

Trim and the Confederate Wars 1641-1649

The town of Trim and its mighty Norman castle was the scene of much fighting during the Confederate Wars. It was attacked and captured by the Irish rebels in November 1641 but was recaptured by an English force under the command of the notorious Sir Charles Coote in April 1642. Coote himself was killed the following month during an unsuccessful attack by the Irish. He was succeeded as commander of the garrison by Sir Richard Grenville (grandson of the famous Elizabethan seaman) and under his command the garrison ranged far-and-wide in counter-insurgency operations including bringing relief to other besieged English outposts such as Athlone. The Pale, counties Louth, Meath, Kildare and Dublin, was vital to the survival of the English forces in Dublin supplying them with food. Trim was vital to the defence of the Pale. In June 1647 the Confederate Leinster Army, commanded by Thomas Preston, attacked the Pale, determined to 'spoil' the country and starve Dublin into submission. After capturing Naas and Maynooth, Preston laid siege to Trim. Recognising that if Trim was lost, then the Pale and Dublin would be lost, the Dublin garrison, now under the command of the Parliamentary general, Michael Jones, marched to the relief of Trim thus setting the scene for the decisive battle of Dungan's Hill.

The Battle of Dungan's Hill 8th August 1647

Dungan's Hill is an upland area which sits astride the Trim- Summerhill-Kilcock road about two miles south of Summerhill.

In July 1647, the parliamentary garrison of Dublin under Colonel Michael Jones was much beleaguered by the Leinster army of the Confederation under General Thomas Preston which had taken the towns of Naas and Maynooth and was advancing on Trim, the westernmost outpost of the Pale. It was vital that Trim be held for the parliament. Preston began a siege of the formidable Trim castle before the end of July. In response, Jones sallied forth from Dublin on 1st August and was joined by forces from the northern settlers and the northern Scots who had contracted to serve him, but for ten days only. His total strength was some 5,000 foot; 1,500 horse and 11 guns of various description. Hearing of Jones's approach, Preston raised the siege and withdrew to Portlester, a secure area a few miles to the west. Owen Roe O'Neill, commander of the Ulster army of the Confederation, which was now based in Connacht, advised him by letter to stay where he was until the northerners withdrew and offered to send 500 horse and 4,000 foot under his son, Colonel Henry. Preston ignored the advice and the offer and on 7th August moved to Agher, a secluded area about three miles west of Dungan's Hill bounded by considerable bog, particularly on its northern side. Here he was informed that Dublin was now held by only 500 men and he was urged to advance on the city.

He moved at dawn on Sunday, 8th August along the narrow way that led to Dungan's Hill and to the main road to Dublin. However, on the way he was delayed for two hours when a wheel came off a waggon and held up the whole convoy. With Jones advancing on Summerhill Preston was forced to make a stand at Dungan's Hill. He had 6,000 foot and 800 horse plus four demi-culverin (12 pounder cannon). He had also received a reinforcement of 500 (maybe 800) highlanders ('Redshanks') under MacDonald of Glengarry. Jones, having advanced to a point where he could see Dungan's Hill, noted the uninviting uphill and wide-open approach to the hill and moved his force to his left in an arc that brought it up to a point where he was facing Preston's flank with his line of battle in dead ground roughly parallel to the main road, though probably a few hundred yards back from it. He was thus facing west and the flank of Preston's army which was, apparently, still facing north as if expecting an attack up the hill from the Summerhill direction. Without delay, Jones attacked using 500 horse as his 'forlorn hope' (i.e. advance party). Preston's infantry was stationed in a large cornfield in which the crop was so high that many of the men could not see what was happening. His horse, under the inept Lord Dillon, was posted, some in a lane which ran towards Jones's line, the rest either to the south, away from where the main action would be, or in reserve. Jones's cavalry charge was such that it bypassed Preston's infantry and galloped towards the bog in rear. His infantry, however, engaged with that of Preston which resisted stubbornly for some two hours before withdrawing, an action that brought it to the bog with fateful outcome. Trapped in the bog the foot-soldiers were a prey to Preston's whole force which fell to execution, some 3,000 being massacred. Preston's horse, including Preston himself, made off to the south and safety. The defeat broke the Leinster army which was unable thereafter to give much account of itself. Coupled with the later destruction that year of the Munster army at Knocknuss, the Confederation was left with Owen Roe's formidable army as its only effective force. Owen Roe was out of favour with the Confederation; had he been called in, the story would have been very different.











