

Before the HAMILTON & MONTGOMERY SETTLEMENT of May 1606

Sir Thomas Smith's FORGOTTEN ENGLISH COLONY

*of the Ards and North Down
in 1572*



Tho: Smith



“...to win and replenish with English inhabitantes the countrey called the Ardes...

...to possesse a lande that floweth with milke and hony, a fertile soil truly if there be any in Europe, whether it be manured or left to grasse. There is timber, stone, plaister and slate commodious for building everywhere abundant, a countrey full of springs, rivers and lakes both small and greate, full of excellent fishe and foule, no part of the countrey distant above viii miles from a most plentifull sea...

...have I not set forth to you another Eutopia?...”

from Sir Thomas Smith's 63 page promotional booklet, circa January 1572

“the platte hereunto annexed” - Sir Thomas Smith's map of east Ulster, circa January 1572, which was printed as a companion to his 63 page booklet. *Used with permission of the British Library.*

FOREWORD: Nearly 440 years ago Sir Thomas Smith recognised the beauty and potential of the Ards and North Down.



Portrait of Sir Thomas Smith from his biography by John Strype (published 1698)



MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR OF ARDS

Cllr Billy Montgomery

The history and development of the Ards Peninsula was largely shaped by the settlement of the area in 1606 by two Scottish landowners, James Hamilton and Hugh Montgomery. This inspiring story has been neglected until recently, when it was brought to light again through research by Mark Thompson. This intriguing booklet provides us with new information about those days, telling the story of the relatively unknown Sir Thomas Smith, whose original idea it was to settle the area. It provides us with a fascinating "what-if" scenario, because had Smith been successful, the Ards and North Down Boroughs today would be very different indeed. I am delighted that the Council has been involved in the production of this publication and I warmly congratulate Mark Thompson and Loughries Historical Society for their enthusiasm and drive to make this story available to a new generation.



MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR OF NORTH DOWN

Councillor Tony Hill

This very attractive and interesting booklet sheds a great deal of light on a neglected chapter in the history of our area. Had the colony proposed by the Englishman Sir Thomas Smith been established, the Scots settlers who came under Hamilton and Montgomery thirty years later, would most likely never have appeared in any numbers. The whole history of North Down and the Ards would have evolved differently, with political and social consequences felt right to this very day. This is what makes the turning points of our shared history so fascinating and I congratulate Mark Thompson and the Loughries Historical Society for bringing such a well-researched story to present-day readers - many of whom may have been entirely unaware of Smith and his ambitious plans. I am pleased that North Down Museum has played a part in the production of the booklet, which I heartily commend.

OVERVIEW: In May 1572 around 800 young men gathered at the small town of Liverpool in the north west of England, bound for a new life in the Ards Peninsula and north Down.

Their venture had been planned with meticulous detail. The English authorities had been considering a scheme like this since at least the year 1515, so there was no shortage of either colonial theory or political will. It was 5 October 1571 when Queen Elizabeth I granted her Secretary of State, Sir Thomas Smith, 360,000 acres of land in this most easterly part of Ulster, “the nearest part of all Ireland to Lancashire.”

Smith and his 24 year old son, who was also called Thomas, had until March 1579 to successfully colonise the lands or else lose their grant. So, almost immediately, they began advertising their newly acquired estate to potential tenants across England, through the unique and imaginative step of publishing a range of promotional literature – a **single page broadsheet**, followed by a **map of east Ulster** and a **63 page promotional booklet**. However, even though the land had been claimed by the English Crown since the late 1100s, it was disputed territory, having also been claimed by the Clondeboye O’Neills from around 1345.

The Smiths’ objective was to establish a new English colony centred around a new fortress town called *Elizabetha* that was to be located at the upper end of the Peninsula where “it is joynd unto the rest of the Island”, and which would be defended by three major forts that the colonists would build. Sir Thomas was sent to France on Royal business, leaving the project in the hands of his son. But, due to delays, by the time the colonists set sail on 30 August 1572 the number of emigrants had plummeted to around just 100.

“this North part is the quietest place of Ireland - the Ardes is the place which her Majesty must begin withal to plant and store”

Thomas Wilsford to Lord Burghley, circa 1574

“the country, from being waste, shall be peopled with right English and obedient Irish subjects”

Sir Thomas Smith to Lord Burghley, 10 April 1572



EAST DOWN in 1572. From a map supposed to have been engraved for Sir Thomas Smith.

They arrived the next day. However, a few months earlier Sir Brian O’Neill, the chief of the Clondeboye O’Neills, had acquired copies of the Smiths’ booklet. The discovery of their plan turned Sir Brian, who was described by the English authorities in 1571 as “a loyal and true subject”, into a man who “suddenly assumed a hostile attitude.” Knowing that Smith’s English colonists would make use of the vacant abbeys and any major stone buildings, O’Neill set fire to them all and left the English outpost town of Carrickfergus in ashes.

The Smith scheme struggled on, but it was doomed from the start, being dogged by both local Irish opposition and internal strife among the colonists themselves.

On 20 October 1573, just over a year after arriving in Ulster, Thomas Smith jnr was killed by two Irishmen he had employed. The high profile murder sent shockwaves through the English authorities in London. The original Smith colony was then scattered, with most of the colonists returning home to England. After a few failed attempts to start afresh, by late 1575 the scheme was abandoned; Sir Thomas’ health deteriorated and he died in August 1577.



Sir Thomas Smith's nephew and heir, **Sir William Smith**, had built a new church at Theydon Mount in Essex, and Sir Thomas was buried there. Sir William tried to revive the Ards project in June 1579, but it was too late. The deadline of the original grant had passed and the great adventure was over.

Nevertheless, Sir William Smith (and, later, his second son who was also called Thomas Smith) clung vainly to the hope that they might one day reclaim the family's grant. However, after the Queen died in 1603, Sir William Smith was sent by the new Scottish King James I to Spain. Smith left his Ulster affairs in the hands of one of the King's men - **James Hamilton** - giving Hamilton inside knowledge of lands in east Ulster which, once he had acquired them for himself, would make him famous.

The failure of the Smiths' English colony, and the destruction which it brought about, cleared the way for the success of the Hamilton & Montgomery lowland Scottish settlement of the same lands that would begin 34 years later in May 1606.

"Hamilton & Montgomery succeeded where Sir Thomas Smith failed. They created the bridgehead through which the Scots were to come to Ulster for the rest of the century."

**ATQ Stewart
 The Narrow Ground**



BACKGROUND: 1177 - 1571 East Ulster had attracted the interest of Earls, Kings and chieftains for centuries.

1177: *The Earldom of Ulster*

The origins of the medieval Earldom of Ulster can be traced to 1177 with the arrival in Ireland of the Anglo-Norman knight **John de Courcy**, who was succeeded by **Hugh de Lacy**. De Lacy was the first Earl of Ulster, appointed in 1205 by King John, whose Earldom was based around counties Antrim and Down. It was a satellite of English authority in Ireland, with Carrickfergus Castle being one of its most enduring legacies. One of the many Anglo-Norman families to come to Ulster was the **Savages** who acquired massive estates in the new Earldom.



1315: *The Bruces in Ulster*

In the 1300s Scottish attention was also turned towards Ulster. **King Robert the Bruce** spent six months in refuge on Rathlin Island in 1306-1307, and his brother **Edward Bruce** led a failed military campaign in Ireland (1315 - 1318). The Bruces "wasted Belfast... Newton, and many other very good townes." As a result of the devastation caused by the Bruces, followed by the assassination of William de Burgh (the third Earl of Ulster) in 1333, the old Earldom of Ulster was split in two.

1345: *The arrival of the Clannaboy O'Neills*

This division happened when a branch of the O'Neills - the **Clann Aoidhe Buidhe (Clannaboy) O'Neills** - moved from west Ulster into east Ulster around 1345 and claimed a huge area in the middle of the old Earldom, a region which was then given the name "Clandeboy." By 1360 the O'Neills had conquered almost the whole territory - **Lower Clandeboy** covered most of south Antrim, and **Upper Clandeboy** covered most of north and west Down as well as the Ards. The strength of the Clandeboy O'Neills, and the weakening of English presence and authority in Ulster was of great concern to the Crown. Colonisation was seen as a possible solution.

1515: *Plans for English Colonies in Ireland*

In 1515 the English Record Commissioners published a document entitled "*The State of Ireland and Plan for its Reformation.*" It proposed a solution for east Ulster - to "exyle, banyshe and expulse" the Clandeboy O'Neills, who were to be replaced by people from England, Wales and Cornwall.



"...to 'exyle, banyshe and expulse' the Clandeboy O'Neills, who were to be replaced by people from England, Wales and Cornwall..."

