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John fitzThomas, Fifth Lord
of Offaly and First Earl of
Kildare 1287 - 1316

A Study of an
Anglo - Irish Magnate

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John fitzThomas, fifth lord of Offaly and first earl of Kildare

1287 – 1316

A study of an Anglo-Irish Magnate

Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D.

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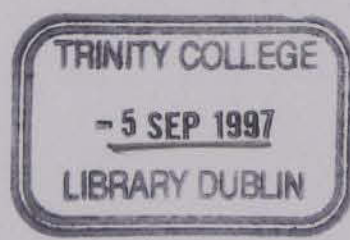
Cormac Ó Cléirigh

Trinity College Dublin
Department of Medieval History
November 1996

John the Evangelist: His work as Bishop and first pope of Ireland

1987 - 1988

A study of an Anglo-Irish Manuscript



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to abandon a job that was both permanent and pensionable, in order to pursue the uncertainties of student life.

I, Conor O'Connell declare that none of the material contained in this thesis has been submitted for another degree at any other institution, and that the research contained herein is entirely my own.

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Summary

John fitzThomas, fifth lord of Offaly and first earl of Kildare, 1287–1316

Cormac Ó Cléirigh

This thesis is a study of the career of John fitzThomas, a member of the family known as the Geraldines of Offaly, who became lord of Offaly in 1287, and was created earl of Kildare just before his death in 1316. The study has two main aims. In the first instance, it will attempt to provide a reasonably coherent account of the most important events of fitzThomas's life. Thus, it will describe how he rose from relative obscurity to become lord of Offaly at a time when his lineage was threatened with extinction. It will then examine the manner in which fitzThomas entered into a series of serious conflicts during the 1290s, which led to his disgrace and the loss of a major proportion of his landed wealth. Thereafter, it will describe how his participation in military campaigns overseas in the service of Edward I served to rehabilitate him in the eyes of his king. The study will also provide an account of fitzThomas's turbulent relationships with his Irish neighbours before going on to explain the circumstances which led to fitzThomas's elevation to the earldom of Kildare in May 1316.

The second aim of this work is to draw upon the experiences of John's life in an effort to cast some light upon the crucial role played by the Anglo-Irish magnates within the society of the lordship of Ireland. Hence, it examines issues such as the importance of a magnate's family ties, the necessity to cultivate local connections, the uneasy link between the magnates and the Dublin government, the attitudes held by magnates about public order and most significantly, the critical importance of the personal relationship between an Anglo-Irish magnate and his king.

Abbreviations

AC	<i>Annála Connacht : the Annals of Connacht, A.D. 1224 –1544. Ed. A. M. Freeman. Dublin, 1944.</i>
AFM	<i>Annala rioghachta Eireann : Annals of the kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters, from the earliest period to the year 1616. Ed. J. O'Donovan. 7 vols. Dublin, 1851.</i>
AI	<i>The Annals of Inisfallen. Ed. S. Mac Airt. Dublin, 1951.</i>
ALC	<i>The annals of Loch Cé : a chronicle of Irish affairs, 1014–1590. Ed. W. M. Hennessey. 2 vols. London, 1871.</i>
AnnClon	<i>The annals of Clonmacnoise, being annals of Ireland from the earliest period to A. D. 1408. Trans. Connell Mageoghagan. Ed. Denis Murphy. Dublin, 1896.</i>
AU	<i>Annala Uladh : Annals of Ulster ... 431 to 1541. Ed. W. M. Hennessey [and B. MacCarthy]. 4 vols. Dublin, 1887–1901.</i>
Cal. Carew MSS	<i>Calendar of the Carew manuscripts preserved in the archiepiscopal library at Lambeth. Ed. J. S. Brewer and W. Bullen. 6 vols. London, 1867 – 73.</i>
Cal. Chanc. warr., 1244–1326	<i>Calendar of chancery warrants ... 1244 –1326. London, 1927.</i>
Cal. Chart. Rolls	<i>Calendar of charter rolls ... 1226 – [1516]. 6 vols. London, 1903–27.</i>
Cal. fine rolls	<i>Calendar of the fine rolls ... 1272 – [1509]. 22 vols. London, 1911 – 62.</i>
Cal. Gormanston Reg.	<i>Calendar of the Gormanston Register circa 1175–1397. Ed. J. Mills and M. J. McEnery. Dublin, 1916.</i>

