

Malby, Sir Nicholas

by Terry Clavin

Malby, Sir Nicholas (c.1530–1584), soldier and president of Connacht, was born probably in the West Riding of Yorkshire, England. All that is known of his parents is that his father died when he was four, and he may have been brought up in London by a merchant, John Malby, who was probably his paternal uncle. At any rate, he became involved in commerce in London in his early adulthood. John Malby was engaged in provisioning the royal garrison at Berwick and Nicholas became involved in Irish matters, possibly in supplying the army there. In 1556 he was listed as being interested in the proposed plantation of Laois (Leix).

Early military service on the Continent and in Ulster On 6 August 1562 he was convicted of counterfeiting money and sentenced to death along with three others. However, he was reprieved (20 September) on condition that he serve as a soldier in France under the command of Ambrose Dudley, earl of Warwick. He became Warwick's secretary in France and was sent to Spain on a diplomatic mission (1565). Although his military career was forced on him, he quickly proved himself to be a formidable soldier and became a supporter of the powerful Dudley family.

In November 1566 he appeared in Dublin seeking military command, and in 1567 the lord deputy of Ireland, Sir Henry Sidney (qv), promoted him to the rank of sergeant-major, a senior rank between commander of the army and captain of the bands. The same year he was stationed in a joint command with Sir William Piers (qv) in Carrickfergus, where they were both preoccupied with the threat posed by the arrival of large numbers of Scottish mercenaries in north-east Ulster. This was a difficult posting in an isolated garrison. The soldiers suffered from illness and lack of supplies. However, Malby impressed Sidney with his efforts, both military and diplomatic, in resisting the Scots. He went into debt through having to provision his men out of his own pocket, and clashed with the vice-treasurer of Ireland, Sir William Fitzwilliam (qv), over the government's failure to do so. During the Butler rebellion (summer 1569) Sidney sent Malby and Sir Peter Carew (qv) with a vanguard ahead of the main relieving army. They were involved in heavy fighting in Carlow (July), where Malby was injured in a fall from his horse.

Colonial ventures in Down In 1570 Malby appears to have campaigned in Connacht under its president, Sir Edward Fitton (qv), where in late 1570–early 1571 his men mutinied and fled the province; a later inquiry exonerated him. In spring 1571 he went to London. As the crown then owed him £1,670, he hoped either to have his arrears paid or to receive some other form of compensation. In March he was appointed collector of the three Ulster ports of Strangford, Ardglass, and Dundrum. On 5 October he received a speculative grant of Kinlarty, Co. Down, on condition that he conquer it from its Irish possessors and settle it with English

colonists by March 1579. En route to Ireland in January 1572, he captured a Spanish ship, seizing its cargo.

That summer he campaigned in Connacht under Fitton again before basing himself in Lecale, Co. Down, in support both of his own claim to Kinlarty and of the colonising schemes of Thomas Smith (qv) in Down. These claims threatened the local Gaelic lord, Sir Brian O'Neill (qv). O'Neill had been a loyalist lord and Malby appears to have been misled by their previously good relationship into believing that he could gain local acceptance of his and Smith's claims. Instead, O'Neill, by variously either attacking the English or pretending to submit to them to gain time, frustrated Smith and Malby. By 1573 Smith's efforts had clearly failed, but Malby found a new patron in the form of Walter Devereux (qv), 1st earl of Essex, who had his own private colonising venture in Ulster. Essex praised Malby for his military service during 1573–4, but again O'Neill proved adept at thwarting his would-be colonial masters. Fitzwilliam, by then lord deputy, viewed the plans of Essex and Malby as wasteful sideshows, and halved Malby's band of horse from 100 to fifty in 1574.

In December 1574 Malby went to London on behalf of Essex to plead for further support from the queen. He returned to Ireland in May 1575, where he was sworn a member of the Irish privy council and took part in Essex's brutal campaign against the Scots in Antrim that summer. By then it was apparent that both his and Essex's colonies were not viable, due to the depth and ferocity of the Irish resistance. In late 1575 he went to London again to petition for £100 worth of land in Ireland in compensation for surrendering his claim to Kinlarty. Despite his long years of service, he had nothing to show but debts that were estimated at £1,194 sterling. At this time, the Spanish sailors he had plundered in 1572 demanded £300 in compensation; this sum was eventually deducted from Malby's salary. However, in 1575 Fitzwilliam's replacement as lord deputy of Ireland by Malby's patron Sidney, who was given a second term as lord deputy, signalled an upturn in his fortunes. In July 1576 he was made chief commissioner of Connacht, and he accompanied Sidney to the province in September.

