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This article briefly surveys the Nugent family’s role as protectors and benefactors of the Irish Franciscans from the destruction of their Donegal friary and the Flight of the Earls to the outbreak of war in 1641. The success of the friars’ endeavours depended upon contact between the Atlantic archipelago, Spain and the papacy. For that reason, the following case study deals with Catholic landowners in Ireland, financiers in the Low Countries and the office of Cardinal Protector in Rome. Kinship is the key factor in understanding the provision of patronage in each case.

The disappearance of the Gaelic overlords represented the most significant development for patronage within the country. Nevertheless, as was the case throughout Europe, people remained faithful to their own districts and their local elites. In Ireland, the ties of allegiance which were the basis of authority were, perhaps, more easily formed than in larger countries such as Spain and France.

The weakness of the state meant that the control of civic authority and finance was in the hands of a number of influential families connected through marriage. In the Dublin administration, the Nugent, Barnewall, Sarsfield, Talbot and Dowdall families each had a share in organising a patronage system which operated at municipal and national levels. The Nugents settled in Ireland during the Norman Conquest and, by the end of the sixteenth century, branches of the family held sixteen strategic strongholds in Westmeath. At a time when their Westmeath territory was on the periphery of the Irish Privy Council’s effective jurisdiction, the Nugents featured prominently in the royal forces and judicial office. In 1586, in the lower house of Sir John Perrot’s parliament, the lawyer Edward Nugent defended the Mass and recalled earlier reigns more favourable to Catholicism. His family’s defence of the old faith depended upon their declaration of loyalty to the interests of the late Tudor and early Stuart state.
Located to its advantage on isolated ground in the barony of Corkarce, County Westmeath, close to Loch Derravaragh and far from the surrounding villages, the Franciscan abbey at Multyfarnham exemplifies how the well-established corporate kin-groups of north Leinster served as protectors and benefactors to diocesan and religious clergy. In the 1540s, with ‘the protecting hand of Lord Delvin’ upon the chattels at Multyfarnham, the abbey and lands passed from his kinsman Sir Thomas Cusack, a state administrator in this area, to Edward Cusack, and on his death, to his son and heir Richard who held it in 1627. The Cusacks leased the lands to Richard Nugent of Donore until his death in 1615.

After the destruction of Donegal friary in 1601, Multyfarnham became a place of refuge for the Franciscans, most notably Donatus Mooney of Westmeath. Mooney’s own account of events explains that, supplied by local benefactors for the upcoming feast of St Francis that year, the church and conventual buildings were burned and plundered. With patronage and protection from the Nugents of Delvin and Donore the friars remained and, according to Hugh Ward, Multyfarnham became ‘an ark in the deluge’.

From 1602, the head of the Nugent family was Sir Richard, 15th Baron of Delvin. Well-known for his ‘obstinate affection to popery’, his father Sir Christopher sheltered the Franciscan bishop of Kilmore...
at Multyfarnham. Sir Christopher would, perhaps, have been more open to Hugh O’Neill’s political interests were it not for Tyrone’s decision to give charge of Westmeath to Captain Richard Tyrrell with a promise of a future grant of lands in the county.\textsuperscript{16}

Lord Deputy Chichester’s subsequent campaign of coercion against recusancy happened during a surge of political unrest on the borders of the Pale in which Sir Richard Nugent was involved.\textsuperscript{17} After settling the land dispute which caused his discontent, Nugent submitted to the crown in 1608 and was restored to official favour.\textsuperscript{18} Nevertheless, while he may have demonstrated loyalty to the Stuarts, Sir Richard and his peers were evasive in matters of religion. In the same year, the Franciscan friar Owen McGrath was tried for treason on a charge of assisting Hugh O’Neill and Rury O’Donnell. Once the Baron Delvin had cleared his own name, he obtained the release of McGrath who then went to stay at Multyfarnham.\textsuperscript{19}

According to Barnaby Rich, the strength of Catholicism in Ireland lay in the support received from six nobles and lawyers of the Pale.\textsuperscript{20} The Baron Delvin was one of six ‘pryncipall pyllers [who] doth entretyne prystes & gvyeth support & countenance to popery in Ireland’.\textsuperscript{21} The five other nobles named were related by blood or marriage to the Baron Delvin who exerted his influence over branches of the Nugent family throughout Leinster.\textsuperscript{22}

