moulton it seemed that this might give him a base from which his ships could dominate the Shannon and enable Parliament, if necessary, to operate in Central Ireland. Moreover he would be in a position to deal with the privateers who infested the Irish ports. As South Wales and its Royalists appeared to be subdued Moulton decided upon the operation.

He sailed on 24 January from the Angle for Cork, leaving Crowther, his vice-admiral in the Expedition, to watch South Wales. Penn, his rear-admiral, thanked his lucky stars as he loathed that particular station. Cork was reached next day, and on the 27th Moulton and Penn went in their pinnace to interview Broghill, the Vice-President of Munster. On the 30th Broghill and his chief officers, with many ladies and gentlemen, returned the call, dining on board the *Lion*, and then passing on to visit Penn, who 'made what provision I could for a banquet'.<sup>2</sup> On 21 February Penn received orders to command the intended expedition, though his own vessel the *Fellowship* was to remain as a guard-ship at Cork. He transferred his flag to a frigate, the *Peter*. On 1 March he and Moulton sailed with twelve ships for Dingle Couch, where they anchored on the 3rd. Penn and Colonel McAdam went ashore to find a spot for the troops to land. By 3 p.m. the

<sup>1</sup> Tanner MSS. 60. 567; McNeill, *The Tanner Letters*, p. 217, Stationery Office, Dublin.  
<sup>2</sup> Penn's *Life of Penn*, Vol. 1, p. 159.



soldiers had taken both town and Castle. The fleet then sailed on to the Vintry, and at night the seamen burned all the villages and houses round the Bay. Penn, who had been left at Dingle to destroy the Castle and bring away its guns, now rejoined the ships.<sup>1</sup>

On 8 March the fleet sailed for the Shannon. Next afternoon it anchored before Glyn Castle and two days later Penn and Moulton, with the *Peter*, *Trial*, *Increase*, *Roebuck*, *Antelope*, *Anne* and *Percy* and *Green* frigate, went up to Bonratty. On the 12th he landed 700 men on Quay Island, which lay in the mouth of the Orgarney river. When he and Moulton dined with Thomond they sounded him as to his joining them. The nobleman cautiously replied he would do what he could, though he feared Penn's force was not large enough to deal with the enemy.<sup>2</sup>

Moulton now received news of forces gathering at Waterford for transportation to England in Dunkirk ships, and of an army of 10,000 gathered at Kilkenny for the same purpose. 'This information I was unwilling to admit, but I know not how to credit it coming from an Irishman and a Papist.'<sup>3</sup> Moulton, a sturdy Englishman and a stout Protestant, could not believe that any such expedition could cross the sea to England in the face of Parliamentary sea-power. But he sailed for Waterford, accompanied by Penn for part of the way down the Shannon.

On 20 March Penn, after bidding farewell to Moulton, sailed up the Shannon for Bonratty. He made an ill-omened start for his expedition, for by bad luck he shipped an incompetent pilot who proceeded to run the vessel on the top of a concealed ridge of rocks, some 6 ft. high on the north side of the river. When the tide had gone down it was discovered that a piece of plank in the bilge had been beaten in two inches into the stranded ship. With the wind at W.S.W. in stormy gusty weather the ship began to strain, so that Penn every moment expected to see his vessel shatter herself to pieces. Two planks of the weather sides broke and split, and the trunnels started. But at 2 p.m. he was greatly relieved by the sight of Liston in the *Roebuck* coming up the river and anchoring by him. After strenuous efforts in which 60 tons of rock were removed they got the ship off at 6 p.m. Liston then personally piloted both vessels up to Bonratty.<sup>4</sup> To guard against such a mishap it was decided that, as there was only 12 ft. of water at low tide the great ships must not be endangered by riding near the shore. Hall in the *Antelope* was sent to ride in the Shannon about a mile towards Limerick to keep a keen watch for vessels and fireships, of which Penn had been warned, coming out from that town.<sup>5</sup> At Bonratty Penn viewed the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 160.

<sup>3</sup> Tanner MSS. 60. 567.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 162.

<sup>4</sup> Penn, *op. cit.* p. 165.

situation, and he and Colonel McAdam, who had taken command of the troops, busied themselves in planning the defences. The danger lay to the north, as the enemy had established their headquarters at Six Mile Bridge, three miles away.