Royal governor of Connacht The two men led the royal forces against the rebellion of John Burke (qv) and Ulick Burke (qv), sons of the imprisoned Richard Burke (qv), 2nd earl of Clanricard. After knighting Malby (7 October), Sidney left him in sole command of Connacht with a force of about 500 soldiers. Till about spring 1577 he was preoccupied with defeating the Burkes. His ruthless scorched-earth tactics largely quelled their revolt, although he did not eliminate them. In autumn 1577 he expanded northwards, forcing the submission of the O'Connor Roe, of the MacDermotts of Roscommon, and of the O'Connors of Sligo. The Burkes of Mayo were led by the canny John Burke (qv) (d. 1580), who offered Malby his full support while largely preserving his independence. During the same autumn Malby concluded negotiations with a number of lesser Gaelic lords in Co. Galway and Co. Roscommon, whereby they agreed to pay a composition rent to support his

forces. Significantly, he did not conclude a composition agreement with Clanricard, preferring simply to quarter his men on the earl's demesne and to seize goods and livestock from his tenants and followers. To all intents and purposes, Malby had supplanted Clanricard as the dominant figure in south Connacht. He treated Clanricard's manors as his own fiefdom while lesser lords paid him a tribute in the manner of a successful Gaelic overlord. These arrangements were the foundation of Malby's subsequent conquest of Connacht, and made his rule of Connacht financially self-supporting.

The queen was sufficiently impressed to grant him a twenty-one-year lease of Roscommon castle and its adjoining leases, and of extensive tracts of former monastic land in the same county. These lands probably exceeded 17,000 acres and formed the nucleus of a flourishing English colony. Most of his tenants appear to have been English soldiers who had served under him in Connacht and Ulster and could be relied on to do so again when the need arose. As the colony was mainly on former monastic land, it was less likely to arouse the hostility of the local Irish. Moreover, the Gaelic clans in Roscommon were not very powerful, and potential enemies were deterred by the colony's proximity to two strong English garrisons at the castles of Roscommon and Athlone.

In spring 1578 Malby campaigned against Sir Brian O'Rourke (qv), taking Leitrim castle temporarily, but the province was largely quiet – a testament to the success of Malby's governorship. That autumn he went to England, where his methods were attracting some criticism. His rule of Connacht was autonomous, unaccountable, and highly arbitrary. He continued to maintain a sizeable standing army on the province despite the composition agreements, hired Scottish and Irish mercenary soldiers, reacted with great savagery to any open opposition, but was quick to forgive and even reward rebels who submitted to him. His judicial rulings and his appointments to local office invariably favoured his own supporters, be they English or Irish. In a remarkably frank letter written in May 1578, Malby claimed that he had learned to rule the Irish according to their own laws, and that although his measures could be severe, they saved more lives in the long run. In a bid to establish close links with the local Irish, he fostered his children to Irish families according to Gaelic custom, appears to have learned some Irish, and made no attempt to suppress catholicism. Indeed, he appointed crypto-catholics to church office, granted protections to twelve monasteries, and negotiated with papally appointed bishops.

However, it was an established orthodoxy in English administrative circles to decry any accommodation with Gaelic society and culture, for fear that the current crop of English colonists would degenerate into Irish barbarism in the manner of their medieval English predecessors. Although in retrospect it is apparent that these concerns were exaggerated, this outlook remained prevalent throughout the period and periodically threatened Malby's position within Connacht. Nonetheless, the relative tranquility of the province insulated him from his critics' objections for the moment, and in June 1579 the queen rewarded him with a permanent grant of his

huge estate in Roscommon on condition that he build a walled town at Roscommon castle. Furthermore, she gave him the more prestigious title of lord president of Connacht, put Thomond under his jurisdiction, and granted him former monastic lands in Co. Longford. He had returned to Ireland about May 1579.

The only rebuff he suffered in London was the queen's refusal to execute the earl of Clanricard. Malby had long hoped to eliminate the Clanricard Burkes, but the possibility that the queen might restore the earl allowed John and Ulick Burke to survive as an annoyance to Malby. The government at the time was anxiously awaiting the arrival in Ireland of a foreign catholic army: John and Ulick were known to be involved in these plans and as a result the crown appears to have compelled Malby to accept the submission of John and Ulick on relatively lenient terms in summer 1579.