<i>Cal. Ormond deeds</i>	<i>Calendar of Ormond deeds, 1172–1603.</i> Ed. E. Curtis. 6 vols. Dublin, 1932–43.
<i>Cal. Inq. P.M.</i>	<i>Calendars of inquisitions post mortem and other analogous documents ... Henry III – [15 Richard II].</i> 16 vols. London, 1909 – 74.
CCR	<i>Calendar of the close rolls ... 1272 – [1509].</i> 47 vols. London, 1892 – 1963.
<i>Chart. St Marys</i>	<i>Chartularies of St. Mary's abbey, Dublin; with the register of its house at Dunbrody, and annals of Ireland.</i> Ed. J.T. Gilbert. 2 vols. London, 1884.
CDI	<i>Calendar of documents relating to Ireland ..., 1171 – [1307].</i> Ed. H. S. Sweetman and G. F. Handcock. 5 vols. London, 1875 – 86.
CJR	<i>Calendar of the justiciary rolls ... of Ireland.</i> Ed. James Mills. 2 vols. Dublin, 1905–14. Ed. Herbert Wood and A. E. Langman; revised by M. C. Griffith. Dublin, [1956].
<i>Clyn</i>	<i>The annals of Ireland by Friar John Clyn and Thady Dowling, together with the annals of Ross.</i> Ed. Richard Butler. Dublin, 1849.
CPR	<i>Calendar of the patent rolls ... 1232 – [1509].</i> 53 vols. London, 1891 - 1971.
DKPRI	<i>Calendar of Pipe Rolls.</i> In <i>DKPRI</i> nos 35 (1903) pp 29–50; 36 (1904) pp 22–77; 37 (1905) pp 24–55; 38 (1906) pp 29–104; 39 (1907) pp 21–74.
<i>G.E.C., Peerage</i>	Gibbs, Vicary and others. <i>Cokayne's complete peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom.</i> 13 vols. London, 1910 – 59.
<i>Giraldus, Expugnatio</i>	<i>Giraldus Cambrensis, Expugnatio Hibernica: the conquest of Ireland.</i>

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H. G. Richardson and G. O. Sayles.
London, 1935.
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*Rotulorum patentium et clausorum
cancellarie Hiberniae calendarium*.
Ed. Edward Tresham. Dublin, 1828.
- Rotuli parl.
Rotuli parliamentorum ... [1278 – 1503]. 7
vols. [London, 1783 – 1832].

Sayles, *Affairs of Ireland*

Documents on the affairs of Ireland before the king's council. Ed. G. O. Sayles. Dublin, 1979.

Stanihurst

Holinshed's Irish chronicle: the historie of Irelande from the first inhabitation thereof, vnto the year 1509. Collected by Raphaell Holinshed, and continued till the year 1547 by Richarde Stanyhurst. Ed. L. Miller and E. Power. Dublin, 1979.

Stat. Ire. John – Henry V

Statutes and ordinances and acts of the parliament of Ireland : King John to Henry V. Ed. H. F. Berry. Dublin, 1907.

Introduction.

Know then, that my predecessors and ancestors ... arrived in this island of Ireland, and by their swords obtained great possessions, and achieved great feats of arms; and up to the present day have increased and multiplied into many branches and families, insomuch that I, by the grace of God, possess by hereditary right the earldom of Kildare, holding diverse castles and manors ... Our house has increased beyond measure, in a multitude of barons, knights and noble persons, holding many possessions, and having under their command many persons.