That scheme didn't proceed. However, by 1548, colonisation of Ireland was official government policy. **William Piers**, the Yorkshireman who founded the town of Carrickfergus, published his "Opinion" in 1565 that proposed a new colony east of the River Bann which was to include Clondeboye. Piers formed a close relationship with the chief of the Clannaboy O'Neills, **Brian O'Neill**, who dominated the region with the support of the English authorities. For about 30 years between 1550 and 1580 there were "constant discussions of the possibility of establishing English settlements in Ireland."

However, if England was of one mind, Gaelic Ulster certainly was not. There was "frequent enmity" between the Tyrone O'Neills and the Clondeboye O'Neills. In July 1567 Brian O'Neill was knighted for his services to the Crown, possibly for his opposition to **Shane O'Neill** – *The O'Neill* - who had been killed near Cushendun on 2 June 1567. In the lower territory of the old Earldom the **Savages** (the old Anglo-Norman family who dominated south Down and the lower half of the Ards Peninsula) were "sore enemies to the O'Neills." In the upper territory, the **MacDonnells of Antrim** (who had arrived there from Scotland in 1399) had been implicated in the murder of Shane. It was a bloody and complicated time.

The history of the Clondeboye O'Neills - *Leabhar Cloinne Aodh Buidhe* - was written (in Irish) around 1680 and published in 1931



1500s: Colonial theory around the world, and in Ireland

It was also an age of exploration with colonial schemes being proposed for many parts of the world. **Queen Elizabeth I** came to the throne in 1558, and her reign included a sequence of Crown-supported colonisation schemes in different parts of Ireland – and America. Having suppressed an Irish uprising in 1580 **Walter Raleigh** was knighted and in March 1584 he received a Royal patent to explore and settle North America. In 1585 he led a failed English settlement at the "lost colony of Roanoke" on the north east coast of North Carolina.

In Ireland, the first colonisation projects of the 1500s were undertaken in the name of the Catholic rulers of England, Mary I and her husband - later Philip II of Spain. King's and Queen's counties were named after them.

Other Irish families in the Ards and North Down:

In Rev James O'Laverty's 1878 book *An Historical Account of the Diocese of Down and Connor*, he records other Irish families who lived in north Down and the Ards in the 1500s:

- O'Gilmores (near Holywood and Bangor)
- O'Mulcreevys (the district around Groomsport)
- O'Flinns (Inishargy, near Kircubbin)
- M'Kearnyes or Kearneys (described as "a powerful sept in the Ards")
- M'Gees (near Portavogie)
- Savages (formerly Anglo-Normans, based in the "Little Ards" or "Upper Ards" around Portaferry)

SIR THOMAS SMITH: Smith was born at Saffron Walden in England in 1513. From humble origins as the son of a small-time sheep farmer, his impressive intellect caused him to rise rapidly in English academic society, becoming Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University when he was just 30 years old.



"...for this two hundred years not one hath taken the right way to make that country either subject or profitable... it needeth nothing more than to have colonies"

Sir Thomas Smith, 6 June 1565

He was close to the infant **King Edward VI** and to his "protector" **Edward Seymour**. Following a series of risings, Seymour was overthrown and executed. On 14 October 1549, Smith was imprisoned in the Tower of London. During this time he translated 92 Psalms into English under the title of "Certaine Psalmes or Songues of David translated into Englishe Meter, by Sir Thomas Smith, Knight, then prisoner in the Tower of London, with other Prayers and Songues by him made to Pas the Tyme There." He was released on 22nd February 1550.

Smith's political ambitions resumed and he became MP for Liverpool. In 1562 Queen Elizabeth I made him Ambassador to France and in the same year he began his most famous book *De Republica Anglorum*. He was repulsed by the St Bartholomew's Day massacre of August 1572 that saw an estimated 30,000 Huguenots killed within two days, and he wrote a famous letter of impassioned outrage to **Sir Francis Walsingham**. News of the massacre reached Scotland within days, and **John Knox** verbally attacked the French Ambassador in Edinburgh.

Smith was full of ideas and imagination. He was fascinated by theories of colonisation around the world and, just like Sir Walter Raleigh, his plans gained the support of Queen Elizabeth I. For Smith, Ulster may have been a complex issue - after all, his son Thomas was serving there as a soldier - but it also had prospects. It was potentially the place where Smith could try out the colonial theories he had studied so avidly, and it might even make him rich. However, the shortcomings of his grand colonial theories for Ulster would soon become clear.

THE LAND GRANT: On 5 October 1571 Queen Elizabeth I granted Sir Thomas Smith a huge estate of 360,000 acres in east Ulster

During the 1560s and 1570s Queen Elizabeth I had at least three approaches from English nobles and soldiers who wanted her support for their colonial ambitions in east Ulster. But it was Smith who succeeded.

In the summer of 1571, Sir Thomas Smith and his associates proposed to the Queen that they would establish a privately financed colony in Ulster "to make the same civill and peopled with natural English men borne." Just a few months later, in an indenture of 5 October 1571, followed by letters patent of 16 November, Sir Thomas Smith and his son Thomas Smith jnr were granted 360,000 acres in east Ulster – a huge area from Toome in County Antrim to the bottom of the Ards Peninsula in County Down.

Advertising for Tenants

The vast area of land needed to be advertised to prospective tenants. The marketing campaign that the Smiths put in place was visionary. Never before had a business venture been promoted in the way they promoted their new colony. Within weeks of securing their grant from the Queen, the Smiths produced the first of three publicity documents:

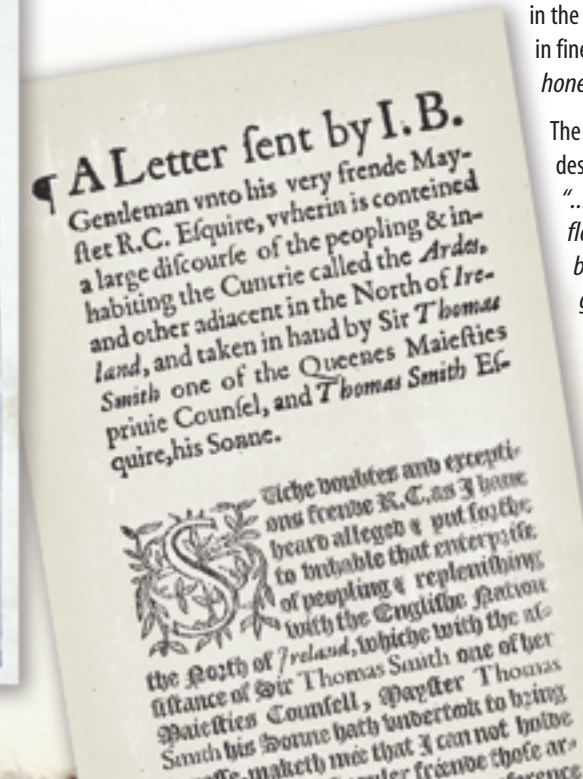
- A single page "broadside" (entitled *The Offer and Order Given Forthe by Sir Thomas Smyth, Knighte, and Thomas Smyth, his sonne*) was printed and circulated in November 1571. It summarised the scheme and stated that all prospective tenants would have to be ready by the end of February 1572.

Just three weeks later, in December 1571, Elizabeth rather inconveniently decided to send Sir Thomas to France, so the day-to-day management of the colonisation project was left in the hands of his inexperienced 24 year old son. Sir Thomas, however, continued to direct the publicity campaign from abroad.

- In January or February 1572 a map of east Ulster was produced and was accompanied by
- a 63 page booklet (entitled *A Letter sent by I.B. Gentleman unto his very frende Mayster R.C. Esquire*). These were two fictional names, with "I.B. Gentleman" playing the part of a convinced prospective colonist, writing to persuade his friend "R.C. Esquire" of the benefits of joining him in the colony. It weighed up the pros and cons of the scheme in fine detail, before concluding that it would indeed be "an honest and profitable voyage."

The Ards was described in the booklet as a "Eutopia" and described in the most flowery and Biblical of language: – "...tell them that they goe to possesse a lande that floweth with milke and hony, a fertile soil truly if there be any in Europe, whether it be manured or left to grasse. There is timber, stone, plaister and slate commodious for building everywhere abundant, a countrey full of springs, rieuers and lakes both small and greate, full of excellent fishe and foule, no part of the countrey distant above viii miles from a most plentifull sea..."

The booklet was probably the work of Sir Thomas. By May 1572 around 800 men had been persuaded by the publicity and gathered at Liverpool, ready to make the voyage to the Ards.



The publicity campaign - the November 1571 "broadside" (courtesy Society of Antiquaries of London) and the January 1572 map of east Ulster (courtesy British Library C13791-69)

The January 1572 booklet (courtesy Trinity College Dublin)

HOW WOULD IT WORK?

From their advertising materials much is known about how the Smiths planned their colony.