Controversial intervention in Munster In July James fitz Maurice Fitzgerald (qv) landed in Munster with a small army and proclaimed a holy war on behalf of the catholic church. Malby was secure enough to leave Connacht and march south with 600 men to help the lord justice, Sir William Drury (qv), to suppress the resulting rebellion. Due to Drury's illness and eventual death, Malby became commander of the royal forces in Munster in mid September. Leading an army of 1,200, Malby went on the offensive in early October, winning a hard-fought battle against the main rebel army at Monasternenagh, Co. Limerick. While on the march, Malby's army terrorised the local populace and killed indiscriminately.

At this point the erratic Gerald Fitzgerald (qv), 15th earl of Desmond and the most powerful lord in Munster, was clearly wavering in his loyalty to the crown. The queen and her advisers in London were torn between crushing all opposition in Munster and using Desmond to pacify the province. Malby was determined to commit the crown to a hard-line policy and decided to act before the queen appointed a new viceroy for Ireland. With Desmond continuing to play for time, between 6 and 10 October Malby sacked Desmond's towns of Rathkeale and Rathmore, putting the wards there to the sword and hanging known servants of Desmond. On 10 October he came before Askeaton, where Desmond was. Malby could not take the castle as he lacked siege guns, but he desecrated the Fitzgerald family tomb, scattering the bones of Desmond's ancestors, close relatives, and first wife outside the castle walls. This was Malby's last act as commander in Munster, but it played a major role in later pushing Desmond into open rebellion and greatly inflamed the situation in Munster.

Malby had believed that the rebellion would be easily and speedily crushed, but it soon became clear that a gruelling and expensive war would ensue. The queen was furious at his reckless conduct. Also, he appears to have been unaware that Desmond's first wife was the mother of Thomas Butler (qv), 10th earl of Ormond, the most powerful noble in Ireland and a close friend of the queen. Despite being a strong loyalist, Ormond despised low-born English soldier-officials like Malby

for usurping the position of lords of ancient lineage, and the desecration of his mother's corpse further antagonised him. Although he concealed his true feelings for a time, he thereafter directed his considerable political influence towards Malby's destruction.

The controversy could not have come at a worse moment for Malby. Earlier in the autumn he had proposed to the queen a plan for keeping the peace in Ireland cheaply. It appears to have involved extending to the rest of the island the methods by which he governed Connacht. He believed it would require 2,000 soldiers and would quickly become financially self-sustaining. The plan would also extend Malby's authority into Munster and Ulster, making him viceroy in all but name. But his actions in Munster rendered these proposals irrelevant, although he would later try to resurrect them. Now on the defensive, Malby abruptly began appeasing the Clanricard Burkes, partly as a means of disproving charges that he was biased against Irish lords and partly to prevent the Burkes from rising in support of the Munster rebels. During 1579–80 he restored John and Ulick Burke to most of their father's estates.

In Malby's absence Connacht had been quiet, with the exception of Richard an Iarainn Burke (qv), who rose in support of the Desmond rebellion in autumn 1579. In February 1580 Malby commenced a lightning campaign on Richard's lands in north Mayo. Resistance collapsed after he took Donamona castle and put everyone in it, including women and children, to the sword. He then marched south to Thomond, where he supplied royal forces fighting in Munster.

Later campaigns in Connacht Although Malby remained preeminent in Connacht, the ongoing rebellion in Munster and the eruption of the Baltinglass rebellion in Leinster encouraged opposition to him. In summer and autumn 1580 he had to undertake punitive expeditions against Brian O'Rourke of Leitrim, who remained a dangerous opponent. That autumn John and Ulick Burke rose again in revolt, a succession dispute broke out among the Mayo Burkes, and much of Connacht fell into disorder as Scottish mercenaries flooded the province. This was a low point in Malby's career; his enemies at court had largely turned the queen against him, while Ormond persuaded two of Malby's former subordinates to provide evidence of numerous abuses of power on his part.

Undaunted, Malby spent the first half of 1581 reducing Connacht with his usual mix of canny diplomacy and practised brutality. On 1 March 1581 the Clanricard Burkes, the Mayo Burkes, and the Scottish mercenaries planned to combine at Doonlaur, Co. Galway, but Malby prevented this juncture by encamping his forces nearby. As a result the Clanricards stayed away, while the Mayo Burkes and Scots withdrew in confusion. He then agreed to recognise the rebel leader Richard an Iarainn as head of the Mayo Burkes in return for his aid, after which he and Richard an Iarainn joined forces and drove the Scottish forces out of Connacht. He then resumed his harrying of the Clanricard Burkes and had regained full control over

Clanricard by the summer, when the Mac an Iarlas agreed to a truce. In a striking demonstration of the new political realities in May, he treacherously arranged the arrest and execution at Galway of Turlough O'Brien, son to the earl of Thomond, and of William Burke, son to the earl of Clanricard. By June only O'Rourke continued to defy him. Malby noted that he had only 400 soldiers with which to subdue the province, and a growing feature of his rule of the province was his reliance on Irish auxiliaries, reflecting the assured touch with which he manipulated factional and clan rivalries within Connacht.