Gerald, 8th earl of Kildare, to the family of the Gherardini in Florence, 27 May 1507.¹

When the Great earl of Kildare wrote to his putative relatives in Florence, his manifest pride in recounting his family's achievements was amply justified. From the arrival of Maurice fitzGerald I at Wexford in 1169, the great aristocratic lineage known as the Geraldines or the Fitzgeralds had always been to the forefront of affairs within the lordship of Ireland. In the words of the pioneering historian G. H. Orpen, 'no family has so continuously played an important part in the drama of Irish history as the Geraldines'.² Indeed, by the beginning of the sixteenth century, the branch of the family led by the Great earl himself, namely the Geraldines of Offaly, had come to dominate Ireland, presiding over a great network of alliances that extended throughout the island, and enjoying a near monopolistic hold upon the office of chief governor.³ To a great extent, modern perceptions of the Geraldines have been shaped by the literary works of Gerald of Wales and Richard Stanihurst, who glorified the deeds of Maurice fitzGerald I and his kindred and of the Great earl respectively. Both writers portrayed the lineage's members as bold decisive men of action, the living embodiments of aristocratic virtue, whose manifest talents were unfairly questioned by their envious inferiors. Thus,

¹ Bryan, *Gerald FitzGerald the great earl of Kildare*, pp 252–3.

² Orpen, *Normans*, iii, p. 111.

³ *N. H. I.*, ii, pp 638–661

Gerald of Wales, who was of course himself a Geraldine, included the following remarkable passage in the *Expugnatio Hibernica* :—

Who are the men who penetrate the enemy's innermost strongholds ? The FitzGerald.

Who are the men who protect their native land ? The FitzGerald.

Who are the men the enemy fear ? The FitzGerald.

Who are the men whom envy denigrates ? The FitzGerald.⁴

In a similar vein, while describing the successful Anglo-Norman defence of Dublin during the summer of 1171, Gerald put what might be called the first expression of a distinctly 'Anglo-Irish' outlook into the mouth of his uncle Maurice fitzGerald I. At a critical stage during the siege, Gerald had Maurice exhorting the beleaguered garrison to take decisive action by observing that 'just as we are English as far as the Irish are concerned, likewise to the English we are Irish, and the inhabitants of this island and the other assail us with equal hatred'.⁵ Writing four centuries later, Richard Stanihurst quoted Gerald of Wales's exaltation of the lineage with evident approval.⁶ Moreover, he then went on to imbue the Great earl of Kildare with precisely the same qualities of martial prowess and general audacity.⁷

Undoubtedly, the vivid imagery employed by Gerald and Stanihurst has served to immortalise the achievements of individuals like Maurice fitzGerald I and the Great earl. However, the writers' celebration of what could be described as the lineage's 'manifest destiny' to play a leading role in the affairs of Ireland lends a certain air of inevitability to the dominance which they actually achieved during 'the Kildare ascendancy' of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.⁸ In turn, this impression has the effect of overshadowing the critical importance of the career of another family member, namely John fitzThomas, fifth lord of Offaly, who was created first earl of Kildare in May 1316. For when

⁴ Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 168–71.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 80–1; *N.H.I.*, ii, pp 84–5.

⁶ *Stanihurst*, p. 81.

⁷ For examples of Stanihurst's glorification of the Great earl see *Stanihurst*, pp 68–9, 250–3.

⁸ See *N. H. I.*, ii, pp 591–618, 638–661; Lydon, *The Lordship of Ireland in the Middle Ages*, pp 271–8.

fitzThomas became lord of Offaly in 1287, the family's fortunes were at such a low ebb that their later success seemed to be anything but inevitable. Indeed, by 1287, the Geraldines of Offaly's position as one of the lordship of Ireland's leading aristocratic lineages was in imminent danger of eclipse. In the first place, the lordship of Offaly had recently endured a lengthy minority during which its estates had been in the hands of English absentees. Secondly, even after the re-emergence of a resident lord of Offaly in 1285, the generous English common law system of dower provision meant that a major proportion of the Geraldine properties remained under absentee control. Lastly and most importantly, in 1287 the Geraldines of Offaly faced extinction as fitzThomas, himself only a scion of a junior branch of the family, appears to have been its only surviving male representative. However, John fitzThomas succeeded in rescuing his family from the oblivion which it faced at the outset of his career. By the time of his death in September 1316, he had managed to take possession of most of the Geraldine patrimony, which by customary law had actually been destined to fall into the hands of the de Cogan and de Clare families. Moreover, he consolidated the family's landed interests in its Kildare heartland and established their status as the region's dominant magnates beyond doubt. Above all, shortly before his death, he crowned his achievements by securing official recognition from the crown for his lineage's claims to be numbered amongst the lordship's greatest families, when he was created earl of Kildare.⁹

