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15th day of July in the year of our Lord 1690

My dearest Nicholas:

I was happy to hear that your time in the countryside had done you good. Health is the first and most important gift of Providence, without it we are poor, miserable creatures, though the whole earth were our property; therefore, I trust that you will take great care of your own. On my part, I will endeavour to take care of mine.

Though admittedly, in my dotage, I fear my health is ailing. This, together with the tragic defeat of King James II in the Battle of the Boyne, certainly seals our family's fate. The King's failed attempt to regain Britain guarantees a continued Protestant ascendancy in Ireland. Indeed, our times resemble those of the Protestant reformation; when people were as moved by religious opinions as they were by political passions.

And so, I am resolved to share with you the circumstances that have put us here in the hopes that you will be equal parts thankful and cautious about the Wall family estate at Laragh House. To give you testimony, I am mindful of my long-standing promise to describe how events have transpired and so I send to you this account.

Our current estate falls to you with much sacrifice made by the generations that have come before you, embroiled as they were in the uprisings that led to Oliver Cromwell's invasion of Ireland. Before the Irish wars, we had in our possession various fiefs and vast acreage in Leinster, including castles, manors houses, and tenants to farm the land.

Our family's first and principal settlement fell just outside of the town of Carlow. John De Valle, a descendant from the De Valle brothers who came to Ireland as part of the Norman Conquest, settled in Johnstown. He built a castle here and possessed considerable holdings that extended over thousands of acres in the baron of Carlow.

John De Valle's descendant, an early patriarch of the Wall family, can be traced to back to Gerald Wale of Johnstown. Gerald passed away on 29 of September 1551. An inquisition following his death revealed that he held a castle and land in Johnstown; a second castle, three messuages and land in Kernanstown; the same (less a castle) in Urglin; a fourth part of all the lands in Killerrig; and the royal manor of Carlow in Capite in tenancy of his lord. Edmond Wale, your great grandfather, was Gerald's eldest son and heir. The castle and lands which passed from Gerald to Edmond in 1551 are the same as those that were passed on to Edmond's son William in 1596.

Under William the fortunes of our family reached their highest point. He ruled over a vast portion of the barony of Carlow, including almost the whole parish of Urglin comprised of 3,080 statute acres as applotted under the Tithe Act , and much of Killerrig. His influence stretched to the east as well, where he held the advowson of the churches of Templepeter and Myshall in the barony of Forth.

The Walls were granted these properties as vassals of the Mowbray overlord. The manor and lordship of Carlow belonged to the Mowbray family from 1380 to 1480. Thomas de Mowbray, the Earl of Nottingham, was an absentee landlord. The Crown, therefore, was compelled to take an interest in the maintenance of Carlow Castle, which was built by William de Marshall, a knight honoured by the King of England. He raised the battlements to ensure the defense of The Pale.

It was directly following the Irish Rebellion in 1641 that the Wall family was dispossessed of some of our properties. Decades after the uprising, 'tis our painful task to observe in remembrance one of the most disastrous periods in our annals, when from a state of profound peace and apparent amity, the country was unexpectedly entrenched in all the horrors of bloodshed and massacre.

The history of it does not form itself into an ordered picture; but remains only as a huge blot, an indiscriminate darkness, which memory cannot willingly charge itself with. Our family fortune fell as Ireland was plunged into a mire of distracted controversies, plunderings, confiscations, excommunications, treacheries, and conflagrations. Such universal misery and blood and bluster the world has never seen, before or since.

There were parties on the back of parties, at war with the world and with each other. There were Old-Irish Catholics who were unable to agree with the Catholics of the English Pale. Then there are Ormond Royalists, of the Episcopalian and mixed creeds, strong for King without Covenant; Ulster and other Presbyterians, strong for King and Covenant; lastly, those of the Commonwealth of England, who wanted neither King nor Covenant. All of these tumbling in huge discord that has made Ireland and its affairs the black unutterable blot that I write about.

