

## Ulster Local History Trust



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Proceedings from

### THE REFORMATION

### Then and Now: Perspectives and Change 1517-2017 Conference

Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich Library & Archive Armagh

4 November 2017

organised by the **ULSTER LOCAL HISTORY TRUST**

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Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich Library & Archive Armagh – 4 November 2017  
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## Introduction to

# THE REFORMATION Then and Now: Perspectives and Change 1517-201

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by Dr Seán Beattie

Chair – Ulster Local History Trust

at the Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich Library & Archive Armagh – 4 November 2017

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I think the world must know by now that Martin Luther nailed 95 Theses to the door of a church in Wittenberg 500 years ago last Tuesday. This momentous event was commemorated by the most powerful woman in Europe, namely Angela Merkel at the very church where it happened. Luther's act of defiance was one of these events that has changed the world so it is worthy of being remembered. The challenge he threw down to the Church was however not the first of its kind and in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Lollards are noteworthy as one of many groups who objected to abuses in the church unsuccessfully.

Why did Luther succeed in igniting the flame that has continued to burn for centuries across Europe? Gutenberg and Caxton provided Luther with a new technology to carry out his mission. The printing press was the social media of its day and it delivered Luther's message to the hidden corners of the Empire. Luther was successful for political reasons also. The warring rulers of the small nation states that formed Germany adopted the new religion; they believed in the principle *cuius princeps, eius religio* – in other words state control of religion. Saxony was first to proclaim the Reformation for its citizens and within a short time, several other powerful princes had become followers of Martin Luther.

Meanwhile in England, Henry VIII broke the ancient connection with Rome in order to secure a divorce from Catherine of Aragon- incidentally, the Kingdom of Aragon is present-day Catalonia - but it was not until the reign of Elizabeth I that the Protestant religion was established firmly in England and our first speaker this morning will throw some more light on this.

Since starting work on this conference one image has been dominant. I refer to Thomas Jenner's print of the 1640s now on display in the British Museum. It shows 15 reformers standing around a table with a candle burning in the centre. The sub text reads – *The candle is lit- it cannot burn out.* In many ways, it reflects the simplicity of Luther's first act in nailing the Theses on the church door and also the determination of those who followed him across the world.



Ireland was a late comer to the Reformation. The Plantation of Ulster was important in carrying through the Reformation in Ulster. The arrival of Gaelic speaking Scots in counties Antrim and Down helped to implant Presbyterianism in the north east. In the North West, settlers in the Laggan area of Donegal ensured the Reformation was embedded by the 1650s.

The story of the Reformation is not straightforward. Emigration on a grand scale, the Penal Laws, wars of religion, executions and burnings at the stake all featured in this monumental episode in our history.



Last month I visited St Paul's Cathedral in London where a series of sermons on the Reformation were preached. I was fortunate to hear a brilliant sermon by Rev Andrew Carwood, Musical Director at St. Paul's. He ended his sermon by asking three questions:

1. Did the church need reform? The answer was undoubtedly YES
2. Did it lead to extremism, violence and deep unhappiness? Again the answer was YES
3. Have we learned the lessons of the Reformation? No. He added that until we realise **that history provides clues** to solving our present day problems, we will never address the divisions which still rack the church and we will never realise the hurt that religious intolerance can bring.

Quoting from the poet Thomas Hardy, he asked will there ever be a time when all will "go well"? Speaking from a Christian perspective, he concluded that we must keep on trying. As historians assembled here in the ecclesiastical capital of Ireland, we can say that today we are still looking at **our history** to provide a better understanding of the Reformation and hopefully by this evening, we will not have the definitive answer but we may have found a few more clues.

## Abstract

### The Protestant Reformation in Ireland 1517-1641

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by Professor Alan Ford – Nottingham University

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#### The History of the History of the Reformation

‘Truth is the daughter of time’ – the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation gives us an opportunity to look back and see how historians have written the history of the reformation, and how their histories have been shaped by their assumptions and biases.

This requires us to examine how the two historical traditions which the Reformation gave rise to – the Protestant and the Catholic – constructed two rival and mutually hostile histories of the Reformation. In Ireland these traditions existed in parallel from around 1600 right down to the middle of the twentieth century.

For the Protestants James Ussher traced the roots of the Church of Ireland back to St Patrick, and claimed that the early Irish church was largely independent from Rome. Catholic stressed the close connections between Patrick and Rome and the continual loyalty of the Irish people to the Catholic religion, resulting in a close identification of Catholicism and Irishness.

By the middle of the twentieth century the professionalization of the historical profession and the rise of ecumenism significantly changed the way that historians wrote the history of the reformation. Historians were no longer exclusively members of the church they were writing about, and Patrick could now be claimed equally by both churches. Nevertheless, elements of the older historiography persisted even into this century.

#### Reading

Alan Ford, ‘Shaping history: James Ussher and the Church of Ireland’ in Mark Empey, Alan Ford & Miriam Moffitt ed., *The Church of Ireland and its past*

*history, interpretation and identity* (Four Courts Press: Dublin, 2017)

Joe Liechty and Cecelia Clegg, *Moving beyond sectarianism* (Columba Press: Dublin, 2001)

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## Biography

### Professor Alan Ford

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Born in Dublin, Alan Ford was educated at Trinity College Dublin and St John's College, Cambridge.

- He has worked in the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs (1982-1988)
- The University of Durham (1988-1998), and
- Nottingham University (1998-2016) where he was
  - Professor of Theology
  - Head of the School of Humanities
  - Dean of the Faculty of Arts, and
  - Pro Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning.

He retired in 2016 in order to cultivate his garden and spend more time writing history.

He is the author of:

***James Ussher: theology, history, and politics in early-modern Ireland and England*** (Oxford University Press, 2007); and, most recently,

he co-edited with Mark Empey and Miriam Moffitt

***The Church of Ireland and its past: history, interpretation and identity***  
(Four Courts Press, 2017).

## Abstract

### Reform – Reformation in South Ulster and North Leinster

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by Dr Brendan Scott – Maynooth University

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This paper discussed the south Ulster diocese of Kilmore in the sixteenth century following the introduction of reform in 1536 and compare events there with what happened in the Pale diocese of Meath at roughly the same time.