THE AREA: The 360,000 acres covered the south of County Antrim and north and east of County Down, including the Ards Peninsula. An area of that size couldn't be safely settled all at once, so the Smiths' aim was to initially seize control of the Peninsula, consolidate their position, and then advance in stages until they had eventually secured the whole region.

CHEAP LAND: The booklet claimed that each venturer would be able to "take land to them and their heirs ten times more than they can buy in England on the price and as good."

SOLDIER ADVENTURERS: Smith envisaged the colony being led by eight or nine hundred "soldier-adventurers" who would be granted parcels of land. These areas were to be divided into parishes in which a church was to be built and land allotted to a clergyman, a constable, a clerk, and a schoolmaster. The size of allocation depended on the class of adventurer:

- Every "soldier on foote" would be granted "a plowland" of 120 Irish acres / 250 English acres and would be expected to wear "sufficient armour... a pike, halberd or caliver... cloke of red colour or carnation with black facing."

- Higher on the social scale every "man who will serve on horseback" would be granted "two plowlands... two hundred and forty acres Irish which is at the leaste fiuve hu'dreth acres and more English." He would be expected to bring "a staffe and a case of Daggers... liuery of the colour aforesayd, and of the fashion of the ryding Dutch clokes."

THE COLONISTS: Smith believed that the younger sons of England's nobility and gentry were the ideal target for the venture. The older sons would inherit the family estates in England, so the prospect of gaining their own lands (cheap and plentiful, and at least 250 acres) in Ulster would have great appeal for these younger brothers. He also proposed that most should be "armiger" or "of gentle birth."

FORTS: Three large forts were to be built at the top of the Peninsula to defend the new colony from attack. Careful calculations projected that the most opposition they would face would total less than three thousand fighting men. And a fight is what Smith expected – "the Irish will assemble and push us back" – but he believed that the military expertise of the colonists would prevail. He reckoned that even 6000 Irish would not be able to overcome 700 Englishmen, and even cited the statistics of a series of recent English victories in Ireland, including one in which 14 Englishmen at Castle Reagh had capably defended themselves against 500 Irish.

"...Ireland requireth rather lasting and warm clothes than gorgeous and deer garments..."

A STRONG TOWN: A town called *Elizabetha* was to be built. Smith snr wrote to his son and said "I reckon you can do nothing till you have a strong town, as a magazine of victuals, a retreat in time of danger, and a safe place for the merchants." It was to be "a little London, first a centre for defence, then of civilisation and trade." He advised his son to look at "Rome, Carthage, Venice and all others where any notable beginning hath been." A fortress city might have worked in classical times, but would it work in 16th century Ulster?

CLIMATE: The weather in Ireland was recognised as an issue by Smith. In his pamphlet he wrote: "Ireland requireth rather lasting and warm clothes than gorgeous and deer garments." This advice highlights the social class of the people he was appealing to, and also shows that he was aware that they might not realise the practicalities of life in the Ulster colony. The soldier-adventurers were to be "lodged under canvas, and upon beddes, until houses may be provided."

THE IRISH: The Smiths intended to employ Irish labourers in the colony: "All Irishmen... that will plow the grounde and beare no kind of weapon nor armour, shall be gentlye entertained and for their plowing and labour shalbe well rewarded with great provision that no iniurie be offered to them." However, these compliant Irish might cause a new problem – a lack of impetus for the colonists to bring English labour. Smith wrote that "...the Churle of Ireland is a very simple and toylesome man... the sweetnesse which the owners shall find in the Irish churle... will hinder the cuntry much in the peopling of it with the English Nation, making men negligent to provide English Farmers." The Irish were to be taught the English language, but were to be denied any social status within the colony. Other farmers were to be drawn "out of the Ile of Man and other poore men out of England." Smith seems to have viewed the scheme with a kind of benevolent superiority: "it is neither sought to expel or destroy the Irish race, but to keep them in quiet, in order, in virtuous labour and in justice, and to teach them English laws and civility..."

ECONOMY: Money would be made by selling grain (first to other markets in Ireland, then to England, and then even to France and Spain, which was "not five dayes journey"). The booklet went on to say that "Mony, corne, butter, yarne, cattle and such like" were in plentiful supply, as were "wheat... otes and barley."

Background: map showing the three intended forts. See page 18

Map: Detail of the map of Ireland by
Baptista Boazio, 1599. *British Museum* cz cct

SIR BRIAN O'NEILL DISCOVERS THE SCHEME

For all of the Smiths' vision and drive, the high-profile publicity of the scheme was to undermine the entire project.

The Smiths' literature, published without Royal approval, fell into the hands of the man who believed their new lands to be his – **Sir Brian McPhelim O'Neill** – and who saw himself as “*captain of these places.*”


Having been knighted for his loyalty to the Queen in July 1567, O'Neill was outraged by what he discovered. On 8 February 1572 Captain Piers of Carrickfergus wrote to the Lord Deputy of Ireland, stating that “*the country is in an uproar at Mr Smith coming over to plant in the North.*” The Lord Deputy, **Sir William Fitzwilliam**, wrote to Thomas Smith jnr that same month to complain that the Smiths should have just got on with the job rather than cause trouble in Ulster by “*rumours spread both by vulgar talk and show of printed writing.*”

Sir Brian O'Neill then put his objections in writing to the English authorities. The previous year, having heard of a potential English colony on lands he considered his own, he wrote to them twice to point out that a) he was loyal to the Queen, and b) that the land was too poor to cope with an influx of new people. However, what were once just rumours had now become reality.

On 6 March 1572 he wrote from Belfast to the Lord Deputy (in Latin) to plead that if the Queen had been aware of O'Neill's loyal service she would not have granted the lands to the Smiths. A few days later he wrote directly to her from Carrickfergus saying that the lands “*hath been possessed by mine ancestors above fourteen descents as their inheritance*” – an argument he reiterated when he addressed the Crown authorities on 27 March, referring to the Smiths' publicity materials as “*certaine books spred in print.*”

The damage was obvious to all, even to Sir Thomas Smith himself, who quickly tried to blame his son for the trouble caused. In a letter to William Cecil, **Lord Burghley**, on 16 April 1572, Sir Thomas wrote that “*the little book which my son sent out was evil done*” – even though it was Smith snr who was most likely its author.

William Cecil,
Lord Burghley



Brian O'Neill m' phalim baeh'

Sir Brian O'Neill's signature, 1572
from the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 1854

THE ARRIVAL OF THE COLONISTS

The strength of local Irish opposition caused the prospective colonists to delay their departure from England for six months.

The original plan had been to leave at the end of February 1572, but by May they still hadn't left and the Mayor of Liverpool was complaining about the “*unruly behaviour*” of the 700 - 800 potential colonists. Hundreds of wealthy young men kicking their heels in what was then just a small town of around 2000 people was a recipe for mayhem.

The Liverpool Town Records of the time state that “*the town was very well vexed and troubled by Captain Smith and Captain William Clayton and the soldiers before they sailed for Ireland.*” Strype's biography of Smith records his anxiety at the reports of their behaviour: “*captains, mariners and soldiers... did nothing but dispend their money. This troubled Sir Thomas.*” High-level financial disputes developed among the waiting colonists and “*one Edmund Higgins, the chief of the gentlemen and captains that were going over... was hindered for want of money agreed upon.*” Strype also notes that other investors included a Mr Harrington and Mr Clarke who had both given “*certain sums of money for lands there to be assured to them.*”

The developing situation worried Sir Thomas greatly. Stuck in France, all he could do was write a series of letters to his son and to the other investors in the scheme. On 8 May 1572 he wrote to Thomas Jr:

“you have played the fool in taking that upon you, which you could not perform...except that you hereafter show more foresight, doubt and provision... I will hereafter take you for a fantastical fool and give you a long Adieu...”

On the same day, in a letter to his nephew, John Wood, Sir Thomas complained of his son that he was behaving as if “*I had a bottomless purse or a mine for him to spend at his pleasure.*”

Sir Thomas returned from France and, on 16 July, the expedition received permission to sail for Ulster. In preparation for this Thomas Smith jnr wrote a “*conciliatory note*” to Sir Brian O'Neill, in which he said that he was coming to live beside O'Neill, and expressed the hope that they might maintain friendly relations with one another. The winter had been extremely cold and the numbers of emigrants had dwindled. By the time they eventually sailed from Liverpool on 30 August 1572 their numbers had been dramatically reduced to just over 100 – a long way short of the sort of numbers they had literally been banking on. The colony needed finance, and finance needed people. Nevertheless, they set sail and arrived in Ulster the following day, 31 August 1572.

The earliest painting of Liverpool, 1682, by British School. Even over a century after the Smith project, Liverpool was still only a small coastal town.



