



**QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST**

Richard II and the wider Gaelic world: a reassessment

Egan, S. (2018). Richard II and the wider Gaelic world: a reassessment. *Journal of British Studies*, 57(2), 221-252. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2017.237>

Published in:
Journal of British Studies

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:
[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

Publisher rights

© The North American Conference on British Studies 2018.

This manuscript is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits distribution and reproduction for non-commercial purposes, provided the author and source are cited.

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Queen's University Belfast Research Portal is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The Research Portal is Queen's institutional repository that provides access to Queen's research output. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact openaccess@qub.ac.uk.

Open Access

This research has been made openly available by Queen's academics and its Open Research team. We would love to hear how access to this research benefits you. – Share your feedback with us: <http://go.qub.ac.uk/oa-feedback>

Introduction

On 2 October 1394 Richard II (d.1400), king of England, landed at the port town of Waterford on the south-east coast of Ireland. Commanding an army estimated 8,000 in strength, this was the largest English military intervention in Ireland since the English conquest of the late twelfth century. Richard II's Irish expedition of 1394-95 has attracted a considerable amount of scholarly attention. Much of the scholarship has however, focused on Richard's relations with the beleaguered colonial administration in Ireland. Historians have pointed almost solely to the Dublin government's pleas for greater royal investment in the Anglo-Irish colony, politically, financially and militarily, as the main reason for Richard's decision to intervene in Ireland.¹ Securing the colony, particularly the southern marches against the encroaching MacMurrough-

¹ Michael Bennet, "Richard II and the Wider Realm," in *Richard II: The Art of Kingship*, ed. Anthony Goodman and James Gillespie (Oxford, 1999), 195-6, 202-4; Art Cosgrove, *Late Medieval Ireland, 1370-1541* (Dublin, 1981), 10-20; Edmund Curtis, *A History of Medieval Ireland from 1086 to 1513* (Second Edition, London, 1938), 265-6; Seán Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Dublin, 1997), 158-9; Gerald Harriss, *Shaping the Nation: England, 1360-1461* (Oxford, 2005), 511; James Lydon, *The Lordship of Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Dublin, 1972), 230-32; Idem, "Richard II's Expeditions to Ireland," in *Government, War and Society in Medieval Ireland: Essays by Edmund Curtis, A.J. Otway-Ruthven and James Lydon*, ed. Peter Crooks (Dublin, 2008), 216-20; Darren McGettigan, *Richard II and the Irish Kings* (Dublin, 2016), 31-60, 93-120; Jocelyn Otway-Ruthven, *A History of Medieval Ireland* (London, 1980), 309-26; Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (Yale, 1997), 270-6; Brendan Smith, *Crisis and Survival in Late Medieval Ireland: The English of Louth and their Neighbours, 1330-1450* (Oxford, 2013), 76-81; Anthony Tuck, *Richard II and the Nobility* (London, 1973), 170-1.

Kavanaghs, formed but one, albeit significant, aspect of Richard's Irish venture.²

The other main area of historical research relating to Richard II and Ireland has centered on the issue of the Gaelic submissions. It has generally been accepted that the submission of so many Irish lords (over eighty nobles submitted to Richard between January and April 1395) represented a growing willingness amongst the fractious Gaelic chieftains and wayward Anglo-Irish nobility to acknowledge the authority of the English crown.³ This interpretation nevertheless, represents a misleading over-simplification of the submissions, the political realities pertaining to late fourteenth century Ireland, and the extent of English power therein. Rather than receiving the submissions of a host of petty, fractious chieftains, Richard was in fact

² For MacMurrough-Kavanagh threat, see Robin Frame, "Two Kings in Leinster: The Crown and the MicMhurchadha in the Fourteenth Century," in *Colony and Frontier in Medieval Ireland: Essays Presented to J.F. Lydon*, ed. T.B. Barry, Robin Frame and Katharine Simms (London, 1995), 168-72.

³ Bennet, "Richard II and the Wider Realm," 196; Edmund Curtis, "Unpublished Letters from Richard II, 1394-5," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature* 37 (1924-27): 276-303, at 281-2; Idem, *Richard II in Ireland, 1394-5: And Submissions of the Irish Chiefs* (Oxford, 1927), 32-5; Dorothy Johnston, "Richard II and the Submissions of Gaelic Ireland," *Irish Historical Studies* 22, no. 85 (March 1980): 1-20; Lydon, *Lordship of Ireland*, 237; Katharine Simms, *From Kings to Warlords: The Changing Political Structure of Gaelic Ireland in the Later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1987), 34, 57, 70-2; John Watt, "Gaelic Polity and Political Culture," in *A New History of Ireland, II: Medieval Ireland, 1169-1534*, ed. Art Cosgrove (Oxford, 1987), 344-5, 50; Saul, *Richard II*, 281-2; Tuck, *Richard II and the Nobility*, 174-7.

negotiating with an established aristocratic alliance network which had come to dominate much of the Irish political landscape. Between them, the four most powerful lords that submitted to Richard – O'Neill of Tyrone, O'Brien of Thomond, Burke of Clanrickard and O'Connor Donn of Roscommon – controlled over a third of Ireland (see figure 2). Furthermore, it was largely through the 'Big Four' (under the guidance of James Butler (d.1405), earl of Ormond) that Richard secured most of the other submissions.

Though historians have presented valid reasons for Richard's Irish expedition of 1394-95, such as the Irish council's plea of 1385 and the growing threat posed by the MacMurrough-Kavanaghs in southern Leinster, the pre-occupation with Anglo-centric source material has detracted from exploring Richard's relations with the Gaelic nobility.⁴ Attempts at salvaging the Irish archival catastrophe of 1922 have yielded some very promising results; the mainstay of recovered material nonetheless, deals with the Anglo-Irish colony.⁵ The notarial instruments used to record the submissions reveal little about the aims or ambitions of the foremost Irish dynasts. Contemporary chroniclers including Henry Knighton and Adam of Usk, though rich in detail on English domestic affairs, gloss over the king's Irish expedition and divulge nothing about his relations with the most powerful Irish lords.⁶ Much of John Froissart's material on the

⁴ *Statutes and Ordinances, and Acts of the Parliament of Ireland: King John to Henry V*, ed. Henry F. Berry (Dublin, 1997), 485-7; Cosgrove, *Late Medieval Ireland*, 17.

⁵ *Handbook and Select Calendar of Sources for Medieval Ireland in the National Archives of the United Kingdom*, ed. Paul Dryburgh and Brendan Smith (Dublin, 2005).

⁶ *Knighton's Chronicle, 1337-1396*, ed. Geoffrey Howard Martin (Oxford, 1995), 551; *The Chronicle of Adam of Usk, 1377-1421*, ed. Chris Given-Wilson (Oxford, 1997), 19; *Johannis de Trokelowe, et Henrici de Blaneforde...necnon quorundam anonymorum Chronicon et Annales*,

1394-95 expedition remains, in turn, apocryphal regarding Richard's dealings with the main Irish chieftains.⁷ The limitations of English material are nonetheless, offset by an abundance of Gaelic sources. An examination of these records, the corpus of annals in particular, reveals not only a great deal about the aims and ambitions of the Irish lords who submitted to Richard, these sources are essential for exploring and contextualizing Richard's relations with elements of the wider Gaelic world.⁸

The submissions, formed part of a much larger strategy of negotiation that extended beyond Ireland to Scotland. Richard's government had, by 1390, established strong relations with the MacDonald lordship of the Isles which, at the close of the fourteenth century, had come to dominate much of the northern Irish Sea world and threatened to overrun large areas of the western Scottish highlands. By negotiating with these Irish lords as well as the highly militarized MacDonald lordship, Richard was, in effect, attempting to rebuild English power within the wider British Isles, albeit through non-English mediums. It has often been remarked that the only

ed. Henry Thomas Riley (London, 1886), 172-3; *Historia Vitae et Regni Ricardi Secundi* (Pennsylvania, 1977), 134-5.

⁷ *Sir John Froissart's Chronicles of England, France, Spain and the adjoining countries: from the latter part of the reign of Edward III to the coronation of Henri IV*, ed. Thomas Johnes, 12 vols. (London, 1803-10), 11:154-67. See also, Johnston, "Richard II," 1-2.

⁸ Rather than using the anachronistic term, *Gaeltacht*, the author has chosen the designation 'wider Gaelic world' which, for the purpose of this essay, signifies both the autonomous Gaelic speaking regions of Ireland and Scotland as well as acculturated 'frontier' regions ruled by respective Anglo-Irish and Scottish magnates.

notable absentee from the submission lists was O'Donnell of Tyrconnell.⁹ The simple fact remains that O'Donnell did not submit in 1395, nor did his allies Burke of Mayo and O'Connor Ruadh of Roscommon (see figure 2). Not only were these three lords allied to one another, they represented an alternative aristocratic network and rivaled the 'Big Four' for control of much of Ireland's western seaboard. There is, moreover, considerable evidence indicating that O'Donnell and his allies were aligned with the Stewart monarchy and the Avignon Papacy.

Richard's negotiations with the Irish lords and the MacDonald lordship of the Isles thus need to be viewed within the broader context of developments within the wider Gaelic world, the course of Anglo-Scottish relations, and the Hundred Years War. The king's relationship with the lords of the wider Gaelic world nevertheless, remains a fundamentally unexplored facet of his kingship. This issue is symptomatic of both the aforementioned reliance on English source material as well as current historiographical and methodological trends. The work of Rees Davies and Robin Frame has been instrumental in decoding the political development of late medieval Britain and Ireland.¹⁰ Their work, however pioneering, remains highly Anglo-centric in outlook, focusing on the expansion of Anglo-French aristocratic culture, transnational landholding, and power in Ireland and the wider British Isles c.1100-c.1340. The decline of pan-insular Anglo-French power following the deterioration of Anglo-Scottish relations and the outbreak of the Hundred Years War has seen historians move away from the 'British Isles' model

⁹ Cosgrave, *Late Medieval Ireland*, 23; Tuck, *Richard II and the Nobility*, 176, no. 1. John Watt stated that 'all the Irish princes who mattered' submitted to Richard in 1395, (Watt, "Gaelic Polity," 324).

¹⁰ Rees Davies, *The First English Empire: Power and Identities in the British Isles, 1093-1343* (Oxford, 2000); Frame, *Political Development*.

espoused by Davies and Frame when exploring the period c.1340-c.1460. Scholars working in this later period have, for example, located the development of English power in Ireland within the context of the wider Plantagenet empire.¹¹ Though offering useful insights into the inner workings of the Anglo-Irish colony, this approach has drawn attention further away from the Gaelic west. Historians of late medieval Scotland in comparison have, understandably, adopted a more national-centered approach when examining the consolidation of Bruce and early Stewart Scotland, albeit with limited consideration for Scotland's relations with Ireland.¹²

This present essay argues for the continued worth of using the archipelagic model for exploring the political development of Britain and Ireland in the later fourteenth century - particularly when considering the role of the wider Gaelic world in influencing the course of 'British' politics. Brendan Smith and Michael Brown had both outlined the value of utilizing such an approach when exploring inter-insular relationships during the period, c.1300-c.1460; though admittedly from respective Anglo/Scottish-centric perspectives.¹³ Although Steven Ellis has

¹¹ Peter Crooks, "State of the Union: Perspectives on English Imperialism in the Late Middle Ages," *Past and Present* 212, no. 1 (August 2011), 1-40; David Green, "Lordship and Principality: Colonial Policy in Ireland and Aquitaine in the 1360s," *Journal of British Studies* 47, no. 1 (January 2008): 3-29

¹² For example, see Stephen Boardman, *The Early Stewart Kings: Robert II and Robert III* (East Linton, 1996).

