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HERALDIC SLEIGHT OF HAND: THE ORIGINS OF SIMON WHITE OF KNOCKSENTRY AND THE EARLS OF BANTRY

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Introduction

The White, or Whyte, family of Limerick is of considerable antiquity in that City and County of Ireland. We find Walter White as Sheriff of Limerick in 1197/8, the year that this city received its Charter from King Richard I, and Robert White as Mayor of Limerick in the year 1213.¹ In the succeeding centuries, some thirty of the name held the same office, with many more as Sheriffs and Burgesses. Sir Dominick White, who was Mayor in 1636, also represented the Liberties of Limerick in the Irish Parliament of 1634. A branch of this Limerick family settled in County Waterford, among whom was Sir Nicholas White of Leixlip (c. 1532-1592), Master of the Rolls in Ireland under Elizabeth I.

This extended family, according to Maunsell, is said to be descended from Walter Whyte, who accompanied Strongbow to Ireland.² Ninth in descent from this Walter was Maurice White, "The Lancastrian," whose son Bartholomew was granted arms bearing three red roses in commemoration of his father's service under three kings of the House of Lancaster (*Argent, a chevron between three roses Gules*).³ Bartholomew White had two sons, Dominick (progenitor of the Limerick branches) and Nicholas (progenitor of the Leixlip branch). The latter branch differenced the original arms by engrailing the chevron. The elder son, Dominick, served abroad and was, in 1513, knighted on the field of battle at Tournai by the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian and soon thereafter created Baron d'Albi of the Holy Roman Empire.

Sir Dominick White, fifth in descent from the above Dominick White, Baron d'Albi, Mayor of Limerick in 1636, supported the Confederate Catholics in 1641, and was ultimately forced to flee to the Continent. He was, in 1679, further ennobled by the Emperor Leopold I, as Count of Albi⁴ and Marquess of Albiville, for himself and his descendants. Also specifically mentioned in the 1679 grant was Ignatius White, one of his sons who served as a diplomat (or, as some have said, spy) representing the interests of the Empire, Spain, and James II, which monarch he ultimately followed into exile in France, where he died in 1694. In addition to the titles of Count and Marquess, very elaborate arms were granted in this same patent.⁵ These more elaborate arms do not appear to have been used extensively, and, indeed, descendants of Dominick White are confirmed in the use of the original arms in later years.⁶

