

THE ‘CALCULUS OF FACTION’ AND RICHARD II’S DUCHY OF IRELAND, c. 1382–9

Peter Crooks

During the penultimate decade of the fourteenth century, a long-standing factional struggle between the two most powerful comital houses in English Ireland became markedly more intense.¹ The nobles in question were Gerald fitz Maurice (d. 1398), third earl of Desmond, head of the Munster branch of the famous Geraldine family; and James Butler, third earl of Ormond (d. 1405).² On two occasions – in the autumn of 1384 and again in the spring of 1387 – the records of the Irish chancery laconically report the outbreak of ‘great discords’ between these earls.³ The royal administration in Ireland deemed it prudent to intervene. Among those it entrusted with the task of mediation were some of the most distinguished political figures in Ireland, including Maurice, fourth earl of Kildare (d. 1390) – whose career of over four decades may have marked him out as something of an elder-statesman⁴ – and two experienced bishops.⁵ The dispute was not easily composed. The negotiations in 1384 lasted well over a week.⁶ One of the mediators grandly claimed that his efforts

The following abbreviations are used in this article:

- COD* *Calendar of Ormond Deeds, 1172–1603*, ed. E. Curtis (6 vols., Dublin, 1932–43)
HBC *Handbook of British Chronology*, ed. E. B. Fryde, D. E. Greenaway, S. Porter and I. Roy (3rd edn, Cambridge, 1996)
IExp *Irish Exchequer Payments, 1270–1446*, ed. P. Connolly (Dublin, 1998)
IHS *Irish Historical Studies*
NAI National Archives of Ireland, Dublin
NHI *A New History of Ireland*, ed. T. W. Moody, F. X. Martin and F. J. Byrne
NLI National Library of Ireland, Dublin
ODNB *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*
PRIA *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*
PKCI *A Roll of the Proceedings of the King’s Council in Ireland [...]*, ed. J. Graves (London, 1877)
PROME *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, ed. C. Given-Wilson et al.
RCH *Rotulorum Patentium et Clausorum Cancellariae Hiberniae Calendarium, Hen. II – Hen. VII*, ed. E. Tresham (Dublin, 1828)

¹ For the development of the Desmond–Ormond antagonism, see P. Crooks, ‘“Hobbes”, “Dogs” and Politics in the Ireland of Lionel of Antwerp, c. 1361–6’, *Haskins Society Journal*, 16 (2005), 138–44.

² For whom, see G. Mac Niocaill, ‘Fitzgerald, Gerald fitz Maurice, Third Earl of Desmond’, in *ODNB*, xix, 811–12; C. A. Empey, ‘Butler, James, Third Earl of Ormond’, *ibid.*, ix, 146–7.

³ *RCH*, 121, no. 77; *ibid.*, 137, no. 220.

⁴ R. Frame, ‘Fitzgerald, Maurice fitz Thomas, Fourth Earl of Kildare’, in *ODNB*, xix, 838–9.

⁵ They were Alexander Petit, *alias* ‘Balscot’, bishop of Ossory (1371–86) and later of Meath (1386–1400); and Thomas le Reve, bishop of Lismore and Waterford (1363–94). See *NHI*, ix: *Maps, Genealogies, Lists – A Companion to Irish History, Part II* (Oxford, 1984), 286, 304, 317.

⁶ Sir Patrick Freigne laboured for fifteen days upon this arbitration, but this included the time it took him to travel from the town of Kilkenny to Clonmel and back again: TNA:PRO, E 101/246/6, no. 33 (*RCH*, 122, no. 28).

had helped restore the king's lieges in Munster to tranquillity.⁷ If so, peace was ephemeral. Early in 1387, the earl of Kildare was again commissioned to intervene and treat between the two earls.⁸

The antagonism between the Geraldine and Butler families was to become perhaps the most notorious, and certainly the most enduring, magnate rivalry in Irish history.⁹ It is sobering, then, to realise how little we know of its crucial early phases. The foregoing summary represents almost the sum-total of our present knowledge of the conflict as it unfolded in the 1380s.¹⁰ In part, this stems from the obduracy of the evidence.¹¹ But our ignorance is also the result of the choices and assumptions of historians, who have concentrated their efforts on delineating royal policy and tracing the doings of the king's chief governors.¹² By contrast, the private concerns of the 'unreliable' resident nobility of Ireland, including their 'internecine quarrels and private wars', tend to be dismissed brusquely as disruptive to the colony's political life.¹³ A despondent Professor Watt captures the mood with his characterisation of the 1380s as a 'particularly drab phase of [colonial] history, with a dreary succession of [chief governors]', who were 'as unable to ward off the hostile Gaelic Irish as to suppress Anglo-Irish marauding and the debilitating feuds among the magnates, of which that between Ormond and Desmond is the most scandalous'.¹⁴

Drabness and dreariness are, of course, in the eye of the beholder; yet Professor Watt's bleak depiction is puzzling given that, by any standards, the 1380s was a memorable period in colonial affairs. This was due primarily to Richard II's contentious experiment in devolution. On 12 October 1385 the king announced his intention of granting Ireland as a palatinate to his favourite, Robert de Vere, ninth earl of Oxford (d. 1392), who was to bear the title marquess of Dublin.¹⁵ This was the most dramatic constitutional departure in 'Anglo-Irish relations' since 1254, when Henry III had granted Ireland (together with a string of other lands) to his son, the future Edward I, on the understanding that 'the above-mentioned lands and castles

⁷ TNA:PRO, E 101/246/6, no. 32.

⁸ *RCH*, 137, no. 220.

⁹ For the conflict in the early modern period, see, most recently, A. M. McCormack, *The Earldom of Desmond, 1463–1583: The Decline and Crisis of a Feudal Lordship* (Dublin, 2005), 88–108.

¹⁰ The conflict escalated further in the 1390s, but those events are better documented: P. Crooks, 'Factionalism and Noble Power in English Ireland, c. 1361–1423' (University of Dublin Ph.D. thesis, 2007), 165, 201–43.

¹¹ Most significantly, the Irish chancery rolls are no longer extant. Where possible, I have attempted to compensate for the inadequacies of the calendar published in 1828 by the Irish Record Commission (*RCH*) by providing references to superior transcripts of the original rolls. In such cases, I have placed the corresponding entry from *RCH* in parentheses.

¹² See, e.g., A. J. Otway-Ruthven, *A History of Medieval Ireland*, 2nd edn (London, 1980), 317–22; A. Tuck, 'Anglo-Irish Relations, 1382–1393', *PRIA*, 69 (1970), C, no. 2, 15–31; D. Johnston, 'Chief Governors and Treasurers of Ireland in the Reign of Richard II', in T. B. Barry, R. F. Frame and K. Simms (eds.), *Colony and Frontier in Medieval Ireland: Essays Presented to J. F. Lydon* (London, 1995), 97–115.

¹³ Tuck, 'Anglo-Irish Relations', 17. Similar language is employed in R. Halliday, 'Robert de Vere, Ninth Earl of Oxford', *Medieval History*, 3 (1993), 76.

¹⁴ J. A. Watt, 'The Anglo-Irish Colony under Strain, 1327–99', in A. Cosgrove (ed.), *NHI*, ii: *Medieval Ireland, 1169–1534* (Oxford, 1987), 390–91. This historiographical argument is further elaborated in P. Crooks, 'Factions, Feuds and Noble Power in the Lordship of Ireland, c. 1356–1496', *IHS* 35, no. 140, 2007.

¹⁵ *CPR 1385–9*, 115. On de Vere, see A. Tuck, 'Vere, Robert de, Ninth Earl of Oxford, Marquess of Dublin, and Duke of Ireland', in *ODNB*, lvi, 312–15; Halliday, 'Robert de Vere, Ninth Earl of Oxford', 71–95.

shall never be separated from the crown of England, but shall ever remain to the kings of that country'.¹⁶ De Vere's elevation attracted widespread notice and resentment.¹⁷ The title of marquess was previously 'unknown in England',¹⁸ such that the monk of Westminster had to explain that it signified a dignity, 'superior to an earl and less than a duke; so that the king caused him to be seated in parliament above the earls'.¹⁹ On 13 October 1386, the king honoured de Vere still further by creating him duke of Ireland.²⁰ Although de Vere himself never crossed the Irish Sea, his involvement clawed the English colony in Ireland to the centre of the most dramatic episode of the decade, the Appellant crisis of 1387–8. Such was the efficiency with which the Lords Appellant aborted the embryonic duchy of Ireland that it is easy to forget that even more grandiose designs may have been in the making. More than one rumour had it that Richard intended to elevate Ireland to the dignity of a kingdom.²¹ The claim cannot be lightly dismissed. Previous kings – most recently Edward III – had conceived of Ireland as a forum for the activities of their sons.²² A royal protégé such as Robert de Vere may then have served as a surrogate for the childless Richard. To be sure, the alienation of Ireland from the English crown would have been a novelty; but in this field of endeavour, novelty was the distinctive mark of Richard II.²³ Groundless or not, the gossip conveys the urgency with which Ireland was impinging on the English political consciousness.²⁴

Since Michael Bennett's important study of Richard II's 'wider realm', students of English history are unlikely to overlook the important place of Ireland in the reign

¹⁶ *Calendar of Documents Relating to Ireland Preserved in Her Majesty's Public Record Office, London*, ed. H. S. Sweetman and G. F. Handcock (5 vols., London, 1875–86), ii, nos. 326, 335. James Lydon terms this the 'doctrine of inalienability': Lydon, 'Ireland and the English Crown, 1171–1541', *IHS*, 29 (1995), 282. In 1388, the breach of this 'doctrine' provided the Lords Appellant with ammunition against Robert de Vere: *The Westminster Chronicle, 1381–1394*, ed. L. C. Hector and B. F. Harvey (Oxford, 1982), 246–9; C. Given-Wilson (ed.), 'Richard II: Parliament of February 1388, Text and Translation', in *PROME*, pt 2, 'Appeal of Treason', article 11 [CD-ROM, Scholarly Digital Editions (Leicester, 2005)].

¹⁷ The official creation was made in parliament on 1 December 1385: Given-Wilson (ed.), 'Richard II: Parliament of October 1385, Text and Translation', in *PROME*, item 17; *Calendar of Charter Rolls 1341–1417*, 301.

¹⁸ *The St Albans Chronicle: The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham*, i: 1376–1394, ed. J. Taylor, W. Childs and L. Watkiss (Oxford, 2003), 780–1.