© National Museums Liverpool



THE LOCATION The plan was to set up a base camp, then build a coastal fortification and a quay. This was to take about three months, after which they would advance north to build three forts across north Down (*shown on map left*), securing the Peninsula. Then they would advance inland in stages until they had taken all of the 360,000 acres.

If the colonists had read their copies of the Smiths' booklet, they would have been aware of the initial plan:

"...He dothe minde at his first landing to fortifie him selfe upon the sea shore and frontier of his country, and builde there his store house and houses of provision... that will, peradventure, be one three monthes worke. Then after the store house and quay of his country built, and left sufficiently guarded, he will remove five or six more or lesse miles, as the cuntry shall serve, and there erecte an other fortress..."

There are very few surviving records of the colony, so over the years various respected historians and authors have speculated as to where Smith's main locations might have been.

Did Smith "fortifie him selfe upon the sea shore" at Newcastle?

In Sir Thomas Smith's first biography (written by **John Strype** and published in London in 1698), it says that a fort was indeed begun in Ulster by the colonists, and also refers to families who were then living at the lower end of the Peninsula:

"Mr. Smith also began a new fort in this country... At Mr. Smith's first coming hither, he found some few that claimed themselves descended of English blood, namely, the family of the Smiths, and the Savages, and two surnames more." These are different Smiths who had settled in the area long before the 1572 colony and lived in what later became known as Quintin Castle, which was bought from **Dualtagh Smith** by **James Montgomery** in the early 1600s. These earlier Smiths (who had been at Newcastle for at least three generations) and the Savages, were both based at the lower end of the Ards Peninsula. The "Little Ards" must have been a significant place for the new Smith colony.

The *Calendar of State Papers for Ireland* contains two letters written by Thomas Smith jnr to Lord Burghley which were both written at "Newcastle in the Ardes". The first was written just two months after the landing (dated 28 October 1572) and the second letter a further seven months later, dated 29 May 1573. Just south of Cloghey, on the outer coast of the Ards Peninsula, is a small townland called **Newcastle** (not to be confused with Newcastle at the foot of the Mourne). In 1572 Newcastle was frontier territory, on the northern limit of the Savages' lands, which were under regular attack from the Clondeboye O'Neills.

Map of the Ards Peninsula and north Down, showing churches, castles and the three intended forts, where the Peninsula "is joyned unto the rest of the Island." Used with permission of the National Library of Ireland.

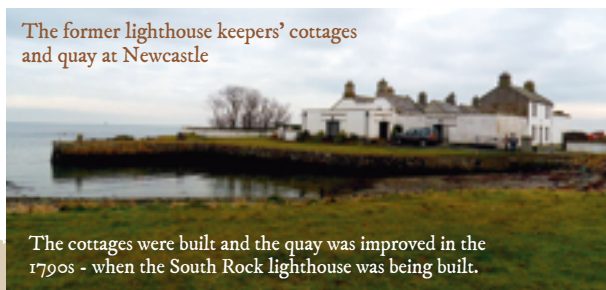


The view from Newcastle townland towards the Isle of Man (from where the Smiths intended to recruit farmers and labourers for the colony)

The case for Newcastle

In the *Hamilton Manuscripts*, edited by TK Lowry and published in 1867, the quotation from John Strype is reprinted, with the location of Smith jnr's fort specified in the footnotes as being "Newcastle, standing boldly over the sea on a neck of land, three miles east of Portaferry." It is well known that at Newcastle there was once a large building - in the early 1600s Sir James Hamilton's brother William was living at "Newcastle in the Ardes", but by 1683 William Montgomery referred to Newcastle in his *Description of the Ardes* as "a ruinous pyle."

The initial landing of the colonists' ships may have been nearby, perhaps at Quintin Bay, but there is no doubt that Newcastle was their first base - in clear view of the Isle of Man (from where they planned to recruit farm labourers), and which even in the late 1680s was just a four hour boat trip away. Today at Newcastle, on the site of the old castle, are buildings that were once lighthouse keepers' cottages - with a thick fortified wall, a seaward lookout post and also a new house built on the site of what were old storehouses. Beside the cottages is a small quay - all exactly as Sir Thomas Smith had planned.



The former lighthouse keepers' cottages and quay at Newcastle

The cottages were built and the quay was improved in the 1790s - when the South Rock lighthouse was being built.

Other suggested locations

Ballycastle near Mountstewart (by George Hill, *Montgomery Manuscripts*, 1869 - and also in Alexander Knox's *History of County Down*, 1875)

Strangford (by James O'Laverty *Historical Account of the Diocese of Down and Connor*, 1875 / George Francis Savage Armstrong, *The Ancient and Noble Family of the Savages of the Ards*, 1888 / George Francis Savage Armstrong, *The Savage Family in Ulster*, 1906 / D.A. Chart article *The Break Up of the Estate of Con O'Neill*, 1942)

Then in 1945, David Beers Quinn, in his article *Sir Thomas Smith and the Beginnings of English Colonial Theory*, made a new suggestion when he referred to "a base some miles south of Newtownards, which he called 'Newcastle Comber'. No-one knows if a place of this name ever existed.

None of these three alternative locations have any primary source cited. The only available primary sources - the two letters in the State Papers - specifically state Smith jnr's location as "Newcastle in the Ardes."

WHO WERE THE INVESTORS AND COLONISTS?

Essex Record Office holds a collection of indentures, signed by Sir Thomas Smith, for just a small group of the many colonists:

- Lord Burghley paid £340 for twenty plowlands (5000 English acres)
- John Thynne (founder of Longleat House) sent money and men
- Sir John Berkeley of Gloucester invested £1000
- Edmund Verney pledged 20 horsemen and 40 footmen
- William Clayton, enough for 12 plowlands (3000 English acres)
- William Pollard £500
- Lewis Larder £500
- Richard Sidnam £500
- Francis Brunyng £500
- John Buddle £300

Also included in these records are a Mr Parsons, a local vicar, Sir Thomas' brother George Smith and his three sons.



Sir John Thynne, founder of Longleat House (above) was one of Smith's investors



PHASE ONE: AUGUST 1572 - MARCH 1573

The colonists headed north towards Newtownards, close to where they planned to build the three large defensive forts; Thomas Smith jnr travelled on to Carrickfergus where he hoped to meet Sir Brian O'Neill and discuss how they might live peaceably together.

However, they were greeted with immediate opposition from **Sir Brian O'Neill**. In September, Thomas Smith jnr - now the self-styled *Colonel of the Ardes* - complained that O'Neill "would not part with a foot of land", and Smith jnr withdrew his men from Newtownards to the castle at Ringhaddy, two miles south of Killinchy.

In October, Sir Brian O'Neill went on a furious offensive and burned down the major stone buildings and abbeys in the area to prevent the colonists using these as garrisons. On 14 October, **Nicholas Malby** (a senior figure in the English military in Ireland, and who had been granted part of County Down in 1571) wrote to the Lord Deputy, describing the unfolding destruction: "Sir Brian M'Felim has taken all the prey [cattle], and fired the towns... the abbeys of Newtown, Bangor, Moville, Holywood and others have been burned". Today's interpretive signage at Newtownards Priory and Grey Abbey confirms these burnings.

Towards the south of the Ards Peninsula the **Savage family** had mixed feelings about the arrival of the Smith colony. The first of their dynasty, William le Savage, arrived from England with De Courcy around 1177 AD, but his descendants had become Gaelicised during their 400 years in Ireland. There were two branches of the Savages on the Ards Peninsula - at Ardkeen and Portaferry - who were often in disagreement with each other as well as with the O'Neills. The Savages must have allowed Smith's colony to embed itself at Newcastle, which itself might have originally been a Savage castle. During Sir Brian O'Neill's campaign of devastation a Henry Savage was assassinated - "slain by his [O'Neill's] special appointment". Henry Savage had been supportive of the Smith colony, perhaps as it may have given his branch of the Savages, and their estates, protection from the O'Neills.

28 October 1572 - Thomas Smith jnr's first letter

Two months after his arrival, Thomas Smith jnr's first letter from "Newcastle in the Ardes" was written to Lord Burghley on 28 October 1572. With a certain amount of optimism Smith jnr wrote that there was "good hope of success", that Sir Brian O'Neill was pursuing peace, perhaps due to the 100 horsemen who had arrived with Smith jnr, and also because of "Captain Malbie's credit with the Irish."

Detail of map F.2016 © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

PHASE TWO: MARCH 1573 - MARCH 1574

It was now clear that the colony was not going to be the "Eutopia" the Smiths had naively predicted.

In March 1573 Sir Thomas made plans to more than treble the strength of the colony. He ordered 250 "well armed, weaponed, vitled" English soldiers to be sent as reinforcements from the Isle of Wight. No-one knows what happened to them, but they never arrived in Ulster.