Building up a network that served the needs of the local élite and those of the state, Nugent’s son Christopher married Sir Randall MacDonnell’s eldest daughter Anne.\textsuperscript{23} The Earl of Antrim was described by the bishops of the province of Armagh as ‘a zealous protector of religion’ and shared Nugent’s wariness of openly defying the authority of the Stuarts.\textsuperscript{24} Compared with the displaced O’Neill, O’Donnell, and O’Sullivan families, who were obliged to comply with the new reality offered by Spain, Antrim and Delvin enjoyed the luxury of both political worlds.\textsuperscript{25}

In 1613, however, Sir Richard Nugent caused offence at Dublin Castle for protesting against illegally incorporated boroughs and other measures designed to emasculate the Anglo-Irish at the first session of the Dublin parliament.\textsuperscript{26} Summoned to Whitehall the following year, the Baron Delvin knelt before James I and Lord Deputy Sir Arthur Chichester. In the company of ‘twenty principal leaders of the Irish Catholics’, Delvin begged the king, ‘to allow him to go to the territories of some Catholic prince, and he would relinquish his estates so that the king might give them to whomsoever he wished.’\textsuperscript{27}
The Nugents had looked to Spain for support and education of the clergy since the reign of Philip II, a time when Catholics regarded the Spanish ruler as the unyielding defender of Christianity. Within Spain itself, the ruler as patron was the source of all grace and favour required to assume responsibility for the moral and religious health of his subjects. From 1589, sons of the Nugents trained and served as professional soldiers in the Spanish Army of Flanders. That year one Richard Nugent, probably the son of William of Delvin and his wife Sinéad, was granted 25 crowns per month as a captain in Sir William Stanley’s new infantry regiment. This sum was increased by 5 crowns in 1605, ‘a report having been made to us of his birth and good parts.’

Jennings identified a further ten extant records for this period which describe the Nugents as officers and gentlemen. James Nugent, ‘of medium height, hair turning grey, scar on the side of his right temple, aged twenty-eight years’, was awarded six crowns extra each month for exceptional service in addition to his salary. Reflecting ties of kinship at home, these records show their place of duty in Old English companies such as those led by members of the de la Hoyd, Preston and St Lawrence families. Nevertheless, when the balance of power changed in favour of Gaelic families, Nugent soldiers prospered under the command of Henry, John and Owen Roe O’Neill.

As Brian Mac Cuarta has shown, patrons looked to their clerical mentors for advice ‘before embarking on projects of a political nature’. Related by kin-groups to the landowners of north Leinster, they were counted on to use their experience of life overseas. In July 1607, for instance, Robert Nugent of the Society of Jesus and the Capuchin Francis Nugent, son of Sir Thomas Nugent of Moyrath Castle, helped provide for five students at the Irish college in Antwerp.

In the Low Countries, Fr Francis Nugent secured the stability of his Capuchin mission with patronage from the Boxhorns, a family of financiers recognised as ‘considerable entrepreneurs’. Maximilian Boxhorn, a member of the council of Brabant, also represented the interests of the Irish friars minor in the Southern Netherlands. Amidst the economic crises of the seventeenth century, the archdukes Albert and Isabel depended upon financiers to collect revenue and provide funds. Yet, compared to ‘nobles of the robe’, those who profited from financial activity were also held in disdain. Representing the economic interests of the friars was, therefore, a reciprocal arrangement for the Boxhorns.
The firm grasp of legislation required by financiers led many to fulfil an important role in government administration, thereby providing them with an efficient means of social advancement. Jan Baptist Spoelberch, a member of the Franciscan third order who helped the Irish friars at Leuven, held office as chief-magistrate of Kampenhout before being made a knight of the Holy Roman Empire in 1626. Prominent works of charity were encouraged at court in the Habsburg Netherlands where financiers could protect their position with bequests to religious institutions. Adapting their vow of corporate religious poverty to everyday needs, the Franciscan family authorised the formation of syndicates, or groups of friends, who handle financial transactions for the friars. The money collected was then deposited in the Mons de Piété bank, founded by the archducal couple, ‘to offset usurious moneylenders.’

Maximilian Boxhorn was amongst the signatories to the archducal licence for an Irish Franciscan house in Leuven and, in 1624, he defrayed the publication costs of Luke Wadding’s Acta legationis. This was a concise report of the proceedings and of the theological questions which needed to be resolved in the debate over the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Selected as a procurator of the Irish Franciscan mission to Scotland, Boxhorn administered the allowances sent from Rome to Leuven by Propaganda Fide.