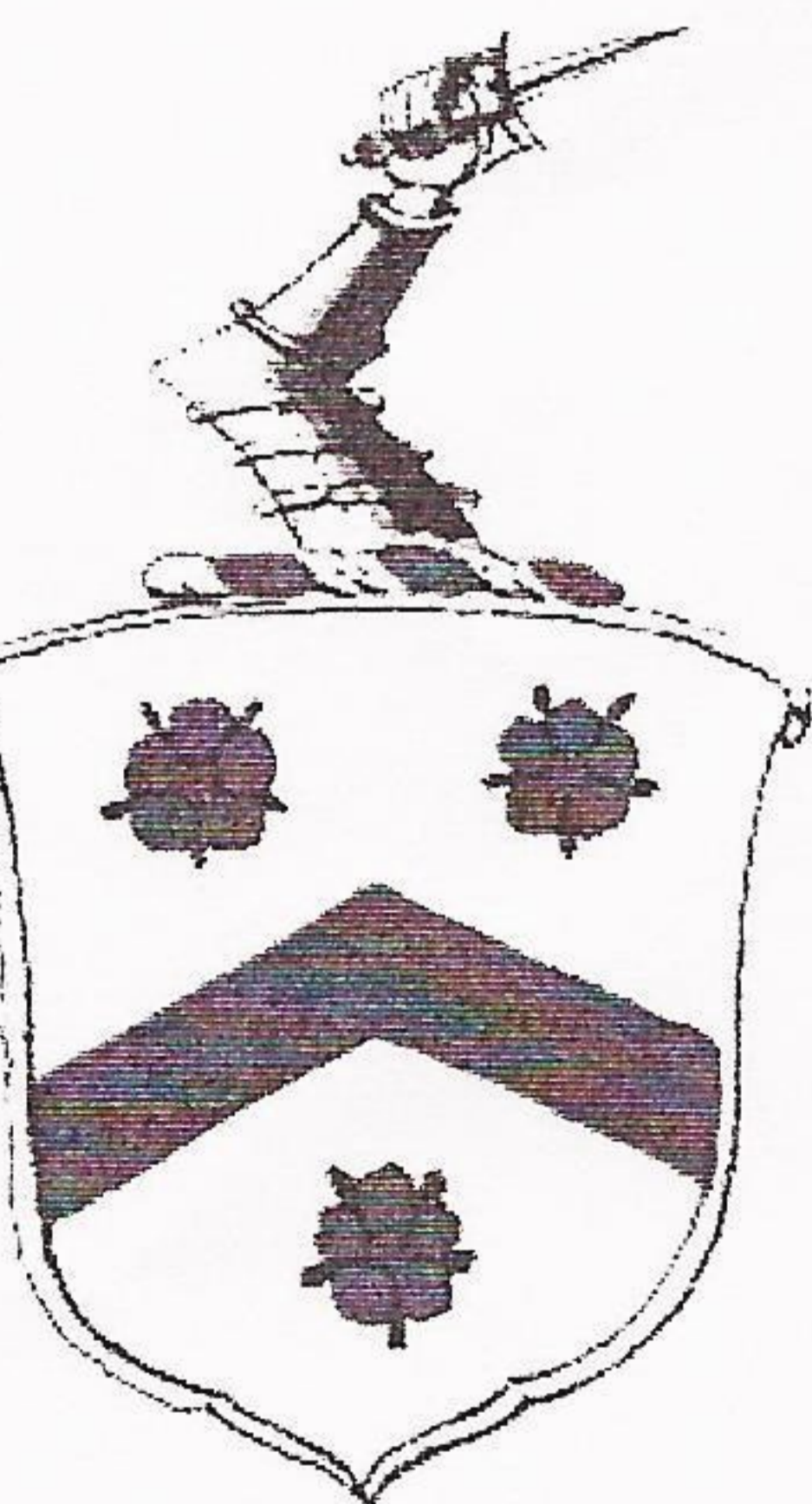


Figure 1: The arms of White of Limerick and associated branches (National Library of Ireland, GO Ms. 165).

usually spelled in French sources) receives quite a thrashing at the hands of English historians. He is almost invariably described as a spy, whose sole motivation is the amassing of wealth. The following passage by Dr. Gilbert Burnet (1643-1715), illustrates well the opinions held of Ignatius White following the collapse of Limerick in 1691:

The king found out one White, an Irishman, who had been long a spy of the Spaniards. And when they did not pay his appointments well, he accepted of the title of marquis d'Albeville from them in part of payment. And then he turned to the French, who paid their tools more punctually. But though he had learned the little arts of corrupting undersecretaries, and had found out some secrets by that way, which made him pass for a good spy, yet, when he came to negotiate matters in a higher form, he proved a most contemptible and ridiculous man, who had not the common appearances either of decency or of truth.⁷

