

Ch 8 Popes and Powers - No Principles

Seasons circled in my life, and as I moved into manhood, I was courting my new wife to be. A decade of my life had trickled by since Mum died when Annie Heagney, as you already know, caught my eye and stole my heart. Ann dwelt little on the warp and woof of the oft-times terrible tapestry of the sorry saga known as history. Miss Heagney was of a different ilk. Ann was over the terrors and torments of the old world and brought a ray of non-judgemental forgiveness into my life. 'A judgemental heart robs us of hope'.¹ Forgive and forget past pain. Love life anew each new day in a new world we can create. But I must say that while I wooed her with those yarns my mother spun, Ann steered me from that self-destructive melancholic remorse that hastened Mum's demise. My progress was slow for I had a long way to go.

Selina Lought had claimed no titles or special privileges, but Mum instilled in us kids a conviction that we are a link in a chain of people whose origins spring from earliest times. She hoped to support our local people whose ancient culture and way of life was now threatened. The intentional destruction of our Gaelic way of life, its leadership and its entire heritage had not succeeded. 'Survival is surely possible' was Mum's parting legacy to me even though she succumbed to overwhelming travails.² Details of Ireland's degradation live with me still. Even Celtic Christians warped our ancient annals so that Irish origins traced back to Noah and the flood.³ However, they also brought a written script in which to record our ancient Celtic cycles.

Our Irish heritage survived and saw Europe through its dark ages, returning civilisation and learning to far-flung outposts of a disintegrated Roman Empire. The 12th-century arrival of Normans in the Ostman towns of Wexford, Waterford and Dublin,⁴ started a process that altered the entire way of Celtic life. Irish aristocracy was gradually deposed and subjected to centuries of harassment designed to extinguish Irish culture forever. Eventually, the Irish were reduced to being serfs and tenants in their own land. But campaigns waged to make us forget our Celtic history and identity, indeed who we are and where we came from, were unsuccessful.



Pope connived with king to control the land of Eire leading to an incursion by Welsh-Normans in 1169. On the basis of a forged document, the only ever English Pope, Adrian IV, in his 1154 papal bull, *Laudabiliter*,⁵ promoted papal dominion over the emerald isle. In reality, an 8th-century forgery known as the 'Donation of Constantine', was falsely attributed to the first Christian Emperor. Proclaimed as truth, the bull established Ireland as a feudal possession of the King of England under the nominal suzerainty of the papacy. Conveniently overlooked by England's Henry was the inclusion in the 'Donation' of all islands off the European coast. Thus, Britannia to the west of Henry's

still mainly continental Angevin empire was included. These isles at the very edge of empire had been fraudulently ceded, centuries before to the Pope of Rome, supposedly by Constantine. With Henry's consent, Strongbow, Earl of Striguil on the river Wye,

commenced importing the Norman variant of Roman Christianity during his 1169 incursion in support of an ousted King of Leinster.⁶ Subsequent 'reforms' by a new Norman English hierarchy gradually assimilated the Celtic Irish Church that had been planted seven centuries before by Patrick.

In 1171 the Plantagenet King, Henry II accepted the fealty of the Irish kings and bishops. They were unaware that by accepting his invitation to dine together, they were actually being dispossessed.⁷ By submitting to Henry's hospitality and his claim to be Lord of Ireland, they were abandoning centuries of Brehon law of partible inheritance whereby family land was parcelled out to sons. Unwittingly they accepted Norman heredity laws and became vassals of the Norman monarch of England and Anjou. In 1066 Norman William the Bastard had conquered Saxon England and claimed all lands to be his, personally, by right of conquest. Henceforth vassals occupied their allotted lands only on sufferance. The Earls of Eire already were in the process of being deprived of their land and heritage, a prelude to their 1607 flight from Lough Swilly several centuries later.⁸ I still recall the emotion in Mum's voice as she clarified some finer points of the Norman invasion:

'With the blessing of the English Pope, his 'holiness authorised' Henry's invasion of Ireland in order 'to proclaim the truths of the Christian religion to a rude and ignorant people'. Mum stressed her ridicule of the very thought of us Irish being rude or ignorant.

