

## Introduction

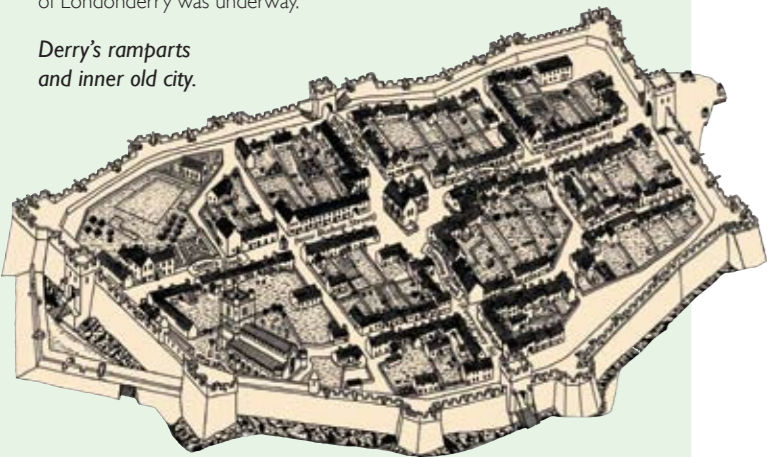
In this piece Mickey McGuinness explores the numerous links that the Creggan estate has to events during the Siege of Derry, including some specific connections to the Rath outside the Creggan Country Park Site.

### Derry City, Plantation and The Honourable The Irish Society

The Flight of the Earls in 1607 and Cahir O'Doherty's failed rebellion of 1608 opened the way for the Plantation of Ulster. The lands of the departed lords were confiscated and plantation plans introduced. Plans for Derry departed from the rules to be applied elsewhere.

In 1609 the City of London was invited to take part in the Plantation. In January 1610 the London Livery Companies were granted lands, which included Culmore, the towns of Derry and Coleraine, and the Tyrone barony of Loughinsholin. A new body, "The Honourable The Irish Society", was established to manage the Plantation. On the 17th of December 1613 fifty-five London companies organised themselves into twelve associations to oversee 12 proportions of the County of Londonderry. The Plantation of Londonderry was underway.

### Derry's ramparts and inner old city.



### The Walled City

The "Society" were to be responsible for building a new walled city on the site of Derry. A new charter was presented in March 1613. Marking the new involvement with the English capital 'London' was prefixed to the ancient settlement name of 'Derry'. From thenceforward, although disputed by later generations, Londonderry would be the official name of the new colonial city. The walls were completed in 1618 and seemed to fulfil the aspirations expressed in the 1604 charter, which thought it "a place very convenient and fit to be made both a town of war and a town of merchandise."

Reservations over how defensible the city might prove in the event of war arose in the report of the Royal Commission of 1626, which observed that the city was:

"...so ill situated that the walls, houses and streets lie open to the command of any shipping that shall come into the harbour, and also to divers hills about the town, and to many other inconveniences."

It concluded that it was:

"...not a place of defence nor tenable if any foreign enemy should come before it"

The real trials, however, were still some years ahead.

### Besieged City

The new city was to meet its first military test, successfully surviving the siege of 1649, when it was defended by Sir Charles Coote for the English Parliament...The second challenge was made during the Great Siege of 1689.

Creggan was not to escape involvement in the historic series of events which were crucial formative events in Derry and Ireland's modern history. Indeed, much of our failure to reach political accommodation locally has its origins in the events of over 300 years ago.

When James II succeeded to the throne of England in February 1685, he proceeded to replace Protestants in his administration and army with Catholics. A predictable consequence was the heightening of fears in the Protestant colony of Londonderry. Consternation increased with the arrival in the Waterside of the Earl of Antrim's Catholic troops who were preparing to garrison the city (7th of December 1688).