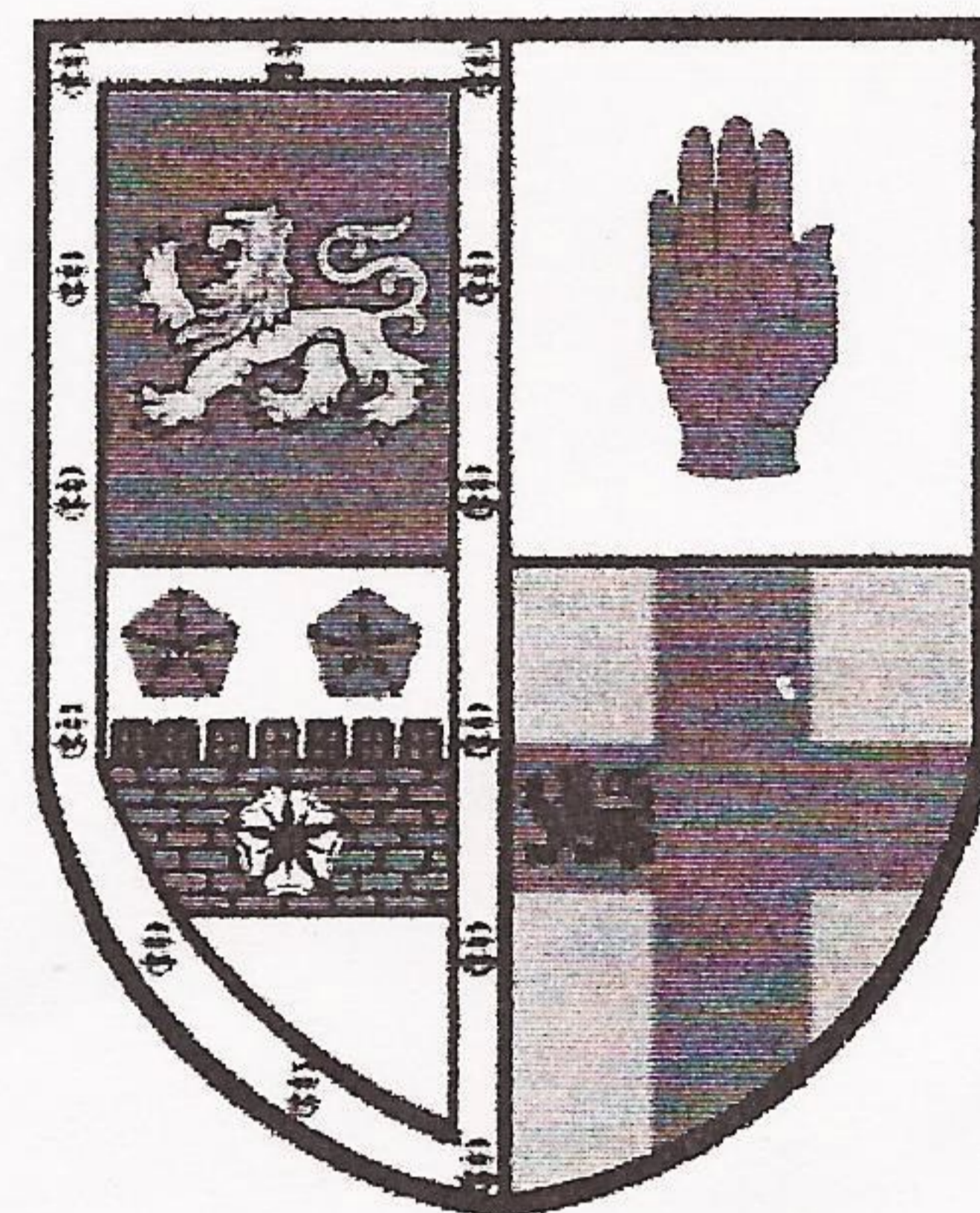


Figure 2: Arms granted to Dominick White of Limerick and his descendants in 1679 by Emperor Leopold I (see note 5).

Sir Dominick White, Marquess of Albiville married Christina, daughter of Thomas Bourke, 4th Baron of Castleconnell by his wife Honora O'Mulryan. His descendants (specifically the daughters of his son, Ignatius) are documented in Spain and France in successive generations. Notable among these are descendants of Winifred White, who married Don Antonio Álvarez de Bohorques, Marqués de Ruchena; Maria White, who married Don Timon Connock, in the service of the Infante Don Felipe of Spain; Theresa White, who married William Lacy, a Knight of the Order of Santiago; and Catherine White, the mother of Antoine de Sartine, Comte d'Alby (Minister of the Marine for Louis XVI of France), who claimed his title by right of descent from his mother. Interestingly, the Comte d'Alby always surmounted his arms with the coronet of a Marquis and not of a Count, apparently a form of heraldic pretension to the senior title. Of the many sons (some sources say five, some six, some seven) of Sir Dominick White recorded in French and Spanish sources, no details of descendants are given.