¹³ Brendan Smith, "The British Isles in the Late Middle Ages: Shaping the Regions," *Ireland and the English World in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Brendan Smith (Basingstoke, 2009), 7-19; Michael Brown, *Disunited Kingdoms: Peoples and Politics in the British Isles, 1280-1460* (Harlow, 2013).

drawn attention to the Gaelic world (or 'Celtic fringe') as force within late medieval 'British' politics, his approach is likewise highly Anglo-centric in outlook.¹⁴ Considering the Gaelic resurgence of the fourteenth century to have been built upon 'flimsy military foundations', Ellis has focused on the expansion of English power within the wider British Isles, rather than assessing how developments within the wider Gaelic world could act as check on English expansion.¹⁵ Ellis' views on Gaelic identity have, in turn, drawn criticism from scholars such as Wilson McLeod and Martin MacGregor, both of whom have offered more nuanced readings on Gaelic cultural and political identity during the late medieval period.¹⁶ McLeod and MacGregor's models, though offering useful insights into concepts of Gaelic identity, ultimately lack a forensic examination of the hard political and dynastic structures underpinning Gaelic Irish and Gaelic Scottish interaction during the later medieval period.

Using Richard II's relations with the wider Gaelic world as a dedicated case study and by drawing upon a broad meld of material from within the Gaelic world, English and Scottish governmental records, and material from the Avignon Papacy, this essay challenges the notion the events in the Gaelic west were peripheral to political development of late medieval Ireland and Britain. The essay is divided into three main, inter-linked sections; the first of which

¹⁴ Steven Ellis, "The Collapse of the Gaelic World, 1450-1650," *Irish Historical Studies* 31, no. 124 (November 1999), 449-69.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 453, 457.

¹⁶ Martin MacGregor, "Civilising Gaelic Scotland: The Scottish Isles and the Stewart Empire," in *The Plantation of Ulster: Ideology and Practice*, ed. Éamonn Ó Ciardha and Mícheál Ó Siochrú (Manchester, 2012), 33-54, 38-40; Wilson McLeod, *Divided Gaels: Gaelic Cultural Identities in Ireland and Scotland, c.1200-c.1650* (Oxford, 2004), 220-2.

explores Richard's relationship with the MacDonald lordship of the Isles and the significance thereof for Irish affairs. Section two examines the context surrounding the emergence of the 'Big Four' and their enemies in Ireland during the later fourteenth century and how this, *in tandem* with events in Gaelic Scotland, laid the foundation for Richard's expedition in 1394-95. The final section examines Richard's Irish venture of 1394-95, including a reassessment of the submissions and why it proved so difficult for Richard to achieve a permanent settlement in Ireland. Weaving through the dynastic world of Gaeldom can, at face value, appear to be arduous task due the complexity of studying lineage-based societies and the fragmentary nature of surviving source material. The associated maps and tables however, provide guides essential for locating each lordship geographically, tracing the development of each lordship, and navigating the complex, dynastic milieu of the late fourteenth-century Gaelic world.

I: Gaelic Scotland in the Late Fourteenth Century

It is a rarely acknowledged fact that over the course of the later middle ages, nearly half the landmass of Britain and Ireland fell under autonomous Gaelic control. In Ireland, a combination of factors including the Bruce invasions (1315-1318), the Black Death, a cooling of the climate, and the migration and settlement of Scottish mercenary galloglass to Ireland saw English power across the north-western section of the island retreat significantly. Though Robin Frame has amply demonstrated that English power in Leinster and much of Munster was exercised effectively by the colonial earls, much of the northern and western seaboard including most of the de Burgh earldom of Ulster and lordship of Connacht was lost to resurgent Irish dynasties or the increasingly independent and acculturated Anglo-Irish Burkes of Clanrickard and Mayo.¹⁷

¹⁷ See essays contained in *Ireland and Britain, 1170-1450*, ed. Robin Frame (London, 1998).

A similar process occurred in fourteenth century Scotland, one that provides context crucial for exploring Richard II's later Irish venture. Robert Bruce's wars for control of Scotland in the early fourteenth century, coupled with the extinction of certain noble lines, brought about the disintegration of royal power in northern Scotland.¹⁸ As with Ireland, the political vacuum was filled by resurgent Gaelic clans, many of whom migrated eastwards from the western highlands such as the MacRuairís of Garmoran, the Clan Donnchaidh of Atholl, and the Clan Chattan of Lochaber and Badenoch.¹⁹ The most powerful Gaelic faction to emerge during the first half of the fourteenth century was the MacDonald lordship of the Isles.²⁰ The lordship was comprised of numerous Hebridean and west highland kindreds, each subject to the nominal authority of the lord of the Isles, a direct descendant of Somerled (d.1164), king of the Hebrides (see figure 1). Over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the lordship of the Isles became a major political force not only within the Gaelic world but also on the wider 'British' stage. This powerful position rested chiefly on the lords of Isles' ability to raise considerable

¹⁸ Boardman, *Early Stewart Kings*, 12-13; Alexander Grant, *Independence and Nationhood: Scotland, 1306-1469* (London, 1984), 204-6.

¹⁹ Stephen Boardman, "Lordship in the North-East: The Badenoch Stewarts, I, Alexander Earl of Buchan and Lord of Badenoch," *Northern Scotland*, 16 (May 1996): 1-30, at 2-3; *Acts of the Lords of the Isles, 1336-1493 (ALI)*, ed. Jean Munro and Robert Munro (Edinburgh, 1986), xxx-xxxv, 4.

²⁰ Michael Penman, "The MacDonald Lordship and the Bruce Dynasty, c.1306-c.1371," in *The Lordship of the Isles*, ed. Richard Oram (Leiden, 2014), 70-80.

military and maritime resources from the various sub-kindreds.²¹ Though the lordship crumbled apart in the late fifteenth century, largely due to internecine struggles and growing royal Scottish encroachment, successive lords of the Isles were able to maintain the relative cohesion of the wider lordship during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

Figure 1.

It was under the leadership of John MacDonald of Islay (d.1387), the first lord of the Isles, that the lordship emerged as a potent force within the Irish Sea world. The strategic position of the lordship made it an ideal ally of the English crown and from the late 1330s to the late 1360s John was courted as an ally both by Edward III of England and Edward Baliol, the pro-English claimant to Scotland.²² This accord proved mutually beneficial. On one level the alliance helped safeguard England's northern frontiers with Scotland during the early decades of the Hundred Years War.²³ Likewise it also served to protect the east coast of Ulster from Scottish intervention. For John this union gave him a freer hand to continue expanding across large areas of northern Scotland as well as the opportunity to meddle in Irish affairs where he had considerable interests.

²¹ Simon Kingston, *Ulster and the Isles in the Fifteenth Century: The Lordship of the Clann Domhnaill of Antrim* (Dublin, 2004), 184-201.

²² For example, see *ALI*, 1-4; *Calendar of Documents Relating to Scotland (CDS)*, ed. Joseph Bain, 5 vols. (Edinburgh, 1881-88), 3: no. 1272; *Rotuli Scotiae 1292-1516 (Rot. Scot.)*, ed. David MacPherson, 2 vols. (London, 1819), 1:516, 534-5, 677.

²³ Alastair MacDonald, *Border Bloodshed: Scotland, England and France at War, 1369-1403* (Edinburgh, 2000), 32.

Sometime during the early 1330s John allegedly exiled his cousins, the Clan Alexander, to Ireland.²⁴ The Clan Alexander were subsequently forced to become mercenary galloglass, serving the expansionist O'Neills of Tyrone, then led by Aodh Reamhar O'Neill (d.1364). Though the record is fragmentary, it appears that John became increasingly concerned that the Clan Alexander, with O'Neill support, would attempt to retake Islay – John's seat of power.²⁵ John quickly set about shoring up alliances. In 1337 he married Amy MacRuairí, sister of Ruairí MacRuairí of Garmoran, the most powerful lord in the northern Hebrides – a match which secured him possession of the northern Hebrides following Ruairí's assassination in 1346 (see figure 1).²⁶ In Ireland he moved to cultivate links with the O'Neills' Irish enemies and the English administration. In 1335 John travelled to Drogheda to assist in preparations for an attack on Scotland. Three years later he successfully petitioned Edward III (d.1377) to allow his cousins, Hugh and John Bisset, to acquire possession of the Antrim-based barony of Larne and Isle of Rathlin respectively (see figure 1).²⁷ John also secured from Edward III a number of safe

²⁴ Noel Murray, "A House Divided Against Itself: A Brief Synopsis of the History of Clan Alexandair and the Early Career of 'Good John of Islay', c.1290-1370," in *Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 2000*, ed. Colm Ó Baoill and Nancy R. McGuire (Aberdeen, 2002), 221-230: 223-5

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 221-230.

²⁶ *ALI*, 242; *Highland Papers (HP)*, ed. James MacPhail, 4 vols. (Edinburgh, 1914-34), 1:74. *HP*, 1:17; *The Original Chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun (Chron. Wyntoun)*, ed. Joseph Amours, John Thomas Brown and George Neilson, 6 vols. (Edinburgh, 1903-14), 6:174.

²⁷ *Reports of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records of Ireland* (Dublin, 1896-), 44:60; *Calendar of Patent Rolls: Edward III, 1327-1377*, ed. Henry Churchill Maxwell Lyte, 16 vols.

passes to allow himself and his mother, Áine, the daughter of O'Cahan, travel between Scotland and Ireland in 1337 and 1338.²⁸

Áine was a member of the O'Cahan kindred whose lordship was located on the northern coast of Ulster, bordering the O'Neill lordship of Tyrone (see figure 1). Áine had married John's father, Angus Óg c.1300 – a previous lord of Islay who fell at the Battle of Faughart during the Bruce Invasions of Ireland in 1318.²⁹ Soon after the granting of the 1338 pass, Áine married Murtagh Ceannfhada O'Neill (d.1395), the brother of the lord of the Clondeboy O'Neills, Brian (d.1369). The Clondeboy O'Neills were regional rivals of the Tyrone branch and contested the Tyrone's branch's claim to the chieftaincy of the wider O'Neill kindred (see figure 1).³⁰ As allies of the colonial government, Brian and his brother Murtagh Ceannfhada acted as a check on the territorial ambitions of Aodh Reamhar O'Neill, lord of Tyrone and patron of the Clan Alexander. By drawing the O'Neills of Clondeboy and O'Cahans closer to one another, John created a buffer between himself and the Clan Alexander while at the same time helping to protect the earldom of Ulster, now confined to an increasingly narrow strip of land hugging the south east coast of Ulster. Moreover, John is recorded as leading two expeditions to Ireland (probably in the mid-1340s) in an attempt to secure the O'Neill chieftaincy for his cousin, Brian; both ventures failed.³¹

(London, 1893-1916), 4:81. Robin Frame, *English Lordship in Ireland, 1318-1361* (Oxford, 1982), 144-52; Smith, *Crisis and Survival*, 31; *CDS*, 3: no. 1272; 1276.

²⁸ *Rot. Scot.*, 1:516, 534-5.

²⁹ *HP*, 1:20; *Reliquiae Celticae*, ed. Alexander Cameron, 2 vols. (Inverness, 1892-94), 2:158-9.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:20. For Clondeboy ties to Dublin, see Smith, *Crisis and survival*, 30-1.

³¹ *HP*, 1:27.

Despite the highly fragmentary nature of surviving source material, relations between the lordship of the Isles and the O'Neills appear to have improved during the last two decades of the fourteenth century. The reconciliation of the O'Neills of Tyrone and Clondeboy during the late 1360s undoubtedly contributed to this process.³² Developments in the western section of Ireland - namely the rise of the O'Donnells - played an equal if not more important role in strengthening tie between the O'Neills of Tyrone and the Islesmen and are discussed in greater detail in section two. It is also worth noting here that by the late 1370s the Clan Alexander had fragmented into a series of smaller sub-kindreds. Though the main sept remained in the employ of the O'Neills of Tyrone, the smaller family branches migrated westward into Connacht. Here they sought and eventually found employment with kindreds allied to the O'Donnells.³³ As outlined below, there is evidence to suggest that the O'Donnells had, by the early 1380s, drifted into the orbit of the Scottish crown. John of Islay thus may have feared becoming stretched on two fronts; the O'Donnells and the Clan Alexander in the west, the Scottish monarchy in the east. Faced with a common enemy in Ireland, relations between the O'Neills of Tyrone and the lordship of the Isles gradually improved. Against the backdrop of Hundred Year War, the government of Richard II sought to exploit this shift in Gaelic *realpolitik* through negotiation with the O'Neills and their

³² For reconciliation, see Simms, "Late Medieval Tír Eoghain," 147-8.