29 May 1573 - Thomas Smith jnr's second letter

Now seven months into the colonial plan, Thomas Smith jnr wrote to his father, sending him "a history of all that has been done since his arrival." He also asked that customs duty for any imported goods coming into the colony should be suspended. However, it was already clear that there was trouble within the ranks - Smith jnr asked for his authority to be reinforced - "for the better countenance of his office of colonelship", stating that "envy hath hindered him more than the enemy."

That same month O'Neill recommenced his campaign of opposition and burned the town of Carrickfergus. The destruction of this most important English outpost caused serious concern for the English authorities. Later that month, and no doubt in an effort to build necessary local alliances, Thomas Smith jnr entered into discussions with the head of the Antrim MacDonnells, **Sorley Boy**, which were aimed at making MacDonnell a denizen and the titled owner of the Glynns and the Route. One account claims that "Sir Brian MacPhelim O'Neill, the local lord, burned places of shelter and fortification, forcing Smith to winter in Carrickfergus where his troops ran amok."

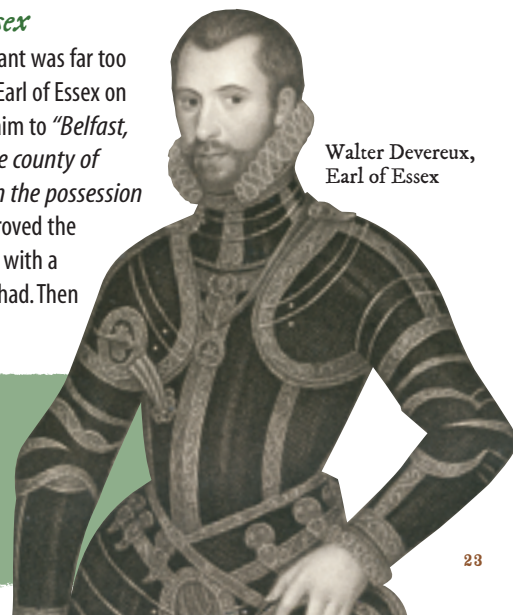
July 1573 - the arrival of the Earl of Essex

By now Sir Thomas Smith knew that the 360,000 acre grant was far too ambitious. Behind the scenes he agreed a deal with the Earl of Essex on 26 May 1573 in which Smith consented to give up his claim to "Belfast, Massareene, Castle Mowbray, and Castle Toome, in the county of Antrim, on the condition of his being firmly secured in the possession of the Ardes", ie all of Clondeboye. Queen Elizabeth approved the arrangement in July and the Earl arrived at Carrickfergus with a force of 1200 men, ten times the number that Smith jnr had. Then Essex began an infamous and brutal campaign in Ulster.

Earl of Essex in Ulster

Space in this booklet does not allow for a detailed summary of the Earl of Essex's activities in Ireland. From July 1573 - Sept 1576 thousands of lives were lost in a colonial project far greater than Smith's.

Walter Devereux,
Earl of Essex



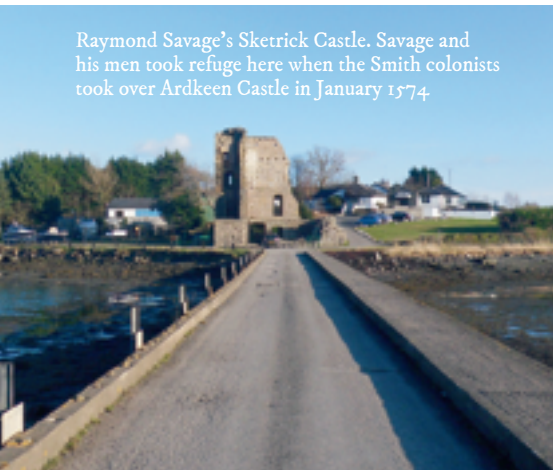
20 October 1573 - the killing of Thomas Smith jnr

Cracks were beginning to emerge among the Ards colonists. Smith jnr had to discipline ten of his own men. Apocryphally, the 63 page booklet speculated that when the colony had been established the local Irish might "lay wait to entrap and murder the master" of the colony. On 20 October 1573 this prediction came true.

Thomas Smith jnr was shot dead by an Irish member of his own staff – "by the revolting of certain Irishmen of his own household, to whom he overmuch trusted, whereof one of them... did kill him with a shot". Most accounts say that he was shot by **Neal Bryan Artho**, a cousin of Sir Brian O'Neill; some accounts claim that his body was then boiled and fed to dogs, and others that he was thrown alive to a pack of wild dogs. Artho himself was arrested, killed and thrown to wolves. The murder of the younger Smith sent shockwaves through English society; **Daniel Rogers*** composed an elegy in Latin, the title of which translates as "The Tumulus of Thomas Smith Killed in Ireland."

The murder of Smith jnr was witnessed by his fellow colonist and uncle, **George Smith**. Thomas Smith jnr's remains and some of the colonists were taken to the Earl of Essex's garrison at Holywood which was being overseen by a Lieutenant Moore. The killing was also a signal for a wider Irish rising. The colony came under attack and Raymond Savage of Ardkeen took the rest of the beleaguered English colonists into protection at Ardkeen Castle in the "Little Ards." The colonists were now under the command of Sir Thomas' nephew, **Denys Smith**. There they remained for a time, after which most of them fled Ulster and returned to England.

Raymond Savage's Skerrick Castle. Savage and his men took refuge here when the Smith colonists took over Ardkeen Castle in January 1574



Anglo-Norman coffin lids at Kilclief Church - tradition records that one of these may have been used as Raymond Savage's gravestone. There is a similar tradition for Con O'Neill, who was buried at Glenmachan around 1620.

* Daniel Rogers had also written "Description of Ireland in Verse" and in 1572 is said to have drawn a detailed map of Ireland to be published in the next edition of *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, the first modern atlas. His father, John Rogers, a convert of William Tyndale, was a Bible translator and a prebendary at St Paul's Cathedral. John Rogers was burned at the stake in 1555 – the first martyr of Queen Mary I of England's "Marian persecution." His wife and children, including young Daniel, were forced to watch. Rogers is known to have travelled to Ireland in the summer of 1572.

PHASE THREE: MARCH 1574 - APRIL 1575

In March 1574 the grieving Sir Thomas Smith began to recruit new colonists

He had no other choice, because the Queen had threatened that unless he did so he would face financial penalties. So, in August 1574, 150 men led by Sir Thomas' brother, **George Smith**, and his three sons (one of whom was Denys Smith), and **Jerome Brett** (who had committed £1000 and 100 men to the project) set sail. Sir Thomas' strategy had by now changed considerably from one of conquest to one of co-operation.

He wrote to the Lord Deputy, saying "...my chief order is that they shall offer no injury to any Irish person, nor take anything from them without paying for it, but quietly build their houses, fortifie their towne, and plow their growndes, and be good neighbours...". The colonists duly arrived and Brett sought a meeting with Sir Brian O'Neill. However, O'Neill was murdered by the Earl of Essex and there was yet another Irish rising.

Once again the English colonists sought refuge in **Raymond Savage's** Ardkeen Castle, but this time they hadn't been invited; they took it by force. When Savage tried to recover the castle the colonists opposed him and threatened to kill him. Sir Thomas had previously expressed doubts about Jerome Brett, whose behaviour was now a major problem; Brett's relationship with George Smith had now descended into ongoing disagreement.

1575 - Jerome Brett out of control

On 8 Jan 1575, Brett wrote to Lord Fitzwilliam to ask that 100 soldiers be stationed at Comber or Holywood for the protection of the colony. He also complained vehemently about Raymond Savage of Ardkeen Castle.

Savage was implicated in the murders of White of Dufferin and an Englishman called Browne. He was also accused of helping his former enemy Sir Brian O'Neill against the Smith colony and of harbouring and protecting "a notorious traitor and murderer" named **Patrick Hazard**. Around 1 Jan 1575 Brett and his men had taken control of Raymond Savage's Ardkeen Castle. Savage then took refuge across Strangford Lough in his other castle at Skerrick. On 7 Jan 1575 he sailed for Ardkeen with 26 soldiers and sent a further 16 on horseback by land. However, one of Brett's men, **Mr Storeys**, spotted them and fired a 25lb cannon shot whilst they were still in their boat. While all of this was going on Patrick Hazard was being held prisoner by Brett inside Ardkeen Castle, but managed to escape by making a death-defying leap from the castle window. Hazard survived and escaped.

As reports of these further failures reached England, Royal patience finally ran out in March 1575 when "the Queen... declared her dislike of the enterprise of Ulster."

"The Queen... declared her dislike of the enterprise of Ulster"

from Strype's biography of Sir Thomas Smith, p 141

PHASE FOUR JUNE 1579

Upon the death of Sir Thomas his nephew Sir William Smith inherited the original 1571 grant to establish an English colony in the Ards.