¹⁹ *Westminster Chronicle*, 145. For the history of this 'foreign' title, see D. Crouch, *The Image of Aristocracy in Britain, 1000–1300* (London and New York, 1992), 98–100.

²⁰ *Calendar of Charter Rolls 1341–1417*, 307.

²¹ *Thomae Walsingham, Quondam Monachi S. Albani, Historia Anglicana*, ed. H. T. Riley (2 vols., Rolls Series, 1863–4), ii, 148; *Chronicon Angliae* [...], ed. E. M. Thompson (London, 1874), 372; *Westminster Chronicle*, 248–9; Given-Wilson (ed.), 'Richard II: Parliament of February 1388, Text and Translation', in *PROME*, pt 2, 'Appeal of Treason', article 11. Adam Usk makes a similar claim in respect of Thomas Holand in 1399: *The Chronicle of Adam Usk, 1377–1421*, ed. C. Given-Wilson (Oxford, 1997), 76–7.

²² See, for instance, M. T. Flanagan, *Irish Society, Anglo-Norman Settlers, Angevin Kingship: Interactions in Ireland in the Late Twelfth Century* (Oxford, 1989), 276–81; J. R. Studd, 'The Lord Edward and King Henry III', *BIHR*, 50 (1977), 4–19; P. Connolly, 'Lionel of Clarence and Ireland, 1361–1366' (University of Dublin Ph.D. thesis, 1977). Henry IV likewise appointed his son, Thomas, as lieutenant of Ireland in 1401: *CPR 1399–1401*, 507.

²³ For Richard's new creations in England, see C. Given-Wilson, *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages: The Fourteenth-Century Political Community* (London and New York, 1987), 47–53.

²⁴ The monk of Westminster reports that Richard conferred the duchy of Ireland on his uncle, Thomas of Woodstock, in 1389. This is untrue, but the persistence of such rumours is instructive in itself: *Westminster Chronicle*, 378–9.

of Richard II.²⁵ Irish historians, however, have not yet exhausted the implications of this for political dynamics within the colony. This may be due to the lingering assumption that at the rotten core of factionalism lurked the problem of noble disengagement from the affairs of the central government. Of course, there is much to be said about the local causes of the Geraldine–Butler dispute: where the shifting boundaries of lordship over men and land converged or intersected in the south of Ireland, friction was the inevitable result.²⁶ Yet the issues at stake transcended the provincial and had a relevance in much broader contexts – the Dublin administration and the English court to name but two. The present essay is an attempt to draw the resident lords of English Ireland in from the historiographical margins. Rather than examining the Geraldine–Butler antagonism simply in terms of local tensions, it shifts the emphasis and explores two political patterns illustrated by the records describing the interactions between the nobility and the central government. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to our understanding of political society in colonial Ireland.

A first pattern concerns the influence of colonial faction on attitudes to the king's representative in Ireland. A recent comment on this period colourfully describes how a newly appointed king's lieutenant may have viewed his commission, 'with all the trepidation of an Englishman venturing among not only the "wild Irish", but into the Byzantine factionalism of colonial Anglo-Ireland'.²⁷ If so, this was partly because the resident nobles of Ireland were adept at championing the grievances of the colony's political community in the pursuit of private ends. Sophisticated political manoeuvres, rather than magnates on the rampage, posed the principal threat to those unfortunate chief governors who found themselves mired in factional controversy. Indeed, the events of these years would have been familiar to the beleaguered chief governors of the Tudor age, who discovered that the colony's response to their programmes of reform was informed not by suspicion of royal government, but by what Professor Ciaran Brady has described as the 'complex and delicate calculus of faction'.²⁸ This evocative phrase is, however, equally useful when its sense is inverted and we examine the 'calculus of faction' at the court of Richard II. Given the entanglement of Ireland in English politics during these years, metropolitan developments must surely have had some bearing upon the fate of rival parties in the colony. This essay takes each of these political patterns in turn in the period c. 1382–9, dividing roughly with the creation of the duchy of Ireland in 1386.

²⁵ M. J. Bennett, 'Richard II and the Wider Realm', in A. Goodman and J. Gillespie (eds.), *Richard II: The Art of Kingship* (Oxford, 1999), 187–204.

²⁶ The local causes of the conflict are examined in detail in Crooks, 'Factionalism and Noble Power', 129–36.

²⁷ K. Kerby-Fulton and R. Horie (eds.), 'The French Version of the *Modus Tenendi Parliamentum* in the Courtenay Cartulary: A Transcription and Introduction', in K. Kerby-Fulton and M. Hilmo (eds.), *The Medieval Reader: Reception and Cultural History in the Late Medieval Manuscript* (Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History, 3rd ser., i, New York, 2001), 227.

²⁸ C. Brady, *The Chief Governors: The Rise and Fall of Reform Government in Ireland, 1536–88* (Cambridge, 1994), 176. See also idem, 'Court, Castle and Country: The Framework of Government', in C. Brady and R. Gillespie (eds.), *Natives and Newcomers: Essays on the Making of Irish Colonial Society, 1534–1641* (Dublin, 1986), 29–30; idem, 'England's Defence and Ireland's Reform: The Dilemma of the Irish Viceroy, 1541–1641', in B. Bradshaw and J. Morillo (eds.), *The British Problem, c. 1534–1707: State Formation in the Atlantic Archipelago* (Basingstoke and London, 1996), 90.

I

The years 1382–6 were stormy ones in colonial politics, witness not only to the discord between the Geraldines and Butlers, but also to trenchant criticism of the king's ministers in Ireland, in particular the chief governor from 1383 to 1386, Sir Philip Courtenay (d. 1406).²⁹ Courtenay's appointment as king's lieutenant in 1383 was a belated response to a power vacuum that had developed in Ireland during 1381–2. On the night of 26–7 December 1381 Edmund Mortimer, earl of March and Ulster, died at Cork while holding the office of king's lieutenant.³⁰ He was followed to the grave within a year by the man who had dominated much of the colony's political life for some three decades: James Butler, second earl of Ormond.³¹ The passing of Edmund Mortimer had provoked consternation within the English administration in Ireland.³² Fortunately, when the second earl of Ormond died, he left a mature and capable heir. His son, James III Butler (d. 1405), was at least twenty-two years old in 1382.³³ In the late 1370s, he had acted as his father's deputy in the office of chief governor of Ireland,³⁴ and he had also been a beneficiary of royal patronage.³⁵ He was, then, well able to assume the mantle of his father. In this, the royal administration seems to have been eager to facilitate him. James III was granted livery of his estates with minimal delay on 2 March 1383.³⁶ His two mainpennors were a former chief governor of Ireland, Sir Robert Ashton (d. 1384) of Pitney, Somerset,³⁷ and the archbishop of Canterbury, William Courtenay (1381–96).³⁸

The involvement of Archbishop Courtenay may be significant in terms of the court's long-term plans both for Ormond and colonial security generally. Three months later, on 20 June 1383, the archbishop's nephew, Sir Philip Courtenay,³⁹ uncle of Edward Courtenay, earl of Devon, entered into an indenture with the king to become the king's lieutenant of Ireland for a period of ten years.⁴⁰ During the

²⁹ For Sir Philip Courtenay, see J. S. Roskell, L. Clark and C. Rawcliffe (eds.), *The House of Commons, 1386–1421* (4 vols., Stroud, 1992), ii, 670–73; Tuck, 'Anglo-Irish Relations', 21.

³⁰ *Chartulary of Saint Mary's Abbey, Dublin* [...], ed. J. T. Gilbert, (2 vols., London, 1884–6), ii, 285; *Westminster Chronicle*, 22–3; *St Albans Chronicle, 1376–94*, 580–81; W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum* [...], ed. J. Caley, H. Ellis and B. Bandinel (6 vols., London, 1817–30), vi, 353; *Usk*, 46–7.

³¹ There is a discrepancy between the date for his death given in the annals (18 October) and the date of 6 November given in the inquisitions *post mortem* conducted in England: *Chartulary of St Mary's Abbey*, ii, 285–6; *CIPM 1377–84*, 281–4, nos. 696–709. However, an exchequer record dated 23 October 1382 refers to the death of the second earl of Ormond: TNA:PRO, E 101/246/2, no. 27. This suggests that the earlier date of 18 October is correct.

³² *Parliaments and Councils of Mediaeval Ireland*, ed. H. G. Richardson and G. O. Sayles (Dublin, 1947), 115–20, no. 66 (*RCH*, 111, no. 39).

³³ *CIPM 1377–84*, 281, no. 696.

³⁴ TNA:PRO, E 101/246/5, nos. 44, 70, 120, 180, 231; *Parliaments & Councils*, 108–9, no. 60 (B).

³⁵ *CFR 1377–83*, 103.

³⁶ *CFR 1377–83*, 352.

³⁷ *NHI*, ix, 474; *VCH Somerset*, iii, 15. Sir Robert Ashton held the manor of Brean, Somerset, by demise of the second earl of Ormond: *CCR 1381–5*, 459; *CCR 1385–9*, 209.

³⁸ For whom, see J. Dahmus, *William Courtenay, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1381–1396* (Philadelphia, 1966).

³⁹ On the Courtenay family in this period, see M. Cherry, 'The Courtenay Earls of Devon: The Formation and Disintegration of a Late Medieval Aristocratic Affinity', *Southern History*, 1 (1979), 71–97.

⁴⁰ TNA:PRO, E 101/68/9/221. Courtenay's appointment followed on 1 July 1383: *CPR 1381–5*, 291. An earlier patent of appointment, dated 23 June 1383, was later vacated: *CPR 1381–5*, 293.

spring, the appointment of the king's favoured candidate to serve as lieutenant – his half-brother, Sir John Holand (d. 1400) – had been cancelled.⁴¹ Sir Philip Courtenay, evidently, was hit upon as Holand's replacement. He was, however, a far less exalted figure than the English of Ireland had come to expect since the lieutenancy of Edward III's son, Lionel of Antwerp (1361–6). Difficulties in persuading the colonial community to accept Courtenay were anticipated,⁴² and it may have been envisaged that the influence of the new earl of Ormond could help overcome any such obstacles. For Ormond, the potential value of the arrangement lay in having the ear of the king's representative in Ireland.