Isolated from the arm of English administration and away from the influence of the Pale, Kilmore remained essentially a Gaelic and pre-Tridentine Catholic diocese throughout the sixteenth century. Recently compared to a ‘corporate takeover’, the Anglican authorities were compelled to continue with an unreformed pre- and early Reformation clergy, who often had no interest in adhering to the new reforms. The events of 1536 and the introduction of the Protestant Reformation into Ireland had little immediate impact on Ireland and even less on the diocese of Kilmore. Edmund Nugent, a member of an Anglo-Norman family from the borderland marches between the Pale and Gaelic Ireland, had already been bishop of Kilmore since 1530. Henry VIII had recommended Nugent for the bishopric who was duly appointed bishop of Kilmore by the pope, Clement VII, on 22 June 1530. Henry VIII was excommunicated by the same pope in July 1533. That Nugent survived as bishop of Kilmore until his death in 1550 is a tribute to his ability to navigate the uncertain and choppy waters of the Henrician reformation.

Although the second richest diocese in Ireland after Dublin, the annual income of the bishopric of Meath in the late 1530s was IR£373 12s. ½d., much lower than the income of any bishopric in England, which must have been a source of frustration for Edward Staples, the English-born bishop of Meath, also appointed in 1530. This lack of well-endowed benefices also made it difficult for the bishops to attract educated preachers, of which there was a general lack in Ireland, particularly those well versed in the principal tenets of the reformed religion, post 1536. And as much of Meath diocese was in marcher areas, there was quite a mixed population with Irish clerics serving these and even more Anglicised areas.



Even in the Pale diocese of Meath, there was not really much change in the religion of the diocese (in practical terms at least) since the reformed religion had been introduced in 1536, even with a bishop in place who was not opposed to the reforms. Meath was close to the centre of administration, had a successful monastic dissolutions programme, yet for all of that, other aspects of the reformation failed to make much headway there either. The Reformation was never really given a chance to spread and take hold in a relatively wealthy Pale diocese such as Meath in the sixteenth century, so it cannot be any great surprise when it failed to take hold in a poorer or remote diocese such as Kilmore either.

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## Biography

### Dr Brendan Scott

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Brendan Scott lectures part time in history at Maynooth University.

He is the manager of **Roots Ireland**, the website of the Irish Family History Foundation. He has published a number of books and articles dealing with religion, trade and society in early modern Ireland. Recent publications include a study (written with William Roulston) of the Church of Ireland in Clogher diocese, published in *Monaghan History and Society* (Dublin, 2017), and with Raymond Gillespie & Salvador Ryan, ***Making the Book of Fenagh: context and text*** (Cavan, 2016).

He is also editor of the ***Breifne*** Historical Journal.

## An Irish Prisoner of Conscience, Archbishop Richard Creagh of Armagh

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by Professor Colm Lennon – Maynooth University

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A list of captives in the Tower of London, drawn up by the Lieutenant on 30 November 1586, included the name of Richard Creagh, a continuing prisoner, about whom ‘Mr Secretary [Walsingham] was to be conferred withal’. At that time, the sixty-three year-old Catholic archbishop of Armagh had been imprisoned in Dublin and then London for twenty years, his active mission on the ground in Ulster having lasted only a matter of months in 1566-7. Creagh’s resilience in the face of captivity and interrogation over the two decades had been remarkable, although his health had suffered grievously through various ailments, including, according to himself, colic, kidney-stones, a hernia, diarrhoea and ‘rheums’, as well as the loss of all his teeth, ‘save two’, and of the use of one of his legs due to constant shackling. His long incarceration as one of the leading recusants in the Tower was an embarrassment to the authorities, his plight having elicited the sympathy of Catholics in Ireland, Spain, Rome and elsewhere. Yet they had denied all appeals for his release, considering him ‘a dangerous man to be among the Irish’ because of ‘the reverence that is by that country borne unto him’. Having headed the list prisoners for whom the Lieutenant claimed maintenance fees for many years, Creagh’s name disappears from the Tower bills in later 1586, and the next official prison record is of his burial in the chapel of St Peter ad vincula in the Tower on 28 January, ambiguously dated 1587-8.

In this paper I hope to try to clarify the circumstances and timing of Richard Creagh’s demise from the sometimes conflicting sources of evidence. In death, Creagh was regarded by his Catholic admirers as a glorious martyr, and suggestions of a nefarious killing would have helped to burnish that image. More significantly, Creagh emerged as a symbol of opposition to the Reformation, at a time when confessional divisions were beginning to harden in Ireland in the 1560s and 1570s, and it may be worthwhile to assess the nature of Creagh’s dissent from the state-imposed religious settlement. In this connection, such aspects of his life as his youthful change of career path may be adduced, his vision of the political and religious aims of his archiepiscopal mission in Armagh, his engagement with the state church authorities, and his growing stature as champion of Catholic

orthodoxy during his imprisonment in Ireland and England. Despite the absence of evidence of any political disaffiliation on his part over the years down to 1586, Creagh's religious constancy in an age of growing insecurity came to be perceived of in polemical terms and may have sealed his fate, occasioning his being 'disappeared' and quietly buried in the Tower. Ultimately, the archbishop's life and death, which reflect the difficulties of sustaining Irish Catholic loyalism under an English Protestant monarchy, allowed recusant commentators to add a distinguished name to the roll of Irish martyrs to the Reformation.

Richard Creagh's dilemma is epitomised in the oaths of fidelity that he took in his young adulthood, the compatibility of which he steadfastly asserted. The first was in his native Limerick, (where he was born about 1523), when he swore allegiance to the English crown on his entry into the citizenship as a merchant in the mid-1540s. The Creaghs were prominent among the mercantile patriciate of that city, giving their name to a central thoroughfare, and Richard had served his apprenticeship in the family business. In that capacity he traded in herbs and dyestuffs between Ireland and France and Spain. His municipal and commercial experience later allowed him to affirm that 'from my youth ... [I served] the crown of England as of nature and duty I was bound, knowing and declaring ... the joyful life that Irishmen have under England ... if they were good and true in themselves'. Two episodes pricked the tender conscience of the young merchant, according to his biographers, influencing a change of career. One was his perception of fraudulent practices in the warehouse where saffron was deliberately soaked to alter its weight, and the other was in a Spanish port where his ship, which had departed without him while he attended mass, foundered in a violent gale at mouth of the harbour. Regarding this as a mark of divine favour, Creagh determined to leave a career in merchandising, and embark on a course of study towards the Catholic priesthood.