During the Irish Rebellion, the Wall family aligned itself Gaelic Irish movement against the new English settlers. And though we are descended from the original invaders of Ireland, over time, the Walls have grown to be staunch advocates for this land, standing strong with other Anglo-Norman families against further interference from abroad. I refer specifically to the intrusion of Protestant settlers from England, encouraged by the Deputy of Ireland, Lord Wentworth of England, as part of his plantation effort. It was his grand plan to develop and benefit from the land, something he believed the Irish were incapable of doing themselves. The English Protestants established colonies close to the Wall properties in Carlow Town, Hacketstown, and in the northern province of Ulster where they took up arms and put up walls against the rural Gaelic Irish.

Through Wentworth's plantations, the Crown sought to tame those "rude parts" of Ireland, but more so to enrich itself by interfering with land titles. In 1606, the "Commission for the Remedy of Defective Land Titles" was established which, on pain of fine or forfeiture, required all Irish landowners to prove the title to their land. Many failed, and much of the properties in many counties was redistributed.

For the old settlers of Anglo-Norman origin like our family, the new plantations constituted a grave danger. Notwithstanding the Wall's loyalty, they had long been experiencing dissatisfaction with their position. More than once, they had formally protested against the unconstitutional methods of the Irish Government, especially in the matter of land tax, and had insisted on the recognition of their rights as established Englishmen. Unfortunately, counter to the favourable consideration of their demands and the development of a more constitutional government, they were, almost to a man, all Roman Catholics, which did not work in their favour.

And here is where the greater divide and layered conflict was laid, for it was through his plantations and land confiscations that Lord Wentworth sought to suppress Roman Catholicism. Anglicanism, as a branch of Protestantism, was the only approved form of worship by the English Crown. Practicing Catholicism in public led to arrests, and non-attendance at a Protestant church was punishable by recusant fines. Catholics were not permitted to hold senior offices of state, nor serve above a certain rank in the army. The Irish Privy Council at the time was itself dominated by English Protestants. In response, the Irish Catholic upper classes sought a series of reforms called 'The Graces', appealing directly to King Charles I for full rights as subjects and religious tolerance.

This oppression resulted in rebellion in 1641, its planners being a small group of Catholic landed gentry and army officers. Rising to seize Dublin Castle and its arsenal, the rebels were Catholics who justified their attacks as a necessary defensive measure against the Protestant threat to extirpate the Catholic religion. Their battle cry was, "we rise for our religion."

An inability on the Government's behalf to act vigorously only kindled the rebellion's ardent flame. The English garrison was then but a few thousand strong and scattered across the country. The Lord Justices, who had saved themselves, seemed to have lost their senses entirely. Their first impulse to trust the Catholic gentry by providing them with arms to defend themselves yielded to an ill-defined dread lest they might thereby be arming their enemies. They could think of no action beyond putting Dublin in a state of defense, concentrating all the available troops in the neighbourhood, laying waste the districts around, and husbanding their resources until their piteous appeals for help from England were answered.

Finding themselves utterly distrusted and unable to maintain a position of neutrality, the gentry of The Pale, driven by their fears and encouraged by the defeat of a small force detached for the relief of Drogheda, threw in their lot with the rebels in December.

'Tis true that a common religious belief in Catholicism cemented strange alliances, as the old English races in The Pale and in other parts of the kingdom who had lately despised the Irish as a barbarous people void of civility and religion, did forget the rivers of bloodshed that had previously flowed betwixt them, and joined to take up arms against the English Protestant settlers. And so formed the alliance of disillusioned Catholics, Irish and Old English alike, with hopes to recover their property and reestablish Catholicism as the preeminent religion.

Though they failed to take Dublin, the rebels, who were also called Confederates, swiftly captured numerous towns, forts, and fortified manors in Ulster. More oft than not, these attacks consisted of beating and robbing, not killing, as the rebels were anxious for a resolution to their difficulties by seizing the property of the settlers. What made these affairs so brutal was that they pitted neighbour against neighbour in face-to-face, violent confrontations between those who had long known one another.

Clashes happened right at our doorstep. In December, the English sent troops to rebel-held areas in counties Wicklow and Tipperary. These expeditions were characterized by excessive and indiscriminate brutality against the Catholic population and further provoked the general Catholic population into joining the rebellion.

Shortly before Christmas, a musket-wielding force of rebels led by your great grandfather Edmond Wall besieged the Town of Carlow. Many English settlers there sought refuge in Carlow Castle. Build on an

eminence, commanding the river Barrow, the noble castle was furiously assaulted. Prominent as he was amongst the Catholic Confederate gentry in the area, Edmond was one of eight County Carlow magnates who, in a letter dated the 27th of December 1641, called on the Governor of Carlow Castle to parley with them after the siege had begun.