In June 1579 Sir William arrived in the Ards with 40 men to make a final attempt to revive the colony, but he was immediately summoned to Dublin by the authorities who refused him permission to carry on. The original Smith grant had already expired on 28 March 1579, and the Smiths' opportunity was lost.

Back in August 1572 Sir Thomas Smith had confidently predicted that by the time his grant ran out he would have 1000 men well-established in east Ulster and 3000 ploughs working the land. In fact, there was nothing.

1587 & 1588: Queen Elizabeth compromises with the O'Neills and Savages

After the spectacular failure of the 1570s a new generation of leaders arose. Sir Brian O'Neill's grandson, **Con O'Neill**, became head of the Clancloy O'Neills. In a spirit of compromise Queen Elizabeth in 1587 formally granted Con O'Neill "Castle Reagh and its appurtenances... in consideration of faithful and good services." (Nearly twenty years later, in 1605, Con O'Neill's estates were divided between himself, James Hamilton and Hugh Montgomery - following Con's daring rescue from Carrickfergus Castle by a kinsman of Montgomery, with land given as the reward. Hamilton and Montgomery began to settle the lands with Scottish tenants in May 1606).

On 28 September 1588 Elizabeth confirmed **Patrick Savage** as Lord Savage of the Little Ards, granting him the 26 "towns, townlands or hamlets" which his father had claimed.

What happened to the English colonists?

Many of Smith's colonists returned home at various stages of the venture, but it is likely that some may have remained even after the collapse of the "official" colony. The *Montgomery Manuscripts* record that "...After the death of sir Brian MacFelim, the Ards had a short interval of rest, during which some English farmers settled therein; but their small beginnings of prosperity were in turn swept away by the rebellion of Hugh O'Neill, earl of Tyrone." The *Carew Papers* say that in 1594, the Little Ards was being farmed by a **Captain Bethell**, a tenant of the Savages. More research is required to better understand how much of an English remnant there may have been left in the Ards and north Down after the Smiths' failure.

THE SCOTTISH TAKEOVER

Queen Elizabeth died childless in 1603 and was succeeded by King James VI of Scotland. With a new Scottish King now ruling over England and Ireland, a new "Scotch nobility" arrived too.

Sir William Smith clung to the hope that one day he might revive his uncle's failed colony. But Elizabeth died childless and was succeeded by King James VI of Scotland, who became King James I of England and Ireland. The Royal court was dramatically changed, with new Scottish courtiers placed in positions of enormous influence.

Smith was "minded to get these lands confirmed to him by that King..." but he was sent to Spain on Royal business by King James I.

He left it to one of the new King's closest allies to complete the deal - "...upon his departure out of England, he desired **Sir James Hamilton, Kt.** to prosecute his said grant on the said Sir William's behalf." Fatally for Smith, this drew Hamilton's attention to the lands of east Ulster, and he in turn "discovered the matter to some other of the Scotch nobility."

Sir William Smith was "merely tricked out of it by the knavery of a Scot, one Hamilton... and this Hamilton did craftily... and never after could Sir William Smith nor any of his posterity recover it."

James Hamilton wanted the land for himself. He was a close friend of the new King. The rest, as they say, is history.

King James VI of Scotland became King James I of England and Ireland



James Hamilton -
Courtesy of National Trust
Castle Ward

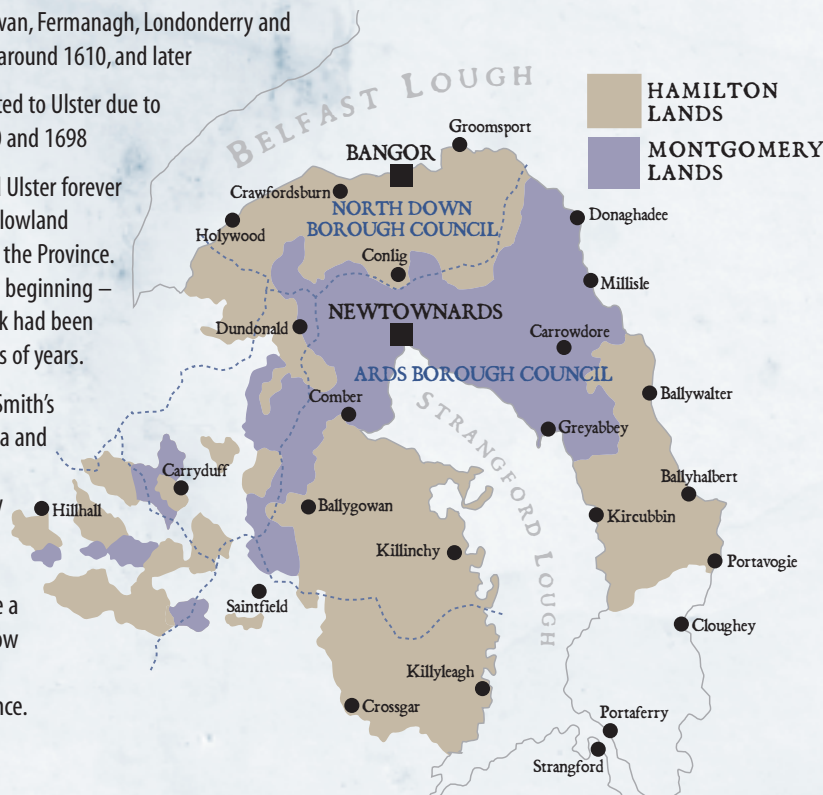
1606: THE HAMILTON & MONTGOMERY SETTLEMENT

A new Scottish king enthroned in 1603 brought a new Scottish dynamic to the British Isles. This led to a huge wave of Scottish migration into Ulster:

- the **Hamilton and Montgomery Settlement** of the old O'Neill lands of Claneboye and the Great Ardes (beginning in May 1606), shown on the map below, followed by
- the Scottish-dominated **Plantation of the six counties in the west of Ulster** (Donegal, Armagh, Cavan, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone) which began around 1610, and later
- **80,000 Scots** migrated to Ulster due to famine between 1690 and 1698

These events changed Ulster forever and left a permanent lowland Scottish imprint upon the Province. But they were not the beginning – the Ulster-Scottish link had been ongoing for thousands of years.

However, Sir Thomas Smith's coveted Ards Peninsula and North Down was the location, and the early 1600s was the era, when the trickle of lowland Scots became a flood. The two-way flow of people and culture has continued ever since.



Based on map shown in "The Scottish Migration To Ulster In The Reign Of James I" by M Perceval-Maxwell, 1973. The boundaries shown here changed much during the early 1600s.

DIFFERENT APPROACHES IN ULSTER

Comparing English colonial theory with Scottish settlement reality

English theory: 1572

Sir Thomas Smith is said to have lost £10,000, a son, and ultimately his own health and life in his failed Ulster colony of 1572. It was a gentrified, military-minded, low-population project involving just hundreds of men. It was a theoretical experiment that had faced violent Irish opposition from the outset, quickly developed its own festering internal feuds, and at best had only lukewarm support from the resident English authorities in Ireland.

Scottish practice: 1606

The Scottish settlement of exactly the same region that began under Hamilton and Montgomery in 1606 was much more practical in nature. James Hamilton and Hugh Montgomery were men with business acumen and ambition, though motivated by bitter rivalry.

The success of the settlement was driven by thousands of lowland Scottish tenant farmers and their families – people who were used to a cool damp climate, experienced at tilling the land, and of forming communities based on subsistence farming. There was no risk of these people arriving in the "gorgeous and deere garments" that Sir Thomas Smith had warned the English colonists against wearing.

There was little or no Irish opposition to the lowland Scots, largely due to the devastation and depopulation which the O'Neills had instigated when Smith's colony arrived in 1572, and which the Earl of Essex and Sir Arthur Chichester (who arrived in Ulster in 1598 and was Lord Deputy from 1604 - 1615) added to over the intervening years up until 1606. In October 1575 Sir Henry Sidney's Survey said that "Claneboye is totally waste and void of inhabitants."

"...The abbeys and other houses then destroyed were never afterwards repaired, and when Sir Hugh Montgomery and his colonists arrived, only the walls remained..."

In the late 1500s English theory in the Ards and North Down failed – but in the early 1600s Scottish practice succeeded. It was the lowland Scots who made the Ards and North Down work.