Simon White of Knockentry

In 1704, Simon White of Knockentry, County Limerick, made his last will and testament, passing a considerable estate to his several

children by two wives. His first wife, a Miss Shouldham (first name not known) was the mother of most of these children, though based on birth dates, we can state with certainty that the youngest son, Benjamin (b. 1682) was the son of the second wife (married 1680), Jane Hovell of Cork.⁸ The estate included hundreds of acres of lands in County Limerick, as well as property in Limerick City and considerable sums of money in cash and in rents payable.⁹

To this will was affixed Simon White's seal, and though the will is now lost (burned in the infamous Four Courts fire of 1922), the work of Thomas Westropp in recording this and other memorials and wills has fortunately preserved it as *A chevron between 3 roses* (given as Simon White of Castleconnell).¹⁰ An identical seal appears on deeds of his son, John White of Cappaghowite.¹¹ Another of Simon's sons, Richard White, was the ancestor of the Earls of Bantry.



Figure 3: Arms of White of Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire

It is most curious that some record of the origins of Simon White, clearly a wealthy member of the Irish gentry (and a Protestant) was not preserved. He provided very well for his several children, and his extensive lands could not have been acquired or inherited without familial or political connections in those turbulent times. Yet, it is as if Simon White suddenly materialized. However, if we examine the lands enumerated in his will, we find important clues to his origins.

As already mentioned, Simon White is known both as "of Knocksentry" (as in J.D. White's history) or as "of Castleconnell" (as described by Westropp). These places are quite close to each other in County Limerick. A third territory, that of "Glanstale" (now Glenstal), in the Barony of Ownybeg, is left to Simon's eldest son, and he describes it as "my estate of freehold and inheritance." This then begs the question, "an inheritance from whom?"

Glenstal itself was originally part of the patrimony of the O'Mulryans (or Ryans), having been held in 1598 by Connor O'Mulryan of Annagh (along with all of Ownybeg, or "Owny O'Mulryan" as it was known). Portions of this territory were granted to the Walsh family, but in 1598, "Glenstille" is listed among the castles of the Bourkes in County Limerick.¹² In 1604, Theobald Bourke, Baron of Castleconnell, is granted further adjoining lands, including the Castle of Cappercullen.¹³ It would seem that some part of Glenstal is in the hands of the Walsh family by 1653, when Edward Walsh, an "innocent Papist" suffers the confiscation of Glenstal, and the lands are granted to Robert Wilkinson (an officer in Cromwell's army). After the restoration of Charles II, Glenstal appears to have been divided between Wilkinson and Simon White in 1666 (Act of Settlement).¹⁴ Based on Simon's description of the territory, it would seem that he successfully made a case for a claim to these lands.

Knocksentry or Knockcentry, was confirmed in 1624 to Theobald Bourke, Baron Brittas (brother of Thomas, 4th Baron Castleconnell), with later records indicating its lease by William Bourke (second son of Lord Brittas) to W. Pope (1655). In 1666, Knocksentry is confirmed to W. Pope and S. Molyneux (the Bourke family apparently having been deprived of the territory by that date).¹⁵

We thus find Simon White in possession of two significant territories with prior association to the Bourkes of Castleconnell at the time of his will of 1704, and, as stated above, Simon White is even referred to as "of Castleconnell" by Westropp (he was buried at the churchyard of Castleconnell). The reader will remember that the wife of Sir Dominick White of Limerick (Marquess of Albiville) was Christina, daughter of Thomas Bourke, 4th Baron Castleconnell by his wife, Honora O'Mulryan, the daughter of Conor O'Mulryan of

Annagh. Based on the territorial associations and the will of Simon White, it is very logical to conclude that he came into these lands as the result of a successful petition to regain some of the patrimony lost by his maternal ancestors in the Cromwellian confiscations and other disturbances of the 17th century. Such a petition would likely have failed had Simon held to the Catholic cause, but would have been considered more favorably for an heir who conformed to the established church.

The Earls of Bantry

Richard White, the son of Simon White of Knocksentry, settled near Bantry, County Cork with his wife, Margaret Hamilton. He died in 1730/31, and his will was proved at Dublin in 1733. He left three children, daughters Margaret and Sarah, and a son, Richard. The younger Richard White (1701-1776), left a daughter Margaret and two sons, Simon and Hamilton. The elder son, Simon White (1739-1776), who married Frances Jane Eyre, left four sons and three daughters. The eldest son was Richard White (1767-1851), who was raised to the Peerage of Ireland as Baron Bantry (1797), Viscount Bantry (1800), Viscount Berehaven (1816) and Earl of Bantry (1816). These titles all became extinct upon the death without male issue of the 4th Earl of Bantry in 1891. The family, however, continues to be represented by the Shelswell-White family, who still reside at Bantry House, County Cork.