The Governor agreed and met them “within half a musket shot of that castle” where a rebel spokesman, perhaps your great grandfather (?), demanded the surrender of the castle on terms. Their offer was soundly rejected, and the Governor withdrew, to the dismay of the almost 500 English trapped inside the castle.

Some took cover in the castle bailey and many died by want of necessities such as food and drink. The castle was held until Ash Wednesday when a Royalist army arrived, whereupon the rebels burned the town and fled after 50 or 60 of them were slain. Indeed, by July of 1643, the Leinster countryside was so scorched by war that nothing was growing, and starvation was rife.

According to a witness named Edward Briscoe of Coolemanagh, County Carlow, “Edmond Wall of Rufflin” was one of the leading men behind the siege of Carlow; and a certain Thomas Tomson complained of losses caused by Edmond Wall of Carlow and others. How long Edmond lived after these events we do not know, but ‘tis clear that he had passed away by the time of the Cromwellian Settlement which began in 1654.

Before the Irish Rebellion, Edmond was in full possession of his estate. Lord Wentworth's “Commission for the Remedy of Defective Titles,” declared the manor, castle, town, and lands of Johnstown, and the towns and lands of Urglin, Rathbaun, Kernanstown, Ballinakillybeg, Ballylennan and Killyshane to be held by Edmond in Capite for a knight's service of £1 yearly. The grant, enrolled on the second of December in 1637, created the manor of Johnstown with power to hold Courts Leet and Baron, to enjoy all the waifs and strays, and to make a park of 300 acres.

Edmond's eldest son and principal heir was William, your grandfather. Through marriage, William unified the 'Old English' and Gaelic families, despite the fact that the head of one household had killed the head of the other some two hundred years earlier!

After the rebellion of 1641, any Irish Catholics who were not loyal to King Charles I were held responsible for the killings of Protestant settlers and had their lands confiscated according to the Adventurers Act, agreed upon on the 19th of March 1642. Sometime between 1642 and 1649, the Wall family converted to Royalists and pledged their support for King Charles I. This was during the revolt led by Oliver Cromwell and the Parliamentarians.

In the summer of 1649, Parliamentary forces were sent to Ireland to place the country firmly under English rule and administrate the confiscation of the land of the Confederate rebels. With a most intense and national hatred of the Irish Catholics, they seized the lands and transferred them to a flood of new English settlers.

Thus, the Parliamentarians sought to extinguish our nation with heavy weaponry and Cromwell's infamous New Model Army, a professional army of soldiers for hire, with devastating effect. Some say brutality displayed by Cromwell at the siege of Drogheda was motivated by revenge for the Protestants killed during the rebellion of 1641. But I believe their ruthlessness was based on religion; Cromwell's

army was comprised of Puritans who considered all Roman Catholics to be heretics; for them, the conquest became a crusade.

The first town to fall to Cromwell was Drogheda, north of Dublin, and he gave no quarter. Neither youth nor beauty was spared. Whence the town was taken, Cromwell gave the order to kill the defending garrison and all Catholic priests. Any remaining men, women, and children were put to the sword in a massacre that lasted for five days. Cromwell's savage butcheries had the intended effect. As he marched southward, many fled at Cromwell's approach and the garrisons capitulated. Trim, Dundalk, Carlingford, and Newry yielded but when he got to Wexford, the town held fast, being a place of great consequence to Ireland.

Having successfully removed the threat at the southeast end of town, Cromwell determined to bend the whole strength of his artillery upon the Castle in Wexford, being persuaded that if he took the Castle, the Town would easily follow.

As soon as Cromwell's men appeared, the defending garrison quit the walls of town, which Cromwell's men perceived. Advancing violently with their ladders, they stormed the Town. Wexford's garrison made a stiff resistance, but Cromwell's forces put all to the sword that came in their way. Two boatloads of soldiers attempted an escape, but being overfull with numbers, the boats sank and near to three hundred drowned. In all, two thousand were lost in Wexford in exchange for just twenty of the Parliamentary forces. Those that weren't slain, fled on foot, leaving their homes empty and the Town half deserted.