Ormond acted as chief governor of Ireland from 20 August 1383 until Courtenay landed at Waterford on 11 September 1383,⁴³ and after the latter's arrival the two men did indeed collaborate.⁴⁴ Courtenay's obligations as the king's lieutenant were, however, multiple. While he seems to have been generally amenable to Butler interests, he could not afford to antagonise Ormond's rivals, the Desmond Geraldines. The lieutenant's circumspection is clear from a document dated 3 February 1384, by virtue of which Ormond received custody of lands at Knockgraffon, Tipperary, that were then in royal hands.⁴⁵ The grant contains the proviso that should Ormond lease these lands to 'any one of the nation of the Burkeyns', they would automatically revert to the crown.⁴⁶ The 'Burkeyns' in question were the Burghs of Clanwilliam, descended from Richard Burgh, the 'red' earl of Ulster (d. 1326).⁴⁷ Their territory lay in west Tipperary and east Limerick between the supremacies of the earls of Ormond and Desmond. In 1377, Sir Richard Burgh of Clanwilliam had been embroiled in a struggle with Gerald, third earl of Desmond, and there had been further upheaval in 1381.⁴⁸ Their conflict was complicated by the fact that the head of the Clanwilliam lineage, Sir Richard Burgh, had been retained for life by James, second earl of Ormond.⁴⁹ Consequently there was a danger that Burgh's conflict with Desmond could escalate into a major confrontation between the two comital houses. Courtenay's desire to avoid this demonstrates some sensitivity on his part to the subtleties of the colony's internal politics.

That sensitivity notwithstanding, the Geraldines and Butlers clashed in the autumn

⁴¹ See Johnston, 'Chief Governors', 103 note 32; Tuck, 'Anglo-Irish Relations', 20. Holand was later earl of Huntingdon (1388) and duke of Exeter (1397–9): G. E. C[okeyne], *The Complete Peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain, and the United Kingdom, Extant, Extinct, or Dormant*, new edn by Vicary Gibbs et al. (12 vols., London, 1910–59), v, 195–200; vi, 653–4.

⁴² His indenture stipulates that accusations against him would be heard before the king: TNA:PRO, E 101/68/9/221. Note also the suggestion that Courtenay took the precaution of carrying to Ireland a French rendition of the English version of the *Modus tenendi parliamentum*, because he 'wanted a copy of ... a treatise on parliamentary procedure in order to start his new position': Kerby-Fulton and Horie, 'French Version of the *Modus*', 227.

⁴³ TNA:PRO, E 101/246/7, nos. 76–7; E 101/246/6, no. 100; 'Lord Chancellor Gerrard's Notes of his Report on Ireland [...]', ed. C. McNeill, *Analecta Hibernica*, 2 (1931), 200.

⁴⁴ Crooks, 'Factionalism and Noble Power', 174–81.

⁴⁵ Knockgraffon (barony of Middlethird, co. Tipperary) was in the medieval cantred of Moyenen: C. A. Empey, 'The Cantreds of Medieval Tipperary', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, 13 (1970), 27.

⁴⁶ NLI, D 1299 (*COD*, ii, no. 271).

⁴⁷ For the Clanwilliam Burghs, see D. G. Marnane, *Land and Settlement: A History of West Tipperary to 1660* (Tipperary, 2003), 217–20.

⁴⁸ *RCH*, 103, no. 91; *ibid.*, 108, no. 46.

⁴⁹ NLI, D 1012 ('Private Indentures for Life Service in Peace and War, 1278–1476', ed. M. Jones and S. Walker, *Camden Miscellany XXXII*, Camden Society, 5th ser., 3 (1994), 76–7, no. 44; cf. *COD*, ii, no. 37). See also a second agreement dating from 1360: NLI, D 1037 (*COD*, ii, no. 61).

of 1384. The immediate spark for their quarrel is unknown, but it is likely that it was somehow connected with the efforts of the third earl of Ormond to establish himself. In August 1383 James III, 'now earl of Ormond', concluded an agreement with his mother, Elizabeth, and her new husband, Sir Robert Herford. Under its terms, Elizabeth was to surrender to her son all the Irish estates she held as dower, with the exception of some manors in north county Dublin, four hundred marks, and one third of the prisage of wines in Ireland.⁵⁰ By November 1383 Ormond had solicited a writ from England granting him permission to travel to court in order to render his homage to the king.⁵¹ The young earl did not set out for Westminster immediately. Nonetheless, he was already associating himself indirectly with some of Richard II's intimates. One broker of patronage was the king's half-brother, John Holand, whose appointment as lieutenant of Ireland had been cancelled in 1383. Although Holand fell from grace in July 1385 after murdering Ralph, son of the second earl of Stafford, he had previously been a great favourite of the king.⁵² In July 1384 John Holand petitioned on behalf of 'Robert de Hereford *alias* Robert Lovekyn, knight, who is busy in the said John's service', for a pardon in the latter's account as the king's seneschal of Tipperary for the period between the death of the second earl of Ormond and the release of the Butler estates to Earl James III.⁵³ This Sir Robert Herford was the same man who had recently married Elizabeth, dowager countess of Ormond. Herford was later to return to Ireland and become closely associated with Butler fortunes.

These glimpses of Ormond's activities lend the impression of a young man in a hurry. Doubtless, that drive and ambition was replicated at a local level in the south of Ireland, where the Butler lordship rubbed shoulders with the territorial concerns of the Munster Geraldines. Against this background, the fact that Ormond came to blows with Gerald, third earl of Desmond, during 1384 should occasion little surprise.⁵⁴ The significant point for this discussion is that, although Sir Philip Courtenay found it necessary to dispatch mediators to Clonmel in Tipperary to restore peace, the outbreak of discord did little to shake the lieutenant's confidence in Ormond. In late November 1384 Courtenay was preparing to return to England. On the eve of his departure, he went to considerable lengths to bolster Ormond's position. On 26 November 1384 he issued Ormond with a general pardon.⁵⁵ The same day, a payment of one hundred shillings was authorised to Sir Patrick Freigne, a close supporter of the Butler family, for his travails earlier that month attempting to arbitrate between the Butler and Geraldine factions.⁵⁶ Two days later, on 28 November, Courtenay nominated Ormond as chief governor.⁵⁷ Ormond took

⁵⁰ *COD*, ii, no. 265. The original deed (NLI, D 1292) is missing at present from NLI. On 30 March 1384 Elizabeth was pardoned for marrying Sir Robert Herford and was granted livery of her lands in England and the march of Wales: *CPR 1381-5*, 403; *CCR 1381-5*, 372.

⁵¹ *CPR 1381-5*, 330; NLI, D 1293 (*COD*, ii, no. 266).

⁵² N. E. Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven and London, 1997), 120, 243-4; Tuck, *Richard II*, 79-80.

⁵³ *CPR 1381-5*, 453 (quotation); *CCR 1381-5*, 467. Sir Robert Herford had previously served the second earl of Ormond as seneschal of Tipperary in 1381-2: NLI, D 1279-80 (*COD*, ii, nos. 254-5). For a catalogue of his career, see T. Blake Butler, 'Seneschals of the Liberty of Tipperary', *The Irish Genealogist*, 2 (1943-55), 332-3.

⁵⁴ *RCH*, 121, no. 77.

⁵⁵ *RCH*, 121, no. 8.

⁵⁶ TNA:PRO, E 101/246/6, no. 33 (*RCH*, 122, no. 28).

⁵⁷ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 502, fol. 95r (*RCH*, 122, no. 1).

up office as justiciar of Ireland on 30 November 1384 and served in that capacity until Courtenay's return in May 1385.⁵⁸

One man who may have helped drive the interests of Courtenay and Ormond together in the last months of 1384 was Robert Wikeford, archbishop of Dublin (1376–90).⁵⁹ On 10 September 1384 Wikeford had received an English-seal appointment as chancellor of Ireland.⁶⁰ He had arrived in the colony by 8 November, when the out-going chancellor, Sir Ralph Cheyne, was instructed to release to him the great seal of Ireland.⁶¹ Wikeford immediately began to foment trouble against Courtenay. Within a matter of weeks, the lieutenant had resolved to remonstrate personally at Westminster against the new chancellor. Having appointed Ormond as chief governor of Ireland, Courtenay travelled to England and informed the king that Wikeford had summoned councils and parliaments without permission, had laid imposts upon the people, and had taken fines and granted pardons for his own use. Outraged, the king wrote to Wikeford on 30 December, 'marvelling not a little, that by colour of his office the chancellor after his last coming to Ireland has done all those things, for which he had no such authority'.⁶² By the time Courtenay returned to Ireland in the early summer, the archbishop had been superseded in office.⁶³ Wikeford's motives need not detain us here longer than to suggest that the explanation may be located in the events in the late 1370s, when Wikeford had agitated against the authority of Ormond's father, Earl James II, then chief governor of Ireland.⁶⁴ The revival of that controversy in 1384 helps to explain the trust that Courtenay placed in James, third earl of Ormond, despite the latter's recent embroilment with the Desmond Geraldines. Archbishop Wikeford of Dublin was a mutual enemy.

On 6 May 1385 Sir Philip Courtenay disembarked at Dalkey, county Dublin, bearing a new appointment as lieutenant of Ireland.⁶⁵ It would be reasonable to

⁵⁸ TNA:PRO, E 101/246/6, no. 97. On 30 November Ormond issued Courtenay with a protection: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 502, fol. 95r. The justiciary rolls, which are no longer extant, showed that Ormond held pleas from 1 December 1384 until 28 April 1385: H. Wood, 'The Office of Chief Governor of Ireland, 1172–1509', *PRIA*, 36 (1923), C, no. 12, 230.

⁵⁹ For whom, see D. B. Johnston, 'Wikeford, Robert (d. 1390)', in *ODNB*, lviii, 864–5.

⁶⁰ *CPR 1381–5*, 455 (*RCH*, 120, no. 41).

⁶¹ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 502, fol. 95r (*RCH*, 120, no. 43). On 10 November 1384 Sir Philip Courtenay ordered that payment be made to Cheyne of arrears of his fee as chancellor from 26 June to 7 November 1384: TNA:PRO, E 101/246/6, no. 92 (*RCH*, 122, no. 2). On 22 November, Cheyne was handsomely compensated for his ejection from office with a grant of the wardship of the liberty of Wexford for the sum of £160: *RCH*, 119, no. 22; *CPR 1385–9*, 523. A point of interface between Cheyne and James, third earl of Ormond, was Sir Robert Ashton, one of Ormond's mainpennors in 1383. Ashton had served as justiciar of Ireland 1372–3 and, at his departure, he had appointed his cousin, Sir Ralph Cheyne, as his deputy. After Ashton's death in January 1384, some of his estates descended to Cheyne: *NHI*, ix, 474; *House of Commons*, ii, 555.