The second oath in about 1554 or 1555 followed this change of vocation to undertake his baccalaureate studies at Louvain. To accomplish this, Creagh had returned to schooling in Limerick to acquire knowledge of Latin, and in 1549 he was among the first group of Irish students to enrol at the University of Louvain in the early Reformation period. There he was awarded a bursary from Charles V, the holy Roman emperor, to support his pursuit of courses in philosophy and theology. This indebtedness to Hapsburg patronage was to be raised in later interrogations of Creagh in

London. On his graduation as bachelor of divinity of Louvain and his ordination as a priest, Creagh took an oath of obedience to the papacy. Before that submission, apparently, Creagh had been recommended as a 'person of great learning and piety' to Ignatius Loyola, General of the Society of Jesus in Rome, and he in turn had urged on Cardinal Pole, Queen Mary's papal legate, Creagh's appointment to either of the vacant bishoprics of Cashel or Limerick. Pleading his inexperience and unworthiness, Richard turned down the offers, but later in 1564, after a seven-year sojourn as schoolteacher back in Limerick, the Louvain oath of obedience to the pope was invoked when Creagh was 'straightly commanded' by the Vatican authorities to accept appointment as archbishop of Armagh. The archbishop's dedication to his episcopal warrant from the papacy was to be a fundamental obstacle to his being accepted as a fit subject of the crown, although the conscientious Creagh argued on many occasions that his religious and political loyalties could be reconciled.

Once Creagh's reluctance to undertake episcopal office in Ireland was overcome in 1564, (the diffident priest frequently expressing a preference for the contemplative or academic life), he embraced the mission to Ulster. Before his departure from Rome, he and the papal emissary, David Wolfe SJ, had been granted a bull for the establishment in Ireland of schools and a university, to be under pontifical regulation, and in the spirit of the decree on Catholic education of the Council of Trent. Already, Creagh had used the opportunity as schoolmaster in Limerick in the 1550s and early 1560s to devise a programme of catechesis (based on his own catechism in the Irish and English languages) within the framework of a broad curriculum in the humanities. He was therefore very much in tune with Reformation and Counter-Reformation thinking about pedagogy in the service of faith formation. Any immediate action in implementing his pedagogical aims was forestalled, however, by his arrest almost as soon as his first expedition to Ireland as bishop began in early 1565. During his detention in the Tower of London, Creagh was interrogated by Sir William Cecil on many aspects of his captured documents and credentials, including the plan to set up educational institutions. Creagh vehemently denied any intention of establishing a university in Ireland without the permission of Queen Elizabeth. Moreover, he promised, if liberated, to go and teach youth in the arts and 'some books of manners', 'for nought, as hitherto I have done, never asking or receiving a penny of the church or ecclesiastical benefice during my life'.

The second expedition to Armagh, upon which he embarked in 1566 after his celebrated escape from the Tower the previous year, was longer-lasting but highly fraught. Faced with the task of promulgating the decrees of Trent in his diocese and province, Richard Creagh had to contend with the hostility of Shane O'Neill, the dominant ruler in east Ulster, whose candidate for the archbishopric had been passed over. Before his leaving for Ulster, Creagh had written to the earl of Leicester from Madrid, undertaking to give to Caesar his own and God his own, and not to meddle in politics. He aspired to being allowed to conduct his ministry with royal toleration, believing that he, as both a subject of the crown and of Gaelic O'Neill ancestry, could synthesise temporal and spiritual reforms with the acquiescence of Shane and the queen. His educational project in Ulster envisaged the 'erection of some schools wherein youth should be brought up in some good manners and beginnings of learning, believing, as I do, that they should forsake their barbarous wildness, cruelty and ferocity if from their youth they were brought up conveniently in knowledge of their duty towards their God and their prince'. But even at a time when politico-religious affiliations were still somewhat fluid, offers from Creagh to Leicester of his general service, and to Lord Deputy Sidney of his practical assistance as peacemaker with Shane O'Neill were shunned. Instead, having been humiliated by O'Neill and on the run from the state authorities, Creagh was recaptured at Easter 1567 and this time his imprisonment was for the rest of his life.

Perhaps Richard Creagh had been led to believe that some flexibility might exist in respect of allegiances from the tenor of his contacts with state officials during the early stages of his captivity. In March 1565, while a prisoner in the Tower for the first time, Richard was apparently offered a deal whereby his episcopal office could be confirmed by royal grant if he were prepared to renounce papal authority. This was a revival of the policy of episcopal surrender and regrant that had been successful in the early 1540s under Sir Anthony St Leger, but it was roundly rejected by Creagh. Another opportunity for relief was apparently presented to him when he was asked to use his episcopal powers as ordinary to ordain some bishops in the Anglican confession, but Creagh 'refused to lay sacred hands on heretics'. In the later 1560s, even when notorious as an escapee from the Tower, the archbishop was cajoled in prison by offers of 'high dignity, wealth and honours' if he would conform, renounce his obedience to Rome and take the oath of supremacy. The agent of these blandishments was the later apostate bishop, Miler Magrath, whom Creagh repelled 'with words of indignation and bade ... begone'! While remaining steadfast in his papal allegiance,

Creagh was apparently influenced by the Louvain school of theologians, including his friend, Michael Baius, who believed that compromise was possible whereby Catholicism could be tolerated in a Protestant state, despite uniformity legislation, as long as temporal pretensions on the part of the papacy were eschewed.

Any hopes of such a rapprochement were shattered in 1570 by the papal excommunication of Queen Elizabeth, which entitled her Catholic subjects to seek her overthrow, but well before this, Richard Creagh was being perceived by the state authorities as an obdurate and troublesome dissident. It was Creagh's dramatic escape from the Tower of London on Low Sunday 1565 (which he presented as a legitimate walk to freedom through a series of unlocked doors) that opened a real dichotomy in Protestant and Catholic views of him. For the state authorities, he became an abiding reminder of an embarrassing security lapse, Elizabeth I referring to him as 'a feigned bishop', 'an unloyal subject' that 'broke out of our Tower of London'. His admirers, on the other hand, regarded him as possessed of quasi-miraculous powers, and later writers told of various providential manifestations that preceded his flight from gaol. Observers of his demeanour when he arrived in the Spanish Netherlands shortly thereafter spoke of his 'extraordinary holiness' and of his being suffused with a pentecostal aura. Creagh's reputation for sanctity among Catholic contemporaries in Ulster was such that the nobility of Tyrone, to the archbishop's horror, never approached him without prostrating themselves at his feet. And a second, short-lived jail break in 1567, this one from Dublin castle, was inspired by the hopes of his abettors of gaining a reward in Spain for the delivery of the archbishop who was 'accounted a very holy man throughout Ireland'. The arresting officer afterwards suffered great opprobrium throughout the country for leading him back to prison.