The great travesty of this battle is that whilst Wexford was being sacked, Cromwell held the formal offer of surrender in his hands. Though he declared his desire to prevent the spilling of blood and preserve the counties around Wexford from ruin, Cromwell justified the killings, claiming God's Providence in bringing about judgement on Wexford, which had the blood of the "poor Protestants" on its hands. Cromwell's army made off with an exceptional plunder, with iron, hides, tallow, salt, pipe, and barrel-staves; and near a hundred cannon. There were also three vessels in the harbour, one of them with thirty-four guns, and another with twenty, which Cromwell's forces also took as their own. What was left of the town, they burned to the ground.

It was during these brutal and bloody times that your father hazarded his escape from massacre of the Wall family at Urglin Castle and the parish, just outside of Carlow. He fled to the Wentworth lands in the mountains of Wicklow and found refuge twenty miles away at Laragh House in Kilquiggan. It was here that the charitable Lord Fitzwilliam gave your father sanctuary, granting him 100 acres of land for head tenancy with which he built the farming village of Laragh just outside of Kilquiggan and Sheleilagh.

Your father was lucky to escape with his life. Under Cromwell's iron rule, anyone who fought against him or was implicated in the rebellion of 1641 was executed. Edward was spared by the Grace of God. Those who participated in Confederate Ireland had their land confiscated. Even Catholic landowners who had not taken part in the wars had their land seized. Irish soldiers who had fought in the Confederate and Royalist armies left the country to find service on the continent. The practice of Catholicism was banned, and bounties were offered for the capture of priests, who were put to death when found.

Following the executions of Wentworth by Charles I, and then Charles himself by Cromwell, the Wall family was forced to forfeit its properties. The "Book of Survey and Distribution for County Carlow" and

the Down Survey parish maps name your grandfather William Wall as the late proprietor of Kernanstown castle and three stone manors, Killerig castle and five stone manors, Johnstown castle and four stone manors, and Urglin castle and two stone manors. After the Cromwell invasions, these properties were ceded to Cromwellian soldiers who were paid with land grants in place of wages.

Some of the confiscated Wall properties were granted to Samuel Blackwood Esq. in 1667. The Walls were divested of lands at Urglin (606 acres), Johnstown (419 acres), Little Pollardstown (181 acres) and Kernanstown (243 acres). An inquisition held on the 2nd of June 1664 found that some of the lands possessed by Edmond in 1641 had been granted to Captain Sampson Toogood in satisfaction of arrears of over £500.