CO-OPERATION, NOT CONQUEST

The lowland Scots' relationship - particularly Montgomery's - with both the O'Neills and Savages was one of co-operation. Here are just a few examples:

- It was **Hugh Montgomery** who arranged for his relative **Thomas Montgomery** to free **Con O'Neill** from his prison cell at Carrickfergus Castle in 1603. This saved Con from certain execution by **Sir Arthur Chichester**, who had threatened to have him put to death without trial. In 1606 Con granted Thomas land at Ballyrushboy (Orangefield).
- On 24 December 1605 O'Neill and Montgomery signed "*Articles of Agreement*" in which they stated that "*the parties covenant not to injure each other, but to aid and assist and defend each other and their tenants from wrong.*" They agreed to hold joint inquiries if any disagreements arose between their tenants, backed by a financial commitment of £1000 to each other, all written in the language of the Scottish laws of the time.
- The O'Neills, Montgomeries and Savages intermarried. Con O'Neill's widow **Ellis** married **Henry Savage** (grandson of the **Raymond Savage** who is mentioned earlier in this booklet). Unfortunately she died only a year later. Henry then married **Elizabeth Nevin**, daughter of Scottish settler **Thomas Nevin** and niece of Hugh Montgomery's wife. During the same period Montgomery's daughter **Jean** married **Patrick Savage** of Portaferry Castle.
- Jean's brother **James Montgomery** sent the newlyweds to the Isle of Man while he repaired Portaferry Castle for them. He may also have secured charters from **King James I** for a market and a ferry. James Montgomery also installed a combined Savage and Montgomery coat of arms on the building (see photo below).
- James Montgomery educated three of the Savages' children in Newtownards and at Rosemount, Greyabbey.
- **James Hamilton** was an executor to the will of **Roland Savage**.



• When Hugh Montgomery died in 1636 it is said that "...His late Lordship was... universally revered, loved and obeyed by the Irish, and much esteemed by Con O'Neill and his followers, but especially of his tenants of that nation, who loudly lamented for their loss of him... because he had been in general carefull to protect them all."

Left: The combined Savage / Montgomery coat of arms (circa 1635) originally installed at Portaferry Castle, now set into a wall at Portaferry Estate.

The Smiths v Hamilton and Montgomery - 50 years of legal challenges

For the next 50 years the Smith family continued a futile fight to try to recover the lands from the Hamiltons and Montgomeries.

April 1610 / 6 April 1611: Sir William Smith (1550 - 1626) launched "*the first succeeding troubles and costly toils*" against Hamilton and Montgomery, claiming the lands as his own.

30 Sept 1612: Inquisition found Smith's title null and void, citing eight breaches of the original grant.

1618 – 1623: "Further troubles" between Montgomery and the Smiths.

1623: Sir Hugh Montgomery sent his son James to the Royal Court in England, "*to obviate the mischief feared from Sir Thomas Smith's complaints...*" until "*the clouds of danger, from the two Smiths aforesaid, were blown over.*"

23 Feb 1623: Hugh Montgomery wrote to James about how to manage the forthcoming Inquisition.

13 Oct 1623: Sir William Smith commenced another action against Montgomery "*to hinder the passing of the King's patent to him*" as part of the "Grand Office" Inquisition at Downpatrick into the old O'Neill Clandeboye and Great Ardes estates.

11 April 1625: Duke of Buckingham intervened between Sir William Smith and Hamilton.

4 Nov 1625: Letter from Hamilton to James Montgomery (Hugh Montgomery's son) advising him to consult Sir James Fullerton "*in the business against Smith.*"

30 April 1626: Sir William petitioned **King Charles I** to hear the case between himself and Montgomery before English Lords. Hamilton petitioned the King that any hearings must be "*left to the law in Ireland.*"

11 October 1626: King Charles I issued a new patent, confirming all of Montgomery's original grants.

14 November 1660: Sir William's second son, also called Thomas Smith (1602-1668), petitioned the new **King Charles II** to reinstate the Ards territory to the Smith family: "*James Hamilton, in the time of your noble grandfather King James, upon some undue pretences... obtained the said lands for himself... but in truth... the said lands are the right of your petitioner...*". The petition came to nothing.

"and never after could Sir William Smith nor any of his posterity recover it."



Map of key sites
 in the Smith
 colony story

“...her majesty (Queen Elizabeth I) had set her heart on the colonisation of the Ards by the Smiths. Then came the revolt of O'Neill, during the progress of which that chieftain literally swept the country with fire and sword, burning the abbeys of Bangor, Movilla, and Comber, together with all other structures which might be made available as garrisons for the English... and when sir Hugh Montgomery and his colonists arrived, only the walls remained...”

from *The Montgomery Manuscripts*

Timeline of Events

- 1345** “Clann Aoidhe Buidhe” O’Neills advance from the west of Ulster to occupy large lands in the east, which become known as Clannaboy or Claneboye.
- 1515** “State of Ireland and plan for its Reformation” advocates “the expulsion of the O’Neills from Claneboye and the re-peopling of it and the other portions of Down and Antrim with natives of England, Wales and Cornwall.”
- Summer 1571** Proposal petition from Sir Thomas Smith to the Queen to plant a colony in the Ards.
- 5 October 1571** Indenture granting 360,000 acres to Sir Thomas Smith and his son Thomas.
- 16 November 1571** Letters patent – to commence paying rent for occupied lands from 29 September 1576.
- December 1571** Sir Thomas despatched to France, leaving the colony in the hands of his son.
- January / February 1572** Sixty three page pamphlet and map published.
- 31 August 1572** Colonists arrive.
- October 1572** Sir Brian O’Neill burns the abbeys and stone buildings.
- March 1573** Sir Thomas orders 250 soldiers as reinforcements from the Isle of Wight; they never arrived.
- August 1573** Earl of Essex arrives; Smiths give him lands north of the Lagan, inc. Belfast, Massareene, Castle Mowbray, Castle Toome and Edenduffcarrick (Shane’s Castle)
- 20 October 1573** Thomas Smith jnr shot dead by an Irish member of his own staff. Body taken to Holywood.
- August 1574** 150 men under George Smith and Jerome Brett leave Liverpool bound for the colony.
- December 1574** Colony destroyed; remaining colonists again take refuge in Ardkeen Castle.
- April 1575** Sir Thomas requests Brett have his authority removed; Earl of Essex agrees to take over Smith’s lands.
- October 1575** Sir Henry Sidney’s Survey says “Claneboye totally waste and void of inhabitants.”
- 12 August 1577** Sir Thomas Smith dies; buried at St Michael Theydon Mount Church, near Epping in Essex.
- June 1579** Sir William Smith arrives in the Ards with 40 men to re-establish colony, but are unsuccessful.
- 1580** George Smith tries to grant Ardkeen and 1/6 of the Smith estate to Anthony Morley of Sussex.
- 1587** Queen Elizabeth I confirms Con O’Neill’s lands.
- 1588** Elizabeth confirms Patrick Savage’s lands.
- 1603** Elizabeth dies, succeeded by King James VI of Scotland.
- 1603/1604?** The new King James sends Sir William Smith to Spain with the English Ambassador (possibly Sir Robert Cecil, 2nd Lord Burghley) to attend the discussions which led to the Anglo/Spanish Treaty of London on 24 May 1604. Hamilton gathers intelligence about the lands in east Ulster.
- 31 April 1605** King James signs three-way deal between Con O’Neill, James Hamilton and Hugh Montgomery
- May 1606** Hamilton & Montgomery Settlement begins

A summary of the Smith Colony papers held at Essex Record Office:

27 July 1572 Quitclaim by "Thomas Smyth to his f. Sir Thomas Smith, for £250, of all rights and interests in the district of the Great and Little Ardes, Clandeboy, towards the South from the castles of Belfast, Mowbray and Toome, to the late Monastery of Masserine in Clandeboy, and in Tyrone and Clandeboy, which the said Sr Thomas Smyth knight or I the said Thomas his sonne or our heires or assignes, before the xxviii daie of March... 1579 againste the yrish shall obtaine possesse and inhabite, in accordance with Letters Patent, 16 November 1571."

1 December 1573 "Orders set out by Sir Thomas Smyth knight, Chancelor of the noble order of the Garter, princypall Secretary to his highnes and Colonell of the Ardes and sowth Clanyboy, whereby all adventurers for the Ardes may be advertised what and how they may clayme by any booke heretofore set owt in his and Thomas Smyth esquier his sonns name now deceased."

These detailed orders relate to the equipment required of each man with provisions made for temporary or permanent loss of land for being 'unfurnished or evil Furnished'; the allotment of land to the adventurers in accordance with the number of armed men provided (including the creation of lordships of hundreds, half hundreds and manors with courts leet and baron); the calling out of the soldiers, which is to be limited to one half (except in emergency) so that 'the court barons and the leetes may be the better kept'; the division of the free holders into 'hondreths, fyfties and tenths' over which are to be set 'centuriers', 'cinquanteiners' and 'deceniers' elected at the leets; division of spoils, the execution and fortification of a 'princypall Cytie or towne of strength' which is the 'chief strength to fortifie a Colonie'. The document bears the signatures and seals (mostly missing) of Sir Thomas Smyth and seventeen others, above the signatures of most of whom are the numbers of horsemen and footmen which each commits to the enterprise.