³³ *The Annals of Ulster (AU)*, ed. William Hennessy, 4 vols. (Dublin, 1887-1901), 1384 (all annals references are given as year as opposed to volume or page number); *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland (AFM)*, ed. John O'Donovan, 7 vols. (Dublin, 1990), 1397; *Annála Connacht (AD 1224-1544) (AC)*, ed. Martin Freeman (Dublin, 1970). 1398; *Annals of Loch Cé (ALC)*, ed. William Hennessy, 2 vol. (London, 1939), 1397, 1398; Nicholls, "Scottish Mercenary Kindreds," 100.

allies (a topic dealt with in section three) and by allowing for a more permanent MacDonald presence in Ulster.

The death of David II in 1371 and accession of Robert Stewart (d.1390) as Robert II led to a brief period of *rapprochement* between the lord of the Isles and the Scottish crown. Unlike David II, Robert was an acculturated monarch. Originally hailing from western Scotland, Robert was able to move easily between the Gaelic and Scots-English speaking worlds.³⁴ In fact, much of his support base within the kingdom derived from Gaelic kindreds such as the Campbells of Loch Awe, the Clan Donnchaidh of Atholl, and the lordship of the Isles.³⁵ Married to Robert's daughter, Margaret, in 1350, John had aligned himself with the Stewarts during David II's protracted captivity (1346-1357), before drifting back into English allegiance upon David's return to Scotland in 1357.³⁶ As a son-in-law of the new king in 1371, John perhaps hoped to secure legitimization for his 'acquisitions' in northern Scotland.³⁷ A combination of factors however, placed great pressure on John's relationship with the new regime. As suggested by

³⁴ Stephen Boardman, "The Gaelic World and the Early Stewart Court," in *Míorún Mór nan Gall: The Great Ill-Will of the Lowlander*, ed. Dauvit Broun and Martin MacGregor (Stornoway, 2007), 83-109.

³⁵ Boardman, *Early Stewart Kings*, 7, 28, no. 31; Idem, "The Gaelic World," 101.

³⁶ For marriage, see *ALI*, 242. For overview of English alliance, see Penman, "Bruce Dynasty," 75-87.

³⁷ Boardman, *Early Stewart Kings*, 90-1; Alexander Grant, "Scotland's 'Celtic Fringe' in the Late Middle Ages: The MacDonald Lords of the Isles and the Kingdom of Scotland," in *The British Isles, 1100-1500: Comparisons, Contrasts and Connections*, ed. Rees Davies (Edinburgh, 1988), 126-7.

Alexander Grant, John may have expected to have been awarded a grant of royal lieutenancy over much of western Scotland; the lieutenancy was instead awarded to Gillespie Campbell of Loch Awe, one of John's main regional rivals.³⁸ The far more damaging rift however, occurred in northern Scotland where Robert II failed to curtail the activities of his son, Alexander Stewart, the infamous 'Wolf of Badenoch', whose forces continually raided John's holdings in Lochaber (see figure 1).³⁹

Within a few years tensions between John and the crown had risen once again. Faced with little recourse, John had, by the late 1370s, revived his alliance with the English government.⁴⁰ Once more this arrangement proved mutually beneficial. The renewal of the Hundred Years war in 1371, the advent of Franco-Castilian naval supremacy, and Robert II's commitment to the French meant that English holdings within the Irish Sea world were vulnerable to French and Scottish attack.⁴¹ For example, during the 1370s the English government feared that Owain Lawgoch (d.1378), a Welshman in French military service and self-proclaimed Prince of Wales, would return to Wales and launch a major revolt with French support.⁴² Despite Lawgoch's assassination at Mortagne in 1378, Richard II's government

³⁸ Grant, "Scotland's 'Celtic Fringe'," 126-7.

³⁹ *HP*, 1:25; Boardman, "Badenoch Stewarts I," 1-30.

⁴⁰ *Rot. Scot.*, 2:11, 45; *ALI*, 297.

⁴¹ MacDonald, *Border Bloodshed*, 31-2; Jonathon Sumption, *Divided Houses: The Hundred Years War III* (London, 2009), 115-70. The English commons had become concerned about the decline of English sea-power in this period, *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, ed. Parliament Great Britain, 6 vols. (London, 1767-77), 2: 311.

⁴² See also Anthony Carr, *Owen of Wales: The End of the House of Gwynedd* (Cardiff, 1991).

remained concerned about French intervention along the southern coasts of England and Wales well into the 1380s.⁴³ English possessions in Ireland were also subject to French and Scottish attack. In 1381 the port town of Kinsale on the south-west coast of Ireland was raided by a large Franco-Castilian force commanded by Jean de Vienne (d.1396) – the Admiral of France and architect of French naval supremacy.⁴⁴ Richard subsequently approved funds for the walling of Kinsale to protect the inhabitants from further attack.⁴⁵ The port of Waterford was likewise raided by Castilian forces in 1377 while Cork city and its hinterland in 1388 are recorded as suffering numerous burnings at the hands of Irish rebels and the king's enemies.⁴⁶ More striking still is that in 1388 (a year after John's death), a large Scottish force, commanded by Sir William Douglas of Nithsdale (d.1391) ravaged colonial settlements at Carlingford Lough before raiding the Isle of Man as part of the broader Otterburn campaign.⁴⁷

These attacks capitalized upon English entanglement on the European continent,

⁴³ For English security concerns relating to Wales, see Rees Davies, *The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dwr* (Oxford, 1995), 83-7.

⁴⁴ *The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham, 1376-1422*, ed. David Prest and James G. Clark (Woodbridge, 2005), 108-9.

⁴⁵ *Rotulorum Patentium et Clausorum Cancellariae Hiberniae Calendarium (RCH)*, ed. Edward Tresham (Dublin, 1828), 114, no. 193.

⁴⁶ Brendan Smith, "Late Medieval Ireland and the English Connection: Waterford and Bristol, ca. 1360-1460," *Journal of British Studies* 50, no. 3 (July 2011): 546-565, at 554. For Cork, see *Calendar of Close Rolls: Richard II, 1377-1399 (CCR, Richard II)*, ed. Henry Churchill Maxwell Lyte, 6 vols. (London, 1914-1927), 3:521-2.

⁴⁷ *RCH*, 127, no. 243; *Chron. Wyntoun*, 6:321-4.

particularly during the mid-1380s when English forces had become increasingly ensnared in the Iberian Peninsula.⁴⁸ Though the earldom of Ulster had, by this time, shrunk to a thin strip of coastline, it appears to have remained economically viable due to a lucrative fishing trade operating from Strangford Lough, Carlingford, and the Abbey of Inch (see figure 1).⁴⁹ Moreover, the defense of Carrickfergus Castle remained of paramount importance both to the Crown and Irish council; in 1392 it was feared Carrickfergus would fall to the Gaelic Irish and the justicar, Sir John Stanley (d.1414), received orders to reinforce the castle's defenses.⁵⁰

John's considerable military and maritime resources offered a greater degree of protection to English holdings north of Wales, especially the castles and fisheries of eastern Ulster. Prior to his removal from governance in 1387, Richard II took steps to secure a greater MacDonald presence in Ulster. On 16 February 1387 a license was granted by the Irish Council for the marriage of Robert Savage to Christina, a daughter of John, lord of the Isles. The marriage was subsequently ratified by the English council on 4 May 1388.⁵¹ The identity of Robert Savage is uncertain but, as Katharine Simms has suggested, he was most likely the son of the previous crown seneschal of Ulster, Robert (d.1360) and brother of the current seneschal, Edmund (fl.1385).⁵² Based in the Ards Peninsula and originally of Anglo-Norman extraction, the

⁴⁸ Sumption, *Divided Houses*, 558-623.

⁴⁹ Timothy O'Neill, *Merchants and Mariners in Medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 1987), 30-3.

⁵⁰ *Calendar of Patent Rolls: Richard II, 1377-1399 (CPR, Richard II)*, ed. Henry Churchill Maxwell Lyte (London, 1895-1909), 4:405.

⁵¹ *RCH*, 137, no. 218; *CPR, Richard II*, 3:435.

⁵² Katharine Simms, "The Revolt of 1404 – An Anti-Lancastrian Dimension?," in *Ireland and the English World in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Brendan Smith (Basingstoke, 2009), 157.

Savages had defended the declining earldom of Ulster from O'Neill expansion for much of the earlier fourteenth century. Despite a brief spell of disfavor in the 1370s, the Savages had re-established themselves as key agents of both the English crown and Mortimer earls of March during the early 1380s.⁵³ There is evidence to suggest that the Savages were highly acculturated to the socio-cultural world of Gaelic Ireland, and by association, Gaelic Scotland. For example, one Jenkin Savage, possibly a brother of Robert (d.1360), was a noted patron of Gaelic bards – this would help explain and contextualize their cordial relations with the lord of the Isles.⁵⁴ The Savage match of 1387 formed the basis for further MacDonald expansion in Ireland which, again, served the purposes of the both MacDonalds and the English crown. John of Islay was an old man in 1387; he was probably in his late eighties and had ruled the Isles successfully for over fifty years. John however, may have had one main concern regarding the succession of the lordship prior to his death later that year.⁵⁵ Following his death it has been suggested that there may have been a very brief period of *interregnum* in the lordship of the Isles; that there was some opposition amongst the island kindreds to the succession of his heir designate, Donald (d.1423), the grandson of Robert II.⁵⁶

⁵³ For the Savages' earlier service, see Robin Frame, "Power and Society in the Lordship of Ireland, 1272-1377," in *Ireland and Britain, 1170-1450*, ed. Robin Frame (London, 1998), 196; Idem, "Military Service in the Lordship of Ireland, 1290-1360: Institutions and Society on the Anglo-Gaelic Frontier," in *Ireland and Britain, 1170-1450*, ed. Robin Frame (London, 1998), 241-2.

⁵⁴ *AU*, 1374.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1387.

⁵⁶ Kingston, *Ulster and the Isles*, 34-5.

The council of the Isles (comprising the chiefs of the main island kindreds) however, soon agreed to support the decision of Ranald – John’s eldest son by his first marriage to Amy MacRuairí – who had been acting as the caretaker lord of the Isles until Donald was ready to take power.⁵⁷ In any case there had been a brief period where the lordship of the Isles may have been vulnerable to a dynastic challenge from the Scottish monarchy or their recent Irish allies, the O’Donnells.⁵⁸ The marriage of Christina (Donald’s sister) and Robert Savage gave the new lord of the Isles a greater foothold in Ireland and formed the basis for the subsequent MacDonald acquisition of the Seven Glynnns of Antrim. The precise dating of the MacDonald acquisition of the Glynnns– brought about by the marriage of Donald's brother, John Mór (d.1427) (son of John of Islay and Margaret Stewart) to Marjory Bisset, the heiress to the Glynnns – remains uncertain. John had certainly secured possession of the Glynnns in 1400, owing to the fact that he is styled as lord thereof in correspondence with the English crown.⁵⁹ Though historians have gravitated towards this later date, by broadening the scope of investigation it becomes possible to posit an earlier date for the acquisition.

Allowing for a greater degree of MacDonald influence in Ulster was part of a broader ‘British’-orientated defensive system orchestrated by Richard II, though a rarely acknowledged aspect of his kingship.⁶⁰ Through the promotion of loyalist servitors and by forming alliances with non-English mediums such as the lordship of the Isles, Richard hoped both to secure his

⁵⁷ *Reliquiae Celticae*, 2:35.

⁵⁸ See below.

⁵⁹ *Rot. Scot.*, 2:155-6. John Mór received an indenture for the Antrim lands, in 1403, see Kingston, *Ulster and the Isles*, 50, n. 100.

⁶⁰ See Tuck, *Richard II and the Nobility*, 164.

own personal rule and rebuild English power within the wider British Isles. For example, as Prince of Wales, Richard enjoyed a strong support base amongst the native Welsh and colonial communities. The king also promoted strong relations with the port-town of Chester and granted possession of the strategic Isle of Man in 1392 for the loyalist William Scrope (d.1399) in 1392.⁶¹ Ireland, nonetheless, continued to pose a significant challenge due to the lack of effective English royal power beyond the colony as well as increasing level of aristocratic factionalism amongst the Anglo Irish community.⁶² Negotiating with the wider Gaelic nobility, the MacDonalds in this instance, and their capacity to raise considerable military resources in regions beyond effective English influence offered Richard a solution.