At the time of these creations, the anti-Catholic mood was especially virulent. As an example, consider the following excerpt from an essay of the Scotsman William McGavin (1773-1832) written in 1821:

As Christians and Protestants, we have nothing to do with popery, or any other false religion, but to endeavour to win men from it by instruction and persuasion. To establish error of any kind, is to throw an obstruction in the way of those who would perform this Christian duty. It is to put a weapon into the hands of the enemies of the truth, with which they will destroy its friends; and to establish popery in Ireland, would be at once to extinguish the light that has begun to rise upon it; for it is a fact, confirmed by the experience of ages, that where Papists have power, they will persecute to death those who presume to teach genuine Christianity.¹⁶



Figure 4: Arms adopted by the Barons, later Earls, of Bantry

Although McGavin may have been extreme in the publishing of his views, the fear of Catholics and the desire to deprive them of influence, particularly in Ireland, was widespread in early nineteenth-century Great Britain. Given this atmosphere, it is relatively easy to imagine that a link to a notable (or "infamous," as it would have likely been described) Jacobite family might have prevented elevation to the Peerage.

With the impending creation of Richard White as Baron Bantry in 1797, it was necessary that he have a suitable coat of arms. Rather than put forward the arms of his ancestor, Simon White of Knocksentry (arms identical with those of Sir Dominick White), Richard White claimed a right to the arms of the Whites of Rickmansworth, which family produced Sir Thomas White, Mayor of London.¹⁷ However, no genealogy was compiled, and in subsequent editions of the British Peerage, the pedigree typically

begins with Richard White (son of Simon of Knocksentry), in some instances with the claim of the Rickmansworth connection, or in some instances with no mention of earlier ancestry.¹⁸

This vacuum led to speculation¹⁹ that the Earls of Bantry sprung from the same Anglo-Norman stock as the Whites of Limerick, even without the connections suggested by the will of Simon White of 1704. John Davis White, writing in 1887, had already come to the probable conclusion that Simon White was a son of Sir Dominick White of Limerick:

I think it very probable that Sir Eustacius [recte Ignatius] and Simon were both sons of Sir Dominick FitzBartholomew White; that Eustacius held to the fortunes of King James, and was one of those who had to emigrate to the continent, and was the person who, afterwards, became Marquis of Albavilla, in Germany. Simon, who, probably, espoused William's cause and Protestantism, is somewhere called Ensigne Simon White.²⁰