An excellent description of the defences is found in the account written by Richard Bellings, secretary to the Catholic Confederation. It is accurate and careful. Bonratty Castle lay upon the Orgarney river, about a mile from its junction with the Shannon, at a point where the Orgarney makes a right-angled bend. To the east the ground was mostly marsh, covered by water at high tide. To the north, about 500 or 600 yards from the Castle was an earth ridge with a broad deep ditch without. Beyond the ditch there was an open space, some 360 ft. wide, which was terminated by a rocky limestone hill 100 ft. high. The ridge and ditch ran for 800 ft. to the west, when it turned south, passing the church, until it reached the marshy ground adjoining the Shannon and Orgarney rivers. This marshy ground was locally known as a *corcasse*, and was not, as Granville Penn, the author of Penn's life, supposed, a work for defending a gun. Here the defence consisted of a pool, whose waters were controlled by a dam connected with the Orgarney. Thus to the west and south there was a spacious plain upon which the garrison could graze their horses and cattle. On the east bank of the Orgarney there was another *corcasse* reaching from a point opposite Bonratty Castle down to Moyhill Point opposite Quay Island.

The space between Bonratty Castle and the ridge was fortified with earthworks, and half-way between the Castle and the ridge there was an earthen platform, consisting of the remains of the old Bailey. To the west of the platform stood a small castle, and beyond it a church, with a pigeon-house built on the south-west corner of the churchyard. These all stood on slightly rising ground, and were defended by the ridge and the ditch. It had been intended to fill this ditch with water from the Orgarney, but as it was a difficult bit of work it had not been accomplished.<sup>1</sup>

Penn and McAdam decided that the platform should be raised and floored so that four guns could be mounted upon it. On 1 April they determined to attack the Irish in their quarters at Six Mile Bridge, almost directly north of Bonratty. At 5 a.m. to their intense surprise 120 horse and 300 foot suddenly appeared with the object of firing some houses near Bonratty. They had set some alight when the alarm was given, and a party of 25 of the garrison's horse charged out upon them. A lucky shot wounded Captain McGragh, the leader of the attack. Panic at this disaster seized the Irish troops and horse and foot fled pell-mell. McAdam's men instantly

<sup>1</sup> Gilbert, *History of The Irish Confederation and the War in Ireland*, 1888, Vol. v, p. 20.

took up the pursuit, killed 80 of the foe and took 100 prisoners, among them the wounded McGragh. No Parliamentarian was even hurt. Elated by their early success Penn and McAdam set out with 50 horse, 600 foot and two drakes, a type of light field gun, and marched to Six Mile Bridge in the afternoon.

Here they not only drove the Irish out of their works but they also chased them for two miles. Thirty of the foe were killed, and five were captured, but the rest, owing to the rough and woody nature of the country, got away. Penn and McAdam returned to the town for the night, and in the morning they fired the houses and carried away 250 barrels of oatmeal. With 350 musketeers they marched to Smithtown and burned the stores there, and then returned to Bonratty 'with what lumber we had gotten'. McGragh and his lieutenant had died of their wounds and they were given honourable burial with three volleys of small shot.<sup>1</sup>

Penn now got to work upon the defences. Walls were pulled down to afford a field of fire, thatch was removed from the houses, and a platform made in the pigeon house for a great gun, while a breastwork was raised 'thwart the causeway at the corner of the garden wall'. Low Island, at the mouth of the river Fergus, some 7 miles down the Shannon, was selected as a base to keep the cattle gathered from the country round. To Penn's dismay and disgust, on 16 April, the Irish raided the place and carried away or killed all the sheep there. A party had come from Croneruaghan Island, 'half a musket-shot from the main, where the rebels have a strong ward in a very good Castle'. A hoy and a pinnace were sent to ride between the two islands.<sup>2</sup>

To make up for this misfortune a raiding party was sent out next day. It crossed the Orgarney to the east and, after sending back 200 cows and 280 sheep, ended up by summoning Ballinclay Castle. As it was too strong to attack without artillery support the raiding party, well-content, returned home.<sup>3</sup>

These operations seriously alarmed the Confederacy at Kilkenny, Complaints were reaching them of 'the inroads which the garrison of Bonratty daily made into the country'. In their view, 'Bonratty under McAdam, a stout officer, who immediately began to raise works to strengthen the Castle, that, by reason of the marshes by which it was environed, might in a short time be upon the matter impregnably fortified'.<sup>4</sup> The strength of the garrison, 800 foot and threescore horse, also caused them alarm. The place must be attacked. They gathered 3000 foot and horse from Leinster and placed them under the Earl of Muskery, with Lieut.-Colonel Purcell,

<sup>1</sup> Penn, *op. cit.* p. 167.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 176.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 176.