⁶² *CCR 1381–5*, 500.

⁶³ Wikeford's replacement as chancellor of Ireland was Bishop Alexander Balscot of Ossory, who took up office on 12 April 1385: *CPR 1381–5*, 532; *RCH*, 129, no. 21.

⁶⁴ TNA:PRO, C 49/75, m. 27–27v; *CPR 1377–81*, 271; *CCR 1377–81*, 171–2, 225. Wikeford's opposition to Ormond may have been connected with the fact that in 1378, while Ormond was justiciar, the archiepiscopal manor of Swords, co. Dublin, was seized into the king's hands: *Documents on the Affairs of Ireland before the King's Council*, ed. G. O. Sayles (Dublin, 1979), 250–3, no. 264. For discussion, see Crooks, 'Factionalism and Noble Power', 146–8, 152–3, 176–81. On Swords, see R. Stalley, 'The Archbishop's Residence at Swords: Castle or Country Retreat?', in *Medieval Dublin VII*, ed. S. Duffy (Dublin, 2006), 152–76.

⁶⁵ *RCH*, 128, no. 15; *CPR 1381–5*, 540.

expect that Courtenay's return would usher in a second period of cooperation with Ormond. In fact, the relationship between the two men quickly soured. It is not easy to account for this change, but it is possible that Ormond's hostility was aroused by the belief that the lieutenant was insufficiently devoted to Butler interests. After his return, Courtenay seems to have attempted to establish greater parity between the Geraldines and Butlers. In doing so, he may have been attempting to redress an imbalance caused by Ormond's recent tenure as justiciar of Ireland. Ormond had not exercised that office with great tact. At almost his very first opportunity, 1 December 1384, he had appointed a panel of justices to inquire into seditions in the south of Ireland.⁶⁶ Two of the areas to be covered by the investigation, Kilkenny and Tipperary, lay within Butler country and so were not contentious. The commission, however, also embraced counties Waterford and Limerick. These were areas of keen Geraldine interest. Still more provocative was the fact that a number of the commissioners – Sir Patrick and Sir Robert Freigne, and John Lumbard – were Ormond's adherents.⁶⁷ Coming so soon after the settlement of strife in Munster the previous autumn, this challenge to the authority of the earl of Desmond must have been deeply disquieting to the Geraldines of Munster. Courtenay may also have viewed Ormond's actions with dismay. The fact that the lieutenant now favoured an even-handed approach was signalled by his appointment of Desmond and Ormond to act *jointly* as his deputies at a great council that was to convene at Kilkenny on 17 July 1385. Courtenay could not attend this assembly because he was campaigning against the Irish of Leinster.⁶⁸ For Ormond, the appointment of Desmond as co-deputy may have been particularly galling given that the council was to be held at Kilkenny, a town at the heart of Butler interests.⁶⁹

Ormond's antipathy towards his former ally became entwined with a more general anti-ministerial sentiment that was expressed at great councils held at Kilkenny and Dublin in the latter half of 1385.⁷⁰ In the course of these assemblies, the ills besetting the colony were discussed, in particular the 'great power of the Irish enemies and English rebels' who, rather ominously, were said to be confederating with the king's 'other enemies of Scotland and Spain', such that 'at this next season, as is likely,

⁶⁶ *RCH*, 121, no. 86.

⁶⁷ For indentures between the Freignes and James, second earl of Ormond, see NLI, D 1223–5, 1272 (*COD*, ii, nos. 205 (i–iii), 247; 'Private Indentures', 98–9, no. 68). Lumbard is named as Ormond's servant in 1388: *RCH*, 141, no. 195. All three men appear as witnesses in *COD*, ii, no. 265. Another commissioner, Walter Coterele, was soon to be appointed a justice of pleas before the seneschal of Kilkenny: *RCH*, 127, no. 236.

⁶⁸ *RCH*, 123, no. 1. Bishop Alexander of Ossory (chancellor of Ireland) and Bishop Thomas of Lismore–Waterford were also commissioned to deputise for Courtenay. One biography of Courtenay misdates this nomination of deputies to July 1384 and states that the lieutenant was in England at the time: *House of Commons*, ii, 671. Possibly there is some confusion with Sir Philip's brother, Sir Peter Courtenay, who attended the Salisbury parliament of April 1384 and was one of those who tortured the unfortunate friar, John Latimer. See *Westminster Chronicle*, 68–75; T. F. Tout, *Chapters in the Administrative History of Mediaeval England* (6 vols., Manchester, 1920–33), iii, 392–3, note 1.

⁶⁹ For the growth of Butler influence in co. Kilkenny – described by one historian as the 'Butler *Drang nach Osten*' – see C. A. Empey, 'County Kilkenny in the Anglo-Norman Period', in W. Nolan and K. Whelan (eds.), *Kilkenny History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County* (Dublin, 1990), 88.

⁷⁰ For the subtle distinction between great councils and parliaments in late fourteenth-century Ireland, see H. G. Richardson and G. O. Sayles, *The Irish Parliament in the Middle Ages* (2nd edn, Philadelphia, 1964), 104–10.

there will be made a general conquest of the greater part of Ireland'.⁷¹ It was decided that the only remedy was the personal presence of the king in Ireland. Two envoys – Bishop Alexander Balscot of Ossory and Archbishop Robert Wikeford of Dublin – were elected to travel to England to solicit a royal expedition or, failing that, the appointment of 'le plus graunt et plus foiable seigneur dengleterre'.⁷² Ormond's contribution to this movement has left only a shadowy impression in the records. A first step towards demonstrating his involvement is to re-examine the chronology. It has generally been assumed that the complaints against Courtenay date from a session of the great council of Ireland that convened at Dublin in October 1385.⁷³ Yet, the records state that grievances were voiced at councils held both at Dublin and Kilkenny. The only council held at Kilkenny in 1385 was that summoned for 17 July, which Courtenay did not attend. This indicates that it was in July, and not October, that the idea of electing emissaries to travel to England was first mooted. The delegation did not finally set out for court until early 1386, but traces of their earlier preparations survive. In September 1385 one Robert Crull, prebendary of Swords, was granted a licence to absent himself from Ireland.⁷⁴ Crull was later named as a member of the company of the envoys of the colonial community and it is stated that he had travelled to England at their request, 'to transact with the Council business relating to Ireland'.⁷⁵ The preparations of Bishop Alexander Balscot of Ossory for a journey to Westminster also predate the Dublin great council of October 1385. As chancellor of Ireland, he had to nominate a deputy to act in his absence. On 20 September 1385 William fitz William was appointed keeper of the great seal.⁷⁶ If the envoys were indeed first chosen in July, this may lend an added significance to their remonstrations about the danger posed by the king's 'enemys descoce'.⁷⁷ Early in June 1385 writs were issued in England for what was to be the last summons of the English feudal host. The army, which was to march upon Scotland, met at Newcastle at the end of July and campaigned in Scotland during August.⁷⁸ The threat of incursions along the coast of Ireland was by no means groundless.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the exhumation of Scottish skeletons at the precise moment that the king was

⁷¹ *Statutes and Ordinances and Acts of the Parliament of Ireland, King John to Henry V*, ed. H. F. Berry, 484–5 (RCH, 128, no. 18).

⁷² *Statutes ... of the Parliament of Ireland*, 486–7 (RCH, 128, no. 18).

⁷³ Otway-Ruthven, *History of Medieval Ireland*, 318; Halliday, 'Robert de Vere, Ninth Earl of Oxford', 76; cf. Tuck, *Richard II*, 81.

⁷⁴ RCH, 123, no. 20. For Crull, see H. Cotton, *Fasti Ecclesiae Hibernicae: The Succession of the Prelates and Members of the Cathedral Bodies in Ireland*, ii: *The Province of Leinster* (Dublin, 1848), 136.

⁷⁵ CPR 1385–9, 91.

⁷⁶ RCH, 123, no. 26. It is not clear if the appointment was effective. Later, on 13 November, Bishop Alexander of Ossory appointed Robert Sutton as his lieutenant in the office of chancellor because he was about to set out for England. On 20 January 1386, Sutton was superseded by Thomas Everdon: RCH, 125, no. 136; *ibid.*, 124, nos. 78, 80–81.

⁷⁷ *Statutes ... of the Parliament of Ireland*, 484.

⁷⁸ Saul, *Richard II*, 144–5; N. B. Lewis, 'The Last Summons of the English Feudal Levy, 13 June 1385', *EHR*, 73 (1958), 1–26; J. J. N. Palmer, 'The Last Summons of the Feudal Army in England (1385)', *EHR*, 83 (1968), 771–5; N. B. Lewis, 'The Feudal Summons of 1385', *EHR*, 100 (1985), 729–43, with comment by J. J. N. Palmer, *ibid.*, 743–6.

⁷⁹ RCH, 127, no. 243; NLI, MS 4 [Harris], fol. 29; *The Original Chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun*, ed. F. J. Armours (6 vols., Edinburgh and London, 1902–14), vi, 320–25. The colony also suffered attacks from Spanish and French fleets: CPR 1385–9, 492 (RCH, 138, no. 33); *St Albans Chronicle, 1376–94*, 368–71.

marching northwards may, in part, have been a contrivance intended to attract the attention of the court.⁸⁰

It is against this background that we must set the actions of the earl of Ormond in the second half of 1385. The Kilkenny great council of 17 July, during which grievances were first expressed against the king's lieutenant, was the same assembly over which the earls of Desmond and Ormond were appointed jointly to deputise for Sir Philip Courtenay. As we have seen, Ormond may have taken umbrage at this acknowledgement of Desmond's status. Courtenay's absence, of course, would have been a prime opportunity for Ormond to vent his spleen, not least because the earl could presumably dominate a great council held in his home territory. Almost immediately after the great council, there are signs that Ormond was preparing to set out for court.⁸¹ He had reached England by the autumn. There he rendered his homage to the king and attended the Westminster parliament that convened on 20 October.⁸² He took the opportunity to voice complaints about Courtenay and sought to forestall any reprisals upon his return. On 28 October, the king expressly ordered Courtenay, 'not to impeach or trouble the earl, his men or servants' for travelling to court, as 'he [Ormond] fears that the lieutenant ... may impeach him'.⁸³

Ormond's visit to England coincided with the creation of Robert de Vere as marquess of Dublin. It is tempting to relate this to the desire expressed by the colonial community for either a royal expedition to Ireland or the appointment of 'the greatest and most trustworthy lord of England'.⁸⁴ It seems almost inconceivable that, with the premier magnate of English Ireland to hand, the king would have neglected to take his counsel on such a significant matter. This is not to suggest that the idea of creating a marquessate for de Vere originated with Ormond; but the earl's serendipitous arrival at court may well have impressed on Richard II that Ireland could serve as a land of opportunities in terms of providing a fit reward for a royal favourite.⁸⁵ In this respect, the episode is reminiscent of the diplomatic coup of Ormond's father, Earl James II, in soliciting the expedition of Lionel of Antwerp in 1361.⁸⁶ Unfortunately, there is little beyond the timing to prove Ormond's involvement. What is indisputable, however, is that Richard II looked on Ormond with affection. The young earl was knighted by the king himself in full parliament, and he cut a fine enough figure at court to attract the attention of the monk of Westminster, who linked Ormond's name with some of the most illustrious men in England,

⁸⁰ For the Scottish invasions of Ireland earlier in the fourteenth century, see R. Frame, 'The Bruces in Ireland, 1315–18', *Ireland and Britain, 1170–1450* (London and Rio Grande, 1998), 71–98, first printed in *IHS*, 19 (1974), 3–37; S. Duffy (ed.), *Robert the Bruce's Irish Wars: The Invasions of Ireland, 1306–29* (Stroud, 2002).