'This invasion was justified as a way of kerbing alleged ecclesiastical abuses. Such knavery was conditional on the collecting of 'Peter's Pence' whereby each *fine* or family annually paid a penny per hearth to the See of Rome.⁹ That Papal Bull of 1155, by virtue of the forged Constantine Donation, was used by Henry to legitimise invasion'.

'A forgery and such is the Donation of Constantine, even if extremely old, remains ever a forgery. But it supposedly transferred to the Pope, authority over Rome and the western part of the Roman Empire'.¹⁰ Mum could barely restrain her contempt as she spelt out the irony of this farce.



'The Bull actually promoted papal dominion not only over the island of Eire but over all the islands off the West coast of Europe, including, by the way, Henry's England. Such a nicety Henry was happy to overlook. His eye was on the expansion of his empire from the continental Pyrenees to our western shore. That Henry only ever spoke in French'.

My now departed mother had railed against the destruction of Irish Celtic Christianity by Norman English Catholics. Forgiveness was difficult for her as she saw history through the prism of subsequent centuries of conquest by those strangers of a rich and ancient culture. Eventually, repression ramped up during the reformation as religion became the rallying cry, and reprisals reinforced the subjugation of the Gaels.

'With neighbours like that, who is in need of enemies!' she declared so sadly. Particularly at times when she was overcome with disgust at the frontier treatment meted out to our neighbours, the local inhabitants. And often her outbursts exploded from the depth of depression that was little improved by the isolation and rigours of pioneering life. There were a few who shared her concern for the destruction and demise of so many. Atrocities and reprisals were committed by both sides. But it was the utter ruthlessness with which the invaders pursued the obliteration of the native way of life that most appalled Selina Lought.

The best kept secret on the frontier around New England was not a secret to the

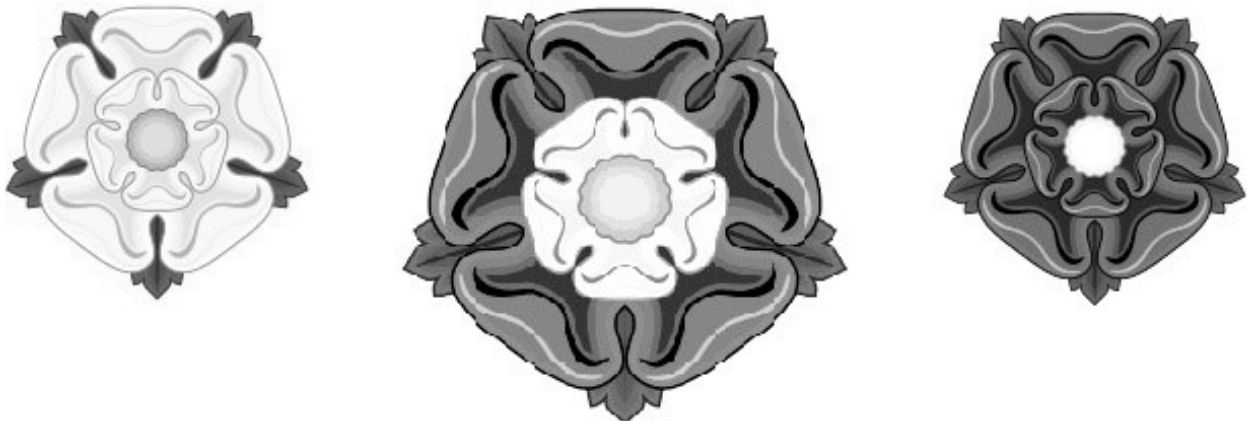
pioneers. The authorities alone knew nothing. Bleached white bones of unburied murdered blacks, soon only a ghostly memory as they gradually crumbled to dust, shrieked mute testimony to a sinful shame felt by so few. Mum was devastated when she pierced the pioneer code of silence. She was so concerned for she knew how powerful community pressure could be as an influence on us men in her family. Even the prosecution of the whites who had perpetrated the 1838 Myall Creek¹¹ massacre of over 30 men women and children near where we now lived, only reinforced the colonial code of silence.