While their officers were negotiating terms with the city fathers, some of the soldiers began to arrive on the West bank. Perceiving danger 13 apprentices closed Ferryquay Gate in an act of defiance which was a crucial event leading up to the Siege. Hoping for a voluntary end to this defiance, James appeared in person at Bishop's Gate on 15 April 1689. Not only did the citizens refuse to capitulate, but they also fired shots at James's party, hitting some of his retinue. The 105 day Siege of Derry had begun; it was to cause much suffering and loss of life and was to become a pivotal point in Irish History.

### Creggan Encampment: Conditions

Although the Jacobite encampment on the West Bank stretched from Balloughry Hill to Culmore, by far the greatest concentration was above the town, identified by historian JG Simms, who deduced that it ran along the contour of Creggan Heights. This location would have given the Jacobites protection from the city's guns. Francis Neville described the sod huts built in the absence of tents.

"The ground on which they quartered shews, as much for having but few tents, they were forced to make Hutts, the walls of which being made of sods. My drawing .....shews each camp very plaine, especially those within half a myle of the city whose hutts.....were sunk about four or five feet underground least the random shott of the great Artillery from the City should doe them any harme."



A recent siege re-enactment.

French officials and officers also sent highly critical reports back to France which further illuminate conditions "at the camp before Derry" in the wet summer of 1689.

### What the French Generals Wrote

#### 30 June 1689

The troops here are extremely tired and fall sick. They have been on a campaign for four months – without tents in a countryside where there is no cover and where it is always raining and where the nights are very cold ...I can assure your Majesty that the troops and most of the officers are extremely discouraged for several

reason- they are badly clothed, badly paid and too exposed to the weather. If things drag on, and I am sure they will, there is a danger that the troops will disappear altogether. Already a quarter of them are in the mountains with their officers.

#### 8 July 1689

The cavalry regiments of Tirconnel and Galmois, which are here, are very fine. They have, however, shrunk in numbers because of the course of action which the king has made them follow since his visit here and also because a number of their horses have been stolen while grazing, since there is no hay here for them to be kept tethered at picket. These sort of thefts are very common, for all the troops pilfer from each other. Whatever there are of new regiments of cavalry and dragoons are established only by taking horses from wherever they can find them. It often happens that they dismount each other and when one wants to talk about his, the gentleman who has taken the horse wants to go away and all the regiment want to follow him.

#### 13 July 1689

The army ebbs away day by day, some through illness and others because they are not paid and because they are disheartened by the fire from the besieged and by the work. Besides that, there is a good deal of negligence on the part of officers of all categories – for which they are mostly not fitted. I do what I can to instruct them but I do not succeed.

### 1 August 1989

The Siege of Derry is still in the same state as I had the honour to tell you in my letter of 16 July. The King's amnesty – general took place on the 19th. The besieged had asked for this before entering into a settlement. After a whole day of conferences which the aforesaid commissioners spent in drinking well, most of them being tipsy, they broke up without deciding anything. During this conference, the people from the town and our soldiers were allowed to talk together and walk through the trenches. A fever is raging through the camp, and it spreads like a kind of plague, but the country is not hot enough for it to be able to develop entirely. Everyone has been attacked and several are dead: Monsieur Rose had a violent bout, and Monsieur De Lery as well, but they have not gone away yet.

What emerges from the correspondence is a picture of troops who are demoralised, poorly housed, poorly armed and not equipped for breaching the walls of Derry. Inhospitable weather and sickness added to their difficulties.

### Military actions

The Neville map, drawn immediately after the siege by Captain Francis Neville, provides fascinating evidence of Creggan's part in the Siege of Derry. It depicts the situation in the latter half of the action when the town had become more closely besieged. Previously, heavy mortar fire had come from Stronge's Orchard (in the vicinity of Ebrington Barracks) in the Waterside. By mid – June, mortar fire was directed from the city side in the vicinity of Creggan. Siege historian J G Simms describes Jacobite (Jacobite refers to a follower of King James) commander Richard Hamilton's difficulties and the limitations of the Jacobite armoury:

"His chief lack was artillery. A limited number of guns did arrive, but few were more than field guns. Nothing less than twenty-four pounders would be effective against the walls, and Hamilton had only one of these: his next largest gun was a solitary 18 pounder. For most of the time, these two were kept down at the boom a couple of miles away. There were some mortars, one of which was very large and threw a bomb of 270 lbs., but the high trajectory of mortar bombs made them suitable for destroying houses, not fortifications. No big guns were brought from France and, if they had been their transport over the Irish roads would have been extremely difficult"

### The Mortar Battery

The feature marked 4 on Neville's Map is described by him as :

"A platform for three mortars, which played well (was aimed) at the Church (St. Columb's Cathedral) and Bishop's House. And of the great number of bombs which were discharged and which fell thick about both, on the first there fell but three, one of which fell on the steeple amongst the bells and did no harm. Another fell on the battlement on the south side, tumbled easily on the leads and brook there with little harme, the people being there in the

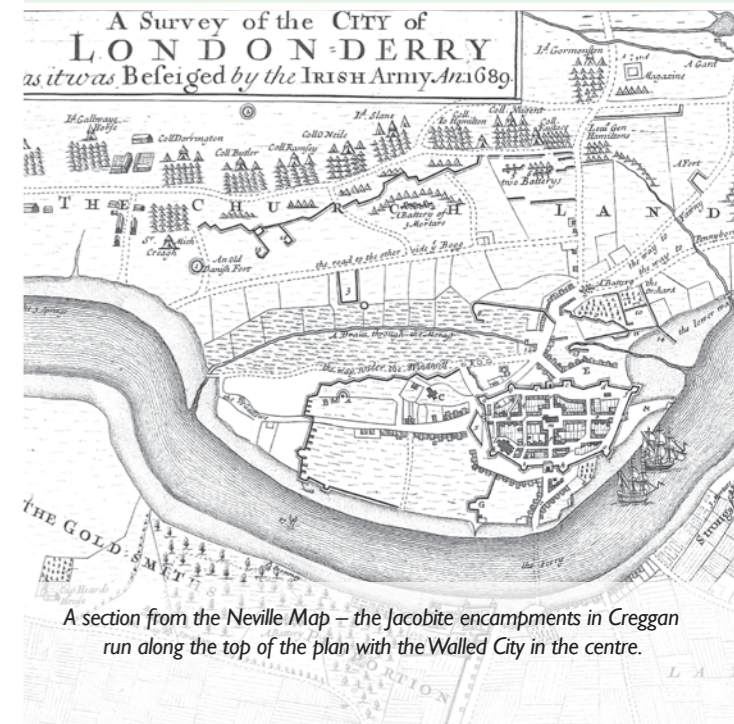
church. The third fell on the north. It brook a little hole in the lead and, by a strange providence, rebounded, came over the battlement of four foot high and brook in the Church yard."

Twenty bombs in all were fired that day killing one man and wounding another. The garrison did not always get off so lightly. One account estimates that 337 bombs were launched between 21 June and 21 July. This is the period when the mortars were moved to the West bank (i.e. the mortar battery indicated on Neville's map). On 27 June, a diarist of the siege, Captain Thomas Ash, recorded:

Ten bombs flew into the city. One fell on Joseph Gallagher's house in Bishop Street, where two barrels of powder were lodged. There were 14 killed by it, viz. six grenadiers belonging to our regiment, four horsemen and four women.

One famous shell launched from the Creggan battery was that which landed in the city on 10 July. Instead of powder it contained terms for surrender and read:

"To the soldiers and inhabitants of Derry. The conditions offered by Lieut. Gen. Hamilton are sincere. The power he hath of the King is real; be no longer imposed upon by such as tell you contrary; you cannot be ignorant of the King's clemency towards his subjects. Such of you as chuse to serve the King, shall be entertained without distinction in point of religion. If any chuse to leave the Kingdom, shall have passes. You shall be restored to your estates and livings, and have free liberty



A section from the Neville Map – the Jacobite encampments in Creggan run along the top of the plan with the Walled City in the centre.

of religion whatsoever it be. If you doubt the powers given to Gen. Hamilton by the King, twenty of you may come and see it with freedom, under the King's hand and seal. Be not obstinate against your natural Prince; expose yourselves no longer to the miseries which you undergo, which will grow worse and worse if you continue to be opinionate, for it will be too late to accept of the offer now made you when your condition is so low that you cannot resist the King's forces longer. July 10th, 1689."