Where Catholic supporters saw in Creagh a person of steadfast faith and devotion to his church, English government officials saw a recalcitrant and false-hearted dissident. However, his trial in 1570 in Dublin for high treason and praemunire resulted in his acquittal on the charges, the jury having resisted intense pressure to convict the archbishop. His continuing detention in Dublin served to maximise the frustration of the authorities: instead of sending a message *in terrorem* to those engaged, as they saw it, in politico-religious subversion, Creagh's vindication enhanced his stature as a recusant hero. In the Castle gaol, he became an arbiter of religious orthodoxy for those freely-admitted visitors, who were questioning their Catholic faith. In particular, he trenchantly opposed church papistry, counselling men and women who sought his guidance against nominal subscription to Protestantism, arguing that no one could serve two masters in the religious sphere. As well as steeling the resolve of those waverers who were inclined to conform to the state church, Creagh remained engaged with his ecclesiastical province of Armagh, dealing with matters such as episcopal appointments, clerical discipline and doctrinal catechesis from his prison cell. So influential was Creagh as a Catholic dissident in Dublin that Lord Deputy Fitzwilliam in a letter to Sir Francis Walsingham in February 1575 requested the transfer to London of 'one Creagh, a Romish thing that wonderfully incites this people and hinders the archbishop of Dublin's godly endeavours to procure religion'. Within a month the English Privy Council had invoked their police powers to extradite Richard Creagh across the Irish Sea to London.

During his final period of detention in the Tower that lasted a dozen years, Creagh's iconic status as a prisoner of conscience continued to trouble the English authorities. Philip II of Spain's frequent solicitations through his ambassadors on behalf of Creagh, whom he had met, and regarded as 'a good servant of God', angered Queen Elizabeth. That he was seen as a figurehead for political disaffection in Ireland even in prison may have created difficulties for Creagh, and suspicion of treachery on the part of the government. For example, younger members of the Pale gentry who attended the Inns of Court in London adopted the cause for his liberation, supplying him with books and necessities in gaol, and raising money in Ireland for his maintenance. One of them, Patrick Sedgrave, embarked on a mission to Rome to endeavour to procure his release, and later in 1580, some of the Baltinglass rebels used Creagh's captivity as a rallying-cry in the cause of liberty of conscience. Potentially more serious had been a petition to the pope in 1570 by the Desmond

rebels in Munster for a transfer of the kingship of Ireland to King Philip II that included the name of Creagh in a list of all of the Irish Catholic religious and secular leaders. Although seen by one Irish historian as evidence of a 'volte face' on Creagh's part in his attitude to political allegiance, there is no evidence in Creagh's writings or statements of any deviation from his commitment to perform his 'bounden duty to my natural prince and country'. The petition bore the names of some, including Creagh, who were in no position to sign, and besides, any suggestion of lèse-majesté would surely have been raised at his trial in Dublin or subsequently.

In his final years, during which the conditions of his imprisonment varied from the harsh to the lenient, the archbishop played a full part in the Catholic devotions, disputations with Protestant divines and protests against evangelical preaching that have been likened to a theatre of Christian drama in the Tower. In an atmosphere reminiscent of the Roman catacombs, Creagh as senior ecclesiastic would assemble as many of the prisoners as possible in a place common to all Catholics, described as a church, for the hearing of mass. Creagh was also reported to have presided over conferences of Catholic clergy to discuss controversies in matters of faith and the duties of Christians 'as regards justice'. In a confrontational setpiece, Creagh and other Catholic priests were forced to attend a Protestant sermon, having been dragged before the pulpit and physically constrained to listen. During a denunciation of Catholics, the saints and the blessed virgin, the archbishop interrupted and challenged the preacher, calling him 'a cheat, an impostor and a seducer of souls'. Efforts to embroil Richard Creagh in religious controversy tied in with a more serious matter that had been discovered about 1580, involving letters from the Tower to the Portuguese court, with the archbishop as one of the signatories. A major investigation conducted by Walsingham unveiled a network of Catholic supporters of Creagh in the city of London, but the substantial charge of treasonous contact with Portugal was not proven, as Creagh, who acknowledged his signature, argued that the initiative was undertaken on behalf of 'such as are in prison on behalf of religion'.

There was one more dramatic vindication of the archbishop of a charge that could have blighted his reputation for righteousness. In 1577 a commission was established to examine an accusation of 'a most wild and ungodly fact committed upon a child of five years old' in the Tower by Creagh,

bishop of Armagh. The subsequent examination found no conclusive evidence for proceeding against the archbishop. A report from the Spanish ambassador six months later mentions the clearing of the bishop who had been falsely charged with, as he put it, having to do with a girl eleven years of age. Creagh's biographers present his exculpation as a triumph of innocence over malice and cunning. Henry Fitzsimon wrote of a 'fraudulent shift' and 'shameless imposture', while David Rothe told of how, in a trial, the young girl, the daughter of his keeper, Wainwright, revealed the plot, and that the jurors and bystanders declared him to be 'pure and spotless'. Philip O'Sullivan Beare described how the girl protested that she had never seen a holier man than Creagh, and that the serious charges of sexual misconduct were found to be insubstantial. All were agreed that the archbishop had been the victim of a malicious plot that had miscarried, and Henry Fitzsimon suggested a motive: the plotters had been driven to their machination by 'despair of defending otherwise their cause'.

This attitude had probably intensified among his captors towards the end of 1586 as his case was referred to Francis Walsingham on 30 November. The costs of Creagh's continuing imprisonment down to 1586 as meticulously claimed by the lieutenant of the Tower amounted to £667 over ten years. The archbishop had been exonerated of charges relating to treason and also personal misconduct. He himself had pleaded for his release into exile on grounds of ill-health in one of his letters to Lord Burghley in 1575, promising to leave the queen's dominions and live quietly abroad, and to seek 'by all means to persuade the obedience of the realm of Ireland to the crown of England'. Yet at that time and later, the authorities saw no alternative to keeping him in custody as 'a dangerous man to be among the Irish', not due to any political threat that he may have posed, but because of his symbolic status as Catholic exemplar. The stated basis for his continuing captivity makes this clear: the lieutenant of the Tower, Owen Hopton, defended the measure of liberty afforded Creagh in the Tower around 1580 on the grounds that the archbishop was being treated as a prisoner 'only for papistry'. But Queen Elizabeth and her most powerful ministers, Burghley, Walsingham and Leicester regarded him as an enemy of the state, and it may have become too dangerous to allow Richard Creagh to live on in prison.