Admittedly, fitzThomas's career has attracted sufficient attention from modern historians to ensure that its broad outlines are already well understood. The process was begun in 1858 when the marquis of Kildare published a book providing biographical details about his ancestors from the year 1057 onwards.¹⁰ Unfortunately, he did not make use of the chartularies in his family's possession and his entry relating to fitzThomas is now of little value. A better biographical summary of fitzThomas's career by T. A. Archer was subsequently published in the *Dictionary of National Biography* in 1889.¹¹ In 1914, a significant

⁹ Orpen, *Normans*, iv, pp 112–4, 213; Lydon, 'Fitzgeralds', p. 75.

¹⁰ C-W FitzGerald, *The earls of Kildare and their ancestors from 1057 to 1773*.

¹¹ *DNB*, vii, pp 214–217.

contribution to the modern understanding of the descent of the Geraldines of Offaly was made by Orpen in his pioneering article, 'The FitzGerald, barons of Offaly'.¹² Specifically, by making use of the charters contained in the then unpublished cartulary known as *The Red Book of the earls of Kildare*, Orpen firmly established John fitzThomas's exact relationship with his predecessors as lord of Offaly. More recently, the doctoral theses of Lydon, Claffey, Frame and Walton have shed a considerable amount of light upon various aspects of fitzThomas's career. Thus, Lydon described his participation in several campaigns overseas within the context of an analysis of the lordship of Ireland's contribution to the wars of Henry III and Edward I.¹³ Similarly, Frame discussed the role played by fitzThomas in the defence of the marches of western Kildare as part of a wider work which explored the relationship between the Dublin government and Gaelic Ireland.¹⁴ Both Claffey who wrote a study of the life of Richard de Burgh earl of Ulster, and Walton, who analysed the Anglo-Irish settlement of Connacht, made extensive references to fitzThomas's activities in the western province during the first half of his career.¹⁵ In particular, both works comment upon the tensions between John fitzThomas and Richard de Burgh at some length. Moreover, historians like Hand and Richardson and Sayles have employed some of the legal disputes involving John fitzThomas to demonstrate various aspects of the interaction between the Irish administration and its English counterpart.¹⁶ Finally, all of the standard works on the history of the lordship of Ireland during this period provide accounts of fitzThomas's quarrels in the 1290s with the earl of Ulster and with William de Vescy, lord of the liberty of Kildare and justiciar of Ireland.¹⁷

¹² Orpen, 'The FitzGerald, barons of Offaly', pp 99–113.

¹³ Lydon, Ireland's participation in the military activities of English kings, pp 198–243.

¹⁴ Frame, *The Dublin government*, pp 104–8, 121–138.

¹⁵ Claffey, *Richard de Burgh*, pp 128–135, 149–60; Walton, *The English in Connacht*, pp 284–314.

¹⁶ Hand, *English law in Ireland*, pp 141, 146, 151, 157; Richardson and Sayles, *Irish parliament in the middle ages*, p. 249.

¹⁷ For example, see *N. H. I.*, ii, pp 185–88; Otway-Ruthven, *Medieval Ireland*, pp 210–11, 213, 214; Frame, *Colonial Ireland*, pp 66, 104.