<sup>4</sup> Gilbert, *op. cit.* p. 14.

Major-General Stephenson, and Colonel Purcell, who commanded the horse, to aid him.<sup>1</sup> The Papal Nuncio undertook to provide the necessary money.

The safety of Low Island still worried Penn. On the 18th he consulted with McAdam about a plan he had in mind for cutting off part of the enemy at Rineana Point on the Mainland. He proposed to land troops at the Point to draw the Irish down there, and to hold them until McAdam, moving overland from Bonratty to take them in the rear, should signal his approach. Penn was then to retreat while McAdam advanced, so that the Irish would be hemmed in without any possibility of escape. Early on the 21st Penn, whose ship was riding in Beth Road, a little above the junction of the Shannon and Fergus rivers, landed three boats of well-armed seamen and four files of musketeers at 4 a.m. A party was sent out to discover the whereabouts of the enemy while the rest prepared selected spots to hold against the foe. Unfortunately a tremendous storm of wind and rain came on. The Irish not unnaturally preferred to remain in the shelter of their quarters, and the slow hours passed with no sign of McAdam. Hoping against hope Penn stood his ground for three hours past the appointed time. Already his luckless troops were soaked to the skin so, yielding to the inevitable, Penn burned some houses and boated his men, only for them to be soaked once more by the waves before they could get aboard. A party had been sent out by McAdam but, after killing 30 Irish and capturing 60 cows and 100 sheep, the severity of the weather drove them back to Bonratty.<sup>2</sup>

On 1 May Penn learned of preparations being made at Limerick to fire the ships near Bonratty, and Browne of the *Trial* was ordered to take all possible care to prevent this.<sup>3</sup> On the 6th news came that Cappah Castle, which lay about two miles north of Bonratty had been summoned by the Irish.<sup>4</sup> Castles and fortified houses had a fatal attraction for both sides in the civil war and garrisons were uselessly locked up in them. Garrisons had therefore been placed in Cappah and in Rossmonnahane, a mile south of Cappah. Both garrisons stood little chance of holding out as they could receive little or no help from Bonratty. They would have been far more useful in defending Bonratty itself.

As the news indicated that the Irish were approaching in full force a council-of-war was called on board the *Discovery*<sup>5</sup> for the next day. Orders were sent to the captains riding near Bonratty to send half their men ashore to Quay Island to build a fort in the north-west waterside to defend the ships lying off there. The men were to go aboard each night, and signals were arranged. If the enemy should attack the fleet in the daytime a flag was to

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 176.

<sup>2</sup> Penn, *op. cit.* pp. 171-3.

<sup>5</sup> She joined Penn on 30 April, commanded by Grigge.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 175.

be hoisted in the main-topmast shrouds of the *Trial*; if at night a gun was to be fired. If the land forces were attacked, or were in distress, by day or night, the great gun on the platform in the garden was to be fired.<sup>1</sup>

On 9 May Lord Thomond embarked in Grigge's ship, which had just arrived to go to Cork en route for England, where he had decided to live. And on the 13th Penn sailed from Beth Road for Bonratty. After inspecting the fort building on Quay Island he went ashore to consult with McAdam on the state of affairs. During their conversation heavy firing was heard from the north, which indicated an attack on Cappah Castle. Muskery had brought up his great guns to bombard the Castle. After 26 shots a breach was made, through which the Castle was stormed. The two files of musketeers, under Sergeant Morgan, a Welshman, who comprised the garrison, were compelled to surrender after a desperate defence, quarter being given them. Muskery at once pressed home his advantage. He marched straight upon Rossmonahane. Sergeant Morgan was sent in to arrange the surrender. 'What he did, being compelled, or how the matter was ordered, is not yet known; the Castle was delivered up without so much as a shot made.' Penn summed up his disgust thus: 'we believe the soldiers were hanged, as justly they deserve'.<sup>2</sup>

