



### **1177: The Savages**

In 1177AD, Anglo-Norman knight John de Courcy arrived in Ireland with 22 other knights and 300 soldiers. One of these knights was William Le Savage. He had been born in 1150AD and was the founder of the Ulster Savage dynasty. Many other powerful Anglo-Norman families settled in the new "Earldom of Ulster" where they built a number of historic abbeys and castles. In the Ards, two main branches of the Savage family developed, at Portaferry and Ardkeen. Other branches of the family settled across Strangford Lough in Lecale and built a number of castles there.

In 1588, Patrick Savage of Portaferry was made "Lord of the Little Ardes" by Queen Elizabeth I. In *The Description of Ireland and the State Thereof* (1598) it says "...Little Ardes lyeth on the North side of the River of Strangford by the Sea, a fertile Champion Countrie. The Inhabitants are an old colonie of the English. It is the Inheritance of the Lord Savage, who, being not able to withstand the violence of the O'Neals, was constraigned to take what they will give him. There are besides dwelling here certen ancient Freeholders of the Savages and Smithes..." (Two Savage brothers – Edmund and Janico - were killed in 1602 in a battle against the O'Neills at Clogny-ny- Castally in Co Antrim. The third brother, Roland, built Kirkistown and Ballygalget Castles.) "...during the lifetime of this Roland, Lord Savage, the Scottish families of Montgomery and Hamilton established themselves in the Great Ardes and Clandeboye respectively. During his lifetime, also, Roland Savage of Ballygalget built the Castles of Ballygalget and Kirkistone..."

### **1315: The Bruce Invasion**

Between 1315-1318, a huge Scottish invasion army of 6,500 men led by Edward Bruce, the brother of King Robert the Bruce, caused great devastation in eastern Ireland. The Bruces' initial aim had been to form alliances with the Gaelic Irish, seize power from the Anglo-Norman "Englishry" who ruled Ireland, and to establish a joint Scottish-Irish kingdom. They even had plans to invade Wales and to take over England! The Bruces' ambitions failed; in the famous epic poem of the invasion, called "Barbour's Bruce", the Savages, then headed by Sir Robert Savage, are listed as one of the families who fought against the invading Bruce armies.

### **1345: The Clandeboye O'Neills**

Around 1345AD, in the aftermath of the failed Bruce invasion, a branch of the powerful Gaelic O'Neill family moved from west Ulster into the area we now know as Antrim and Down. They were known as the Clan Aedh Buidhe (Clan of the Yellow-haired Hugh) O'Neills – and the land they settled on became known as Clanaboy or Clandeboye. With the old "Earldom of Ulster" now seriously weakened, the Clandeboye O'Neills became more and more powerful. They regularly attacked other O'Neills, the Antrim MacDonnells and, in particular, the Savages who had settled at the lower end of the Ards Peninsula. By the early 1500s the English Crown was



considering ways of breaking the Clandeboye O'Neills hold on east Ulster

### **1572: The Smiths**

Queen Elizabeth I came to the throne in 1558; one of the characteristics of her reign was colonization. She believed that, when traced back to the original "Earldom of Ulster" which had been founded almost 400 years earlier, the English Crown still owned the lands which the Clandeboye O'Neills regarded as theirs. But O'Neills claimed that they had possessed the lands for 14 generations. Regardless, in 1571, Elizabeth granted her Secretary of State Sir Thomas Smith a colossal 360,000 acres in east Ulster. The grant included all of the Ards and north Down apart from the southern tip of the Peninsula, known as the "Little Ards" or the "Upper Ards" which had become the power base of two branches of the Savage family. Around the mid 1400s another branch was based just across Strangford Lough in the district of Lecale, and built the "seven castles of Ardglass". The Clandeboye O'Neills, headed by Sir Brian O'Neill, discovered the booklet which Smith had printed to advertise his new Ulster lands to prospective tenants. They were outraged by her duplicity (just a few years earlier she had knighted Brian O'Neill for his loyalty) and when Sir Thomas Smith's colonists arrived in August 1572, the O'Neills launched a series of attacks on them, including the burning down of all of the ancient abbeys in the area. After three failed attempts to make it work, the Smith scheme collapsed in 1575 and, according to a survey of that same year, Clandeboye was left "totally waste and void of inhabitants". Sir Thomas Smith died and his nephew and heir, Sir William Smith, tried in vain to restart the colony in 1579.

### **1575 - 1606: Prelude to the Ulster-Scots**

With the collapse of the Smith colony, Queen Elizabeth agreed peaceable compromises with both the O'Neills and Savages – in 1587 with Con O'Neill (Sir Brian's grandson) and in 1588 with Patrick Savage, who she confirmed as "Lord Savage of the Little Ards".

At Christmas 1602, Con O'Neill was holding a Christmas party at Castle Reagh. They ran out of wine, so Con sent some of his men to raid a wine store in the small hamlet of Belfast. They encountered Royal troops, a skirmish broke out, and one of the troops was killed. Con was arrested and jailed in Carrickfergus.

He was sprung from jail some time later by Hugh Montgomery, who had been approached by Con's wife Ellis with an offer - half of the O'Neill estate as a reward for her husband's freedom.

At the same time, the old Smith grant fell into the hands of another Scot, James Hamilton.

Hamilton and Montgomery were both en-route to see King James to seek his approval for their acquisition of O'Neill's estate. In the end, the King granted all three men - O'Neill, Hamilton and Montgomery, one third each.



Con was free and pardoned and returned to Castle Reagh. Hamilton and Montgomery now had huge new estates - but their rivalry in securing the lands became mutual hatred. That hatred drove their ambition, and the success of their Settlement, which began in May 1606.