⁸¹ *RCH*, 127, nos. 196, 204, 225, 235–7.

⁸² *HBC*, 565.

⁸³ *CCR 1385–9*, 14.

⁸⁴ *Statutes ... of the Parliament of Ireland*, 487.

⁸⁵ Cf. the situation in thirteenth-century Ireland, when it has been suggested that John fitz Geoffrey (d. 1258) may have encouraged King Henry III to view Ireland, 'as a place where the demands of *curiales* might be satisfied': R. Frame, 'Henry III and Ireland: The Shaping of a Peripheral Lordship', in *Ireland and Britain*, 52, first printed in P. R. Coss and S. Lloyd (eds.), *Thirteenth Century England IV* (Woodbridge, 1992), 179–202.

⁸⁶ See the petition of 1360 requesting 'un bone chiefteyn suffisant, estoffés et efforcéz de gentz et tresore': *Parliaments & Councils*, 19–22, no. 16 (quotation at 21). For the involvement of James, second earl of Ormond, see Crooks, "'Hobbes'", 134–7.

including three of the king's surviving uncles. This remarkable extract, which seems to have escaped the notice of Irish historians,⁸⁷ is worth quoting:

On 9 November in full parliament at Westminster, the king raised two of his uncles to the rank of duke, advancing Edmund of Langley, earl of Cambridge, to duke of York and elevating Thomas of Woodstock, earl of Buckingham, to the dukedom of Gloucester⁸⁸ ... On the same day also James earl of Ormond received the belt of knighthood from the king. The ceremonies over, the king and queen joined the newly invested great ones and the other nobles present in attending a banquet arranged for the occasion with great taste and brilliance by the duke of Lancaster.⁸⁹

Ormond was subsequently showered with gifts. Sometime before June 1386, he married Anne, daughter of John, late fourth lord Welles (d. 1361).⁹⁰ The Welles family may not have been of the first rank, but the marriage was by no means a poor match. Anne's brother, John, fifth lord Welles (d. 1421), married Eleanor, sister of Thomas Mowbray (d. 1399), earl of Nottingham (1383) and later duke of Norfolk (1397). Although Mowbray later defected to the Appellants, in 1386 he was still a great favourite of the king, who made him Earl Marshal of England during that year.⁹¹ Ormond, therefore, was moving in illustrious circles. As if this were not enough, he was also given material support. On 30 November, the city of Waterford was ordered to pay him forty pounds annually from the farm of the city as Ormond's father, the second earl, had been accustomed to receive.⁹² The timing of the grant may be significant. The following day, 1 December 1385, Robert de Vere was created marquess of Dublin.

Ormond's tactic of abandoning a chief governor lukewarm to his interests in order to seek the greater rewards that could be won at court had proved extremely effective. Across the water in Ireland, Sir Philip Courtenay was attempting to prevent further muck from being raked against him. At the great council held at Dublin on 23 October he challenged anyone who felt aggrieved, 'by reason of any extortion, oppression, unjust seizure, or imprisonment by the said lieutenant ... [to] speak, confess or show it, and he would immediately amend and remedy it'. The assembled prelates, magnates and commons were presumably intimidated into submissiveness rather than overcome by sycophancy. They at once, 'declared, confessed

⁸⁷ It is noticed, however, in J. L. Gillespie, 'Richard II's Knights: Chivalry and Patronage', *Journal of Medieval History*, 13 (1987), 148–9; idem, 'Richard II: Chivalry and Kingship', in J. L. Gillespie (ed.), *The Age of Richard II* (Stroud, 1997), 126.

⁸⁸ These were the king's uncles, sons of Edward III. On Thomas of Woodstock (d. 1397), see A. Goodman, *The Loyal Conspiracy: The Lords Appellant under Richard II* (London, 1971), 74–104.

⁸⁹ *Westminster Chronicle*, 140–41. Knighton notes that Richard II created an 'incomparable number of knights', and connects the event with the creation of the marquess of Dublin: *Knighton's Chronicle, 1337–1396*, ed. G. H. Martin (Oxford, 1995), 338–9. For discussion, see J. J. N. Palmer, 'The Parliament of 1385 and the Constitutional Crisis of 1386', *Speculum*, 46 (1971), 477–90; C. Given-Wilson, 'Richard II and the Higher Nobility', in *Richard II: The Art of Kingship*, 117–19. The duke of Lancaster was, of course, John of Gaunt (d. 1399).

⁹⁰ His new wife first appears in the records on 17 June 1386: *CPR 1385–9*, 163. For the Welles family, see *Complete Peerage*, xii, pt 2, 441–3.

⁹¹ Goodman, *Loyal Conspiracy*, 163; Saul, *Richard II*, 121–3; *Complete Peerage*, xii, pt 2, 442–3.

⁹² *CCR 1385–9*, 22; *CPR 1385–9*, 68.

and said that they were aggrieved in none of the premises'.⁹³ Having received the all clear, Courtenay had the record of his exoneration enrolled in the Irish chancery, no doubt in anticipation of future attacks on him.⁹⁴ This precaution did him little good. In January, the two envoys who had been elected 'at the councils at Dublin and Kilkenny' set out for England. They travelled separately. The archbishop of Dublin landed in England on 14 January 1386.⁹⁵ Bishop Alexander Balscot of Ossory set sail on 20 January,⁹⁶ probably taking with him a copy of the grievances presented at the assemblies held at Kilkenny and Dublin.⁹⁷ Balscot's aim was clearly to petition for Courtenay's dismissal. In this he was successful. The lieutenant was accused of 'intolerable oppressions, duresses [and] excesses', and on 26 March 1386 Balscot was issued with a strict order to place Courtenay under arrest.⁹⁸

Like Ormond, Bishop Alexander Balscot was rewarded for travelling to England. On 10 March 1386 he was translated from his diocese of Ossory to Meath, a move that would certainly have been considered a promotion.⁹⁹ Balscot's associate, Robert Crull, was appointed treasurer of Ireland.¹⁰⁰ These complainants against Courtenay seem to have crystallised to form the colonial element in the expedition that Robert de Vere was to have led to Ireland. All three – Earl James III of Ormond, Bishop Alexander of Meath (chancellor of Ireland) and Robert Crull (the newly appointed treasurer) – were soon consorting with the officials of the marquess of Dublin, in particular the man de Vere appointed as his lieutenant in Ireland, Sir John Stanley.¹⁰¹ During the spring of 1386, shipping was arrested along the west coast of England for de Vere's army and protections were issued to his men.¹⁰² On 12 February the admirals were ordered to release a ship called *le Gabriel* of Waterford, captained by Walter Spence, for the use of the earl of Ormond.¹⁰³ Ormond was retained by the marquess, his company consisting of twenty-six men-at-arms and eighty archers.¹⁰⁴ Another member of Sir John Stanley's retinue was Ormond's step-father, Sir Robert

⁹³ A similarly 'curious comedy' was played out in the Westminster parliament of January 1390, when the majority of the king's ministers asked to be discharged from office. They then demanded that anyone who wished to accuse them of any offence or official impropriety should declare it publicly in parliament. The challenge went unanswered, and the ministers were reappointed: Given-Wilson (ed.), 'Richard II: Parliament of January 1390, Text and Translation', in *PROME*, item 6. The phrase quoted is that of Tout, *Chapters*, iii, 460.

⁹⁴ *Statutes ... of the Parliament of Ireland*, 486–7 (*RCH*, 128, no. 9).

⁹⁵ *CPR 1388–92*, 88.

⁹⁶ *RCH*, 124, nos. 79, 82.

⁹⁷ *Statutes ... of the Parliament of Ireland*, 484–7 (*RCH*, 128, no. 18). These complaints were exemplified on 14 January, the very same day that the chancellor, Bishop Alexander Balscot, nominated a series of attorneys. The next day, 15 January, Balscot appointed Thomas Everdon as his deputy during his absence: *RCH*, 124, nos. 80–81, 96; *ibid.*, 126, nos. 161–2.

⁹⁸ T. Rymer, *Foedera, Conventiones, Litterae, etc.*, ed. G. Holmes (20 vols., London, 1704–13), vii, 504–5; NLI, MS 4 [Harris], fol. 15–15v; *CCR 1385–9*, 49.

⁹⁹ *NHI*, ix, 286. He was addressed by his new title on 26 March, when the king ordered him to arrest Courtenay, 'late the king's lieutenant': *CCR 1385–9*, 49.

¹⁰⁰ For Crull's account as treasurer, see *IExp*, 544–5.

¹⁰¹ Stanley was appointed by de Vere at London on 20 March 1386, but his indenture (which was later enrolled in the Irish chancery) is dated 8 June at Kennington: TNA:PRO, C 47/10/24/8 (*RCH*, 131, no. 31). De Vere had been granted Kennington for eight years without rent on 4 February 1386: *CPR 1385–9*, 115. For Stanley, see M. J. Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism: Cheshire and Lancashire Society in the Age of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Cambridge, 1983), 215–23.

¹⁰² *CPR 1385–9*, 125–6, 128, 130–31, 156.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 157.

