

The Battle of the Boyne

The Battle of the Boyne is probably the most famous battle ever fought in Ireland, and more than 300 years later it is still one of the most bitter. Fought on Irish soil, it essentially settled a question of succession for the English crown.

England had been ruled by the Stuart kings through much of the 1600s. The last Stuart king was James II, who also ruled Scotland as James VII. James was a Catholic, which the English parliament did not like. But they were content to let him reign since he had no direct heirs, and his successor to the throne would be his Protestant sister Mary. But in 1688 when James produced a Catholic heir, the nobles called on Mary and her husband, William of Orange, to land an invasion army from the Netherlands. James fled England and thus was held to have abdicated.

James decided to go to Ireland, the most Catholic part of his kingdom, to fight for his throne. William also landed in Ireland with his army. More than 50,000 troops met in battle in July 1690 beside the River Boyne in County Meath. William's forces were victorious. It marked the end of James's hope of regaining his throne. In Ireland it led to the enactment of the Penal Laws, which stripped Catholics of most of their rights and property.

Today members of the Protestant Orange Order march in Northern Ireland every July 12 to celebrate the victory. Catholics often protest the marches and hold counter marches. Trash (or worse) is sometimes thrown, and riots can break out.

The flag of Ireland attempts to make peace between the sides, including both the green of Catholic Ireland and the orange of Protestants with white, representing peace, between them.