Some doubt still surrounds the date of Creagh's death. There is a gap in the sequence of surviving Tower Bills from the last quarter of 1586 until the next extant Bill of 25 March 1588, from which Creagh's name is missing. The first official reference to him as being dead appears in a papal grant of the archbishopric of Armagh to Edmund Magauran in succession to Richard on 1 July 1587, which refers to his death 'in prison in England' as having taken place 'praeterito anno' or 'last year'. But the register of burials for the chapel of St Peter ad Vincula in the Tower suggests a later date. Under the dates '1587[8]' is an entry reading: 'Bishop Richard Crue, Irish, buried in the Chapel xxviiijth January'. In other words, Archbishop Creagh (for it can only be he) was laid to rest in the chapel on 28 January in 1588 (New Style), though within the Old Style year of 1587, which ended on 24 March. That this is probably a mistake can be posited by adducing a few details in the Catholic and prison sources. Meanwhile, Creagh's biographers were themselves uncertain about the date of his death, most ascribing it wrongly to 1585 (he was definitely alive in later 1586), the exception being Philip O'Sullivan Beare who, apparently correctly, dated it to 1587, but the early seventeenth-century writers **were** at one in claiming that the cause of his death was illegal killing.

The earliest claim that the archbishop had been deliberately poisoned in jail emerged in a letter of Robert Southwell, S.J., to the Anglo-Dutch publisher, Richard Verstegan, in 1591, which refers to Creagh's dying at the hand of one Robert Poley, 'Sir Francis Walsingham's man', who gave him some poisoned cheese. This and another report of 1595 were based apparently on the eye-witness testimony of William Crichton, S.J., who was a fellow-prisoner of Creagh in the Tower from 1584 onwards and gave him the last rites, according to David Rothe. By the seventeenth century, the key elements of the story of archbishop's end by nefarious means were incorporated in the emerging martyrology of Richard Creagh. Rothe's extended account of his death contains more or less accurate details that suggest a contemporary witness, including the name of the keeper, John Colledge (rendered 'Culligius'), the doctor who confirmed the poisoning, having examined his urine, Arcloum (probably Dr Edward Astlow), and Creagh's spiritual comforter, William Crichton, S.J., but the identity of the alleged poisoner was not recorded in Irish Catholic circles. Assassination as the mode of the archbishop's death was accepted by Henry Fitzsimon in his treatise on the Mass of 1611 and his *Britanno-machia ministrorum* of 1614. According to the author, he was informed thereof by his Jesuit confrere, Crichton. Both Richard Stanihurst and Stephen White, following

Fitzsimon, also stated that Creagh was killed by poisoning.

A distinctive Catholic interpretation of Richard Creagh's death, if not its chronology, was thus established from the early 1590s, which reflected the culmination of a life perceived to be of 'extraordinary holiness'. Members of the Society of Jesus laid the foundations of his reputation for saintliness, and in this respect the role of William Crichton, S.J., was vital in two ways. Firstly, his own personal history may be used to corroborate a date for Creagh's death in very late 1586 or early 1587. Fr Crichton was released from the Tower in the early part of 1587, having administered the last rites to the stricken Creagh some time after 30 November 1586. He then made his way to Rome where he had arrived by 1 July 1587, when he had an interview with Robert Persons, S.J., and on the same date the appointment of Creagh's successor as archbishop of Armagh was announced. Crichton was the obvious informant of the Vatican authorities about Creagh's death '*preterito anno*'. This may refer to the Old Style English year ending in March 1586, though Crichton himself presumably accepted the year as beginning on 1 January in the New Style. Secondly, Crichton provided evidence of the 'odium fidei' or hatred of the faith on the part of Creagh's captors, a vital component of the construction of a cult of 'the blessed martyr Creagh' by Catholic historians, such as Fitzsimon and Rothe. While the killing of the archbishop by poison clinched the case for his martyrdom in the eyes of his Catholic biographers, however, the long years of tribulation and imprisonment had already elicited great admiration and sympathy for the imprisoned archbishop.

As to a possible reason for an extra-judicial killing, as claimed by Catholic sources, the report that Robert Poley was the poisoner of the archbishop of Armagh may provide a clue. Poley was an agent of Sir Francis Walsingham, who had encouraged a group of plotters led by Sir Anthony Babington, to lure Mary Queen of Scots into treasonous correspondence with them in 1586. After Mary's implication in a plot to assassinate Queen Elizabeth, Poley was imprisoned in the Tower with Babington and the other conspirators in the autumn of 1586 in order to preserve his cover as a spy. Babington and his companions were executed soon afterwards, but in the prison list of 30 November, the name of Poley appears next but one to that of Creagh. Did Walsingham use his agent in order to remove a dangerous dissident around whom Catholics might rally, once the grander design of the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, was accomplished on 8 February 1587?

Or did the archbishop become privy to the details of the manipulation of the plotters? A date of death just prior to a burial on 28 January 1587 would fit with the conjunction of these dramatic events and the presence of the key actors, Poley and Crichton, in the Tower. If Creagh's death took place a year later, in January 1588, only Robert Poley of the two was then being held in jail in the Tower, whence he was released in September 1588. He was later present at the violent death of the playwright, Christopher Marlowe, in Deptford in London in 1593.

While a date of death just before 28 January 1588 might fit with the allegation that Robert Poley was the poisoner, it cannot be reconciled with Fr William Crichton's being a source of information about a murder, let alone his administering of the last rites to Creagh. For Crichton was liberated from the Tower in the earlier part of 1587. Furthermore, a date in 1588 precludes the Jesuit's being the conveyer of information about Creagh's death to the Vatican authorities in Rome, where he had arrived by July 1587. I think it most likely therefore that Richard Creagh's death occurred shortly before 28 January 1587, when he was buried in St Peter ad vincula. The reference to a burial on 28 January 1588 was probably a mistake, due perhaps to confusion between calendrical systems on the part of a later copyist, but there is also the possibility that the record was altered deliberately in an attempt to cover the tracks of Walsingham's agent provocateur, and to distance the real date of the archbishop's demise from the prosecution of the Babington plotters and the subsequent execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, on 8 February 1587.