In October 1389, a year after Richard reassumed power, Edmund Savage was granted the wardship of the heiress Marjory Bisset and her sister Elizabeth – both daughters of one recently deceased 'Hugh Bysset' – with permission to marry them to any of the king's loyal lieges.⁶³ While no record provides a date for the union of John Mór and Marjory, it is possible that the match may have occurred as early as 1390. Surviving proclamations of Anglo-French treaties between August 1389 and March 1396 name John Mór ('Jehan de Ysles' or 'Johan des Isles') as an ally of the English crown.⁶⁴ The fact that the actual lord of the Isles, Donald, is not included suggests

⁶¹ For the importance of these regions see Bennet, "Richard II and the Wider World," 187-204; Saul, *Richard II*, 172,187, 393-4; Tuck, *Richard II and the Nobility*, 62, 82, 180.

⁶² Peter Crooks, "The 'Calculus of Faction' and Richard II's Duchy of Ireland," in *Fourteenth Century England: V* ed. Nigel Saul (Woodbridge, 2008), 94-115.

⁶³ *RCH* 146, no. 198.

⁶⁴ *Foedera*, ed. Thomas Rymer, 20 vols. (London, 1727-35), 7:622-29, 639-40, 656-8, 714-16, 777, 824.

that John Mór had become the main intermediary between the crown and his brother and may have been engaged in negotiations with the crown and Savages as early as 1389, settling soon after as the *de facto* lord of the Glynnns.⁶⁵

The marriage not only secured a lasting MacDonald presence in Ulster, it may have helped to mend relations with the O'Neills of Tyrone. Numerous Irish annals indicate that the head of the Bisset affinity – MacEoin Bisset – was married to Sadhb (d.1387), daughter Aodh O'Neill, quite probably, Aodh Reamhar O'Neill, which would make her a sister of the O'Neill chieftain, Niall Mór (d.1397).⁶⁶ Despite a mistake in the English translation of the *Annals of the Four Masters* there is no record of MacEoin Bisset's first name.⁶⁷ It is therefore very possible that 'MacEoin Bisset' and the aforementioned 'Hugh Byset', father of Marjory and Elizabeth, were one and the same. This would, in turn, mean that Marjory was the niece of Niall Mór O'Neill and suggest a familial link between all three dynasties.

The territorial aggrandizement of the MacDonalds in Antrim would form a central aspect of Richard II's Irish strategy. Though nominally at peace with Scotland and France since 1389

⁶⁵ The English crown was also in separate contact with Donald (and his half-brother Godfrey of Uist) via the Bishop of Sodor, see *Rot. Scot.*, 2:94-95; *Foedera*, 2:592; *CPR, Richard II*, 5:181.

⁶⁶ For her obituary see, *AC,AU, ALC, AFM*, 1387; *The Annals of Clonmacnoise (AClon)*, ed. Dennis Murphy (Dublin, 1986), 1387. The annals also refer to Aodh Óg O'Neill who was allied to MacEoin Bisset, whether as brother-in-law or father-in-law, is uncertain, (*AU*, 1383); an Aodh na Fiodhbhaighe whose son died in 1358, (*AFM*, 1358); and an Aodh son of Ruairí O'Neill who died in 1353 (*ALC*, 1353).

⁶⁷ The editor John O'Donovan's misinterpretation of the surname 'MacEoin Bisset' has given rise to the idea that he was called John, see *AFM*, 1387.

the lordship of the Isles' ability to check Scottish expansion in the northern Irish Sea world allowed Richard to direct his full attention on Ireland. Here Richard could pursue the recovery of the Mortimer inheritance and the reduction of forces hostile to English interests therein – particularly in the west of Ireland. The idea that the O'Neills of Tyrone had a vested interest in the MacDonald acquisition of Antrim is also reinforced by developments in Ireland west of the River Shannon. Therefore, in order to understand the broader context behind both the cooling of O'Neill-MacDonald tensions and the background to Richard's Irish expeditions, it is necessary to first trace the political development of Gaelic Ireland's western seaboard at the close of the fourteenth century.

II: Gaelic Ireland in the Late Fourteenth Century

The *Annals of Connacht* record that on 25 November 1384, Ruairí O'Connor, king of Connacht, died from plague.⁶⁸ The earlier fourteenth century had witnessed growing tensions and divisions within the O'Connor lordship of Roscommon. Contemporary annalists however, credited Ruairí's sixteen-year reign as allowing for a greater degree of stability and political cohesion within the wider O'Connor lordship.⁶⁹ Indeed, his death has been described by Kenneth Nicholls as causing 'the fatal division of the O'Connor' lordship into the two dominant, competing lines of O'Connor Ruadh and O'Connor Donn.⁷⁰ Following Ruairí's death two rival claimants to the vacant kingship were proclaimed almost immediately. Turlough Óg O'Connor Donn (d.1406) (a nephew of Ruairí and son of Ruairí's predecessor, Aodh d.1356, son of

⁶⁸ AC, 1384.

⁶⁹ AC, AU, ALC, AClon, AFM, 1384.

⁷⁰ Kenneth Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicized Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Second Edition, Dublin 2003), 174.

Turlough d.1343/5) was elected king of Connacht by the O'Connor Donn kindred, their kinsmen the O'Connors of Sligo, the O'Rourkes of Breifne, the O'Kellys of Hymany, the MacDermots of Airteach and the Burkes of Clanrickard.⁷¹ Conversely, Turlough O'Connor Ruadh (d.1425/6) – a second cousin of Turlough Óg O'Connor Donn and son of Aodh (d.1368), son of Felim (d.1316) – was supported by the MacDermots of Moylurg, the O'Malleys of the Owles and the Burkes of Mayo. O'Connor Donn and O'Connor Ruadh's alliance networks (including lesser kindreds) are depicted on the below table and map (see table 1 and figure 2). For the purpose of this essay, these alliance networks are referred to as the *Donn* and *Ruadh* factions. These terms were originally coined by Kenneth Nicholls and later adopted by Art Cosgrove.⁷² Both scholars have alluded to the existence of these networks in Connacht. However, the fact that these Connacht-based alliances developed into larger, competing aristocratic networks that eventually came to dominate nearly two-thirds of Ireland during the later fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, remains hitherto unacknowledged in the historiography.

Table 1.

It is important to bear in mind that while this conflict stemmed from a civil war in Roscommon, hegemonic control of Connacht was, in reality, being contested by the more powerful patrons of O'Connor Donn and O'Connor Ruadh, namely the competing Burke of Clanrickard and Mayo families (and eventually by the O'Briens, O'Donnells and O'Neills).

⁷¹ *AC, AU, ALC, AClon, AFM*, 1384. The MacDermots of Airteach were a rival branch of the main Moylurg line and eventually die out in the sixteenth century. Their lordship was located in the western section of County Roscommon, see *AFM*, 1405, 1416; *AC*, 1416.

⁷² Cosgrove, "Ireland beyond the Pale," 576-80; Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicized Ireland*, 174.

Initially this conflict had been confined west of the River Shannon, primarily to the province of Connacht. In the space of a few short years however, it had spread to neighboring provinces of Ulster, Leinster, and Munster (see table 2 and figure 2). The reasons behind the expansion of this conflict lie in the geopolitical situation pertaining both to Connacht and the other provinces as well as the political and territorial ambitions of the main magnates therein. hegemonic The lords of western Leinster became drawn into the conflict in eastern Connacht partly due to power struggles in northern Leinster but also to maintain control of the Shannon. For example, the competing branches of the O’Ferralls of Annaly (the Clan Sean and Clan Aedh) sought support from O’Connor Donn/Burke of Clanrickard and O’Connor Ruadh respectively in an attempt to control this vital waterway. Further south, the O’Connors of Offaly, kinsmen of the O’Connor Ruadh kindred through marriage, acted as a check on O’Connor Donn and Burke of Clanrickard expansion in Leinster. For example, not only did the O’Connors of Offaly provide military support to O’Connor Ruadh when required, the O’Connors of Offaly were later joined in marriage to the O’Donnells of Tyrconnell (see below).⁷³ Another comparable situation existed in northern Munster. The O’Briens of Thomond, with the support of the Burkes of Clanrickard (both members of the *Donn* faction), emerged as the dominant regional powers and posed an ever greater threat to the towns of Limerick and Cork as well as the authority of the earl of Desmond.⁷⁴ Likewise the MacCarthy of Desmond, due to necessity, became increasingly drawn into the *Donn/Ruadh* struggle (see section 3).

Table 2.

⁷³ *AC, AU, ALC, AClon, AFM*, 1406. *AFM, AU*, 1433.

⁷⁴ *AFM*, 1382; *CIRCLE: A Calendar of Irish Chancery Letter, c. 1244-1509*, ed. Peter Crooks (Trinity College Dublin; online resource, at <http://chancery.tcd.ie>), Patent Roll 2 Henry IV, 23.

Figure 2.⁷⁵

The Ulster dimension to this conflict was perhaps the most significant; one that is essential for exploring why the O'Neills later wished to co-operate with Richard. As noted, the earlier fourteenth century witnessed a sustained period of O'Neill expansion in central and eastern Ulster. Following Aodh Reamhar's death in 1364 his son and successor, Niall Mór (d.1397) continued this process.⁷⁶ By the early 1380s most of central and eastern Ulster had fallen under the control of the O'Neills with Gaelic factions such as the Maguires, Clondeboy O'Neills, MacMahons, Magennis, O'Hanlons as well as kindreds of Anglo-Norman extraction such as the Bissets of the Glynnns owing their loyalty to the O'Neills of Tyrone (though the Clondeboy O'Neills and the Magennis appear to have later joined with O'Donnell – see below). This powerful position rested both on the compliance of these lesser kindreds as well as the relative cohesion of the wider Tyrone lordship. As with the *Donn* and *Ruadh* factions in Connacht, the allegiance of the smaller lordships, Maguires and MacMahons, was maintained through ties of dynastic politics including marriage alliances and fosterage but also enforced through military intimidation. Niall Mór and his heir designate, Niall Óg (d.1403), maintained their court in south-eastern Tyrone or northern Armagh, either at Dungannon or Eamhain Macha (Navan Fort).⁷⁷ From here they continued to expand O'Neill power in eastern Ulster and posed

⁷⁵ This map is based on an earlier version compiled by Kenneth Nicholls, see Patrick J. Duffy, David Edwards and Elizabeth FitzPatrick, "Introduction: Recovering Gaelic Ireland, c.1250-c.1650", in *Gaelic Ireland, c.1250-c.1650: Land, Lordship and Settlement*, ed. Patrick J. Duffy, David Edwards and Elizabeth FitzPatrick (Dublin, 2001), 24-5.

⁷⁶ *AFM*, 1397.

⁷⁷ For location of O'Neill seat, see Simms, "Late Medieval Tír Eoghain," 147.

an ever greater menace to the northern borders of the Pale. The fulcrum of O'Neill power in this period however, derived from the activities of another of Niall Mór's sons, Éinrí Aimhreidh (d.1392), and his ability to protect Tyrone from Turlough an Fhíona O'Donnell (d.1422), the lord of Tyrconnell.

Éinrí Aimhreidh's duty in defending the western approaches to Tyrone rested on the maintenance of large military forces – drawn from Tyrone and the Maguire lordship of Fermanagh – as well as fomenting dynastic unrest within Tyrconnell. The O'Neills' ability to play rival branches of the O'Donnells against one another in Tyrconnell formed the basis for O'Neill expansion in eastern Ulster during the 1360s and 1370s.⁷⁸ For example two of Niall Mór's daughters were married to rival claimants to the O'Donnell lordship; Gormlaith (d.1416) was married to Sean O'Donnell (d.1380) while her sister, Gráinne, was married to Turlough an Fhíona O'Donnell.⁷⁹ Turlough an Fhíona, seized power within Tyrconnell in 1380 and quickly came to pose a serious threat to O'Neill dominance in Ulster.⁸⁰ Over the course of the early 1380s the O'Donnells gradually began to reassert themselves; the conflict in Connacht came to play an increasingly important role in the O'Neill-O'Donnell struggle. In an attempt to flank the O'Donnells, Éinrí Aimhreidh sought assistance from the *Donn* faction in Connacht, allying himself with the O'Connors of Sligo and O'Rourkes of West Breifne – both of whose lordships

⁷⁸ For O'Neill expansion, see *AC*, *ALC*, 1366, 1368, 1370, 1374; *AU*, 1362, 1365, 1367, 1369, 1370; *AFM*, 1365, 1366, 1368, 1370, 1375.