Nevertheless, the production of a detailed study of fitzThomas's career is a worthwhile undertaking for several reasons. In the first instance, John's dual achievement in saving his family from extinction and in becoming earl of Kildare was evidently a key turning-point in the history of a great Anglo-Irish lineage, and as such, an examination of his life is intrinsically important and desirable. Secondly, Irish historians have recognised for more than half a century that, even in its heyday during the second half of the thirteenth century, the lordship of Ireland was a highly fragmented political entity, and that its aristocratic lineages played at least as dominant a role in its governance as did the administration in Dublin.¹⁸ Despite this however, most historians studying the lordship have tended to concentrate upon its legal, institutional and tenurial structures, an approach which of necessity has placed a heavy emphasis upon the activities of the Dublin government.¹⁹ Moreover, although several regionally-based studies have been produced in the more recent past, their embrace of relatively lengthy time spans has meant that their primary focuses were set upon issues such as settlement patterns and tenurial relationships, rather than upon the careers of particular individuals.²⁰ In fact, with the important exception of Claffey's work on the Red earl of Ulster, the pre-occupations and objectives of individual magnates have been somewhat neglected. Hopefully then, a study of John fitzThomas will go some way towards redressing this problem. More broadly, the examination of the career of an Anglo-Irish magnate, undertaken from his own perspective rather than that of the Dublin administration provides an opportunity to gain a fresh set of insights into the nature of society within the lordship of Ireland during the last decades of the thirteenth, and the first decades of the fourteenth centuries.

¹⁸ Curtis, *A History of Medieval Ireland*., pp 156–7. For a more modern re-iteration of this fundamental point, see Frame, 'Power and society in the lordship of Ireland, 1272–1377', pp 3–33.

¹⁹ For example, the main thrust of the historiographical interests of two leading historians of the lordship can be seen in Asplin, 'The writings of A. J. Otway-Ruthven to 1980', pp 255–63; *ibid*, 'Bibliography of J. F. Lydon', pp xv–xx.

²⁰ For example, see Empey, *The Butler lordship in Ireland to 1509*; Parker, *The politics and society of county Waterford in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries*; Smith, *The English in Uriel 1170–1330*.

Consequently, this work has two main aims. First, it will attempt to provide a reasonably coherent account of the most important events of fitzThomas's career in order to explain how he initially rose to prominence in Ireland, the manner in which he coped with the grave challenges which confronted him in the course of his life, and the circumstances which enabled him to secure the earldom of Kildare for his lineage. Secondly, it will draw upon the experiences of John's life in an effort to elucidate the central role which the Anglo-Irish magnates played within their society. Hence, it will address a range of issues which are crucial to an understanding the way in which a magnate operated within his environment. These will include the importance of a magnate's family ties, his need to cultivate his local connections, his dealings with the Dublin administration along with the related topic of the use or misuse of law, his interactions with the Irish and lastly the critical importance of the personal relationship between a magnate and his king.

Broadly speaking, the primary sources which have been used to prepare this thesis may be grouped into three categories. The first category consists of the relevant historical, literary and propagandistic writings which were produced during the medieval period. For the purposes of this study, the most important works of this kind were the various annals and chronicles of both Anglo-Irish and Irish origin, of which the *Dublin Annals*, the annals of Friar Clyn, the *Annals of Inisfallen* and the *Annals of Connacht* proved to be of the greatest value.²¹ In addition, some use was made of other contemporary or near-contemporary writings, such as the O'Clery Book of Genealogies, a poem written in honour of Piers de Bermingham and the 1317 Remonstrance to Pope John XXII.²² However, the bulk of the sources used in the thesis fall into the second category, namely the surviving official records generated by the English and Irish administrations. As far as the English records available in print are concerned, extensive use has been made of the calendared chancery records such as the Patent, Close and Charter rolls; of the rolls of parliament and the associated parliamentary petitions, and finally, of the mass of material contained in the *Calendar of Documents relating to*

²¹ *Chart St Marys*, ii, pp 241-398; *Clyn*; *AI*; *AC*.

²² Pender, 'The O'Clery book of genealogies'; Heuser, *Die Kildare-Gedichte*, p. 162; *Scotichronicon*, vi, pp 395-403.