Sure seven stockmen hanged for the crime of killing one child. But what of the several dozen people they slaughtered. It may have been the first time in colonial history that white men were punished under the law. But the outcry against the 'guilty' verdict in the form of petitions and financial assistance, gave voice to the hardly hidden outrage among the whites at the punishment of those murderers. The Sydney Morning Herald expressed public opinion of the time, 'The whole gang of black animals are not worth the money the colonists will have to pay for printing the silly [court] documents'.¹²

'It was common after an inroad of the blacks upon the sheep and cattle, for men of two or three adjoining stations to assemble for a regular and indiscriminate slaughter in which young and old were shot down. Reprisals were undertaken on a large scale -- a scale which never reached the ears of the government, or if it reached them at all, found them conveniently deaf .. men, women and children are butchered without distinction or stint .. it becomes by practice a pleasurable excitement.'¹³

Occasionally bush gossip let out that the 'blackfellows were going to get a dose': and indeed, in more than one known instance, 'damper well hocussed' with arsenic or strychnine was laid in the way of the savages, whereby many were killed.

Some attempts were made to bring justice to the perpetrators of this cowardly as well as barbarous act, but, in the bush, justice is too often deaf, dumb and lame as well as blind'.¹⁴



Mum made sure we understood the story of our race, coloured a little by her very Irish view of things. Apparently the Irish propensity for maintaining hostility with near neighbours rubbed off on their Hiberno-Norman Lords. 'The Irish thing gets into your blood', Mum declared in scorn. The resurgence of traditional local conflict split Norman lordships and eventually drew the Norman settlers into allying with native chieftains against each other. Plague and famine during these end of time times hit the Norman settlers even harder than the Gaels. The Black Death of 1348 preceded by the European famine were marginally less disastrous for native Irish. Scattered to the poorer land, the Irish lived dispersed in more rural settlements outside the Norman towns and villages where food was even scarcer in the famine. Pestilence less powerfully passed around the countryside. Gaelic language and customs came to dominate the country again as the Norman-controlled area shrank back to a fortified Pale around Dublin on the east coast.

Mercifully for about fifty years either side of 1400, intermittent conflict in England know as the Hundred Years War, kept the English occupied at home and largely out of

Irish affairs. Mum could barely hide her love for the story of the War of the Roses behind her disgust for the ravages of war even one that kept the strangers out of meddling in Irish affairs. Direct English involvement in Ireland was held at bay as the houses of York and Lancaster fought a series of dynastic wars for the throne of England. Their heraldic symbols, a white and a red rose respectively, characterised this century of sporadic battles as the War of the Roses¹⁵ contested bitterly between two Plantagenet Houses. Successive kings of England delegated their constitutional authority over the Papally conferred Lordship of Ireland to the powerful Geraldine Earls of Kildare. The Norman Welsh Fitzgeralds held the balance of power using military force combined with the Celtic tradition of widespread alliances with lords and clans. Lancastrian claim to England's throne descended to Henry Tudor¹⁶, who defeated Richard III, the last king of the House of York, at the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1486.¹⁷ Henry VII then married Elizabeth of York uniting the factions and starting the Tudor line. Symbolised in the Tudor Rose, it combined the White York Rose inside the Red Lancastrian Rose.¹⁸