⁷⁹ *AC*, *AU*, *ALC*, *AFM*, 1416; *The Life of Aodh Ruadh O Domhnaill, Transcribed from the Book of Lughaid O Clerigh*, ed. Paul Walsh, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1948, 1957), 2:158.

⁸⁰ *AFM*, 1380.

bordered with southern Tyrconnell.⁸¹ These lordships held great strategic value: whoever controlled these lordships could, in theory, control the passageways between Ulster and Connacht (see figure 2). Conversely, in order to ease pressure on his southern flank O'Donnell reached out to the *Ruadh* faction in Connacht who could attack Sligo and West Breifne and draw *Donn* faction forces away from Tyrconnell.

It therefore comes as no surprise that Sligo and West Breifne became hotly contested combat zones over the next number of years as both the O'Donnells, O'Neills and their respective *Ruadh* and *Donn* faction allies each jostled for control of these lordships. Indeed, the scenario in northern Connacht forced the Burkes of Clanrickard and the O'Briens of Thomond to participate more actively in central Connacht in order to draw the *Ruadh* faction away from northern Connacht. This strategy of tying the *Ruadh* faction down on a series of fronts initially proved successful. During the late 1380s and early 1390s Éinrí Aimhreidh, in co-operation with his allies in Connacht, succeeded in containing the O'Donnell threat. This, in turn, enabled Niall Mór and Niall Óg to continue solidifying their hold upon eastern Ulster – a prime example being the O'Neill assault upon the town of Dundalk situated on the north coast of Leinster in 1392 (see figure 1).⁸²

The O'Donnells however, had one major advantage in this broadening geopolitical

⁸¹ *AU*, 1388; *ALC*, *AFM*, 1388, 1389. This alliance was sustained into the early fifteenth century. For example, in 1420 Éinrí Aimhreidh's son and successor, Domnall Bog (d.1432), was provided with shelter in Sligo during a period of internal strife in Tyrone (*AC*, 1420). The alliance with Sligo was subsequently adopted by the main ruling line in Tyrone following Domnall Bog's death, *AFM*, *AU*, 1432.

⁸² *AC*, *AU*, *ALC*, *AFM*, 1392.

conflict. Unlike Tyrone, Tyrconnell was a maritime lordship and there is evidence to suggest that the O'Donnells were able to draw upon sizeable maritime resources, giving them a tactical advantage over their opponents. The importance of galleys and other seafaring craft in Gaelic Scottish warfare has been amply demonstrated. Galleys, or smaller craft such as *birlinn* enabled west Highland factions such as the MacDonald lordship of the Isles and Campbells of Loch Awe to dominate much of the western Scottish seaboard, patrolling strategic lochs and safeguarding trade routes and maritime passageways.⁸³ In comparison, historians of Gaelic Ireland have tended to overlook the importance of the maritime landscape in late medieval Irish politics; a topic which to date has largely been the pursuit of marine archaeologists.⁸⁴

The O'Donnells are noted for their ability to raise large military forces from amongst their sub-kindreds. This included cavalry drawn from the O'Dohertys of Inishowen and light infantry or 'kern' from the O'Gallaghers and O'Boyles of Boylagh.⁸⁵ The three MacSweeny galloglass septs of Fanad, Banagh and na Doe however, formed the backbone of O'Donnell armies. Originally hailing from Knapdale in western Scotland, the MacSweenys were displaced during the Scottish-Norse wars of the late thirteenth century and the Anglo-Scottish wars of the

⁸³ Stephen Boardman, "The Campbells and Charter Lordship in Medieval Argyll," in *The Exercise of Power in Medieval Scotland*, ed. Stephen Boardman and Alasdair Ross (Dublin, 2003), 115-17.

⁸⁴ Connie Kelleher, "The Gaelic O'Driscoll Lords of Baltimore, Co. Cork: Settlement, Economy and Conflict in a Maritime Cultural Landscape," in *Lordship in Medieval Ireland: Image and Reality*, ed. Linda Doran and James Lyttleton (Dublin, 2007), 130-59.

⁸⁵ Katharine Simms, "Late Medieval Donegal," in *Donegal: History and Society*, ed. William Nolan, Liam Ronayne and Mairéad Dunlevy (Dublin, 1995), 183-202, 187-89.

early fourteenth century.⁸⁶ A maritime kindred, they quickly found shelter in Ireland and secured permanent employment as hereditary galloglass for successive O'Donnell chieftains – the Fanad branch emerging as the dominant MacSweeney grouping. From their coastal lordship in western Tyrconnell, the MacSweenys of Fanad not only provided their O'Donnell masters with heavy infantry, they also maintained a small fleet of galley-style craft.⁸⁷ The tactical and logistical advantages afforded by these craft was significant. On one level, the MacSweeney fleet allowed the O'Donnells to intervene directly in Connacht, side-stepping any obstacles posed by the O'Connors of Sligo or the O'Rourkes of West Breifne.

As demonstrated elsewhere, the ability to intervene in far flung regions of the Gaelic Ireland would later prove essential to the establishment of the O'Donnell hegemony over much of north-western Ireland during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.⁸⁸ During the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries maritime connections enabled the O'Donnells and MacSweenys to develop and strengthen the alliance with the *Ruadh* faction in Connacht. Though composed in the early sixteenth century, the *Leabhar Chlainne Suibhne* recounts that by the early fifteenth century the MacSweenys had married into the O'Malleys of the Owles – another

⁸⁶ Michael Brown, *The Wars of Scotland, 1214-1371* (Edinburgh, 2004), 272; Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicized Ireland*, 100-2.

⁸⁷ Darren McGettigan, "The Principality of Tír Chonaill in the Early Sixteenth Century," in *An Historical, Environmental and Cultural Atlas of County Donegal*, ed. Jim MacLaughlin and Seán Beattie (Cork, 2013), 144.

⁸⁸ Simon Egan, "The Resurgence of Gaelic Power in Ireland and Scotland and its Wider Impact" (PhD diss., University College Cork, 2016), 236-304.

prominent seafaring kindred (see table 1 and figure 2).⁸⁹ At the turn of the century not only was there a large force of MacSweeny galloglass serving alongside the O'Malleys in Connacht, the O'Malleys also provided military support to the O'Donnells and MacSweenys in Tyrconnell when required.⁹⁰ This effectively allowed the O'Donnells to resist encroachment from both the O'Neills of Tyrone to the east and the O'Connors of Sligo in the south. Maritime connections also enabled the O'Donnells to open a second front against the O'Neills in eastern Ulster; during the early fifteenth century O'Neill of Clondeboy, O'Hanlon, and Magennis were each co-opted into alliance with O'Donnell (see figure 1).⁹¹

The sea was important to the O'Donnells and their allies for two further reasons. The cooling of the climate in the fourteenth century resulted in the migration of vast herring stocks to the coasts of Ireland and Scotland.⁹² The influx of English, French, Spanish, and Dutch fishermen generated considerable wealth for the Gaelic nobility. Using fleets, Gaelic kindreds such as the O'Donnells, (or the O'Malleys, the O'Driscolls and O'Sullivan Beare dynasties of south Munster), and the Campbells of Argyll, imposed a levy upon visiting fishermen for fishing

⁸⁹ *Leabhar Chlainne Suibhne: An Account of the MacSweeny Families in Ireland, with Pedigrees*, ed. Paul Walsh (Dublin, 1920), 57, 63-5.

⁹⁰ For MacSweenys in Connacht, see, *AU, ALC, AFM*, 1413. For O'Malleys in Ulster, see *AU, AFM*, 1413, 1427.

⁹¹ *AU, AC, AFM*, 1422.

⁹² Jim McLaughlin, *Troubled Waters: A Social and Cultural History of Ireland's Sea Fisheries* (Dublin, 2010), 93-120.

within their respective spheres of influence or for seeking shelter along the coast.⁹³ The wealth generated by the fisheries enabled the Gaelic nobility to develop trading links with the rest of the British Isles and continental Europe. Over time the lords of the western Ireland built strong trading connections with insular ports such as Bristol and Glasgow as well as continental trading hubs including La Rochelle and Bordeaux (as the soubriquet ‘an Fhíona’ – ‘of the wine’ – suggests O’Donnell may have been personally involved in the trade).⁹⁴ The O’Donnells, for example, also maintained a network of agents in many of these ports not only to safeguard their mercantile interests but also to carry and receive news.⁹⁵ Ultimately, this ensured that the Gaelic ‘periphery’ remained attuned to developments within the wider Atlantic world.⁹⁶

The Irish intrigues of the later Stewart kings, James IV (d.1513) and James V (d.1542), particularly their relationship with the O’Donnells, has been the subject of recent scholarship.⁹⁷ The O’Donnell-Stewart alliance of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century was nonetheless, built upon much earlier foundations which can be tentatively traced to early 1380s. Indeed the

⁹³ See Mark Gardiner and Tom McNeill, "Seaborne Trade and the Commercialisation of Fifteenth- and Sixteenth Century Gaelic Ulster," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Section C* 116 (2016):229-62.

⁹⁴ Katharine Simms, "Niall Garbh O'Donnell, King of Tír Conaill, 1422-39," *Donegal Annual*, 12 (1977), 8.

⁹⁵ MacGettigan, "Renaissance Lordship," 206-7.

⁹⁶ Egan, "Gaelic Resurgence," 18-21.

⁹⁷ Alison Cathcart, "James V, king of Scotland – and Ireland?," *World of the Galloglass: Kings, Warlords and Warriors in Ireland and Scotland, 1200-1600*, ed. Seán Duffy (Dublin, 2007), 124-43; Norman MacDougall, *James IV* (Edinburgh, 2006), 116-20, 134, 198-200, 266-7.

O'Donnell's alliance with the Stewart monarchy runs like a leitmotiv through the history of late medieval Ireland – though one which has received little scholarly attention. Evidence for the origins of this relationship is contained in the registers of the Avignon Papacy. Recent years have witnessed a growing interest in the development of the Church in late medieval Gaelic Scotland, including the impact of the Avignon Papacy therein.⁹⁸ Aside from a number of short studies, little research has been conducted on the Papal Schism's impact upon Gaelic Ireland.⁹⁹ Though Edouard Perroy originally framed Richard's Irish expeditions as a crusade against the Clementist Irish, it has generally been assumed that the Avignon Papacy had little impact upon Gaelic Irish politics – a re-examination of surviving sources would suggest otherwise.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Iain MacDonald, *Clerics and Clansmen: The Diocese of Argyll Between the Twelfth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Leiden, 2013); Sarah Thomas, "Bishops, Priests, Monks and their Patrons: The Lords of the Isles and the Church," in *The Lordship of the Isles*, ed. Richard Oram (Leiden, 2014), 123-45.

⁹⁹ Philip Daileader, "Local Experiences of the Great Western Schism," in *A Companion to the Great Western Schism (1378-1417)*, ed. Joëlle Rollo-Koster and Thomas M. Izbicki (Leiden, 2009), 89-122, 100-101; Aubrey Gwynn, *A History of Irish Catholicism: Volume II, Anglo-Irish Church Life in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Dublin, 1968), 51-64; Katherine Walsh, "Ireland, the Papal Curia, and the Schism: A Case Study" in *Genese et Debuts du Grand Schisme d'Occident (1362-1394)*, ed. Jean Favier *et al* (Paris, 1980).