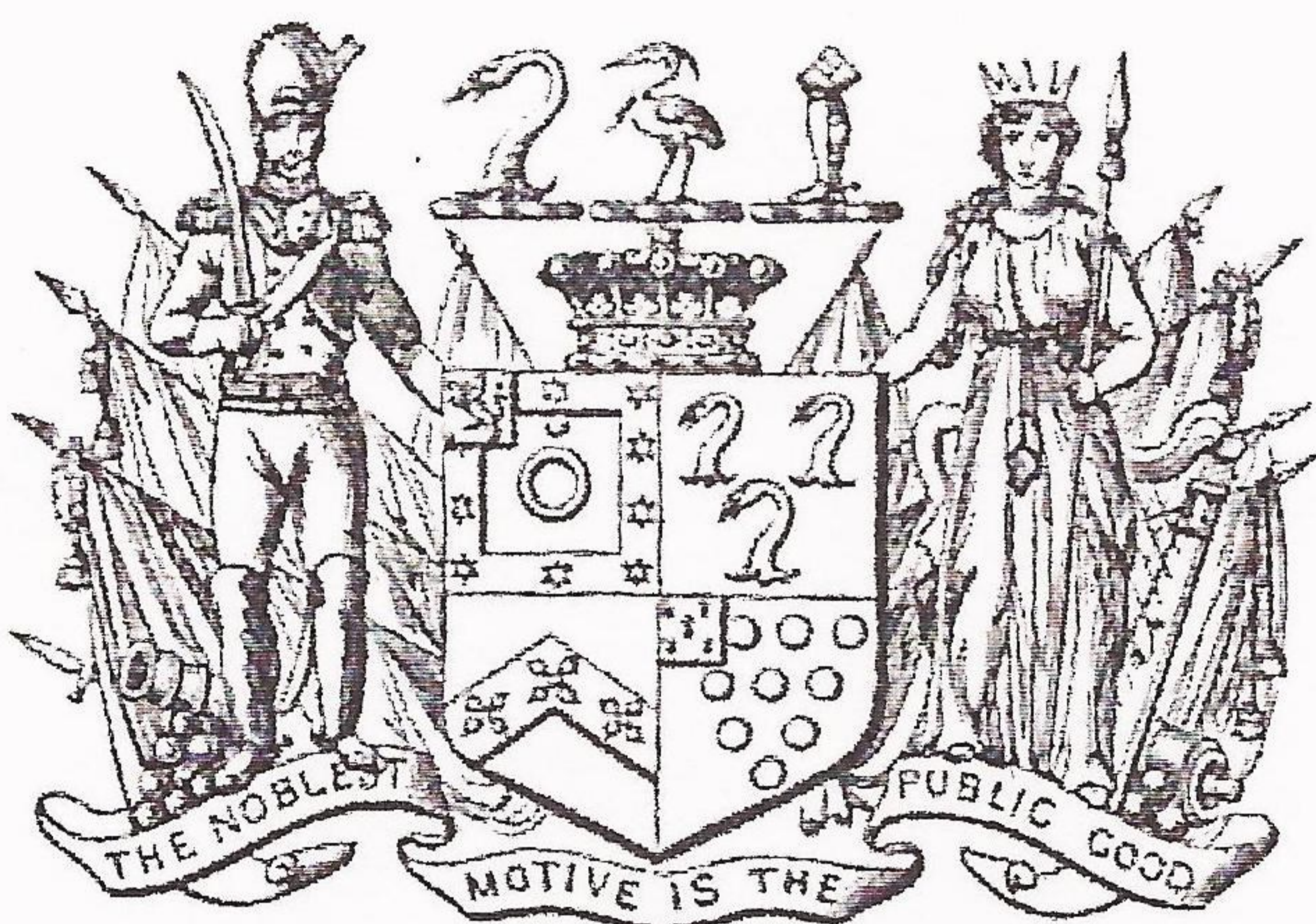


Figure 5: A later achievement of the Earls of Bantry (see note 15).

Conclusion

Simon White of Knocksentry is first recorded as a wealthy member of the gentry, leaving his considerable estate to his several children in 1704. He was not recorded as a Cromwellian adventurer, and by the time of his death, he was in possession of several territories with historic links to the Bourkes of Castleconnell (allied by marriage to the White family). His arms, and those of his son John, are identical to those of Sir Dominick White, Mayor of Limerick in 1636, who was an hereditary Baron of the Holy Roman Empire, and further created a Count and Marquis of the Empire, settling on the continent after the collapse of the Jacobite cause in Ireland.

When Simon's descendant, Richard White of Bantry, was raised to the Peerage of Ireland in 1797, the historic arms of the family were discarded in favor of a claim to the arms of Sir Thomas White of Rickmansworth, Mayor of London. A genealogy supporting this claim was never advanced or recorded. One can only conclude that the adoption of the arms of White of Rickmansworth was either a misdirection, or at least an example of wishful thinking, avoiding a link to ardent Jacobite ancestors and relations, notably Sir Ignatius White, Marquis of Albeville.

By this heraldic "sleight of hand," the Earls of Bantry were able to avoid a potential obstacle to their elevation to the Irish Peerage, and the English heralds appear to have been willing to tolerate the substitution. To the heralds' credit, they did not synthesize a genealogy which would have made the Bantry family a branch of "respectable" English stock. Based on property records and the will of Simon White, rescued from the ashes of history by John Davis

White, we may now connect this previously separated branch to the great Limerick family so prominent for some eight centuries.