Herford.¹⁰⁵ In June, Alexander Balscot and Robert Crull likewise brought small companies to the general muster of Stanley's army in the West Country.¹⁰⁶ The king himself displayed an interest in the arrangements and spent some time with de Vere at Bristol in mid-July.¹⁰⁷

One final aspect of this episode adds weight to the suggestion that Ormond's involvement in engineering Sir Philip Courtenay's fall from grace in 1385–6 was motivated by his private concerns, in particular his acrimonious relationship with the Desmond Geraldines. Early in 1386, just as the complainants against Courtenay were setting out for England, Sir Philip Courtenay issued Gerald, third of Desmond, with significant governmental commissions. On 4 January 1386 Courtenay nominated Desmond as his deputy, 'for the defence of Munster'.¹⁰⁸ The appointment gave Desmond authority across much of the south of Ireland, in Geraldine as well as Butler territories. A further sign of Courtenay's confidence came when he appointed Desmond and his adherent, Patrick Fox, as justices to take assizes in the crosslands of county Kerry.¹⁰⁹ By the time these grants were made, Courtenay was well aware of the actions being taken against him. With Ormond lobbying at Westminster, it is scarcely surprising that the lieutenant should have chosen this moment to grace the Desmond Geraldines with his favour.

II

As James, third earl of Ormond, set sail for Ireland in the summer of 1386, his affiliation to a royalist party surrounding the new marquess of Dublin was quite distinct. He was returning with a knighthood, a wife, and pecuniary reward; he had banqueted with the royal family and entered the service of the king's favourite; and letters had been issued ordering the arrest of Sir Philip Courtenay. All this seemed set to guarantee Ormond's pre-eminence. It was to be a transient victory. The turn of events in England in the autumn of 1386 conveyed an important lesson. To be the king's friend was not always a blessing; indeed, at times it was decidedly a predicament. We turn now to the ramifications across the Irish Sea of factional politics in England.

The 'Wonderful' parliament, which was in session from 1 October to 28 November 1386, was extremely hostile to the king and his ministers.¹¹⁰ Amid this charged

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 130. Herford had been disadvantaged during Courtenay's lieutenancy. The lands and tenements he held with his wife, Elizabeth, widow of Earl James II of Ormond, were seized into the king's hands due to his past debts and his absence from Ireland. On 21 September 1386, Sir John Stanley, in his capacity as lieutenant of the marquess of Dublin, ordered restoration of these lands: NLI, MS 4 [Harris], fol. 23.

¹⁰⁶ *CPR 1385–9*, 163. Crull nominated attorneys on 12 June 1386: *ibid.*, 155. One of Crull's attorneys, William Rikhill, also served as attorney for the earl of Ormond: *ibid.*, 152.

¹⁰⁷ Saul, *Richard II*, 155, 471.

¹⁰⁸ NAI, Lodge MSS, xvii, fol. 149 (*RCH*, 127, no. 238). A grant to Desmond of forty pounds from the fee farm of the city of Cork – issued as a reward 'for certain great expenses which the said earl sustained in the parts of Munster' – may also date from this time. The grant was made 'in the time of the Marquis [*sic*] of Dublin', which might refer to any time between 1 December 1385 and 13 October 1386; but, in light of Desmond's recent appointment 'for the defence of Munster', it is conceivable that it predates Courtenay's flight from Ireland in April 1386: *PKCI*, 126–8, no. 113.

¹⁰⁹ *RCH*, 127, no. 242.

¹¹⁰ *HBC*, 565.

environment the king acted to inflame feeling by creating Robert de Vere duke of Ireland.¹¹¹ This act of bravado on the king's part was followed by an extended period during which his power was constrained. From 19 November, the government of England was vested in a commission that was to hold office for a year. While the commission was not altogether inimical to the king's interests, some members – notably Archbishop Courtenay of Canterbury – were likely to be extremely hostile to the duke of Ireland and his supporters.¹¹² The shift in the balance of power was quite distinct. The court, which had been so willing to indulge complaints against Sir Philip Courtenay, suddenly began to support the former lieutenant. Courtenay had remained in office in Ireland until Easter 1386.¹¹³ In late April, being aware of the 'danger of arrest and imprisonment', he fled Ireland with his family and 'with great difficulty and danger escaped and came into England with great trouble'.¹¹⁴ He later sat as a knight in the 'Wonderful' parliament.¹¹⁵ The appointment of the commission of government in November 1386 provided him with an opportunity to recoup his losses. Courtenay petitioned that he had been thrust out of office contrary to the terms of his indenture. He accused de Vere's officers of seizing all his goods and chattels, as well as the revenues and profits of Ireland which should rightfully have been at his disposal. The ministers of the duke of Ireland were now ordered to restore these, while de Vere himself was instructed to pay Courtenay one thousand marks in compensation.¹¹⁶

This anxiety to ensure that Courtenay would receive justice doubtless stemmed from hostility to the new duke of Ireland. A side-effect was that the authority of de Vere's administration in Ireland, which should have bolstered Ormond's power, was undermined. It took a number of months for the impact of this reversal of fortune to be felt across the Irish Sea. Early in 1387, the sheriffs of Meath, Kildare, Dublin and Louth received instructions to investigate the 'oppressions and extortions' perpetrated by Sir Philip Courtenay.¹¹⁷ Seemingly the party hostile to Courtenay still held

¹¹¹ *Calendar of Charter Rolls 1341–1417*, 307; *Complete Peerage*, vii, 70. For the reaction to this promotion, see Given-Wilson (ed.), 'Richard II: Parliament of October 1386, Introduction', in *PROME*.

¹¹² Palmer, 'Parliament of 1385 and Constitutional Crisis of 1386', 488–9; W. M. Ormrod, 'Government by Commission: The Continual Council of 1386 and the English Royal Administration', *Peritia*, 10 (1996), 303–21.

¹¹³ He made a grant under the Irish seal on 14 April 1386, recorded in an *inspeximus* of 18 April 1388: *CPR 1385–9*, 432. A document enrolled in the Irish chancery states that Ireland came into the hands of the marquess of Dublin on 19 April 1386: *RCH*, 134, no. 125. Prior Richard White of the hospital of St John of Jerusalem was appointed as justiciar of Ireland by de Vere's council in England; he was sworn into that office on 19 April 1386: NLI, MS 4 [Harris], fols. 21, 31–31v. He served in that capacity until the arrival of Sir John Stanley on 30 August at Dalkey, co. Dublin. On 18 September in the Great Hall of Dublin Castle, Stanley displayed his patent of appointment to the king's council in Ireland: Bodleian Library, MS Rawl. B 502, fols. 95v–96r (*RCH*, 131, no. 31).

¹¹⁴ *Issues of the Exchequer* [...], ed. F. Devon (London, 1837), 241. It has twice been stated incorrectly that Courtenay was arrested in Ireland in 1390: N. Pronay and J. Taylor, *Parliamentary Texts of the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1980), 122; Kerby-Fulton and Horie, 'French Version of the *Modus*', 226–7, 229 note 5. In both cases, the document cited in support of this assertion is an order dated 27 October 1390 to investigate the 'goods and chattels of Philip de Courtenay there [in Ireland] arrested by the king's authority': *CPR 1388–92*, 349.

¹¹⁵ Tuck, 'Anglo-Irish Relations', 26; *House of Commons*, ii, 671–2.

¹¹⁶ *CCR 1385–9*, 232; Saul, *Richard II*, 165.

¹¹⁷ *RCH*, 136, nos. 205–6. Orders to take inquisitions concerning Courtenay's goods had been issued on 20 September 1386, shortly after Stanley assumed office as lieutenant of the marquess: *RCH*, 136, no. 184.

sway. A new mood soon became discernible. On 12 February 1387 Gerald, third earl of Desmond, was granted custody of the lands of his kinsman, Sir John Roche of Fermoy, during the minority of the latter's son and heir, Maurice (d. 1448).¹¹⁸ The Roche estates lay in county Cork, one of the regions in which Butler and Geraldine influence intersected. Ormond's later involvement with these Cork lands suggests that he was disgruntled the favour shown to his rival. In December 1390, the year after Richard II had declared himself fully of age, custody of the Roche lands was transferred to John Elyngham, a serjeant-at-arms of the king. Later, in 1397, Ormond along with the treasurer of Ireland from de Vere's period, Robert Crull, came to Elyngham's aid by swearing that the latter did not receive a penny from his grant until 20 August 1393.¹¹⁹ Ormond's support for Elyngham is significant. It suggests that he was gratified by the Geraldines's loss of the custody in 1390, and – stretching the evidence further back again – it tends to confirm that he considered the original grant of 1387 inimical to his interests. The grant to Desmond of the Roche inheritance predates by just one month the report of 14 March 1387 that great discords had once again broken out between Desmond and Ormond. The Roche wardship, of course, was hardly the sole cause of the conflict. Nonetheless, the preferment shown to Desmond is indicative of the uncertain atmosphere in which the conflict arose. At one moment Ormond's fortunes were in the ascendant, bolstered by the favour of the king and his favourite; the next, his support base had collapsed and his adversary was being cultivated.

The result of the arbitration in 1387 is not recorded, but it is relatively clear that Desmond continued to hold the confidence of the central government. In the next few years, during which Richard II's authority became increasingly uncertain, he was to receive a series of commissions bolstering his authority in the south of Ireland.¹²⁰ A less conventional show of support came on 8 December 1388, when Desmond was issued with a licence to foster his son, James (d. 1463), later seventh earl of Desmond, with Conchobhar Ó Briain, brother of Brian *Sreamach* Ó Briain of Thomond.¹²¹ The letter granting this licence speaks of the good place that Earl Gerald of Desmond daily held for the king in the parts of Munster.¹²² The wider Geraldine affinity also felt the warm glow of favour. On 3 February 1389 Patrick Fox – who was later to serve with Desmond as a keeper of the peace – was granted, in conjunction with the mayor and community of Limerick city, the keeping of the royal fishery in the city for seven years.¹²³ A decade previously, James III Butler (as he then was) had himself been granted the 'keeping of the weirs, issues and profits belonging to the king's fishery of Lymeryk' for ten years.¹²⁴ The ten-year term had only recently elapsed at Michaelmas 1388. The fact that the fishery should have

¹¹⁸ *RCH*, 133, no. 92; NAI, Ferguson Repertory, i, fol. 84. See *The Pipe Roll of Cloyne (Rotulus Pipae Clonensis)*, ed. P. MacCotter and K. W. Nicholls (Cloyne, 1996), 183; E. Donnelly, 'The Roches, Lords of Fermoy: The History of a Norman-Irish Family', *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, 40 (1935), 38.

¹¹⁹ *CCR 1396–9*, 119.