Not for the first time the reply was to be "No Surrender", a phrase which has reverberated down to the present. The Mortar Shell is on display in St. Columb's Cathedral.

#### "Danish Fort" Southway

The feature marked I on Neville's Map is identified as ..... "an Old Danish Fort" repaired by the enemy, in which they kept a strong guard at all tymes" The site has been identified as the ground above Southway near the location of the 19th Century Scott House. Indeed its position would have allowed the surveillance of much of the actions of besieged and besieger.

#### The Rath

The Rath roundabout is the feature which has the strongest claim to antiquity. Brian Lacy has suggested prehistoric origins with the possibility that it was re-used over the centuries and developed as a fort during the siege. The late Mickey Harkin, who worked at the construction of Creggan, spoke of the discovery of cannonballs when the adjoining roads were being constructed. This would substantiate the claim that the present roundabout is the site of the fort referred to by historians. Although referred to as the Creggan Rath the site is also known locally as the Cropic or the Cropic Camp. A French word occasionally used in English, 'Croupe', signifies "the rounded top of a hill". Although not strictly on the summit, the views from the site give the impression of



*The ancient rath at the top of Westway.*

great altitude. A possible explanation of this name might be that it derives from usage by French troops who were encamped in the vicinity. An encounter which probably took place there is described by historian C D Milligan:

"An engagement at Creggan, which occurred on 18 May and lasted until night, parted the combatants, and was marked by the murder of Captain John Cunningham. A party of the garrison numbering a hundred were led out to the open fields by Captain Cunningham, Captain Noble, Captain Archibald Sanderson and others. They sieged a fort the enemy had made on a hill. Then a force from Galmoy's Horse, coming between the garrison soldiers and the town, attempted to cut them off. Fifteen or sixteen of the garrison were killed and many wounded, some dying a few days later. Captain Noble and others managed to get away, except Captain Cunningham, who was taken prisoner. Although quarter had been given, he was basely murdered."

The site of the present roundabout suggests that it would have been an appropriate choice for strategic reasons. Important skirmishes were fought at Pennyburn Mill, and the Rath commanded the safe route along the Creggan Burn to Pennyburn Mill, sheltered from the city's guns. It also commanded the road to Burt. Fleet commander Kirk's landings at Inch posed the threat of a Williamite invasion from there. The most direct route was the road from Burt over which occupants of the Creggan Rath could have kept a watchful eye.

#### The siege – an assessment

Derry's defensive weaknesses had been alluded to by the Royal Commission of 1628 which remarked on the city's vulnerability to attack from the river. Threats from shipping, however, did not materialise during the siege as the Williamite fleet commanded Loughs Foyle and Swilly. It was left to the besiegers to exploit the "Divers hills about the town". The importance of securing the high ground around Windmill Hill was recognised by both sides. Occupation, for the besiegers, would have given them a shorter range from which they could hope to breach the walls on the Bishop's Gate side. It was, consequently, fiercely fought over; the besiegers eventually losing out.

*The Siege of Derry.*



#### The breaking of the boom.



In the end, the combination of bombardment and blockade was to fail. Shortcomings on the Jacobite side included poor conditions, inadequate armaments/equipment and poor morale. These factors, coupled with the fortitude and courage of the defenders and the breaking of the Boom on 28 July 1689, brought an end to the Siege of Derry.

Many historic siege events were enacted over the area now occupied by Creggan Housing Estate. Continental forces fought here and reverberations were felt in Europe. Long term consequences were most keenly experienced in Ireland and particularly in Derry, where the legacy is still relevant.

In an ironic twist of history, another Siege of Derry, involving Creggan and the Bogside was ended by Operation Motorman 31 July 1972, only in the second case, the Jacobites (or at least the inheritors of the Jacobite position) were the besieged.