In a sense, of course, the actual date of death is less relevant than the fact that the state authorities had secretly decided to do away with Richard Creagh, as the Catholic sources suggest. He had become too dangerous not only to be released, but also, apparently, to be held in continuing captivity. While Queen Elizabeth's personal inclination was towards toleration of individual dissent, her animus towards Creagh, rooted in his notoriety as escapee from the Tower, was intensified by the growing conviction that he was an 'unloyal subject'. The longer-term significance of the case of Richard Creagh may lie in its positing of the incompatibility of dual allegiance to monarch and papacy. He was one of the earliest of the Old English of Ireland to argue for the reconciling of religious and political loyalties, but his fate prefigures the status of 'half-subjects' accorded the Catholic royalist leaders of the English Pale in the reign of Elizabeth's successor. He died not

because of any proven political disloyalty on his part, but because of the very strength of the witness that he bore to his own faith. And the irony is that he fulfilled many of the criteria for leadership of a reformed Christian church in that early Reformation era: in his commitment to catechesis as a basis for true doctrine, his dedication to social reform through education, his seriousness of purpose in undertaking an episcopal role, and his insistence on high standards of clerical training and discipline among clergy and laity.



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## Biography

### Professor Colm Lennon

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Colm Lennon is Professor Emeritus of History at Maynooth University.

He has researched and published in the social, cultural and religious history of early modern Ireland, and the history of Dublin.

Among his publications are *The lords of Dublin in the age of Reformation* (1989), *Sixteenth-century Ireland: the incomplete conquest* (1994) and *Confraternities and sodalities in Ireland: charity, devotion and sociability* (2012). His work on Dublin includes the editing of *Dublin, part II, 1610 to 1756* (2008) in the Irish Historic Towns Atlas series.

In 2000 he published a biography of Archbishop Creagh, entitled *An Irish prisoner of conscience of the Tudor era*.

# THE REFORMATION IN IRELAND: interpretations old and new

## WHY DID THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION FAIL IN IRELAND?

By Henry A. Jefferies

**I**n terms of sheer importance in Irish history, few events compare with the Reformation. In particular, the contrasting outcomes of the Reformation in Ireland and Britain had profound consequences for Anglo-Irish relations over subsequent

centuries, and still affect life in Northern Ireland to this day. Yet circumstances have conspired to hamper our understanding of the Reformation in Ireland. The loss and destruction of Irish archives and physical evidence are very difficult

to overcome. The dramatic collapse of Christianity in Ireland over recent decades has sapped interest in the subject. Furthermore, the dominance of constitutionalist historians in Irish third-level history departments has caused the Reformation in Ireland to be studied primarily as a constitutional rather than as a religious phenomenon. Let us consider five prevailing assumptions about the Reformation in Ireland in the light of recent research.

### 1. 'Not far short of total breakdown'?

A generation ago there was a consensus that the late medieval Irish church was on the verge of 'total breakdown'. Historians were never quite sure how to relate that assumption to Ireland's subsequent experience of the Reformation and tended to sidestep the issue. Recent studies, however, based primarily on ecclesiastical records and surveys of the architectural remains of late medieval church buildings, have overturned the notion that the church in Ireland was on the verge of 'total breakdown' on the eve of the Reformation. Evidence from across the island shows that it was actually experiencing a remarkable renewal right up to the moment of Henry VIII's breach with Rome. The Irish church operated through a dense network of parishes and chapelries, with radii of only a mile or so in the Pale and two miles over much of Gaelic Ireland, which were staffed by plenty of priests and supervised by many able bishops.

Given the fragmentation of political authority in Ireland in the sixteenth century, and the consequent disorders that wracked many areas, the Irish church authorities were not always able to call on the secular authorities to enforce canon



Left: Henry VIII c. 1537 by Hans Holbein the Younger. Brendan Bradshaw has shown that Henry VIII's Reformation was accepted 'with alacrity' by the Anglophone élites in Ireland. But was it a truly 'Protestant' Reformation?

Opposite: Queen Mary by Antonis Mor, 1554. Did her reign mark a 'watershed' in Ireland's experience of the Reformation?



law as rigorously as their counterparts in more settled regions of Europe. In a context of wide-scale economic underdevelopment, impoverished congregations could not always afford to maintain church buildings in perfect condition, or to subsidise the education of many parish clergy to university standards. Yet there is evidence of many new churches being built or renovated in the century before the Reformation. Lay people's wills, their foundation of chantries, their election of churchwardens and the growth of religious confraternities, not to mention the remarkable burgeoning of the mendicant orders, especially the Franciscans, reflect widespread commitment to Catholic doctrines and practices and a keen attachment to the institutional church on the eve of the Reformation. That was bound to influence Irish responses to the Reformation.

## 2. 'Accepted with alacrity'?

Brendan Bradshaw, in *The constitutional revolution in Ireland in the sixteenth century*, declared that Henry VIII's Reformation was accepted 'with alacrity' by the Anglophone élites in Ireland. That bold assertion contradicted a long-standing Catholic interpretation to the contrary, but was solidly based on the facts that the Irish parliament of 1536/7 endorsed the king's ecclesiastical bills with relatively little demur and that several of the local élites collaborated with the crown in suppressing religious houses across much of Ireland. Subsequent research has consolidated and extended Bradshaw's insight. We now know that Henry VIII succeeded in displacing papal jurisdiction over much of the Irish church to quite a remarkable degree. Small wonder that the first Jesuit missionaries to the country wrote a pessimistic report in 1542 about the future prospects of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that Henry VIII's was not a Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther caustically quipped: 'Squire Henry meant to be God and do as he pleased'. In fact, the king had written

a book defending Catholic doctrines against Luther, for which a grateful Pope Leo X granted him the title of 'Defender of the Faith' in 1521, the Latin initials of which are still inscribed on British coins to this day! Henry was concerned primarily with jurisdiction over the church in his domains, and its revenues, not with Reformation theology. The Catholic Mass and other Latin rituals were retained in Henry's church. His Reformation, after some initial uncertainty as to where it would culminate, was widely acquiesced in in Ireland because it did not dispute fundamental Catholic teachings. We should not confuse acceptance of Henry VIII's idiosyncratic royal supremacy with enthusiasm for Protestantism.