Penn had hold of the situation at once; he hastened on the building of the fort and obtained a promise from McAdam to continue in it the garrison of two files of musketeers. After impressing the need to complete the fort on Captains Brown and Dacre of the *Trial* and *Peter*, who were riding off Bonratty, Penn rejoined his ships in Beth Road. He came up again on the 28th with bread for the *Peter* and the *Green* frigate. These were small vessels of 80 and 30 tons, which drew little water. At 10 a.m. some Irish horse appeared up the hill and tried to draw out the garrison, 'having made an ambush of musketeers behind hedges'. McAdam had been expecting this attack in the previous evening but as it had not taken place he had gone to bed to get a little rest. He was speedily on the scene and sent out four files of musketeers, who were attacked 'by the rogues in the ambush'. The musketeers outflanked them and drove them from the hedges. Five or six companies of foot, with two troops of horse, then came down the hill and drove the musketeers back in their turn. McAdam sent out his horse, who took full advantage of the flat open space between the ridge and the hill to drive the Irish into their works. Muskery now opened fire into McAdam's works from a falcon and a demi-culverin, and McAdam replied and dismounted one of the guns. Desperate attempts were made to capture it but these were driven back. As it was low water Penn ordered the fort on Quay

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 176.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 179.

Island to be fully manned 'lest they should attempt anything (as was most likely at this time) against it'. McAdam wished to send two of the smaller ships to sea to secure provisions, but Penn objected on the ground that as the rebels 'only aim is at the Island, they could not be possibly spared from thence', and also because he did not feel sure that they would return 'having already had their hands (if not their hearts) full of this business'.<sup>1</sup> In view of this heavy attack it was decided to send two of the 'less useful vessels' for assistance; Smith in the *Anne and Percy* to Sligo to hasten Sir Charles Coote's march to Bonratty's relief, while Liston in the *Roebuck* was to go to Cork to ask for Broghill's aid. They were replaced by Winnal in the *Blessing* who had brought supplies and ammunition.<sup>2</sup>

By this time the Irish had established their camp behind the hill to the north. They had mastered much of the ground outside the ridge and ditch, which supplied them with an abundance of wood, which they needed for fascines and faggots. These were necessary to make their approaches, as the hill was too steep and stony for trenches to be dug and so fascines had to be used instead. On 22 May they had brought these within carbine shot of the defences, and were busily filling them with earth.<sup>3</sup> Penn and his boy were watching this proceeding from the outward work, when two shots were fired at them without effect. McAdam rode out to gain a view of the Irish strength, 'having lain so still as they have done'. He opened fire and a hot skirmish continued for two hours. The Irish brought down their cannon and heavy fire ensued. Towards the end of the fight McAdam determined to try and beat the foe out of their works and to take their guns. He asked for the assistance of Penn's seamen as 'being more skillful in drawing them away, or to unspike and break them'. Penn consented and on the 24th the sally was made, and the seamen and soldiers drove the foe out of their works with some loss, only to find the Irish had withdrawn their guns up the hill again. The raiding party were then driven back into their lines by a charge of the Irish horse.<sup>4</sup>

On the 29th McAdam sent for Penn. He was anxious, as provisions were beginning to run short, to send away the women and children. Penn agreed as he thought this should have been done long before. The refugees should be sent to Cork or Kinsale in the *Roebuck* and *Anne and Percy*. In the afternoon parties of horse and foot sallied out and for two hours skirmished with strong forces of the enemy. The great guns on both sides engaged heavily, and the Irish brought into action a new demi-culverin. All next day the fighting continued, and so heavy was the pressure that it was impossible to embark the refugees in the *Roebuck*. The *Anne and Percy* was so short of

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 181.

<sup>3</sup> Gilbert, *op. cit.* p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 181.

<sup>4</sup> Penn, *op. cit.* pp. 184-5.

provisions that the captain refused to carry extra passengers, and only next day were the unfortunate refugees able to get aboard.<sup>1</sup>

On 4 June the acute question of supplies was discussed. As some of the cattle had been captured it was decided to move them to Fennis Island, in the mouth of the Fergus instead of to Low Island, the original base. They were taken in the hoy.

The Irish resumed the attack and a vigorous cannonade was exchanged. Several shots were scored on the little castle without doing any harm.<sup>2</sup> But two guns, which had been sent from Limerick, had been placed in such a position as to shoot directly down the river which, as Penn noted with some concern, 'will much annoy us in our making to the Castle'. As a result Penn warned McAdam that he must apply for such ammunition as he needed in good time 'before the rebels blocked up the water passage to Bonratty, as was most probable they would'. Brown, of the *Trial*, now asked that his ship 'might ride against the pass, to intercept the rebels in their intended going over'.<sup>3</sup> This point was at the corcasse, probably near the dam, and would guard the passage to Quay Island and also up the river.