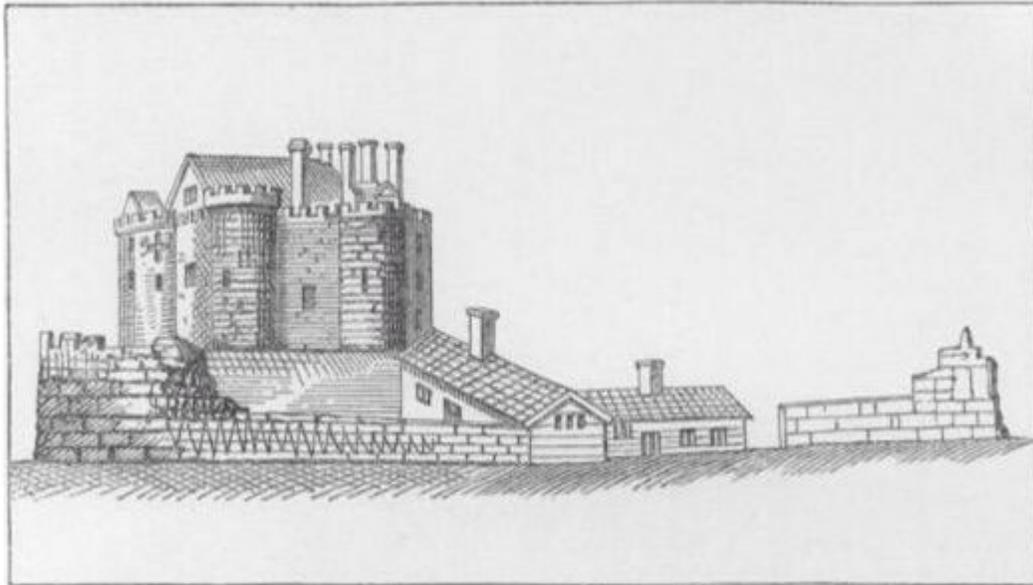
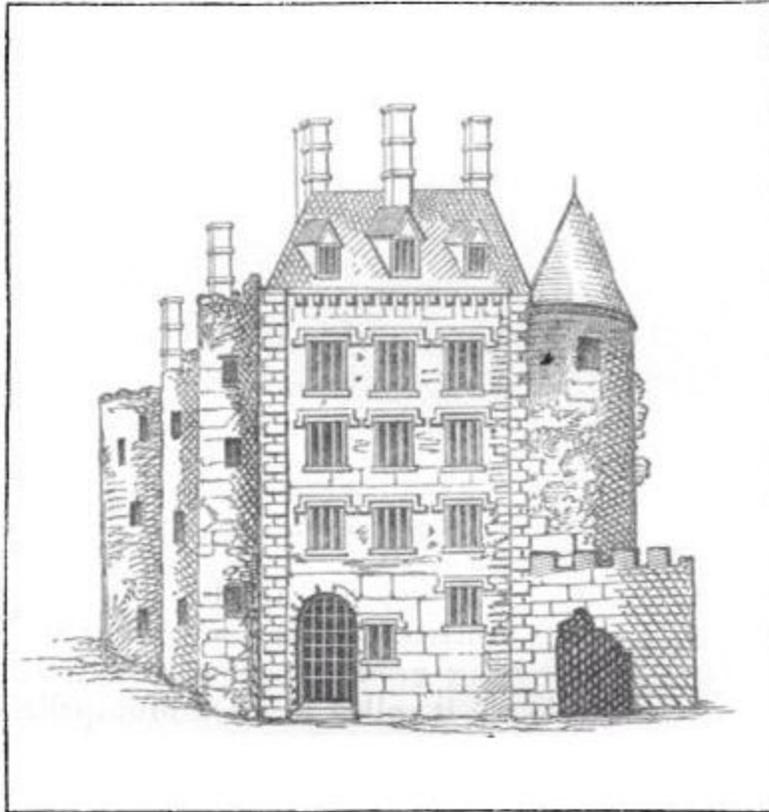
As you well know, your father supported the Jacobite cause under King James II, hoping it would lead to an increased tolerance for Catholicism and self-governance in Ireland with a Crown of its own. Most importantly, he believed it was the only chance of having our lands reinstated. Your poor father passed away before he could admit that this would not come to pass, for which he would have been sorely disappointed. King James deserted Ireland after his defeat at the Battle of the Boyne, leaving his supporters to “shift for themselves.” Measures passed by the 1689 Parliament were annulled, severe laws barred Catholics from public life, while the Act of Attainder was used to justify still more land confiscations.

Thus, did the varying fortunes of this family rest on the hostilities in Ireland, the differences of religion and cultures divided between Old and New English, Irish Gaelic, and even the Scots. At the close of this long and sordid saga, steeped in the bloodshed of your forefathers, the head tenancy at Laragh is at present passed on to you. Let it be witnessed as I have writ on this 15th day of July in the year of our Lord one thousand six hundred and ninety. It falls on you, dear Son, to raise our family to its rightful standing, though it be from a lower base than where we began as Anglo-Normans during the Conquest.

There you have the details of our past, faithfully put down by me with eyewitness accounts passed down through generations of Walls. Let me entreat you to look with a serious and reflective mind on the days which have passed. Many are the religions, many are the shades of those religions, but it must be confessed the principles of the Christian religion are the most perfect and the most beautiful that can be imagined. There is one virtue which is particularly Christian; this is the knowledge of our own heart in *real humility*.

Defend yourself, my dear Son, against this broken system in Ireland; let your dear character always be true and loyal; this does not *exclude prudence*—worldly concerns are now unfortunately so organised that you *must be cautious*, or you may injure yourself and others—but it does not prevent the being sterling and true. Nothing in persons gives greater reliance, greater weight, than when they are known to be *true*. From your earliest childhood I hoped to plant in you this important virtue and watch it grow.