Lordship over Ireland,¹⁹ as a Papal Possession, had been created for the foreign King following the Norman invasion of 1169-71.²⁰ With the ancient Irish Kingship in abeyance, the Irish kingdom became a fief of the Holy See under the authority of the King of England. Ostensibly it extended to all Ireland but English control was increasingly under challenge from local Irish leaders. It reduced in time to The Pale stretching along the east coast from Dublin to the garrison town of Dundalk ²¹ that, on occasions, gave the landlocked Kingdom of Oriel ²² access to the sea.²³ Normans altered Gaelic society with efficient land use, introducing feudalism ²⁴ to the existing native tribal-dynastic crop-sharing system.²⁵ While the Normans were being Anglicised by intermarriage with the Saxon stock of England, in Ireland they were becoming 'more Irish than the Irish' in the Hiberno-Norman²⁶ interaction with the Gaels. This lesser title of Lordship lasted until 1542 when the Parliament of Ireland conferred the Kingship of Ireland upon King Henry VIII of England after he rejected Papal authority over him and the church in England.²⁷



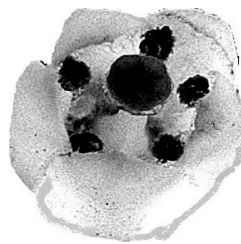
Henry VIII, the second Tudor King, claimed by right, during the English Reformation, belief not only in his royalty but also in his leadership of an English church. Death by dying most terrible became the fate of non-believers re-badged as traitors by the Treasons Act of 1534.²⁸ The reformation added a particular twist to the spike those strangers, our nearest neighbour shared with us. Great was the collateral damage caused by the military assaults by our neighbour, and our resistance to their incursions. Even our non-combatant women and children were targeted and terrorised, as they struggled to live amidst the hounds of war that imposed terror and famine on the population in general.

From Tudor land confiscations in the 1550s through to and beyond those initiated by the 1652 Cromwellian Act of Settlement, plantations robbed us of our land and livelihood. We learnt to live on praties from the new world until the potato crop failed in the famine of 1848. This bit of bad news travelled swiftly over the oceans to reach us even in the antipodes. As we huddled round the fire in the warmth of our hut listening to stories from our past, we came to know a very dismal view of the world from whence we came. Mum taught us much more than our letters and reading. But happy were we kids to be done with the worst of the Old Country ways that Mum so vividly shared in yarns.

Annie, my wife to be, abhorred the Colonials' conduct towards our black neighbours. But she passed judgement on none. She took to heart that God had a providential hand firmly on the reigns of the world. 'Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven'.²⁹ Many would deny that oppressed locals were surreptitiously on the receiving end of judgmental humans who showed not a skerrick of humanity. Maybe it was Annie's lofty view of life that attracted me. She touched a raw nerve when she pointed out that each can only change their own inner attitudes, not those of any others in the world around us. 'If 'finding fault is our mindset, we create a gloomy atmosphere for ourselves and those around us. A judgemental heart robs us of hope, and a life without hope is also dark and unbearable.'³⁰ Maybe Mum had made the mistake of many, indulging too deeply in a melancholic self-pity over past events. Such an attitude could suck you in like mud in boggy ground.

My Mother was dead and gone near a dozen years when in 1869 I married the love of my life in Armidale.³¹ Simplicity marked the beginning of our life together as we gathered with our friends to celebrate our union with no recognition sought from church or state. Living as we did, distanced from civilisation, Ann and I grew our little family on the leading edge of a wave of pioneers spreading across the land and populating the colony. Our marriage sought no acknowledgement from outside authority and so our family grew with no official records of the births we celebrated.

Ann could see, even a decade after mum so tragically departed life, that I was heading towards a downward spiral, similar to the melancholia that trapped my mother into alcohol and depression. And our love grew as I grew to appreciate the wisdom of her ways. From where she saw things, even that Pommy Pope may have thought he was doing the right thing by his Irish flock in bringing them into the transnational fold of Rome. If only Ann Heagney had met Selina Lought, Mum's life might have turned out differently. I know mine was changed, and for the better. Mum may have been empowered to soar above the abysmal bog of negativity and despair into which she was slowly dragged by injustice, past and present. Ann maintained that justice and judgement belonged to God. Who on earth has any right to condemn another soul to hell? No matter whether Pope or pauper, judge or king, each of us must face our Maker on the day of Judgement.



Red Gold Flower

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