¹⁰⁰ Charles Burns, "Papal Letters of Clement VII of Avignon (1378-94) Relating to Ireland and England," *Collectanea Hibernica*, 24 (1982): 7-44, at 8; Lydon, "Richard II's Expeditions," 216; Colman Ó Clabaigh, *The Friars in Ireland, 1224-1540* (Dublin, 2012), 49-51; Edouard Perroy,

The papal schism of the later fourteenth century further ingrained pre-existing alliance blocs that had developed across Europe during the Hundred Years War. Among those adhering to the Roman papacy of Urban VI (d.1389) included the English, the Flemish, the Danes, the Swedes, the northern Italian city states, the Poles and Hungarians. Conversely, Clement VII of Avignon (d.1394) was supported by the French, the Castilians and Aragonese, the kingdoms of Naples and Cyprus, and Scotland. In Ireland, there appears to have been a large support base for Clement VII in the dioceses of Raphoe, Killala, Clonfert, Clogher and Annaghdown with a lesser following in the dioceses of Tuam and Elphin.¹⁰¹ Raphoe, Killala, Clonfert, Annaghdown, and western Clogher were each controlled by lords of the *Ruadh* faction. Tuam and Elphin, on the other hand, were divided between the *Donn* and *Ruadh* factions which may explain the resistance to Avignon influence therein.¹⁰²

Tracing the full extent of competing Avignon and Roman influence in Ireland is made extremely difficult due to the limitations of surviving source material and a full reconsideration of the Avignon Papacy's impact upon the wider Hiberno-Scottish world remains a *desideratum*. This short essay however, is not forum for such an undertaking. There are, nonetheless, a number of brief points to make in relation to the Scottish-Avignon interest in late fourteenth century Ireland and how this ultimately shaped Richard II's security concerns regarding Ireland. The

L'Angleterre et le Grand Schisme D'Occident: Etudé sur la Politique Religieuse de L'Angleterre sous Richard II (1378-1399) (Paris, 1933), 102-3.

¹⁰¹ Burns, "Papal Letters," 16-21, 24-5, 27-32. The bishop of Annaghdown, was driven from his bishopric by the Gaelic Irish, see Petition of John Twilloe to Richard II, 1393 The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA) SC 8/215/10722.

¹⁰² Burns, "Papal Letters," 16-21, 24-5, 27-32.

possible adherence of the aforementioned dioceses and lordships to the Avignon papacy opened up a further international dimension to Irish politics. Material contained within the calendar of Avignon papal registers indicate that members of the Ruadh faction were in contact with the Scottish king through clerical intermediaries loyal to the Avignon papacy from 1379 onwards. While the greater number of petitions were sent directly to Avignon, it appears that a number of letters were forwarded to the Scottish court and were included in Robert II's correspondence with Clement VII in 1381.¹⁰³ These petitions originally came from the O'Muldoons of Lurg and the O'Lennons of Lisgool, both in the diocese of Clogher.¹⁰⁴ While the political allegiance of the O'Lennons is more difficult to trace due to the fragmentary nature of source material, it is worth noting that the bishop of Clogher John O'Corcraín, wrote to Richard II c.1380 informing the king that he had been driven from his bishopric; though whether or not this was linked with Scottish/Avignon involvement in Clogher remains uncertain.¹⁰⁵ The O'Muldoons, on the other hand, appear to have been allies of the O'Donnells and controlled a territory co-existent with the modern day barony of Lurg. Their lands were, moreover, located north of the passes from Connacht into Ulster and were subjected to raids by members of the *Donn* faction (see figure 2).¹⁰⁶

A pattern of communication between the O'Donnells, their allies and the Scottish

¹⁰³ For the full roll of Robert II in 1381, see *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Petitions to the Pope 1342-1419 (CPP)*, ed. W.H. Bliss (London, 1896), 559-61.

¹⁰⁴ *Calendar of Entries*, 559. Petition of John O'Corcraín to Richard II, c.1377-c.1386 .

¹⁰⁵ Petition of John O'Corcraín to Richard II, c.1377-c.1386 TNA SC 8/222/11071.

¹⁰⁶ *AC, ALC*, 1400.

monarchy appears to have developed over the next number of years. This is evident both from further material contained in Avignon registers as well as the broader context of Scottish activity in the wider Irish Sea world. In February 1383 the bishop of Glasgow, Walter Wardlaw (d.1387), was ordered by Clement VII to assist in the removal of the bishop of Killala, Robert Eliot, in place of the Clementine favored candidate, Cornelius O'Connor.¹⁰⁷ The following year Wardlaw was appointed Avignon papal legate for Ireland and Scotland with the intention of further undermining English and Roman papal influence in the northern Irish Sea world.¹⁰⁸ Though Wardlaw died in 1387 there is evidence that his successor as bishop of Glasgow, Matthew Glendinning, maintained the connection with Ireland and in 1394 he secured a benefice in the diocese of Sodor for one 'Maurice Nemie' of Raphoe diocese in Tyrconnell'.¹⁰⁹ The movement of Avignon clerics across the North Channel provided the Stewart monarchy with a direct line of contact to the O'Donnells of Tyrconnell.¹¹⁰ As noted, the early Stewart kings, Robert II and Robert III (d.1406), in the mould of their ancestor Robert Bruce, were acculturated monarchs and enjoyed strong relations with many Gaelic Scottish factions such as the Campbells of Loch Awe and Clan Donnchaidh of Atholl. Cultivating cordial relations with these lords was essential to the

¹⁰⁷ *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters, 1362-1404*, ed. W.H. Bliss and J.M. Twemlow (London, 1902), 245-6.

¹⁰⁸ *Calendar of Papal Letters of to Scotland of Clement VII of Avignon, 1378-94*, ed. Charles Burns (Edinburgh, 1976), 104-7. See also, MacDonald, *Border Bloodshed*, 83.

¹⁰⁹ *CPP*, 620. The identity of Maurice is uncertain.

¹¹⁰ Other Ulster clerics also received benefices, see *Ibid.*, 575-6.

Clerics were often used to carry messages between the O'Donnells and Stewarts. See *The Exchequer Rolls of Scotland*, ed. John Stuart *et al*, 233 vols. (1878-1904), 4: 585, 677.

security of the Scottish kingdom; this became particularly acute from the 1380s onwards once the MacDonalds switched their allegiance to Richard II. These cultural and political ties to Gaelic Scotland acted as a bridge into Gaelic Ireland and allowed the Stewarts to develop an alliance with the O'Donnells. Indeed, though it is beyond the scope of this present article there is evidence to suggest that the Campbells of Loch Awe may have developed links with the O'Donnells during this time.¹¹¹

From the Scottish perspective, the alliance with the O'Donnells opened another front against the English in the western section of Ireland. This, in addition to aforementioned Scottish forays on eastern coast of Ulster and Franco-Castilian raids on the south coast of Ireland placed greater pressure on English military and financial resources. The O'Donnells could also contribute to the defense of Scotland, largely by tying English forces down in Ireland and, perhaps more importantly, by acting as a check on the MacDonalds. As noted earlier, it appears that by the early 1380s the Clan Alexander – the dynastic rivals of the lords of the Isles – had fragmented into smaller family branches. One of these branches migrated westwards, and by the early 1390s had found employment as galloglass under the MacDermots of Moylurg, members of the *Ruadh* faction and allies of Turlough an Fhíona O'Donnell.¹¹² This branch also appears to have had links with the O'Donnells; in 1397 O'Donnell personally attempted to secure a permanent lordship for the Clan Alexander by displacing the O'Connors of Sligo (see below). Though this venture ultimately ended in failure, the prospect of the Clan Alexander possessing a permanent base of operations in Ireland can hardly have been welcomed by the lord of the Isles.

¹¹¹ Colin Campbell of Loch Awe was killed by O'Donnell's enemy, Brian O'Connor of Sligo (d.1440), in Tyrconnell in early 1413, see *AFM*, 1412.

¹¹² *AU*, 1397; *ALC*, *AFM*, 1387, 1398; *AC*, 1398; Nicholls, "Scottish Mercenary Kindreds," 100.

At the close of the fourteenth century much of the northern two-thirds of Ireland had become divided into the two opposing camps. The death of Éinrí Aímhreach in May 1392 placed greater pressure on Tyrone's western defenses.¹¹³ The same year O'Donnell captured Éinrí's son and successor, Domhnall Bog (d.1432), and it was only through a combined attack led by Niall Óg O'Neill and O'Connor of Sligo that the O'Donnell threat was contained, albeit, briefly, and Domhnall Bog's release secured.¹¹⁴ By 1395 O'Donnell and his *Ruadh* faction allies had made significant gains both in Ulster and Connacht. It is from within this context that the MacDonalds sought to strengthen their ties with the English monarchy against the O'Donnells and their growing attachment to the Stewarts. Likewise, the O'Neills of Tyrone and their *Donn* faction allies, faced with a powerful network of enemies within Ireland sought greater recognition and protection under English law. For Richard, the willingness of these Gaelic factions to negotiate provided him with the opportunity not only to strengthen English power in Ireland but to re-establish a degree of influence across much of the wider British Isles that had not been seen since the military hegemony of Edward I (d.1307).

III: Richard II in Ireland

Dorothy Johnston has noted that Richard II may have considered leading an expedition to Ireland as early as 1389. Discerning the reasons behind this are made extremely difficult due to the limitations of surviving English and Anglo-Irish governmental sources.¹¹⁵ Having recovered

¹¹³ *AC, AU, ALC, AFM, Miscellaneous Irish Annals (AD 114-1437) (AMisc)*, ed. Séamus Ó'hInnse (Dublin, 1947), 1392.

¹¹⁴ *AC, AU, ALC, ACLM, AFM*, 1392. Domhnall Bog later became ruler of Tyrone in 1404 - something that his father never achieved.

¹¹⁵ Johnston, "Richard II and the Submissions," 3.

his position from the Lords Appellant in late 1388, Richard was still focused on recovering his domestic standing; mainly by building ties with Wales, Chester, and other ‘peripheral’ areas of his dominions. What is certain however, is that Richard regarded developments in Ireland as of great importance.¹¹⁶ This poses the question as to what extent Richard was aware of developments in Ireland, particularly in the Gaelic west?

Taken at face value, an investigation of surviving Anglo-Irish and English sources would suggest that the colonial nobility’s knowledge of developments in the western section of Ireland was limited. Developments in western Ireland were however, unlikely to appear in English patent or close rolls unless it was a direct concern to the colonial government.¹¹⁷ Richard’s actions in Ireland however, point to the king having, at the very least, some understanding of the significant geopolitical shift then occurring in the western section of Ireland and the growing level of Avignon and Scottish influence therein. Indeed much of Richard's intelligence on affairs in western Ireland may have derived from the colonial earls who, as outlined by Robin Frame, had successfully adapted to frontier life in fourteenth century Ireland.¹¹⁸ James Butler, third earl of Ormond, for example, not only acted as interpreter for Richard during the submission of numerous chieftains, according to Froissart, Ormond played an important role in persuading the most powerful chieftains to submit.¹¹⁹ An investigation of the Richard's initial military campaign coupled with an analysis the submissions themselves, and the context of specific grants made to

¹¹⁶ Tuck, *Richard II and the Nobility*, 170.

¹¹⁷ For example, see *RCH* 170, no. 74;185, no. 68; *CPR, Richard II*, 4:405.

CIRCLE, Patent Roll 2 Henry IV, 23.

¹¹⁸ For overview of adaptability, see Frame, "Power and Society", 191-220.

¹¹⁹ *Froissart's Chronicles*, 11:156-7.

individual Gaelic lords would, in turn, suggest that Richard was more informed on Gaelic affairs than is evident in surviving chronicle sources.

As noted in the introduction, the threat posed to colony's southern defenses by Art MacMurrough-Kavanagh (d.1416/17) has attracted a considerable amount of scholarly attention. The course of Richard's successful campaign culminating in Art's submission on 7 January has been dealt with elsewhere.¹²⁰ Richard's success against the MacMurrough-Kavanaghs coupled with the sheer military might of his forces has long been regarded as one of the chief reasons why the other Gaelic lords felt compelled to submit (see table 3).¹²¹ If this threat of force was indeed a factor then it pertained mainly to the submissions of the Gaelic and rebel Anglo-Irish lords in Leinster where the proximity of the royal army was more visible. For example, Murchadh O'Connor of Offaly (d.1421) – a member of the *Ruadh* faction – is recorded as being on the receiving end of sustained English assault; hence his submission to Richard (see table 3).¹²² In comparison, the terrain of the Gaelic heartlands stretching from Thomond on the Atlantic seaboard to the northern coasts of Ulster presented a foreboding obstacle to Richard's army. Richard would be faced with a powerful coalition of Irish chieftains in the *Donn* faction should he have decided to march north in an attempt to force their submission – an unlikely scenario considering that Richard's army was needed to secure Leinster and prevent Art

¹²⁰ Curtis, *Richard II in Ireland*, 185-6, 189-90; Lydon, "Richard II's Expeditions", 225-8; Emmet O'Byrne, *War, Politics, and the Irish of Leinster, 1156-1606* (Dublin, 2003), 110-12.