To a certain extent, the 1630s was a time of renewal for the Franciscan houses of Rome where noble families earnestly supported ascetic reform. Luke Wadding was directly responsible for such renewal and also for the completion of St Isidore’s, a project funded by his extensive political and religious contacts in Rome. The resources provided by the Barberini and Ludovisi families, for instance, demonstrate the respect then held for Luke Wadding.

The outcome of each papal election brought with it ‘family and friends eager to establish their own positions and ready to invest money in the construction of a church or a palace.’ During his long reign, the pro-French Barberini pope, Urban VIII assumed control of papal commissions from Paul V and Gregory XV – funding building projects for religious orders or a favourite nephew interested in acquiring a valuable collection of art and artefacts.

Luke Wadding’s custody of St Isidore’s provides us with a clear example of such patronage. When setting the foundations to the façade of the church, Wadding determined that they should be set deeper than initially intended. On digging deeper groundwork, the
builders discovered a grotto which held five statues. These were bought from Wadding by Francesco Barberini, the Cardinal Protector of the friars minor. The statues are the five herms now preserved in the National Museum, Rome.\(^\text{51}\)

To return to Ireland, when severe measures were used against Irish recusants in the second decade of the seventeenth century, the Multyfarnham community lived under the protection of Christopher Nugent, Sir Richard’s brother.\(^\text{52}\) On their expulsion from the convent in 1622, fifteen friars from Multyfarnham stayed in a farmhouse given them by local landowner Andrew Nugent before their return to their original premises.\(^\text{53}\) Members of the Nugent family gave legacies to Multyfarnham where they wished to be buried and records exist for the burials of at least three members of the Delvin branch at the abbey from 1610–29.\(^\text{54}\) Mass stipends for a patron’s intentions often provided for the clergy. Considering the hostile conditions, such legacies were referred to indirectly in Irish wills for the period. For instance, in her will the dowager Lady Delvin, Mary Nugent née Fitzgerald, left £15 ‘for pious uses’, and £30 ‘for godly uses as she will declare in a letter to her son the Lord of Delvin.’\(^\text{55}\) This contrasts sharply with the more conspicuous bequests for Masses made in the final settlements of Irish exiles in Spain.\(^\text{56}\)

Since anti-recusant policy tended to concentrate on male heads of households, gentlewomen could actively participate in the promotion of Catholicism.\(^\text{57}\) Sir Richard Nugent’s sister, Elizabeth, Countess of Kildare, maintained a strong affiliation with the Society of Jesus. When anti-recusancy policies wavered in the early 1620s, she called upon Lord Deputy Falkland to declare her tenants exempt from his religious decrees.\(^\text{58}\)

Apart from occasional bouts of pressure a ‘period of partial toleration for Irish Catholics’ occurred with accession of Charles I.\(^\text{59}\) Church organisation recovered and religious orders returned to community life.\(^\text{60}\) With the abbey completely restored, large assemblies of Catholic clergy and the laity regularly gathered at Multyfarnham. When they met in September 1626 to debate the Graces, dispensations to be given by Charles I in exchange for monetary payments, ‘most of the gentlemen of Westmeath and Longford [sent] beeves, muttons, poultry, wheat, malt, usquebagh, pewter, linen, and bedding.’\(^\text{61}\) According to the Lord Deputy, nearly 2,000 people attended Mass at Multyfarnham on the Feast of St Francis, ‘and very few of the country gentry were absent.’\(^\text{62}\)
In the same report, Falkland noted that the Nugents’ generosity towards the church extended to religious vocations. That year, a son of Thomas Nugent of Colamber joined the friars minor at Multyfarnham, along with four other sons from Gaelic and Old English noble families. Described by a contemporary as ‘fierce and passionate, especially in matters of religion’, Sir Richard Nugent was made first Earl of Westmeath in 1621 and emerged as the principal spokesman for Irish Catholics. Four years later, he placed two of his daughters in a convent to complete their education. One, Sister Magdalen Clare Nugent, made her profession with the English Poor Clares at Gravelines with four daughters of the Dillon, Cheevers and Dowdall families. They returned to Ireland in 1629 where they founded a new convent in Dublin. This was one of ten religious houses raided on St Stephen’s Day that year.