¹²⁰ R. Frame, 'Commissions of the Peace in Ireland, 1302–1461', *Analecta Hibernica*, 35 (1992), nos. 58, 107.

¹²¹ I have followed the numbering of the earls of Desmond in *NHI*, ix, 233; cf. *Complete Peerage*, iv, 246–7.

¹²² NAI, Lodge MSS, xxi, fol. 39 (*RCH*, 139, no. 88 [misprinted as no. 82]).

¹²³ *RCH*, 140, no. 124; Frame, 'Commissions of the Peace in Ireland', nos. 58–9, 108.

¹²⁴ *CFR 1377–83*, 103.

passed so soon into the hands of a Geraldine supporter must truly have been an affront to Ormond.

Meanwhile, the conflict in England had intensified. As the crisis approached its most furious point in the winter of 1387, Sir John Stanley returned to England leaving Alexander, bishop of Meath, as justiciar of Ireland.¹²⁵ Robert de Vere, duke of Ireland, fled to the continent after losing the battle of Radcot Bridge in December 1387. During the 'Merciless' parliament, which convened at Westminster on 3 February 1388, he was sentenced in his absence to death and forfeiture.¹²⁶ The duchy of Ireland – now in its last days – was not isolated from the furore. On 6 March the king's confessor, Bishop Thomas Russhok of Chichester, and six royal justices were banished from England and condemned to live out their lives in the Irish coastal towns of Dublin, Cork, Waterford and Drogheda.¹²⁷ Shortly afterwards, on 20 March, parliament was prorogued until 13 April.¹²⁸ During the hiatus, letters were sent to Ireland commanding the justiciar to cease using the duke of Ireland's seal, banners and pennons, 'as the king is informed that the bishop in error used the seal of the said Robert [de Vere, late duke of Ireland] ... after common knowledge that by reason of a judgement rendered against him in this parliament he forfeited to the king all his lordships, manors, lands and goods, likewise causing the said Robert's banners etc. to be raised against attacks of the [king's Irish] enemies, to the dishonour of the king'.¹²⁹ The traffic to and fro across the Irish Sea was clearly swift.¹³⁰ De Vere had been condemned early in February 1388.¹³¹ Tidings of his fate had been carried to Ireland and news of the justiciar's recalcitrance borne back to Westminster, all within the space of two months.

Ormond's attitude to this activity is difficult to assess. We cannot assume that he was entirely hostile to the Appellant movement. Like most of the English nobility, he probably had no desire to have his 'head broken for the duke of Ireland'.¹³² There is no evidence that he offered de Vere any support, military or otherwise, in 1387–8. Rather, he seems to have spent this time sitting out the storm in Ireland.¹³³ Ormond may even have sympathised with the Appellants. One of their leading supporters was Sir Thomas Mortimer, a former chief governor of Ireland and half-brother of Edmund, earl of March (d. 1381), with whom Ormond's father had been on friendly terms.¹³⁴ Sir Thomas Mortimer slew the constable of Chester, Sir Thomas Molineux,

¹²⁵ Stanley's last recorded pleas were held on 4 November 1387; the bishop of Meath held pleas on 13 November. See Wood, 'Office of Chief Governor', 230.

¹²⁶ J. N. L. Myres, 'The Campaign of Radcot Bridge in December 1387', *EHR*, 42 (1927), 20–33; *HBC*, 565.

¹²⁷ Given-Wilson (ed.), 'Richard II: Parliament of February 1388, Text and Translation', *PROME*, pt 3, 'Attainers'. See also *CCR 1385–9*, 509–10, 515–16; *Knighton's Chronicle*, 502–5; *Westminster Chronicle*, 336–7; *Usk*, 12–13; Bibliothèque Municipale de Troyes, MS 1316, fol. 49v. *HBC*, 565.

¹²⁸ *Foedera*, vii, 577; *CCR 1385–9*, 388 (quotation); *PKCI*, xiii–xiv, no. 3.

¹³⁰ For communications across the Irish Sea, see Frame, *English Lordship in Ireland*, 114–19.

¹³¹ Saul, *Richard II*, 193.

¹³² A comment attributed to Ralph, Lord Basset: *Knighton's Chronicle*, 407. See also C. Given-Wilson's comment that most lords 'were more concerned to avoid trouble than to take a stand': 'Richard II and the Higher Nobility', in *Richard II: The Art of Kingship*, 116.

¹³³ *NLI*, D 1314 (*COD*, ii, no. 285); *PKCI*, xii, no. 2.

¹³⁴ *NHI*, ix, 474; Crooks, 'Factionalism and Noble Power', 139–41, 154–7.

at the battle of Radcot Bridge, a fact recorded by several English chroniclers.¹³⁵ Its contemporary significance in Ireland is suggested by the fact that Henry Marlborough noted in his Irish chronicle that Thomas Molineux had been killed 'apud Rotcotebrig' in 1387.¹³⁶

Ormond's private feelings may be unknowable, but the adverse effect of the Appellant crisis on his career is all too apparent. In contrast to Earl Gerald of Desmond, Ormond virtually disappears from the records after 1387. His interests had been closely tied to the party surrounding Robert de Vere.¹³⁷ The careers of such men were in jeopardy in 1388. The general antipathy that was directed towards the king's justices in England during the Appellant crisis also flared up in Ireland at this time.¹³⁸ One royal justice, Edmund Clay, had been commissioned to arrest Sir Philip Courtenay in 1386 and had later served de Vere as chief justice of Ireland.¹³⁹ Shortly after the fall of the duke of Ireland, Clay was accused at court of 'various extortions, damages, grievances and excesses against the king and people [in Ireland]', and, in April 1388, mandates for his arrest were issued.¹⁴⁰ By that summer, messengers acting on behalf of the Appellants had reached the colony. In July 1388 one John Horwelle, a sergeant-at-arms, attended a great council held at Clonmel, where he furnished the assembly with the names of those king's knights who had been put 'beyond the protection of the lord king at the last parliament held in England'.¹⁴¹ His little list included Robert de Vere's chamberlain, Sir John Lancaster, who had served alongside Ormond as a commander in the expedition that de Vere was supposed to have led to Ireland in 1386.¹⁴² Another man who was closely associated with the Butler family and who had been arrested earlier in 1388 was Richard II's chamber knight, Sir Nicholas Dagworth.¹⁴³ Like these men, Ormond seems to have been considered part of a political out-group. Consequently, he was not entrusted with the task of seizing offices granted by de Vere or dismantling the symbols of his administration.¹⁴⁴

Association with the duke of Ireland had, therefore, proved embarrassing for Ormond. The atmosphere in Ireland in 1388 did not seem propitious for a recovery of his former status. By the late summer of that year, the earl had decided to travel

¹³⁵ *Westminster Chronicle*, 222–3; *Knighton's Chronicle*, 422–3. See J. L. Gillespie, 'Thomas Mortimer and Thomas Molineux: Radcot Bridge and the Appeal of 1397', *Albion*, 7 (1975), 161–73, especially 163–5; Myres, 'The Campaign of Radcot Bridge', 20–33; A. Dunn, 'Richard II and the Mortimer Inheritance', in C. Given-Wilson (ed.), *Fourteenth Century England II* (Woodbridge, 2002), 161–3.

¹³⁶ Bibliothèque Municipale de Troyes, MS 1316, fol. 49v.

¹³⁷ Ormond served, for instance, as justiciar 'of the marquess [of Dublin] in Ireland': *IExp*, 545.

¹³⁸ For that hostility in England, see J. R. Maddicott, *Law and Lordship: Royal Justices as Retainers in Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-Century England*, Past and Present Supplement 4 (1978), 66–8.

¹³⁹ *Foedera*, vii, 504; *CCR 1385–9*, 49. Clay was appointed chief justice of the lieutenant's bench on 20 September 1386, shortly after the arrival of Sir John Stanley: *RCH*, 132, no. 49; NLI, MS 4 [Harris], fol. 24. See F. E. Ball, *The Judges in Ireland, 1222–1922* (2 vols., New York, 1927), i, 166.

¹⁴⁰ *CCR 1385–9*, 411.

¹⁴¹ *Parliaments & Councils*, 125–7, no. 71.

¹⁴² Sir John Lancaster brought twenty men-at-arms and sixty archers to a muster of de Vere's army in the summer of 1386: *CPR 1385–9*, 163. On Lancaster, see Tuck, *Richard II*, 61, 80.

¹⁴³ *Issues of the Exchequer*, 235; *Westminster Chronicle*, 228–9; C. Given-Wilson, *The Royal Household and the King's Affinity: Service, Politics, and Finance in England, 1360–1413* (New Haven and London, 1986), 162. For the Ormond–Dagworth connection, see Crooks, 'Factionalism and Noble Power', 113–14, 137–48.

¹⁴⁴ *CPR 1385–9*, 436.

to England.¹⁴⁵ His visit was well-timed. It coincided with Richard II's wooing of the commons at the Cambridge parliament of September 1388, which gained the king support from a political community that was increasingly disenchanted with the Appellant coalition.¹⁴⁶ Early the next year, the king won over the two least committed Appellants, the earls of Nottingham and Derby.¹⁴⁷ Ormond had returned to Ireland by this time. A change in official attitudes to him is detectable by mid-February 1389, when he was appointed 'keeper and governor' of Kilkenny and Tipperary.¹⁴⁸ This was no great concession. The Butlers were, after all, lords of the liberty of Tipperary, while Kilkenny was at the centre of their interests. But the appointment is indicative of a slight warming in the political climate. The thaw truly arrived after 3 May 1389, the day Richard II assumed the governance of his realm.¹⁴⁹ The monk of Westminster, who had previously made note of Ormond's career, records that Richard removed 'all officers, both greater and less, even those beyond the sea'.¹⁵⁰ And indeed, Richard II was soon attending to the business of making appointments in Ireland. On 31 July, Sir John Stanley entered into an indenture with the king to serve as justiciar of Ireland for three years.¹⁵¹ On 1 August the patent of his appointment was issued.¹⁵² His powers of patronage were clarified on 13 August,¹⁵³ and a week later the appointment was discussed and ratified by the king's council in England.¹⁵⁴ With Stanley's appointment confirmed, the two other principal ministers were slotted into place. Bishop Alexander Balscot of Meath was appointed as chancellor of Ireland,¹⁵⁵ and Robert Crull was once again admitted as treasurer.¹⁵⁶ The intention was clearly to reconstitute the Irish administration as it had existed in the time of the duke of Ireland, when Stanley, Balscot, and Crull had held the three senior posts in the Irish administration.