¹²¹ Cosgrove, *Late Medieval Ireland*, 20-2; Frame, *Political Development*, 215; Lydon, *Lordship of Ireland*, 233; Idem, "Richard II's Expeditions", 228; Otway-Ruthven, *Medieval Ireland*, 328.

¹²² Curtis, *Richard II in Ireland*, 167, 189, 193, 209-10; *AFM*, 1395.

MacMurrough-Kavanagh from breaking his peace. Instead the activities of Richard and the lords of the *Donn* faction suggest both parties hoped to achieve a mutually beneficial arrangement.

Table 3. ¹²³

Accompanying Richard on this expedition were a number of prominent English noblemen, chief among whom was Roger Mortimer (d.1398), fourth earl of March. Mortimer was the greatest absentee landlord in Ireland. In addition to his expansive estates in England and south-east Wales, Roger had inherited the earldom of Ulster and lordships of Connacht, Trim, and Meath from his father, Edmund, third earl of March (d.1381).¹²⁴ The recovery of these estates was of paramount importance to Richard and fitted into the aforementioned strategy of strengthening English power in the ‘peripheral’ areas of the British Isles.¹²⁵ Richard had already developed a link between the MacDonalds and Mortimer through the earl’s tenants, the Savages and their marriage into the Bisset affinity. The remainder of Mortimer’s Irish lands were, in most cases, controlled by members of the *Donn* faction (though Burke of Mayo, O’Donnell and O’Connor Ruadh each held segments of the Mortimer lands). The O’Neills of Tyrone controlled most of Mortimer’s lands in Ulster, though other segments were held by the O’Cahans, MacMahons, O’Neills of Clandeboy, O’Hanlons, Magennis. The O’Reillys of Breifne, the O’Ferralls, MacGeoghegans and O’Kearneys each bounded parts of Mortimer’s patrimony in

¹²³ For a full list, see Curtis, *Richard II in Ireland*, 57-225; Idem, "Unpublished Letters," 276-303; Myles V. Ronan, "Some Medieval Documents," *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 7, no. 2 (1937): 229-41.

¹²⁴ Simms, "Revolt of 1404," 144-5.

¹²⁵ Mortimer was granted livery of his Irish lands, in June 1393, see *CPR, Richard II*, 5:354. See also, Tuck, *Richard II and the Nobility*, 173.

southern Ulster and northern Leinster while Mortimer's lands in Connacht were controlled primarily by the Burkes of Clanrickard and the O'Connor Donn dynasty (see table 3).¹²⁶

Roger's father, Edmund, had previously tried to recover these lands during his tenure as lord deputy of Ireland (1379-81). Though Edmund had some initial success in acquiring the submissions of Niall Mór O'Neill, O'Ferrall, MacGeoghegan, O'Kearney, O'Hanlon, Magennis, and O'Reilly, his heavy handed tactics (such as the burning of large areas of eastern and southern Ulster) pushed many Gaelic lords into rebellion.¹²⁷ Following his death in 1381, the Dublin government was unable contain O'Neill incursions into eastern Ulster and northern Leinster. Carrickfergus was burned in 1384 while Dundalk was suffered two major O'Neill raids in 1387 and 1392 (see figure 2).¹²⁸ For Richard, it was clear that military action against the lords of the *Donn* faction would yield minimal results. By negotiating with these lords Richard not only stood a better chance of recovering of recovering the Mortimer inheritance, the establishment of strong, cordial relations with these lords would greatly bolster English influence across the north western section of the island and limit the potential for Scottish intervention in Ireland.

Richard thus strove to build stronger links between the lords of the *Donn* factions, the colonial administration, and the crown. The king secured a greater degree of legal protection for

¹²⁶ Simms, "Revolt of 1404," 144-5. In late 1394 Mortimer received the submissions of John O'Reilly (d.1400), lord of East Breifne (*RCH*, 165, no. 233), and O'Ferrall of Annaly (*AMisc*, 1394). See table 3.

¹²⁷ *AU*, *AFM*, 1380; Simms, "Revolt of 1404," 144-5.

¹²⁸ *AU*, 1384. *AC*, *AClon*, 1387, *AFM*, 1387, 1392. Though the capture of Niall Óg O'Neill in 1389 bought the colonists some badly needed breathing space, see *AC*, *AU*, *ALC*, *AClon*, *AFM*, 1389; *Cal. Pat.*1388-92, 404.

the submitted lords by defining their legal status before the Irish Council, issuing pardons for past offences, and by knighting the more powerful lords – Niall Óg, Brian O'Brien (d.1400), Turlough Óg O'Connor Donn, and William Burke of Clanrickard (d.1423) (as well as Burke's regional ally, Walter Bermingham).¹²⁹ The knighthoods bound these lords closer to the king; the case of O'Connor Donn is particularly important. In addition to being admitted to English law (placing him in the words of one scholar within Richard's 'charmed circle'), O'Connor Donn was also granted the constabulary of Roscommon Castle.¹³⁰ Once a bastion of English power west of the Shannon, Roscommon Castle had been lost to the O'Connors since the 1350s; Richard's grant however, went beyond simply acknowledging the castle's current occupant.¹³¹ Within the broader context of the submissions, the grant served to bolster O'Connor Donn's position against his main rival, Turlough O'Connor Ruadh, the main ally of O'Donnell and a supporter of the Avignon papacy in Connacht. Furthermore, when taking the submission of the *Donn* faction, Richard not only used clerics loyal to Rome as intermediaries and messengers (such as the bishops of Kilfenora and Kilmacduagh); to prevent these lords' breaking the king's peace, he bound most of the submitted lords to various sums of money before the representative of the

¹²⁹ Curtis, *Richard II in Ireland*, 186-7, 214-6.

¹³⁰ Jocelyn Otway-Ruthven, "The Background to the Arrest of Sir Christopher Preston in 1418," *Analecta Hibernica* 29 (1980):71-94, at 78, 91-2. For 'charmed circle', see John Gillingham, "Killing and Mutilating Political Enemies in the British Isles from the Late Twelfth to the Early Fourteenth Century: A Comparative Study," in *Britain and Ireland, 900-1300: Insular Responses to European Change*, ed. Brendan Smith (Cambridge, 1999), 128, no. 68.

¹³¹ For grant, see Otway-Ruthven, "Arrest of Christopher Preston", 78.

Roman papal camera, Francis de Capanago.¹³² The promotion of the Roman Church, in turn, served to limit the influence of Avignon, and therefore the Scottish crown in Gaelic Ireland.

Ultimately, it was the fear of a Scottish attack on northern England that convinced Richard to return home, departing Waterford on 15 May 1395.¹³³ Traditionally, Richard's expedition of 1394-95 has been regarded as a failure, owing to the necessity of a second expedition in 1399 – one that effectively ended his reign. Richard's Irish settlement was nonetheless, made unworkable for two main reasons; the territorial ambitions of the earl of March and his ally Ormond, and the activities of O'Donnell. Surviving letters indicate that sometime in late 1394 Niall Óg O'Neill, O'Brien, O'Connor Donn and Tadhg MacCarthy (d.1428) of Desmond discussed the prospect of submitting.¹³⁴ O'Brien and O'Connor Donn were reluctant to submit to Richard and attempted to convince O'Neill of the same.¹³⁵ The reasons for their hesitancy are uncertain. It appears that both lords were most likely anxious at the possibility of a renewed English presence in the west – a region where English influence had been defunct for nearly fifty years. O'Brien and O'Connor Donn also appear to have been faced with significant opposition from their regional allies, the most notable of which being Domhnall

¹³² Curtis, *Richard II in Ireland*, 90-3, 113-14. De Capanago had been appointed by Boniface IX in 1393 and was granted a license by Richard II to execute the office of papal collector there, *CCR, Richard II*, 5:311; *Foedera*, 7:751; *CCR, Richard II*, 5:225.

¹³³ The English Council had been calling for Richard's return since February 1395, see *POPC*, 1:57-9. See also, MacDonald, *Border Bloodshed*, 126-7.

¹³⁴ Curtis, *Richard II in Ireland*, 221-3.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 143-4.

O'Connor (d.1395), lord of Sligo – a supporter of O'Connor Donn (see figure 2).¹³⁶ Unlike most other colonial towns lost to the Gaelic Irish, Sligo remained a functioning borough with a lucrative maritime trade. Domhnall may have feared that a renewed English presence in the west would have undermined his control of the port-town.¹³⁷ Niall Óg O'Neill by late January 1395, was engaged with highly sensitive talks with Richard. Unwilling to tolerate any opposition, Niall Óg threatened to attack Domhnall O'Connor unless he acquiesced and submitted to Richard.¹³⁸ While this threat ultimately secured Domhnall's compliance at crucial stage, it does highlight how lesser chieftains were often expendable at the hands of more powerful lords.

Tadhg MacCarthy's concerns regarding his submission related to developments in the southern half of Ireland, particularly in Munster (see figure 2).¹³⁹ James Butler, earl of Ormond, and Gerald FitzGerald (d.1398), third earl of Desmond had been feuding since the early 1380s.¹⁴⁰ The Mortimers had been allies of the Butlers since the late 1370s and Roger naturally aligned himself with Ormond to gain leverage within Irish politics.¹⁴¹ As Peter Crooks has suggested, Ormond used his newfound influence with Roger and Richard to have the king's cousin –

¹³⁶ Curtis, *Richard II in Ireland*, 214.

¹³⁷ For west coast trade, see Gardiner and McNeill, "Seaborne Trade", 229-62.

¹³⁸ Curtis, *Richard II in Ireland*, 214.

¹³⁹ A marriage between Tadhg MacCarthy's son, Domhnall (d.1468), and Ulick Burke of Clanrickard's daughter, Sadhb (d.1468) was also orchestrated sometime in the early fifteenth century, see *ALC*, 1468.

¹⁴⁰ For which, see Crooks, "'Calculus of Faction'," 115.

¹⁴¹ Peter Crooks, "Factionalism and Noble Power in English Ireland, 1361-1421" (PhD diss., University of Dublin, 2007), 201-46231.

Edward Albemarle (d.1415), earl of Rutland – created earl of Cork.¹⁴² This effectively drove a wedge into Desmond's power base, forcing MacCarthy to acknowledge the authority of Rutland as his immediate overlord rather than Desmond.¹⁴³ Though MacCarthy eventually agreed to this arrangement and received a knighthood from Richard, he first met with the lords of the *Donn* faction to discuss the prospect of submission.¹⁴⁴ Melaghlín O'Kelly (d.1402), lord of Hymany and member of the *Donn* faction presented a similar case. Writing to Richard II in March 1395 he expressed his fears that Ormond, under the guise of Richard's authority, was about to seize lands held by O'Kelly's kindred since the early fourteenth century.¹⁴⁵ O'Kelly also informed Richard that, as a security measure, he had enlisted the support of the earl of Desmond's son, John (d.1399), to counter Ormond.¹⁴⁶

A recent essay by Brendan Smith has suggested that Mortimer was more adept at negotiating frontier life in Ireland than has perhaps previously been acknowledged.¹⁴⁷ A great lord of the Anglo-Welsh marches, Mortimer enjoyed strong relations with both his English and Welsh tenants; not unlike his ally Ormond and his ability to uphold English power in Ireland

¹⁴² Curtis, "Unpublished Letters," 123-4; Crooks, "Factionalism and Noble Power," 217-18.

¹⁴³ Curtis, "Unpublished Letters," 123-4; Idem, *Richard II in Ireland*, 67-8.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 221-3.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 122-3, 204-3; Crooks, "Factionalism and Noble Power," 215-16.