Bellings says it lay half an English mile below the Castle.<sup>4</sup> This spot was the key to Bonratty, though it was difficult to take and hold until the little castle had been captured. Quite early Penn had realized this but it was some considerable time before the Irish grasped the fact.

The besiegers strove to press forward their lines to the level ground outside the ditch, but the Parliamentary horse made such effective use of this cavalry terrain that the foe could make no progress. Constant sorties were made by the garrison but little harm was done, even though on several occasions the lower lines of fascines on the hill had been pulled up. These sallies were finally checked by a gun placed in the lower part of the Irish works. Yet the main object of the Irish attack, the carrying of the Castle and the mastering of the main works, had hardly been begun. Lord Muskery, 'seeing the party with him ready to fall into great distress, called on the officers and let them know, that unless some attempt were made to distract the besieged from being wholly intent upon that quarter, where they made their approaches, necessity would force them to rise with dishonour, the clamours of the soldiers being already very great, and the end they aimed at being in all appearance so far remote'.

Muskery's problems were connected with supply and pay, and he realized a prolonged siege was therefore out of the question, for it would be impossible to hold together an undisciplined force for any length of time. He had to force a decision without delay.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 187.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 190.

<sup>4</sup> Gilbert, *op. cit.* p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 22.

He decided to create a diversion from his main attack by an assault on the corcasse. This was held by a guard upon the pool on the west side. The dam was selected for the point of attack; 'the place, if gained, would have easily been fortified, and a passage made there, by which part of the army might be transmitted to invest the Castle, on that side which stood free, and whence they received constant relief from the Parliament ships riding in the Shannon'. The attack was made. So unexpected was it that the guard took to their heels and ran, and for four hours the Irish held the place. Then they also were seized with panic. 'They saw some lighted matches move from the Castle towards them, and imagining they heard the noise of horses, they fled, carrying some small booty over the dam, which afforded passage to one man abreast'. Bellings says the sergeant in charge led the flight, of which slack discipline was the cause. Muskery determined this must be stamped out, and next day he handed over ten of the culprits to the provost-marshal for execution, in spite of vigorous protests, even from the officers.<sup>1</sup>

Penn appears to date this incident about 9 June, when he records, 'our men digging a trench to secure the aforesaid corcasse, were set upon by the rebels, intending to beat them from their works; but with the loss of 15 men, shamefully retreated'. Penn had realized early that the corcasse was the key to Bonratty. He instantly brought Farmer in the *Green* frigate to anchor off the threatened spot. Four guns, rejoicing in the quaint name of *murderers* were sent ashore to Quay Island from his ship and the *Increase* 'to clear the flankers'.<sup>2</sup> His partial success seems to have revealed to Muskery the real key to the position, for he now concentrated upon the little castle, the capture of which would enable him to move into the corcasse.

By 12 June the Irish had drawn their lines so close that the problem of feeding the cavalry horses became pressing. It was decided to keep them on Quay Island whence they could be ferried to any threatened spot. Several ships now arrived; the *Charles*, *Sampson*, *Roebuck* and *Truelove*. The last two brought 100 soldiers, 'good proper men to look upon', Penn records though he went on to sound a more ominous note, 'God grant they prove truer to their cause and colours than the Welsh have done'.<sup>3</sup> They were sent on to Bonratty. Suddenly in the distance Penn caught the sound of a great volley of small shot. Then three beacons flared up, one at Cappah Castle, another at Hunt's Castle, and the third on the top of the hill above Limerick. At 10 p.m. that night the barge which had taken the soldiers up to Bonratty returned with a letter from McAdam; he reported that the whole Irish army, horse and foot, in battle order, were standing to arms. 'What this means', wrote Penn, 'he nor we yet knowing, he desireth me to come to-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 22-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 194.