NOTES

- 1 Ferrar, John. *The history of Limerick, ecclesiastical, civil and military, from the earliest records, to the year 1787*, (Limerick: A. Watson & Co., 1787), p. 230.
- 2 Maunsell, Robert George. *The History of Maunsell or Mansel, and of Crayford, Gabbett, Knoyle, Persse, Toler, Waller, Castletown; Waller, Prior Park; Warren, White, Winthrop and Mansell of Guernsey*. (Cork: Guy and Company, 1903), p. 141.
- 3 *Ibid*.
- 4 There is a much abbreviated account of an earlier grant to Dominick White of the title Count of Albi preserved in the College of Arms in London (Ms. I.26/101). I am grateful to PL Dickinson, Richmond Herald, for his transcription of this and the excerpt of the 1679 grant also preserved in the College of Arms (same reference).
- 5 A Large two-headed black eagle, painted naturally, crowned with an imperial crown adorned with precious stones, with outstretched wings, their beaks open and tongue out and red, with feet spread and holding in them a Mantle of violet color with a hood of the same color, all lined with ermine, in the middle of the Mantle is a crowned shield of arms and upon the crown a helmet with a grill and above the helmet a slogan written in Saxon language that says ETHEL J CARIGE on which there is a silver horse walking; and the Shield divided into four quarters; in dexter chief on a red field a golden lion passant to dexter with blue claws and tongue; in the dexter base, on a silver field a red wall with seven towers and a silver rose upon the wall, and over the wall and the Towers, two red roses. Surrounding the two quarters in the said dexter half of the Shield, small black helmets between two lines on a silver field; in sinister chief in a silver field, a right hand raised, open, bloody; in sinister base, a gold field, a Red Cross, which occupies the whole quarter and on the right side on the field of the Cross, a black lion passant. And the entire Shield supported by two silver dragons. (Grant of 1679, transcribed from Spanish archives and translated by the Author.)
- 6 For example, in 1776, arms are confirmed to Patrick White of Benicarló, Spain, the great-great grandson of Dominick White of Limerick. *Argent, a chevron between three roses Gules, barbed and seeded proper*. See National Library of Ireland, Genealogical Office MS 165, as well as Burke, Sir Bernard (Ulster King of Arms), *The General Armory of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales*, (London: Harrison and Sons, 1884), p. 1103.
- 7 Burnet, Gilbert, *Bishop Burnet's History of His Own Time: From the Restoration of Charles II to the Treaty of Peace at Utrecht in the Reign of Queen Anne* (London: William Smith, 1838), p. 450.
- 8 Gillman, Herbert Webb. *Index to the Marriage License Bonds of the Diocese of Cork and Ross, Ireland for the years from 1623 to 1750*. (Cork: Guy and Company, 1896/7), p. 69.
- 9 Will of Simon White, 1704, reproduced in White, John Davis, *History of the Family of White of Limerick, Knocksentry, Cappaghwhite, Lisowen, Kilmoylan, etc. etc.* (Cashel: J.D. White, 1887), pp. 13-14.
- 10 *Journal of the Association for the Preservation of Memorials of the Dead, Ireland*, (Dublin: Volume III, 1897), p. 397.
- 11 White, p. 6.
- 12 Edmund Hogan, SJ, Ed. *Description of Ireland In Anno 1598* (Dublin: M.H. Gill & Son, 1878), p. 206.
- 13 Westropp, Thomas Johnson. "The Ancient Castles of the County Limerick, North-Eastern Baronies," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, Vol. XXVI (1906-7), Part B, p. 100.
- 14 *Ibid*.
- 15 *Ibid*, p. 85.
- 16 McGavin, William. "Subject of Catholic Emancipation Continued" in *The Protestant: Essays on the Principal Points of Controversy Between the Church of Rome and the Reformed*, Vol. II (Hartford: Hutchinson and Dwier, 1835), p.p. 418-19.
- 17 White, p. 6.
- 18 For example: Burke, Sir Bernard (Ulster), *A Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary of the Peerage and Baronetage*. 42nd Ed. (London: Harrison, 1880), p. 78.
- 19 Montgomery-Massingberd, Hugh, ed. *Burke's Irish Family Records* (London: Burke's Peerage Ltd., 1976), p. 1205.
- 20 White, p. 8.