## 3. A Marian 'watershed'?

Bradshaw suggested that the reign of Mary (1553–8) marked a 'watershed' in Ireland's experience of the Reformation, between the conformity that characterised the years preceding it and the resistance to religious change documented subsequently in Elizabeth's reign. That view was fiercely rejected by Nicholas Canny, who highlighted evidence that the Counter-Reformation had not become established in Ireland in Mary's reign.

Yet Mary's reign was not without significance for Ireland's Reformation story. Recently it has been shown that the queen moved quickly to support the restoration of Catholicism, and Cardinal Reginald Pole, after a tardy start, involved himself directly in consolidating that restoration. Pole worked with the queen in devising a radical programme to invest the impropriated tithes held by the crown since the dissolution of the monasteries into funding the training of priests in the future and enhancing the financing of their ministries. Pole's programme may have been one of promise rather than achievement in Ireland, but it was significant nonetheless.

Mary and Pole promoted a team of Catholic stalwarts to spearhead the restoration of Catholicism in Ireland. The most important of the



promoted men were Irish religious exiles who were put into key dioceses: George Dowdall, archbishop of Armagh; William Walsh, bishop of Meath; and Thomas Leverous, bishop of Kildare. John Thonery, the Marian bishop of Ossory, showed himself committed to the Catholic restoration from the moment of his consecration, and he distinguished himself as a Catholic dissident under Elizabeth. Hugh Lacey, the Marian bishop of Limerick, would distinguish himself in Elizabeth's reign by actively supporting a papal mission intended to thwart the queen's Reformation.

The weakest link among Mary's appointments to Irish dioceses was the one Englishman she promoted, Hugh Curwen, archbishop of Dublin. Curwen had had to be reconciled to the Catholic Church by Cardinal Pole because of heresy and schism but, tellingly, he avoided swearing an oath to the pope. Subsequently he told Elizabeth that he had no qualms about swearing an oath acknowledging her as the supreme governor of the church. Mary's decision to promote Curwen, probably because of his likely usefulness in her civil administration in Dublin, proved to be a costly mistake for her religious programme.

Nonetheless, Mary and Pole may have done enough to ensure that the response to Elizabeth's Reformation in Ireland was much more robust than that accorded to Edward VI's Reformation. Though there was very strong feeling against the religious changes decreed under the boy king—there was, for example, a call in Meath for the burning of Bishop Staples as a 'heretic' after he delivered his first Protestant sermon in 1548—the Irish reaction to Edward's increasingly radical Protestant Reformation was remarkably inchoate. The success of John Bale, the Protestant bishop of Ossory, in winning support for the Reformation in Kilkenny in 1553 suggests that Catholicism might have been vulnerable to an earnest campaign in favour of Reformed Christianity had the young king lived for as long as might reasonably have been expected. Archbishop Dowdall's flight into exile in 1551 not only was symptomatic of a wider failure in Catholic leadership but also suggests a crisis of confidence about the future prospects of Catholicism in Ireland. Yet Mary's reign may have helped to restore something of that confidence ahead of the Elizabethan religious maelstrom.

#### 4. A 'quiescent phase'?

Since 1979 generations of Irish history undergraduates have been taught that there was a 'quiescent phase' until the late 1580s or '90s, during which time people in Ireland conformed quietly to Elizabeth's Reformation. Constitutionalist historians asserted that the subsequent rejection of the Reformation was prompted by constitutional grievances rather than religious preferences. More recently, however, overwhelming evidence has contradicted the notion of a 'quiescent phase' in the first half of Elizabeth's reign, and controverts the attempts made to synchronise the failure of the Reformation with the political alienation evident in the last decades of her reign.

Part of the reason for that fundamental misunderstanding of the Elizabethan Reformation in Ireland

was the failure to see it in its broader, English context. In England the Catholic Church was quickly decapitated and the crown promoted Protestants to senior positions in the church and universities with striking speed after the English Reformation parliament of 1559. In contrast to England, after the Irish Reformation parliament of 1560, the crown could not find Protestants for promotion in Elizabeth's other kingdom. It could not insist that the clergy or secular officials in the boroughs and shires take the oath of supremacy—even in Dublin and the Pale—which meant that the Reformation was virtually unenforceable in Ireland. People would not attend Protestant services voluntarily, and when on occasion they were forced to attend they disrupted the services and behaved as though they were at a 'May game'.

The queen was obliged to establish the Irish Ecclesiastical Commission in 1564 to compel people to attend Protestant church services and not disrupt them. Even then the lords and gentry of the Pale continued to boycott prayer-book services, while the queen's officials dared not provoke the 'multitude' who would not conform. The population was invariably characterised by crown officials as 'stubborn' and 'obstinate' in religion. The term 'church papist' was never used to describe anyone in sixteenth-century Ireland, but has been misapplied to Ireland by some historians. Compared with England, the resistance encountered by the Elizabethan Reformation in Ireland was quite extraordinary from the start. One need only read any contemporary report to see that there was no 'quiescent phase'.

#### 5. *'Mal posée'*?

The question of why the Reformation failed in Ireland is not, as has been claimed, *mal posée* but it was *prématurée* before sufficient research had been conducted to sustain convincing answers. Contemporaries were unanimous that it had failed comprehensively before Elizabeth died. Catholic and Protestant commentators estimated the number of Irish-

born Protestants in the entire country at between 40 and 120. In Dublin only twenty Irish-born householders attended Protestant church services at the end of the sixteenth century, and only four of them would receive communion. Only five individuals attended Protestant church services in Cork in 1595. There were five children in the Protestant school in the populous diocese of Meath in 1604. By any standard the scale of failure was overwhelming.

To account for the failure of the Reformation in Ireland a number of variables have to be considered. The strength of popular attachment to Catholicism on the eve of the Reformation, which is becoming ever clearer as research progresses, was clearly significant in shaping Irish responses to Reformation theology. Close study of the evidence from well-placed contemporaries throughout Elizabeth's reign, Catholic and Protestant, English and Irish, shows the persistence of Catholic convictions among the élites in Ireland and among the 'lesser orders'. Colm Lennon's study of Dublin is exemplary in that regard. The general refusal to subscribe to the Elizabethan oath of supremacy in Ireland, the refusal to attend Protestant church services and the disruptive behaviour of those forced to attend against their will, the withdrawal of voluntary financial support from local churches as they were Protestantised and the widespread disappearance of the office of churchwarden were forms of resistance to the new religious order that the crown, without the cooperation of the local clergy and law officials, simply could not overcome.