<sup>2</sup> Penn, *op. cit.* p. 192.

morrow and bring Captain Coachman with me: to which I returned answer, I would (God willing) be with him.<sup>1</sup>

Next day, the 18th, they went up to Bonratty, posting the *Charles* to anchor by the *Green* frigate 'for the better stopping of the passage'. McAdam told Penn his troops would make a sally next morning and at 2 a.m. heavy firing showed that the sally was in progress. The Irish works were entered, the foe driven out, and the fascines and baskets spoiled. At 9 a.m. Penn received a note from Swymmer to say the *Roebuck* was so dangerously leaky that she could not go to sea. Her guns were to be transferred and she was sent down the Shannon to Eniscattery to be hauled ashore and examined. It was decided to send the *Green* frigate to Sligo to ask for help, and Winnal in the *Blessing* was sent up to Bonratty in her place. As there was now only 16 days' drink left in the ships, Penn sent the empty beer casks to Kinsale by the *Roebuck* and *Increase* on 26 June.<sup>2</sup> He had now eight vessels with him, the *Peter*, *Blessing*, *Charles*, *Truelove*, *Trial*, *Sampson*, *Antelope* and *Green* frigate, whose orders for Sligo had been cancelled. At McAdam's request Penn moved up from Beth Road to an anchorage in the Shannon a little to the west of Quay Island.<sup>3</sup> Next day Coachman of the *Truelove* who had been ashore, brought back the news that a general assault was expected. After sermon at the fort on Quay Island Penn called a council-of-war and it was decided to send ashore 64 men out of the ships, with some guns, four grandoes and a fiz-gig out of the *Charles*, and four grandoes out of the *Trial*.

Yet unknown to Penn or McAdam, Muskery's position had become increasingly difficult. Money was short, notwithstanding £600 brought by the Papal Nuncio, and how to pay the soldiers was more than Muskery knew. With lack of pay was the danger the men might disperse to their homes. The siege must be brought to a close as soon as possible; a prolonged investment was ruled out, in Muskery's opinion, for another reason; the garrison was 'abundantly provided with all things', and could be continually supplied from the ships riding in the Shannon. Little did Muskery know the real truth; that Bonratty was desperately short of food and munitions.

The little castle must be taken since it 'much annoyed the Irish in their trenches and retarded their approaches'. Muskery therefore brought up his Limerick guns to batter the building.<sup>4</sup> This closing in of the Irish forced Penn to consider how he could defend the fort on Quay Island more adequately. On the 29th he took out of his ships anchored above the Island, all the men they could spare in order to build a line and work there, to guard

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 195.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 198.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 196.

<sup>4</sup> Gilbert, *op. cit.* p. 23.

against a possible attack by the enemy's horse and foot at low tide across the sand and rocky ground that lay between the island and the corcasse. Should the island fall it would be impossible to send help by water to Bonratty. All through next day in 'extreme foul weather, with much rain and dirt' all hands laboured at the line under Penn's personal direction, until it began to take shape.<sup>1</sup> At the same time the Irish were battering at the little castle with their guns, but the walls were so thin that the shot actually passed through them without shattering the fabric, and so 'undauntedly did those entrusted with the guard of it maintain it, that still as the cannon enlarged the breach, they at every shot poured forth a volley by the hole the bullets had made'.<sup>2</sup>

Next day, 1 July, McAdam asked Penn to come for a consultation as he hourly expected another assault. Penn found him engaged at a council-of-war, 'in which I desired not to interpose, as not willing to engage myself in the shore-matters, otherwise than I might with freedom perform my duty in my proper sphere'. When the council was ended he joined them at dinner. As they sat eating, the cannonade grew to such a pitch that McAdam rose from his seat and went to the little castle to see what damage had been done and to encourage his men by his presence. At this very moment the gunner of a field piece on the hillside took aim at an upper window of the Castle to try his skill, though without the least idea of doing any damage as the distance was too great. His random shot, however, decided the issue at Bonratty. As it passed through the window it killed McAdam. From this disaster the defence never recovered, for there was no one capable of taking McAdam's place, either for courage or as an inspiring leader of men. Major Hooper, who took over the command, Penn described as 'pusillanimous'. Trouble broke out almost at once; Penn heard some of the soldiers grumbling about some money that McAdam had found in the Castle, demanding part of it for their pay. To satisfy them Penn had a guard placed over the room in which it was stored. The officers, too, began to quarrel, and Penn had to order them to their posts. His chief anxiety was that some deserter, especially from among the Welsh, might carry the news of McAdam's death to the Irish.<sup>3</sup>

The rot spread, for early next morning Penn found some of the officers in McAdam's room, with 18 bags of money and some plate in front of them, which they were about to divide. He begged them to leave enough to provide for the future and for the soldiers. 'But', he commented, 'what power my poor rhetoric to this purpose had, you may easily guess if ever you saw or heard it preached on a poor miser.' He could make no impression

<sup>1</sup> Penn, *op. cit.* p. 200.