Even before this reorganisation at the pinnacle of the royal administration, Richard II's assumption of power had affected the distribution of authority at a local level in the colony. At the end of May 1389 Thomas Butler, brother of Earl James III of Ormond, together with Nicholas White of Clonmel, was appointed to investigate seditions in county Cork.¹⁵⁷ Here was a clear sign that Ormond was once again flexing his muscles in the south of Ireland. Other appointments to investigate

¹⁴⁵ *RCH*, 138, no. 32; *ibid.*, 141, no. 195.

¹⁴⁶ A. Tuck, 'The Cambridge Parliament, 1388', *EHR*, 84 (1969), 225–43; Saul, *Richard II*, 200–2; Saul, 'The Commons and the Abolition of Badges', *Parliamentary History*, 9 (1990), 302–15.

¹⁴⁷ Saul, *Richard II*, 203.

¹⁴⁸ NAI, Lodge MSS, xvii, fol. 149 (*RCH*, 142, no. 226).

¹⁴⁹ *Foedera*, vii, 618–19; *CCR 1385–9*, 671.

¹⁵⁰ *Westminster Chronicle*, 390–92; Tout, *Chronicles*, iii, 456–7.

¹⁵¹ TNA:PRO, E 101/68/11/265 (*RCH*, 145, no. 136).

¹⁵² *CPR 1388–92*, 91 (*RCH*, 144, no. 77).

¹⁵³ *CPR 1388–92*, 99. Stanley was granted Blackcastle, co. Meath, on 23 August 1389: *CPR 1388–92*, 106; *RCH*, 144, no. 81; *COD*, ii, no. 291; NAI, Ferguson Repertory, i, fol. 144; BL, Add. MS 4798, fol. 19.

¹⁵⁴ *Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England*, ed. N. H. Nicolas (7 vols., London, 1834–7), i, 7.

¹⁵⁵ *CPR 1388–92*, 109 (*RCH*, 144, no. 78). He was sworn into office as chancellor on 25 October: *RCH*, 144, no. 79.

¹⁵⁶ *CPR 1388–92*, 103. Crull had been removed from the treasurership on 27 May 1388. He did not, in fact, resume the office until 1391. In the mean time, Richard White, prior of the hospital of St John of Jerusalem in Ireland, served as treasurer: *IExp*, 545–6.

¹⁵⁷ *RCH*, 142, no. 242. The commission was repeated on 1 June: NAI, Lodge MSS, xvii, fol. 149 (*RCH*, 141, no. 185).

seditions in counties Kilkenny, Waterford and Wexford provide further evidence of Ormond's rehabilitation. The Kilkenny commission, for instance, was to be headed by Ormond's retainer, Sir Patrick Freigne.¹⁵⁸ Meanwhile, Ormond's step-father, Sir Robert Herford – who had crisscrossed the Irish Sea during 1388–9, probably representing Butler interests – received an English-seal appointment as chancellor of the green wax of the Irish exchequer.¹⁵⁹ Richard II's assertion of authority in 1389, therefore, seems to have led to an immediate improvement in Ormond's standing in Ireland. Royal favour was, once again, demonstrating its capacity to further careers.

III

This review of the events of 1382–9 serves, in the first place, as a corrective to the traditional portrayal of the nobles of English Ireland in the late fourteenth century as disengaged from workings of the central government. The royal administration – far from being 'ineffectual' and unable to suppress the violence of a disharmonious nobility¹⁶⁰ – was in fact a cardinal feature of the factional struggle between the Geraldines and Butlers, whether as a vehicle for the promotion of private fortunes or as a forum for vigorous politicking with the intention of subverting the interests of rivals. Since high office and proximity to court were primary constituents of power, it follows that internal political alignments played a central role in determining colonial attitudes to the king's ministers. By the same token, political waves generated at the factious court of Richard II had the power to rock Irish boats.

Recognition of this interdependence allows us to decipher the otherwise bewildering politics of late fourteenth-century Ireland; but a point of wider significance emerges when Ireland is placed in a framework of colonialism more generally. Irish historians of an earlier generation might well have depicted the political patterns reviewed in this essay in terms of J. C. Beckett's 'Anglo-Irish Tradition'.¹⁶¹ Such fond insularism has since fallen by the wayside. 'Greater Britain' and (for some early modernists) the 'Atlantic World' are now the paradigms of choice.¹⁶² The gusto with which scholars have opened up the borders between old national historiographies has rarely, however, been matched by a desire step out from behind chronological barricades.¹⁶³ One historian has recently stated that '[a]sserting an on-going continuity between the Norman [*sic*] colonization of Ireland and Britain's early modern imperial Atlantic adventures is ... implausible'.¹⁶⁴ Yet the utility of a longer view is strongly suggested by Keith Stringer's reflections on another modish topic

¹⁵⁸ *RCH*, 141, no. 182.

¹⁵⁹ *CPR 1388–92*, 49. For his movements, see *CPR 1385–9*, 505; *RCH*, 141, no. 202.

¹⁶⁰ Watt, 'Anglo-Irish Colony under Strain, 1327–99', in *NHI*, ii, 390–91.

¹⁶¹ J. C. Beckett, *The Anglo-Irish Tradition* (London, 1976), especially 24–5.

¹⁶² The literature is vast, but for a useful entrypoint into the debate, see D. Armitage, 'Greater Britain: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis?', *American Historical Review*, 104 (1999), 427–45; J. Ohlmeyer, 'Seventeenth-Century Ireland and the New British and Atlantic Histories', *ibid.*, 446–62.

¹⁶³ Although see A. F. McC. Madden, '1066, 1776 and All That: The Relevance of English Medieval Experience of "Empire" to Later Imperial Constitutional Issues', in J. E. Flint and G. Williams (eds.), *Perspectives of Empire: Essays Presented to Gerald S. Graham* (London, 1973), 16–18.

¹⁶⁴ K. Kenny, 'Ireland and the British Empire: An Introduction', in K. Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford, 2004), 6.

– nationalism – and his conclusion that ‘medievalists and modernists have more to learn from each other than has often been thought’.¹⁶⁵

This essay could be thought of as an attempt to bring a medieval Irish dimension to the growing portfolio of work which describes how the distribution of power in colonies – in many times and many places – was typically the result of a ‘bargaining process’ between settler elites and the agents of the metropolitan government.¹⁶⁶ Further work exploring points of contrast with other colonial societies would naturally be instructive.¹⁶⁷ But, in many respects, it is the continuities that are the most striking. The exasperation of the sixteenth-century chief governor, Sir Henry Sidney (d. 1586),¹⁶⁸ could perhaps stand for the mindset of some of his counterparts two centuries before:

This [divided] composition of a Council I thought convenient, for the primitive reformation of so old a cancered faction as was and yet is between the two earls [of Desmond and Ormond], who albeit they would inveigh against each other, yet if any sentence passed for the advancement of the Queen’s¹⁶⁹ prerogative, or suppression of either of their tyrannies, straightways it was cried out of, and complained to the Queen, specially by the Earl of Ormond, as injustice and oppression.¹⁷⁰

Of course, the king’s lieutenants of the medieval period did not write memoirs, so historians must scavenge elsewhere for juicy titbits. One such is Sir Philip Courtenay’s effort – which sprang from a similar feeling of personal insecurity in a factious environment – to gain vindication from the great council held at Dublin in October 1385.¹⁷¹ Nor need the parallels end in the Tudor era, for the theme of this essay touches on the eternal dilemma of colonial administrators. At the turn of the twentieth century, the political novelist, Rev. James Owen Hannay (1865–1950), memorably captured the gulf between the theoretical powers of a chief governor and the practical limitations imposed by indigenous interest groups:

The Right Honourable George Chesney was a Cabinet Minister, and was popularly supposed to govern Ireland. In reality, his position was like that of a football in a tightly-packed scrimmage. Vigorous forwards impelled him, more by kicking than persuasion, in opposite directions. The equilibrium which might have resulted was continually being interfered with by adroit players, who

¹⁶⁵ K. Stringer, ‘Social and Political Communities in European History: Some Reflections on Recent Studies’, in C. Björn, A. Grant and K. Stringer (eds.), *Nations, Nationalism and Patriotism in the European Past* (Copenhagen, 1994), 9–34 (quotation at 23).

¹⁶⁶ J. P. Greene, ‘Negotiated Authorities: The Problem of Governance in the Extended Politics of the Early Modern Atlantic World’, *Negotiated Authorities: Essays in Colonial Political and Constitutional History* (Charlottesville and London, 1994), 14–16; J. L. Phelan, ‘Authority and Flexibility in the Spanish Imperial Bureaucracy’, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 5 (1960), 47–65.

¹⁶⁷ S. Reynolds has demonstrated the value of such an approach: ‘Empires: A Problem of Comparative History’, *BIHR*, 79 (2006), 151–65. For some preliminary remarks contrasting medieval and early modern states and their capacity to pursue colonial projects, see J. Ohlmeyer, ‘A Laboratory for Empire?: Early Modern Ireland and English Imperialism’, in Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire*, 28.

¹⁶⁸ For whom, see W. T. MacCaffrey, ‘Sidney, Sir Henry’, in *ODNB*, 1, 545–50.

¹⁶⁹ Elizabeth I (1558–1603).

¹⁷⁰ C. Brady (ed.), *A Viceroy’s Vindication? Sir Henry Sidney’s Memoir of Service in Ireland, 1556–78* (Cork, 2002), 52.

¹⁷¹ *Statutes ... of the Parliament of Ireland*, 486–7 (*RCH*, 128, no. 9).

shoved him sideways or heeled him out backwards ... He was never without the consciousness that alert half-backs were lurking in Westminster, eager for a chance of picking him up and whisking him away. It speaks for the toughness of the leather in which he was encased that the Right Honourable Mr. Chesney not only enjoyed life, but continued fully distended with that wind which is the prime necessity of politicians who make many speeches.¹⁷²

Few chief governors in late medieval Ireland could boast such leathery resilience!

¹⁷² George A. Birmingham [pseud.], *The Seething Pot* (London, 1905), 95–6. On Hannay, see B. Taylor, *The Life and Writings of James Owen Hannay (George A. Birmingham), 1865–1950* (Lewiston [NY], 1995); and for a sketch of Hannay's mental world, see A. Gailey, 'An Irishman's World', *The Irish Review*, 13 (1992–3), 31–9. My thanks to Dr Gailey for bringing my attention to this passage.