In July 1581 when Aodh O'Donnell (qv) (d. 1600) appealed to the crown for help after being defeated by Turlough Luineach O'Neill (qv), Malby led his men to Lifford in order to save Aodh O'Donnell's weakness and Malby's swift intervention led to the replacement of O'Donnell's overlordship over Sligo with that of Malby, and to the beginning of royal interference in the previously independent and powerful lordship of Tyrconnell.

Recall to London Despite his military successes, the factional struggles at the royal court continued to threaten Malby's position. In spring 1581 his allies secured Ormond's dismissal as commander of the royal army in Munster, but (as Malby feared) this humiliation only hardened Ormond's determination to destroy him. His attempts to negotiate a reconciliation with the earl came to naught, and Ormond's agents scoured Connacht gathering evidence and suborning discontented Irish and government officials to testify against Malby. Having stabilised the military situation in Connacht, he came to court in November 1581 to defend himself. His gruff, soldierly bearing did him few favours in this context, particularly given that in Ormond he faced a smooth and accomplished courtier. In spring 1582 he answered thirty-four separate charges against his rule of Connacht. At this time the queen had lost all patience with the hard-line strategies being urged on her by Malby and his colleagues, due to their high cost. The most damaging accusations against him in her eyes were that he had misappropriated royal funds and had provoked the Irish into rebelling by his harshness. The result was a royal rebuke, combined with a reduction in his pay and authority in Connacht.

While in England, he appears to have come to an accommodation with the still-imprisoned Clanricard, who had been the source of many of the complaints against him, and convinced the queen to release Clanricard, who accompanied Malby back to Connacht in June. On arriving in Connacht, he was welcomed by virtually all the leading Gaelic lords in the province in a well choreographed and subsequently well publicised demonstration designed to highlight the success of his rule. Almost immediately, he began complaining about the greater restrictions placed on him, and played up a relatively unsuccessful raid by the O'Donnells into Sligo as indicating that his weakened authority would encourage further incursions.

Death and legacy Following Clanricard's death (summer 1582), Malby mediated between John and Ulick Burke over their father's inheritance. In September it was

agreed that Ulick would become 3rd earl of Clanricard, and their father's lands would be partitioned between him and John. As earl of Clanricard, Ulick now assisted Malby in imposing order in south Connacht, and in an act of homage conveyed to him the castle and manor of Ballinasloe, Co. Galway. In November Malby summoned all the nobility of Connacht to assemble at Galway to discuss how to maintain order in the province. During 1583 he imposed a puppet leader upon the Mayo Burkes following the death of Richard an Iarainn and even O'Rourke agreed to pay a rent to the queen. However, John Burke continued to cause trouble, as a result of which his brother Clanricard had him assassinated in November 1583. This act was performed with Malby's connivance if not his active prompting, and he arranged for the earl to be pardoned for his part in his brother's death. After seven years of hard fighting, he had finally bent the Clanricard Burkes to his will; his hegemony in Connacht was now uncontested.

By the close of 1583 he was described as being unwell, and he died at Athlone on 4 March 1584. His obit in the Annals of the Four Masters lauded him for his valour in battle, while the Annals of Loch Cé condemned him for wreaking havoc throughout Ireland and for reducing the people of Connacht to servitude. Clearly, the Irish both respected and feared him in equal measure. Malby was undoubtedly the most effective English soldier and coloniser of his generation, but was chagrined that he never received due credit for this from his royal mistress. After his death, revelations regarding his management of crown revenues in Connacht further damaged his reputation in London. Significantly, most of his government colleagues in Ireland remained sympathetic and continued to regard him as a model to emulate. His methods may have been crude but were perhaps the only means by which Connacht could have been subdued, given the queen's refusal to support adequately her forces in Ireland.

He married (date unknown) Thomasine, daughter of Robert Lamb of Leeds, Yorkshire, with whom he had a son, Henry. The colony in Roscommon continued to grow after his death but suffered badly during the Nine Years War (1594–1603) in which his son Henry was killed in 1603.

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