<sup>3</sup> Penn, *op. cit.* p. 201.

<sup>2</sup> Gilbert, *op. cit.* p. 20.

that they would no longer stand to their arms. He asked for boats to bring off what guns they could, 'together with my Lord of Thomond's lumber (as he termed it), which was in the Castle'. He announced they had resolved to quit the Castle by swimming over their horse and escaping to the eastwardmost corcasse. There they would stand 'till they could possibly get on board our ships', Penn was disgusted; 'all which was as far from my affection, as it was impossible for them to bring to perfection'.<sup>1</sup>

As there was nothing to be done Penn promised the assistance of his boats, 'if by money, or fair words, or both, I could persuade our seamen to engage themselves, whose hearts (by the evil example of the soldier, and the pusillanimity of the commander) were now quite fallen'. The complete loss of morale, which had spread even to the seamen, could only lead to one result. It was not long in coming; two hours later the eastwardmost corcasse fell. All assistance to the men in Bonratty Castle, either by sea or land, was now impossible. Penn at once shipped all the women and children from Quay Island, and had some breastworks built to secure the Island against the possibility of an attack by the enemy horse at low water. Two hot skirmishes took place ashore, and then all was quiet, but what had happened was unknown.

All through the night there was a strange silence, a dramatic contrast to the last few days; no gun or musket was heard on either side. In the morning two officers, bringing with them an Irish captain, boarded the *Peter*. Penn was told the Castle must surrender as there were only 300 effective soldiers left. They asked Penn for his advice as to the conditions they should make, and he enquired what the terms were. They told him quarter, with the right of marching out with full honours of war by land to Cork, while the wounded would be shipped to Cork or Kinsale. Though Penn still hoped vainly for help from Broghill he saw that their minds were made up, and soon they departed for Bonratty. While the terms of surrender were still being discussed the Irish, about 6 p.m. suddenly opened fire upon the ships. One was shot through and through, her mainmast spoiled, and a sailor killed. 'They plied us so hard, with two guns at a time, for seven shot together, that we were forced to let slip; and the tide (as it pleased God) serving well, we got higher up into the river.' Even so they were within musket shot of the shore, and Penn called his captains together to consult what to do. It was decided to go down the river out of range of the enemy's guns, to demolish the fort and works on the Island, after embarking the guns. This was done, though six horses had to be killed. A favourable tide brought the ships away and on 12 July they anchored in Beth Road, where Penn found the *Fellowship*. He boarded her, 'and, (being wet and weary)

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 206.

took myself to rest'. But not for long, as his 40 seamen still at Bonratty troubled him. He called his captains together and it was decided that the Irish captain, Fitz-Gerald, should write to Muskery on their behalf. The letter was sent by two women prisoners who were set ashore. Penn arranged that a fire should be lighted at this spot when the answer came. He waited eagerly, and at last a fire blazed up near the appointed place. At once he sent off his boats, with a flag of truce in the leading one. To his disgust and astonishment fire was opened upon them from the shore and they were forced to sheer off. A camp fire had been mistaken for the signal!<sup>1</sup>

Next day a boat came down bringing the Articles of surrender, signed by Muskery and the garrison's officers. Penn stigmatized them 'as so mean, and so far beneath the honour of a soldier, that I should never have consented thereunto'. However, he went on 'things past cure ought to be past care', and he accepted them, and sent up his boats to bring away his seamen and the soldiers. At 9 p.m. they returned crammed full of sailors and troops, of women and children. On the 16th the little fleet arrived at Eniscattery Road, where the refugees were landed in order that the sick and wounded could be placed in one ship, separate from the healthy.<sup>2</sup>

Thus ended the expedition to Bonratty. Once again it had been made clear that unless a squadron could prevent a place from being encircled by land, it could not prevent its capture by a determined foe, unless relief came by land as well. Yet the expedition came near to success. Had not a chance shot killed McAdam, a resolute and inspiring commander, the result might have been different. For it was strange how ignorant each side was of the difficulties of the other. Penn and McAdam had no idea that Muskery's army was on the point of breaking up for want of pay, while Muskery was under the impression that the garrison were well supplied, whereas they were desperately short of provisions.