Perhaps Elizabeth's Reformation might have made some real progress in Ireland if Protestant preachers could have been found to persuade people to embrace its doctrines. There was, however, no indigenous community of Protestants in Ireland from whom a Reformation ministry could be recruited. There were no Irish Protestant scholars to staff any hypothetical Irish university to educate aspirant Reformation ministers, had any such aspirants existed.

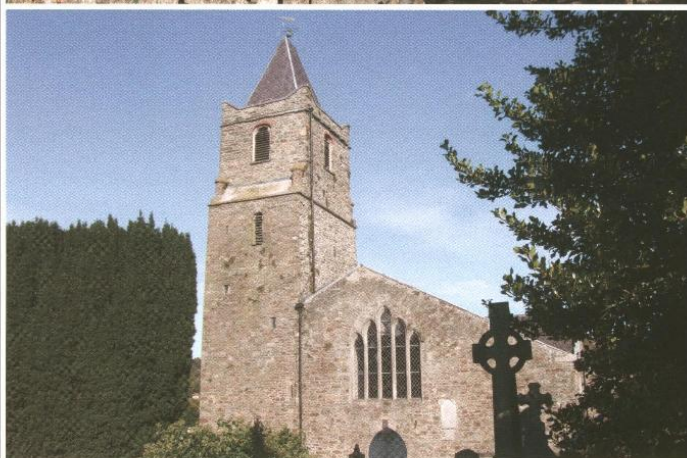


Right: St Canice's Cathedral, Kilkenny. The fiery Protestant preacher John Bale, bishop of Ossory, has left us a very graphic impression of his ministry in Kilkenny in 1551. Although he encountered tremendous hostility from the local Catholic priests and many older citizens, he built up a remarkable following among the young men of the town. His experiences show that the failure of the Reformation in Ireland was not inevitable. (Arran Q. Henderson)

Below right: St Multose Church, Kinsale, Co. Cork, founded in 1190—one of the very few medieval churches in Ireland to remain in continuous use despite the Reformation. Most fell into ruins as parishioners abandoned them after they were converted for use for Protestant services. (Canon David Williams)

The virtual absence of Protestant preachers, of any nationality, meant that the Irish attachment to Catholicism, which was commented on by contemporaries, went unchallenged in many areas. The Elizabethan Reformation could neither be enforced nor propagated in Ireland in the absence of support from the local community.

Yet there remained the likelihood that Catholicism would atrophy over time, as Elizabethan bishops were appointed and they in turn promoted clergymen ordained with the Book of Common Prayer in place of Catholic priests, and took possession of church buildings, ecclesiastical real estates and tithes. The survival of the Catholic Church depended on its ability to sustain a Catholic ministry throughout Elizabeth's reign. A continuing Catholic pastoral system was overseen by David Wolfe SJ, the papal commissary for Ireland from 1560. William Walsh, the deposed Marian bishop of Meath, played a crucial role in maintaining Catholicism in the Pale. From the early 1560s an underground network was in place to transport Irish priests and aspirant priests to Catholic colleges on mainland Europe. Meanwhile, the ministries of priests who remained in the established church were supplemented by independent chaplains and by tutors who ensured that the children of the élites received an unambiguously Catholic education, and by the preaching of



friars, even in the Pale. From 1577 college-educated Catholic priests were returning to Ireland as harbingers of the Counter-Reformation. Once they created a parish system parallel to that of the established church the future of Catholicism in Ireland was assured.

#### Conclusions

The failure of the Reformation in Ireland was not inevitable. Archbishop Dowdall's flight into exile in 1551 shows that no one could have been confident as to the ultimate outcome of the Reformation in Ireland. The absence of an indigenous Protestant community at the start of her reign meant, however, that Elizabeth's administration in Ireland struggled in vain to enforce and propagate her Reformation from 1560. One might speculate,

counterfactually, what might have happened had circumstances been different or had different strategies been employed to advance the Reformation in Ireland. Nonetheless, it is now obvious that the Reformation had failed decisively in Ireland before the Virgin Queen died.

*Henry A. Jefferies is the Head of History at Thornhill College, Derry.*

#### FURTHER READING

- H.A. Jefferies, *The Irish church and the Tudor Reformations* (Dublin, 2010).
- H.A. Jefferies, 'Elizabeth's Reformation in the Irish Pale', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 66 (2015).
- H.A. Jefferies, 'Why the Reformation failed in Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies* 40 (2016).
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## Biography

### Dr Henry Jefferies

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Dr Henry Jefferies is an Associate Member of the Arts & Humanities Research Institute at Ulster University.

He is a specialist on the Reformation in Ireland. His most important book, *The Irish Church and the Tudor Reformations* was the first book to survey the course of the Reformation across Ireland since 1934.

He has published a book on the Reformation in Armagh diocese, another on his native Cork, edited books on Clogher diocese, Derry diocese and county Tyrone, and published many papers in academic journals.

His work explores how the ministry of the Irish Church in the Reformation era, and how people responded to the extension of the English Reformation to Ireland.



# Ulster Local History Trust



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With lectures and open discussion, the Conference aims to explore the historical narrative relating to the Reformation and recent research, with the objective of examining the unique legacy of the Reformation in the world of today, particularly in Ireland.

#### **Date and Venue**

- **Saturday - 4 November 2017**
- **Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich Library & Archive**
- **9-15 – 16.00**

**09.15** Registration

**10.00** Welcome by Chairman, Dr Seán Beattie

**10.15** Gareth Wilson - Lord Mayor - Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council

**10.30** **Professor Alan Ford – University of Nottingham**

*The Protestant Reformation in Ireland 1517-1641*

**11.15** Tea/Coffee Break

**11.45** **Dr Brendan Scott – Maynooth University**

*Reform – Reformation in South Ulster and North Leinster*

**12.45** Lunch

**13.45** **Professor Colm Lennon – Maynooth University**

*An Irish Prisoner of Conscience, Archbishop Creagh of Armagh 1523-1586*

**14.45** **Glynn Kelso - PRONI**

*PRONI-LibrariesNI and the Reformation Project*

**15.00** **Retrospective – Open Panel Discussion with**

**Dr Henry A Jefferies** – Associate Member of the AHR Institute – Ulster University

**The Rev Tony Davidson** - First Presbyterian Church, Armagh

**The Rev Dr Michael Kennedy** – Representative Canon of St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin 1992-2014

**16.00** **Close**