¹⁴⁷ Brendan Smith, "Dressing the Part in the Plantagenet Empire: The Death of Roger Mortimer, Earl of March and Ulster, in 1398," in *The Plantagenet Empire, 1259-1453: Proceedings of the 2014 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. Peter Crooks, David Green and W. Mark Ormrod (Donington, 2016), 232-47.

while at the same time engaging with Irish culture.¹⁴⁸ Mortimer was also a patron of the Welsh poet Iolo Goch (d.1397). In a famous poem addressed the earl in early 1394, Iolo Goch extolled Mortimer's martial prowess and encouraged him to subdue the 'Ulster dog' – Niall Óg O'Neill.¹⁴⁹ Mortimer's desire to 'get his rents' from the Irish of Ulster, however energetic, placed great strain upon Richard II's Irish settlement.¹⁵⁰ In January 1395 Niall Óg wrote to Richard beseeching him to be his 'shield' against the ambitions of the young earl.¹⁵¹ The O'Neills were willing to reach a settlement with Mortimer and agreed to surrender the *buannacht* (the billeting of soldiers on local populations) of Ulster to him.¹⁵² Relations between the O'Neills and Mortimer, however, soured the following year. Having been appointed lord deputy of Ireland by Richard (though his jurisdiction was limited to Ulster, Connacht and Meath; Sir William Scrope had had powers over Munster, Leinster, and Louth), Mortimer, with the support of Ormond and the earl of Kildare, attacked the O'Neills, O'Reillys, and O'Ferralls, burning Armagh and its Cathedral in the process before raiding the Magennis territory of Iveagh and killing the heir to

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 242-4.

¹⁴⁹ Eurys I. Rowlands, "Iolo Goch," in *Celtic studies: Essays in Memory of Angus Matheson*, ed. James Carney and David Greene (London, 1968), 125. For identification of 'Ulster dog' as Niall Óg, see Simms, "Revolt of 1404," 148, 159, no. 37.

¹⁵⁰ *AClon*, 1394.

¹⁵¹ Curtis, *Richard II in Ireland*, 210-12.

¹⁵² For *bonnacht*, see Curtis, *Richard II in Ireland*, 85-90, 173-90; *Anglo-Norman Letters and Petitions from All Souls MS 182*, ed. M. Domnicia Legge (Oxford, 1941), 210-11; Smith, *Crisis and Survival*, 82-3; Otway-Ruthven, *Medieval Ireland*, 328-9.

the lordship, Cú-Uladh.¹⁵³ These attacks, though aimed at cowing the O'Neills and the Irish of eastern Ulster, achieved relatively little. Mortimer's actions instead had a ripple effect upon the western section of Ireland, one that was ruthlessly exploited by O'Donnell and his allies.

Niall Mór and Niall Óg's fixation with Richard in the east left western Tyrone vulnerable. An O'Donnell-fomented civil war in the Maguire lordship of Fermanagh in early 1395 created a distraction which Turlough an Fhíona used to raid western Tyrone, capturing Brian (d.1402) – brother of Domhnall Bog (see figure 2).¹⁵⁴ A second attack orchestrated by O'Donnell's ally, Burke of Mayo, upon the *Donn* faction in western Connacht, drew the O'Connors of Sligo westwards, enabling O'Donnell to launch a devastating raid upon the Sligo lordship (see figure 2).¹⁵⁵ With Brian held captive, there was little Domhnall Bog could do to withstand O'Donnell. The lack of assistance from his cousin, Niall Óg, appears to have pushed Domhnall Bog into rebellion. By late 1395 he is recorded as leading an attack on Niall Óg's *caput* (possibly either Dungannon or Navan Fort), taking both his son and heir designate, Brian Óg, and wife Úna captive, before handing Úna over to the English.¹⁵⁶ While the annals do not identify Úna's new captors, it is possible that they were handed over to Mortimer as a stark warning to Niall Óg to devote greater resources to war against O'Donnell.

Niall Óg was spurred into action and, in early 1396 he ransomed Brian from O'Donnell, subsequently handing him over to Domhnall Bog in exchange for his own son, Brian Óg

¹⁵³ *AMisc*, 1396. For appointments, see Otway-Ruthven, *Medieval Ireland*, 335, no. 51.

¹⁵⁴ *AFM*, 1395.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

(d.1403).¹⁵⁷ By this time Niall Óg was under assault from Mortimer in the west, and unable to take further action against O'Donnell. Over the course of 1396 O'Donnell launched a number of assaults upon Sligo, eventually driving Murtagh Bacach O'Connor(d.1403) – brother and successor of Domnall O'Connor – from his lordship in early 1397.¹⁵⁸ The *Donn* faction were now stretched on a series of fronts; O'Donnell in the north, Mortimer pressing on Tyrone and Annaly, while O'Connor Ruadh defeated an army led by O'Connor Donn in central Connacht (see figure 2).¹⁵⁹ O'Donnell now sought to establish full control of Sligo, installing his grandson, Tadhg O'Connor (d.1403), as lord of Sligo and by granting a segment of the lordship to the Clan Alexander (see figure 2).¹⁶⁰ It was only bickering amongst Tadhg O'Connor's men and the Clan Alexander over the division of lands, and a surprise counter-attack by Murtagh Bacach which saw O'Donnell's forces driven from the region enabling Murtagh Bacach to regain control of Sligo by early 1398.¹⁶¹ Despite this victory, a considerable amount of damage had been done. Domnall Bog had briefly refused to support Niall Óg against O'Donnell in 1397, effectively giving O'Donnell a free reign in the west. Though reconciled with Niall Óg in 1398, divisions had been sown between the two dominant O'Neill kindreds in Tyrone. This growing rift would eventually lead to the outbreak of both civil war and a succession crisis in Tyrone during the early fifteenth century (see below).

¹⁵⁷ *AFM*, 1396.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *AFM, ACLM, AMisc*, 1396.

¹⁶⁰ Tadhg was the son of Cathal Óg O'Connor (d.1362) and Gráinne, daughter of Turlough an Fhíona, see *AFM*, 1396, *AU, ACLM, AFM, AMisc*, 1397.

¹⁶¹ *AU, ACLM, AFM, AMisc*, 1397.

From the perspective of the crown, the situation in Leinster was little better. Mortimer's attacks on the Gaelic Irish of Ulster and Ormond's activities in Munster made it very difficult for the recently submitted chieftains to remain within the king's peace. Though Dorothy Johnston has stressed the notion that Leinster was at peace during 1395-98, evidence contained in the Irish annals suggests a very different state of affairs.¹⁶² Tensions between the Gaelic Irish of Leinster and north eastern Munster increased following a botched attempt at capturing Art MacMurrough-Kavanagh in late 1395.¹⁶³ Art's allies, the O'Tooles are recorded as inflicting a heavy defeat upon English forces in 1396.¹⁶⁴ Though colonial troops, perhaps in retaliation, burned the monastic site of Glendalough in the Wicklow mountains during the summer of 1398, the O'Connors of Offaly succeeded in capturing Gerald FitzGerald (d.1432), earl of Kildare, the same year.¹⁶⁵ The English position in Leinster was to suffer a further blow later in the year. Despite a brief spell of royal disfavor - owing largely to the activities of his uncle, the Appellant Sir Thomas Mortimer (d.1397) - Roger Mortimer was reconciled with Richard II and reappointed to his Irish lieutenancy in April 1398; only to perish two months later whilst campaigning against the O'Byrnes in Carlow.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² Johnston, "The Interim Years," 173-9

¹⁶³ *AFM*, 1395.

¹⁶⁴ *AFM*, 1396.

¹⁶⁵ *ALC*;1398; *AFM*, *AClon*, 1398.

¹⁶⁶ Crooks, "Factionalism and Noble Power," 227. Although this lieutenancy was rescinded soon after, see *CPR, Richard II*, 6:336, 402, 407; *The Chronicle of Adam of Usk, 1377-1421*, ed. Chris Given-Wilson (Oxford, 1997), 40-1. For reconsideration of Mortimer's killing, see Smith, "Dressing the Part," 232-47.

Prior to Mortimer's death Richard had become increasingly concerned about the situation in Ireland and announced his intention to lead a second expedition there in the autumn of 1397.¹⁶⁷ Whether or not the king was genuinely interested in securing a suitable compromise between the crown and the main Irish lords - the O'Neills and *Donn* faction in particular - remains a matter of debate.¹⁶⁸ Mortimer's death and Kildare's capture in 1398 nonetheless, forced Richard's hand regarding Ireland and the following year on 1 June 1399, Richard landed at Waterford.¹⁶⁹ Unlike his venture of 1394-95, this expedition proved a military disaster and Richard was soundly beaten by Art MacMurrough-Kavanagh at every turn. The subsequent outbreak of Henry Bolingbroke's rebellion forced Richard to return to England only to be deposed by the new king in October 1399.¹⁷⁰ The vacuum created by Mortimer's death and Richard's sudden departure allowed Art MacMurrough-Kavanagh to reassert his position in southern Leinster. Mercenaries raised from Munster enabled him to push northwards through Wicklow while an alliance with Maurice *de facto* fifth earl of Desmond opened a second front against Art's main regional ally: James, earl of Ormond.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ *CCR, Richard II*, 6:154, 157.

¹⁶⁸ Dorothy Johnston has pointed towards Richard's commitment, see Dorothy Johnston, "The Interim Years: Richard II and Ireland, 1395-1399," in *England and Ireland in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. James Lydon (Dublin, 1981), 173-91. For a contrary view, see Crooks, "English Imperialism," 33-40; Smith, *Crisis and Survival*, 85, no. 68.

¹⁶⁹ Curtis, "Unpublished Letters," 297-8.

¹⁷⁰ For reassessment, see Douglas Biggs, *Three Armies in Britain: The Irish Campaign of Richard II and the Usurpation of Henry IV, 1397-1399* (Leiden, 2006).

¹⁷¹ For MacMurrough-Kavanagh expansion, see O'Byrne, *Irish of Leinster*, 113-15.

The situation in Leinster was but one in a series of problems faced by the new Lancastrian administration in Ireland and the wider Irish Sea world. Mortimer's earlier raids on Ulster followed by the outbreak of the aforementioned civil war in Tyrone seriously damaged the O'Neills' relationship with the colonial government in Dublin; it would take years and the strong leadership of Niall Óg's son, Eoghan (d.1456), to rebuild this relationship. Internecine feuding in Tyrone would facilitate the rise of Turlough an Fhíona's son, Niall Garbh (d.1439), who would come to dominate northern Irish affairs until the early 1430s. The consolidation of O'Donnell power in this period coupled with the outbreak of Owain Glyn Dŵr's rebellion in Wales, in turn, exposed large areas of the Irish and Welsh coastlines to French and Scottish intervention. While Glyn Dŵr's son, Maredudd ab Owain, finally surrendered to Henry V (d.1422) and accepted a pardon from the king in April 1421, the situation in Ireland played out somewhat differently.¹⁷² It was largely thanks to the intervention of Alexander, lord of the Isles (d.1449), that Niall Garbh was defeated and the earlier O'Neill hegemony restored – the course of which has been dealt with elsewhere.¹⁷³

Conclusion

Richard II was the last English head of state to lead military operations in Ireland prior to Oliver Cromwell in 1649. In an age when the 'first English Empire' of the thirteenth and earlier fourteenth centuries was entering a period of protracted decline, Richard's Irish expeditions represented a concerted and pragmatic attempt to reverse the 'ebb tide' of English power and build stronger links with the more 'peripheral' areas of the British Isles. The decline of English

¹⁷² Davies, *Owain Glyn Dŵr*, 293.

¹⁷³ Simon Egan, "The Early Stewart Kings, the Lordship of the Isles, and Ireland, c.1371-1433," *Northern Studies* 49 (Forthcoming, 2017).

power within the wider British Isles during this period, coupled with England's increasing entanglement in France during the Hundred Years War has seen an increasing number of scholars gravitate towards the 'Plantagenet' model when exploring the development of English royal power in the later middle ages. This essay has nonetheless, emphasized the importance of locating Richard's Irish ventures within the broader archipelagic context as well as the viability of utilizing a regional approach when considering both the English crown's relations with the archipelago's constituent regions as well as the political development of late medieval Britain and Ireland as whole - the dynamic relationship between elements of Gaelic Ireland and Gaelic Scotland in particular. As a case study, this essay has, on one level, offered new insights into Richard's relationship with lords of the wider Gaelic world. This essay has also, on another level, demonstrated the necessity for paying closer attention to Gaelic west as a force within 'British' politics. Though the so-called 'Celtic fringe' remains a geographically peripheral region of late medieval Ireland and Britain, its political importance to both the English and Scottish monarchies was clearly greater than previously acknowledged.