It was not the only irony, however. The approximate site of the 17th century mortar battery, which wreaked so much havoc in the late 17th century Jacobite offensive, was to become the site of another military installation in the 20th century namely the Eastway British army encampment, which played an important role in the recent troubles. A third Irony is that it was an Apprentice Boys March, celebrating victory for the defenders of 1688-89, which provided the touchstone for a serious slide into a more violent era of the troubles.

The high ground at Creggan was to become more important as the siege wore on. The higher region, out of range of cannon fire from the walls, provided for the bulk of the Jacobite encampment. Here reserves could be safely accommodated. Reinforcements could, and did, issue from the camp to engage with raiding parties, as they did at the day long battle at the Rath. From here also would have come relays of foot soldiers to man earthworks and trenches around the Bogside and adjoining areas.

The manned forts at Southway and the Rath helped, along with trenches, earthworks and other forts, to complete the blockade that increasingly became the besieger's tactic. A successful blockade would eventually have starved out the defenders. The other element of Jacobite activity, namely that of causing as much damage, injury and loss of life as possible, was not to be abandoned. Armaments available to the besiegers, including mortars, were incapable of breaching the walls but mortars could and did cause considerable death and destruction when lobbed over the walls into the city. The decision to move the mortar battery from Stronge's Orchard in the Waterside to the West Bank on 21 June, ensured that Mortar fire would come from the Eastway site. From the diary of Thomas Ash it has been calculated that as many as 337 bombs were fired from here between 21 June and 21 July. The highest figure for one day was 30 on 3 July.

This pamphlet has been produced as part of the Creggan Country Park's 'Step Back in Time' Heritage Lottery funded project examining the history of the Creggan Country Park site and the wider Creggan area. A number of pamphlets covering subjects linked to the Creggan Country Park heritage are available including:

- The siege of Derry
- Industrial heritage
- Land ownership
- Natural Heritage
- Early History
- Living Landscapes/the Rath
- Talking History

Creggan Country Park can also arrange Walking Tours of its site exploring all these subject matters in detail as well as offering field trips to other sites associated with these topics. Tours can also be tailored to suit groups focusing on specific academic fields. For example the Industrial Heritage module can be expanded to suit groups studying science/geography whilst the siege module can be tailored for modern history groups.

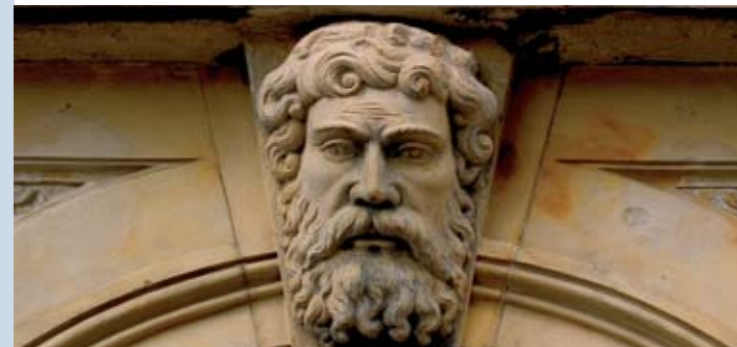
#### Other sites associated with the siege of Derry:

##### Derry's Walls/ St Columb's Cathedral

St Columbs cathedral was used as a defence post for the besieged occupants of Derry's walls during the siege and now contains a museum with numerous artefacts from that period. It is located within Derry's walls, which were the main focus of events during the siege.



Creggan Country Park can organise guided tours of the city walls and the cathedral in association with its partner organisation derrybluebadgeguide ([www.derrybluebadgeguide.com](http://www.derrybluebadgeguide.com)). These tours can be tailored to suit all age groups and can be specifically designed to suit groups studying modern history. For details contact Creggan Country Park on (028) 71363133 or [info@creggancountrypark.com](mailto:info@creggancountrypark.com).



# Creggan Country Park and the Siege of Derry

*By Mickey McGuinness, Derry Historian*