I shall finish by giving you my best blessings, and remain ever, my dearest Love, your faithfully attached Mother.

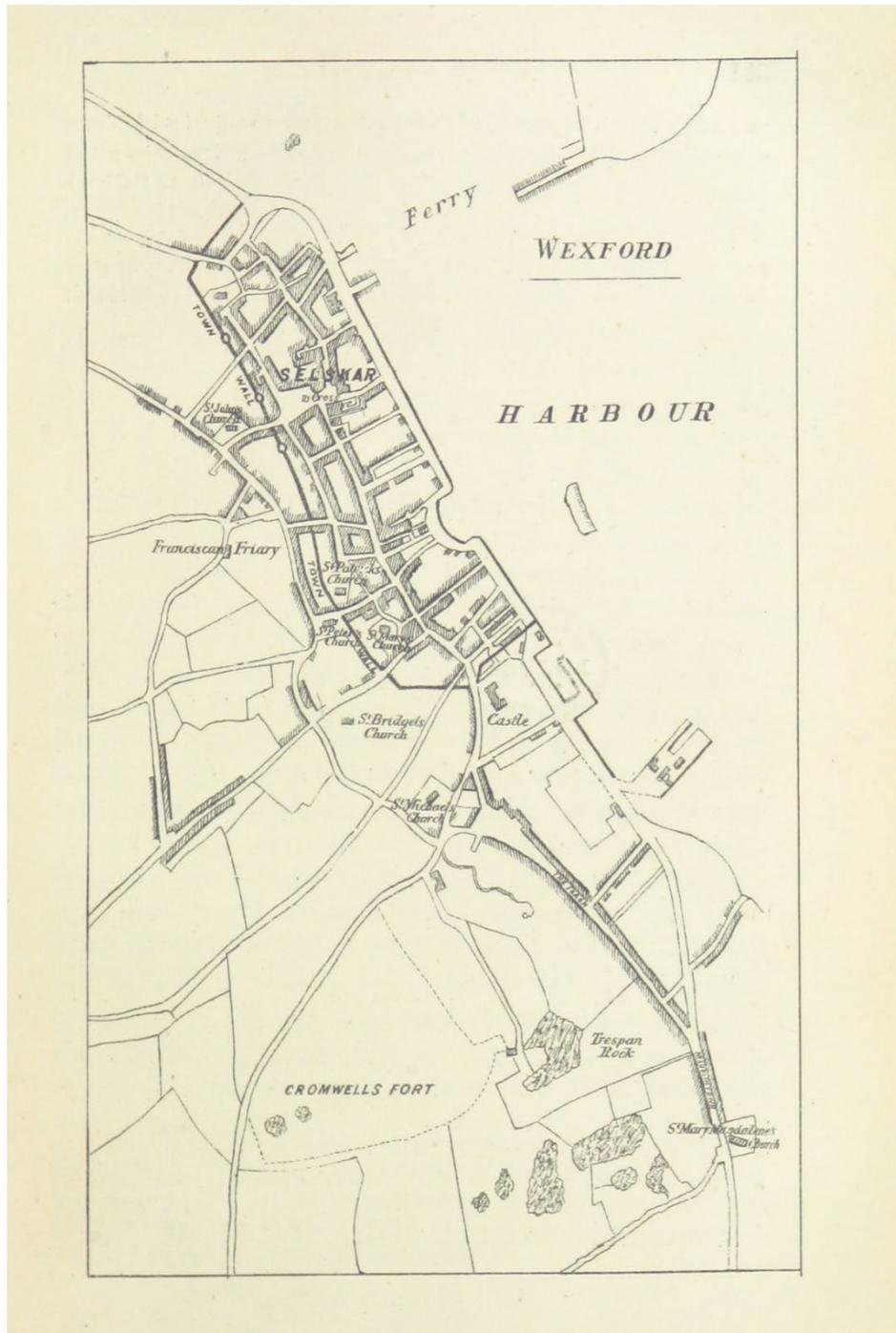


The Castle and the Garrison of Catherlaugh.