The stability instilled by Nugent patronage in Westmeath encouraged the growth and preservation of Gaelic culture. The precedent for such activity was already well-established. According to Brian Ó Cuív, one of the most important sixteenth-century Irish manuscripts extant contains a collection of poetry for the Nugent family of Delvin. Sir Richard's father had composed a little primer of Irish to help Queen Elizabeth learn the language. William, brother of Sir Christopher, wrote poetry in the Irish language expressing a Catholic identity shared by the Gall and the Gael. In the early 1600s, the Franciscan catechist and poet, Bonabhentura Ó hEodhasa, corresponded with the Nugents and addressed poems to William, and to his wife, Sinéad.

Thus the pattern continued when Mícheál Ó Cléirigh stayed at Multyfarnham to transcribe Cogadh Gaedel re Gallaibh, the War of the Gaedhil with the Gall, from the Book of Cuconnacht Ó Dálaigh. Its owner or compiler was an early twelfth-century historian from Lackan, Co. Westmeath, close to Multyfarnham. Ó Cléirigh returned to the abbey the following decade, while transcribing the Rule of St Clare in Irish translation at the Poor Clare convent, Bethlehem, County Westmeath, for the use of the community. On 4 November 1630, Conall mac Néill Mág Eochagáin of Lismoyney, Co. Westmeath, testified that he had seen the originals from which the Réim Rioghbraidhe na hÉireann agus senchas a naamh was transcribed. Finally, in August 1641, the Franciscan chapter at Multyfarnham considered Fr John Colgan’s request for funds to proceed with the publication of the Lives of the Irish Saints, calling for a levy of £3 on each friary in Ireland.
along with half the money they had in hand. A committee in attendance also ruled against charges of inaccuracy made by Fr Tuileagna Ó Maoil Chonaire regarding the work of Mícheál Ó Cléirigh and his associates.

After forty years as a protector and benefactor to continentally-trained clergy, Sir Richard Nugent lost his life in an affray at Athboy, Co. Meath, in 1642, refusing to support the rebellion which had broken out the previous year. The Confederate wars severely disrupted the provision of patronage for the friars’ projects, especially their printing press at Leuven. Sir Richard’s political and religious interests illustrate the considerable measure of continuity which existed in religious practice, reinforced by continentally-trained clergy with patronage from Madrid, the Low Countries and Rome. Combined with consistent local support from the Nugents at Multyfarnham, these ties of kinship, marriage, friendship and office show how reciprocal contact between the Franciscans and their patrons was vital to their enduring presence in early seventeenth-century Ireland.

References

1 The first version of this paper was delivered at the Third Annual Donatus Mooney Seminar, Mícheál Ó Cléirigh Institute for the Study of Irish History and Civilisation, School of History and Archives, University College Dublin. I am grateful to John McCafferty and Edel Bhreathnach for inviting me to contribute.


4 Áine Hensey of NUI Maynooth is examining the lives of Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland clergy in Kilkenny and Waterford during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, with particular reference to their associations with the laity; ‘Thoroughly given to Rome-runners and friars’: patrons and priests in south-east Ireland, 1550–1650’, a paper delivered at the I.H.S.A. Conference, Trinity College Dublin, 20 February 2010.


20 *Remembrances of the state of Ireland, 1612*, ed. C. Litton Falkiner, PRIA, 26 (1906), pp 140-1; cited by Martin, *Friar Francis Lavalin Nugent*, p. 3.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.


25 Óscar Recio Morales, *Ireland and Spanish Empire, 1600-1825* (Dublin, 2010), p. 79.


31 Ibid., p. 79.

32 Ibid., pp 6, 8, 10, 85, 88, 208, 254, 266, 272, 283.

33 Ibid., p. 269.


Martin, *Friar Francis Lavalin Nugent*, p. 90.

Ibid., pp 243-4.


Hazard, *Faith and patronage*, pp 130, 154. It was Spoelberch who purchased a small site in Leuven for the Irish Franciscans, with a house attached, next to the river Dyle and just outside the old city walls.


Ibid., p. 184.


Ibid., p. 180.


Enhancing a precious legacy

63 Ibid.
64 Aidan Clarke, The Old English in Ireland, 1625–42 (repr. Dublin, 2000), p. 73.
68 Ibid., p. 511.
72 Nollaig Ó Muráile (ed.), Méicéal Ó Cléirigh, his associates and St Anthony’s College, Louvain (Dublin, 2008), p. 109.
73 Paul Walsh, Irish leaders and learning through the ages: essays collected edited and introduced by Nollaig Ó Muráile (Dublin 2003), p. 123.
74 Ibid., p. 118.
76 Clarke, The Old English in Ireland, 1625–42, p. 188.