3. - The Viking Era

At the end of the 8th century and during the 9th century Vikings, from where we now call Scandinavia, began to invade and then gradually settle into and mix with Irish society. The Vikings founded, Dublin, Ireland's capital city in 988. Following the defeat of the Vikings by Brian Boru, the High King of Ireland, at Clontarf in 1014, Viking influence faded.

In early Medieval **Europe**, a prime subject of frightening tales-come-true were the famously marauding and pillaging **Vikings**, spilling out of their dragon-headed longships in a state of bloodlust, thirsting for **gold**. With their menacing presence eventually stretching from eastern Europe and the **Mediterranean** all the way to North America, no land seemed safe – and it was early on in their globetrotting exercise that the Vikings zoned in on the appealing green shores of **Ireland**. From 795 CE onwards, monasteries and towns were looted or destroyed in persistent raids, followed by the building of forts and settlements which allowed these Norsemen to become wildcard players on the Irish political scene. The Vikings, although losing their autonomous power in the late 10th to early 11th century CE, had by then already integrated into Irish society through intermarriage and

close contact with the locals, and left a lasting **mark** on both commerce and culture.

The Norman Era

The 12th century saw the arrival of the Normans. The Normans built walled towns, castles and churches. They also increased agriculture and commerce in Ireland.

The **Norman invasion of Ireland** was a Norman military expedition to Ireland that took place on May 1, 1169 at the behest of Dermot MacMurrough, the King of Leinster. It was partially consolidated by Henry II on October 18, 1171 and led to the eventual entry of the Lordship of Ireland into the Angevin Empire of France et al. The invasion had the Pope's blessing because Irish Christianity did not conform to Rome's rules. Therefore, Ireland could be pacified and brought under the authority of the Pope. Later, papal blessing would sanction the imperial projects of Spain and Portugal. Immediate consequences were the end of the Irish High King

The English King Intervenes:

When word got back to King Henry of England that the man who he knew as the Earl of Pembroke (Strongbow) had established himself as King of a province in Ireland,

he was furious. The way he saw it, he had given permission for his citizens to help Mac Murchada militarily, not to rival his authority as King.

Henry, rather pointlessly, issued a decree forbidding Strongbow to go to Ireland, cut off the supplies from England and set out for Ireland himself with large army arriving in Waterford in October 1171.

Realising that the King could and would defeat him, Strongbow intercepted Henry before he had even arrived offering apologies and begging forgiveness.

Henry's anger must have relented for he let Strongbow remain Lord of Leinster, provided he submitted authority to the King of England.

Realising that King Henry was their only hope against Strongbow's expansionism, the less powerful Irish kings decided it would be in their best interests to have him on-side.

Henry thus spent quite a period receiving delegations from the Irish Kings of Munster, Bréifne, Airgialla and Ulaid (see map above) all of whom submitted to King Henry as their overlord and agreed to pay him tribute. Only the former High King, Rory O'Connor of Connacht,

and the Kings of the Northern Uí Néill did not submit to Henry.

Henry carefully divided the parts of Ireland for which was now overlord. He set aside Dublin which was no longer to be part of Leinster, but rather owned by the King and chartered to the city of Bristol.

The province of Meath (Mide) which had already been invaded by Strongbow's men, was instead given as a liberty (a semi-autonomous lordship) to Hugh de Lacy, a loyal supporter of Henry, which must have angered Strongbow.

Henry returned to England in April 1172 leaving the provinces of Meath and Leinster ruled by two Anglo-French Lords, with Irish kings loyal to King Henry in all the remaining kingdoms other than Connacht and the northern Uí Néill.

The Treaty of Windsor in 1175 between King Henry 2nd and King Rory O'Connor of Connacht recognised O'Connor as High King of all lands outside Meath and Leinster, and in turn O'Connor would collect tribute payments from those areas.

Kingship and the beginning of English rule in Ireland, which continued until 1922.

Plantations and The Penal Laws

After King Henry VIII declared himself head of the Church in England in 1534, he ensured that the Irish Parliament declared him King of Ireland in 1541. From this time up to the late 17th century, an official English policy of 'plantation' led to the arrival of thousands of English and Scottish Protestant settlers. The most successful plantation occurred in Ulster. From this period on, sectarian conflict became a common theme in Irish history.

The 17th century was a bloody one in Ireland. It culminated in the imposition of the harsh regime of Penal laws. These laws set about disempowering Catholics, denying them, for example, the right to take leases or own land above a certain value, outlawing Catholic clergy, forbidding higher education and entry to the professions, and imposing oaths of conformity to the state church, the Church of Ireland. During the 18th century strict enforcement of the Penal laws eased but

by 1778 Catholics held only about 5% of the land in Ireland.