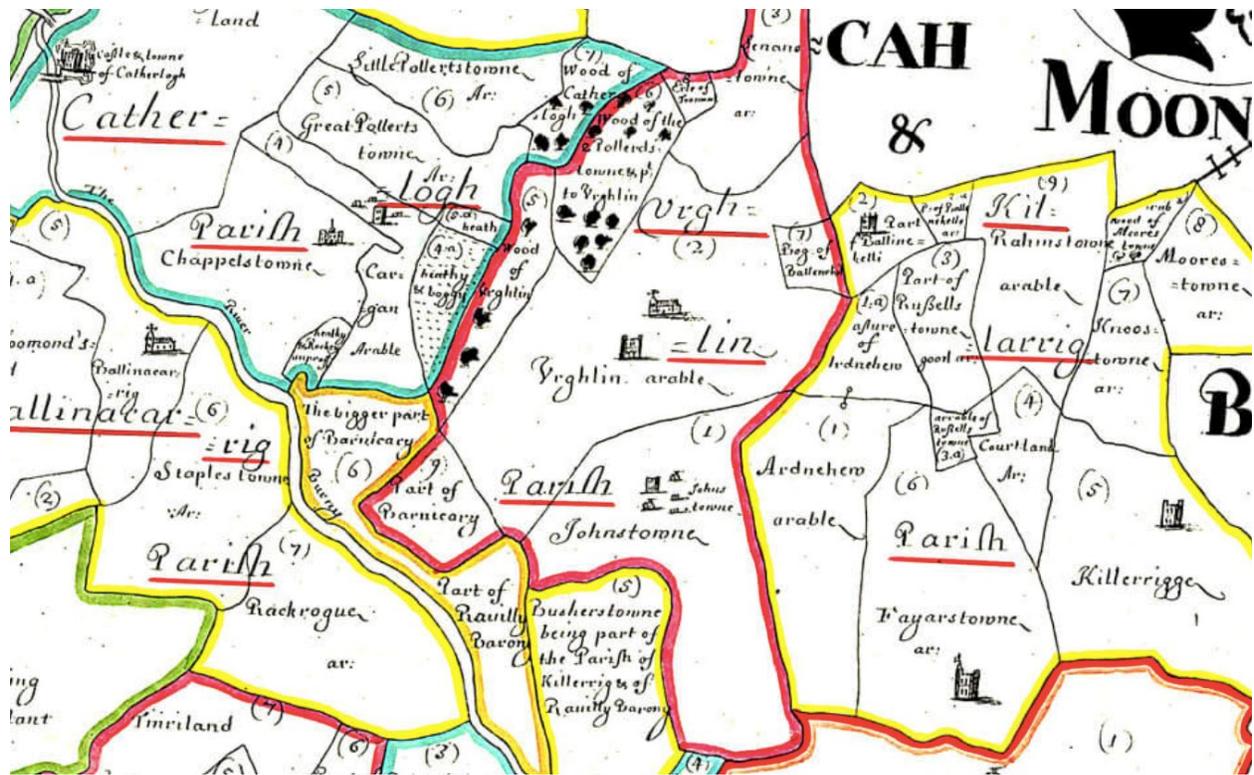
The manor and lordship of Carlow (Catherlaugh) belonged to the Mowbray family from 1380 to 1480



The Thirty-two Counties of Ireland



Township and Harbour of Wexford



An extract from "Sir William Petty's Down Survey of the 1650s," with Carlow Castle in the top left corner (Catherlogh), showing Urgan Parish, namely Johnstown, Ardneue, Fryarstown (Friarstown), and Killerrig



Johnstown House at Urgan in Carlow County



Laragh House

Background

This letter is based on a fictional letter from the Widow Wall to her son, Nicholas, detailing the background of the loss of the Wall family's extensive properties from the time of the Irish Rebellion of 1641 to the Cromwellian Invasion in Ireland, from 1649–1653. During the Cromwellian Conquest, one of the Wall family, the father of Nicholas Wall (name unknown) escaped the massacre of the Wall family at Urgan and found refuge some 20 miles away in Kilquiggan as part of the estate of Lord Wentworth (which would become Coollattin). Nicholas Wall was recorded as taking over the head tenancy at Laragh from the "Widow Wall" in the records of the Coollattin Estate books. The letter is written shortly after King James loses the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. If Nicholas' father fled in 1653 (and was in his mid-twenties), this would put the widow somewhere between 60 - 70 years old.

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