8 December 1573 Deed of covenants between "Sir Thomas Smith kt. and Sir John Barckley of Beverstone Castle (co. Gloucs), kt., by which the latter agrees to provide footmen and horsemen in the 'towne or cytie called the Queenes New Colony or Smyths Colen' in return for land" (area specified) in the district of Ards. Clauses relate to loss of men by battle, plague or other cause, non-marriage with 'the wyeld lrysh' or 'scotische Irish', limiting of terms of leases of land to the Irish, use of timber for building houses and ships.

13 December 1573 Bond in £1,000 of Jer. Brett of Ledes (Kent) to provide 100 armed soldiers to serve under Sir Thomas Smyth in accordance with the Orders signed by him.

16 December 1573 Deed of covenant between Sir Thomas Smyth, kt., and Francis Brunyng of Chisingbury (Wiltshire), gentleman.

18 December 1573 Bond in £500 of Francis Brunyng of Chisingbury (Wiltshire) gent., to provide 50 men.

20 December 1573 "Offices necessarie in the Colony of Ardes and orders agreed vppon." Lists the qualities and functions required of the 'Chieftayne or Deputie Colonell, or Setler of the Colony, Common Counsell, Privie Counsell of martiall affaires, Mr. of the horsemen, Trybune or Coronsell of the footmen, The Marshall, The Moustier master, Chapleynes, Fathers of the Colony and other Aides and assistauntes'. The tithes of the colony are to be divided among the officers according to rank 'tyll the countrie be divided into parishes, half hondreths and hondreths'. Captains are advised not to banquet and feast one another 'for these two years', to consult one another before dinner and after dinner, and not to entertain a stranger in company with other captains, on grounds of security and expense. These orders, which are made 'because you must begin as you were all in warre', conclude with an 'Advice or admonycion' by Sir Thomas that 'Two things do I wishe most specyallie avoyded now at the beginynge of this Colony, superfluity of fare or delicatres, and excesse of apparel. For yow be com to laye the foundation of a good and (as it hoped) an eternall Colony for your posteritie, not a may game or a stage playe... And a soldier is prayed rather for his good harnes on a valyante booke. A good weapon in his hande, than for his painted and well colored coate or clooke'. The document bears the signatures and seals (broken) of T. Smith, Jerome Brett and George Smith.

1 February 1576/77 Grant by Sir Thomas Smith to his nephew William Smythe of all the estates in Ireland granted by Letters Patent, 16 November 1571.

28 August 1577 Power of attorney from "George Smith of London, esq., and John Wood of Greenstead, gent., executors of Sir Thomas Smith, decd., to Wm. Smith (nephew of Sir Tho.), for the better recovery of debts due in virtue of bonds entered into by various persons" (names and details given).

16 April 1580 Grant by "George Smith of Mount Hall, esq., John and Wm., his sons, to Ant. Morley of Lewes (Sussex), esq., of the site of Arkeyne within the Little Ardes (Ulster) and a sixth part of all the estates in Ireland granted to Sir Thomas Smith, now decd, by Letters Patent, 1571, at an annual rent of a boar and a hogshhead of claret, or 40s. in lieu."



The famous antiquarian of the Upper Ards, James Shanks (1854-1912), found a number of Elizabethan silver coins from the late 1500s at his home farm of Ballyfounder - just a few townlands away from Newcastle, where the Smith colony had been based in 1572 - 1573.

Primary Sources

Sir Thomas Smith's 1571 grant from Queen Elizabeth is reprinted in Young, R.M., *Historical Notices of Old Belfast* (Belfast 1896).

The Offer and Order Given forthe by Sir Thomas Smith, Knighte (the single page broadsheet published in late 1571). Smith's signed original is held by the Society of Antiquaries in London. A version is reprinted in George Hill, *An Historical Account of the MacDonnells of Antrim* (Belfast, 1873). Digital copies available from the Ulster-Scots Agency. However, Hill's closing paragraph is different than in the original.

Tract by Sir Thomas Smith on the Colonisation of the Ards in County Down (the 63 page pamphlet from early 1572) is held in Trinity College Dublin. It is reprinted in George Hill, *An Historical Account of the MacDonnells of Antrim* (Belfast, 1873). Digital copies available from the Ulster-Scots Agency.

The 1572 Map of east Ulster is held by the British Library (ref C13791-69). Good facsimiles are featured in John Strype, *The Life of the Learned Sir Thomas Smith Kt* – in both the original 1698 and later 1820 editions.

January 1574 letter from Jerome Brett to the Lord Deputy is reprinted in the Appendix of GF Savage Armstrong, *The Ancient and Noble Family of the Savages of the Ards* (London, 1888).

Original handwritten indentures between Sir Thomas Smith and a group of colonists are held at Essex Record Office under the title "*Thomas Smith and the Ards*" reference no. D/DSH/01/1-10.

The Calendar of State Papers of Ireland contain many references to Smith's colonisation attempts.

Books

The most comprehensive book on Smith is Mary Dewar's *Sir Thomas Smith, a Tudor Intellectual in Office* (London 1964). The most readable account of Smith's colony is in the chapter 'The Irish Venture 1571 - 1577'.

John Strype, *The Life of the Learned Sir Thomas Smith Kt* – originally printed 1698; new edition 1820. John Strype (1643 - 1737) was a renowned historian and biographer, a son of a Flemish Protestant family who fled persecution to safety in England. Strype was Curate at two Essex churches - Theydon Bois (just four miles from Sir Thomas Smith's home, and burial place, at Theydon Mount) from 1669 - 1674, and then at Low Leyton from 1674 until his death in 1737. His first biography, *Memorials of Thomas Cranmer*, was published in 1694.

Articles

Robert Dunlop, 'Sixteenth Century Schemes for the Plantation of Ulster', in *Scottish Historical Review*, 22 (1924-1925).

David Beers Quinn, 'Sir Thomas Smith and the Beginnings of English Colonial Theory', in *Journal of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol 89, No. 4, December 1945.

Hiram Morgan, 'The Colonial Venture of Sir Thomas Smith in Ulster, 1571 - 1575' in *The Historical Journal*, 28,2 (1985) pp 261 - 278.

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography entries for Sir Thomas Smith, Thomas Smith, Nicholas Malby, William Piers, Daniel O'Neill and John Strype.

Select Bibliography

The Hamilton Manuscripts, TK Lowry, 1867

The Montgomery Manuscripts, George Hill, 1869

The Life of the Learned Sir Thomas Smith Kt, John Strype, 1698 and 1820

The Ancient and Noble Family of the Savages of the Ards, GF Savage Armstrong, 1888

The Savage Family in Ulster, GF Savage Armstrong, 1906

Historical Notices of Old Belfast, RM Young, 1896

The Plantation of Ulster, Philip Robinson, 1984

Newtown - a History of Newtownards, Trevor McCavery, 1994

This booklet is not intended to be an exhaustive account of the Thomas Smith colony. Much more work needs to be done, from archaeology to archives, in order to better understand this important chapter in our history. We hope it has both interested and educated you, and inspired you to find out more.

About the author

Mark Thompson was born and bred in the Ards, with a long family heritage in the area. He was Chair of the Ulster-Scots Agency from 2005 - 2009, during which time his major initiatives included *Hamilton & Montgomery 400*, *The Bruces in Ulster*, *Ulster Virginia* and *The Covenanters in Ulster*. Post-Agency, he is even more dedicated to recovering important chapters of local and Ulster-Scots history and making them more widely known.

About the publisher...

Loughries Historical Society is an Ulster Scots Community Group, formed in Newtownards, Co. Down, back in September 2005. The primary aim of the group is to 'Promote the Ulster Scots tradition through education'. Our group feel it is vitally important that all aspects of Ulster Scots Culture - such as literature, language, music & dance, arts & crafts, local history and poetry is preserved, enhanced and developed.

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North Down and the Ards can rightly be called
“*The Birthplace of the Ulster-Scots*”, thanks to the
Hamilton and Montgomery Settlement
of lowland Scottish families which began in May 1606.

But what happened here before the Ulster-Scots?
Part of the answer can be found in the story of
Sir Thomas Smith’s forgotten English colony of 1572 - 1575.

RESEARCHED, WRITTEN AND DESIGNED BY

MARK THOMPSON

Former Chairman of the

Ulster-Scots Agency (June 05 - June 09)

*A fully referenced and footnoted version of
this booklet is available upon request.*

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“Hamilton & Montgomery
succeeded where Sir Thomas
Smith failed. They created
the bridgehead through
which the Scots were to
come to Ulster for the rest
of the century.”

ATQ Stewart

The Narrow Ground



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Ornament graphic above from Sir Thomas Smith’s 63 page promotional booklet, c. January 1572

Cover map: Ards and north Down detail of the map of Ireland by Baptista Boazio, 1599. *British Museum* c2 cct