Penn had done his best and rightly he confined his command to his squadron. Muskery, though luck aided him, was a capable and skilful leader; he had solved his difficulties by pressing on with his attack, once he had realized that the key to Bonratty lay in the capture of the west corcasse. When the morale of his foe broke he allowed them no rest but, by an overwhelming attack, he crushed and broke their spirit. Yet it speaks much for the organization of the Navy that it was able to send a squadron to the Shannon, for such was its grip upon the sea that the Royalists were powerless to prevent such a movement.

Bad weather stopped Penn from reaching Kinsale until 26 July. There it was decided that Moulton in the *Lion* and Crowther in the *Entrance* should act as convoys for ships between Ireland and England, and that the *Truelove*

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 207-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 210.

*Blessing* and *Charles* should ply between the Shannon and Galway, while the *Sampson*, *Peter* and *Discovery* were to ply between the Old Head of Kinsale and Land's End. The *Green* frigate was to go to Youghal, and the *Trial* and *Antelope* to Milford, and Penn in the *Fellowship* to overhaul in England.

The strain through which Penn had gone now declared itself. On 6 August he wrote, 'not being well through melancholicallness (surely a word worth recording) of the place where I had been long mewed up, together with the sad success of our forces there, I was constrained to enter into a course of physic; and so was exempt from other duties.' On 12 August he sailed for England.<sup>1</sup>

More than a naval squadron was needed to deal with the Royalist forces in Ireland, even to establish a possible base. Penn's expedition had demonstrated this fact. An army, properly supplied and well led, was necessary. Yet the lesson learned at Bonratty, was to be put into good effect in the near future, for a force, commanded by Cromwell, and supported by a fleet under Blake, Popham and Deane was to illustrate the value of amphibious warfare, properly co-ordinated. Only thus could the nests of privateers in Ireland be smoked out and ended.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 216.

## THE BINNACLE

By *Commander W. E. May*

ALL matters concerning the history of the compass are obscure and, inevitably, information as to early binnacles is extremely sparse. While most writers on navigation take the compass for granted and scarcely mention it, only one or two refer to the binnacle at all. The information in nautical dictionaries is also very scanty and, as will be seen, these tend to repeat one another.

The word *binnacle* appeared at the very beginning of the seventeenth century, and for about 150 years was used concurrently with the earlier form *bittacle*, which it finally replaced. It is usually stated that *bittacle* is derived from the Portuguese *bitacola*, but this I believe to be an error, which probably originated in the 1888 edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*.<sup>1</sup> The theory would appear to be more tenable if the word *bittacle* had first appeared in the English language during the sixteenth century, when England admittedly learned much of navigational lore from the Iberian nations, but the word was in use in this country at least a century earlier. Our contacts with France were at that time close, and it is much more likely that we adopted and corrupted their *habitacle*, and that this was derived from the Latin *habitaculum*, a small dwelling. This theory was advanced at least as early as 1835,<sup>2</sup> and the suggestion made by Webster in 1832 that *bittacle* is derived from the French *boîte d'aiguille* seems too far-fetched to be considered.<sup>3</sup> (In the 1907 edition, this dictionary says that the word is derived from the Portuguese.)

The *Imperial Dictionary*<sup>4</sup> states the binnacle was originally 'a little house near the mizzenmast for pilot and steersman, and this from L. *habitaculum*, an abode, from *habito* to dwell'. Walter Skeat<sup>5</sup> says that 'The *habitaculum* seems to have been originally a sheltered place for the helmsman', and Captain John M. L. Gorett<sup>6</sup> that 'the astrologer was called down from aloft and installed in a small cabin erected on deck to house the Marinette

<sup>1</sup> Vol. 1 (1888), p. 869, art. Binnacle.

<sup>2</sup> *Penny Cyclopaedia* (1835), Vol. IV, p. 410, art. Binnacle.

<sup>3</sup> Noah Webster, *International Dictionary* (1st ed. 1828); 1907 ed., Vol. 1, p. 146, art. Binnacle.

<sup>4</sup> John Ogilvie, *Imperial Dictionary* (1st ed. 1847); 1904 ed., Vol. 1, p. 272, art. Binnacle.

<sup>5</sup> Walter W. Skeat, *Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (4th ed. 1910), p. 60, art. Binnacle.

<sup>6</sup> John M. L. Gorett, 'The Mariner's Compass', *Journal of the American Society of Naval Engineers*, Vol. XLVII (1935), p. 223.