Ireland.²³ Most of the unpublished English records which are cited in this work are preserved in the Public Record Office in London. In particular, extensive use was made of the items of Irish interest contained in the record class known as Exchequer King's remembrancer, accounts various (E. 101), the special collections known as Ancient Correspondence (SC 1) and Ancient Petitions (SC 8) respectively, and the class known as Chancery Miscellanea (C. 47). Some material was also taken from the British Library's collection, including a Wardrobe Book of the twenty-fifth year of Edward I (BL Add MS 7965). The most useful printed official records of Irish origin have been the calendars of Justiciary rolls, Pipe Rolls, and Patent and Close Rolls, as well as the printed Statute rolls.²⁴ Most of the unpublished records of Irish origin which have been utilised are preserved in the National Archive's collection. In particular, some useful material was extracted from the Public Record Office of Ireland's calendar of memoranda rolls (NAI EX 2/1) and the Irish Record commission's calendars of plea rolls (RC. 7) and memoranda rolls (RC. 8). Finally, the third category of source used consists of the calendars and editions of family chartularies, such as the *Calendar of Ormond deeds*.²⁵ By far and away the most important such source was the cartulary begun in 1503 by Philip Flattisbury for the eighth earl of Kildare, known as *The red book of the earls of Kildare*, which contains a large quantity of documents relating to fitzThomas's activities.²⁶

At this point, it may be worthwhile to sound a note of caution about the sources pertaining to John fitzThomas's career. Although their quality is rich by Irish standards, their limitations should also be acknowledged. On a general level, the bulk of the extant material was generated by the activities of the Irish and English administrations. Consequently, when employing this kind of evidence it is important to take account of the fact that the official records reflect the priorities and perspectives of the two governments, which were not identical to those

23 CPR; CCR; *Cal. Chart. Rolls*; *Rotuli Parl.*; *Rot. parl. hac. inediti*; CDI.

24 CJR; DKPRI; *Rot. pat. Hib.*

25 *Cal. Ormond deeds*.

26 *Red Bk Kildare*.

possessed by an aristocrat like fitzThomas.²⁷ Furthermore, the relevant charter evidence which has been preserved in *The Red book of Kildare* is geographically skewed, being predominantly concerned with John's land acquisitions within the Kildare region itself. As a result, details of fitzThomas's activities in the province of Connacht, which were of critical importance during the first half of his career, are under-represented.

In addition to the difficulties caused by the inherently biased nature of the surviving material, a study of John fitzThomas's career is also hampered by several important gaps in the evidence. Most importantly perhaps, the fact that no personal material in the form of private correspondence, or of a will has been preserved effectively precludes any attempt to treat of John's 'interior life'. Similarly, the surviving evidence is of little value in the reconstruction of several of fitzThomas's most important familial connections. In particular, his relationships with his mother, his wife, and their respective kindreds are now largely irrecoverable. By way of illustration, it is known that fitzThomas married a woman named Blanche de Roche. However, by the late thirteenth century, individuals of that surname were widely distributed throughout the lordship of Ireland, and it is not possible to ascertain the particular segment of the lineage from which Blanche originated.²⁸ Moreover, any household accounts which may have been drawn up on fitzThomas's behalf have not been preserved. Their absence had the effect of limiting the degree to which his retinue could be reconstructed and to which his income could be assessed accurately. Finally, it is to be regretted that no contemporary set of annals with an emphasis upon events in the midlands has survived.

In the course of preparing this thesis, two methods of presenting the findings of the research, namely by theme or in chronological order, suggested themselves. Initially, taking a thematic approach seemed to be an attractive option, primarily because of the advantages to be gained by being able to discuss a particular issue, such as the overall significance of fitzThomas's military service overseas, *en bloc*.

27 The potential dangers of over-reliance upon official documentation was discussed by McFarlane in *The Nobility of Medieval England*, p. 2.

28 The available evidence concerning John's mother and wife is discussed in Chapter 2 pp 34–5 and Chapter 6 pp 180–1 respectively.

However, it rapidly became apparent that, given the extent to which the various strands of fitzThomas's career were interwoven, the benefits to be gained by discussing a particular facet of his life in isolation would only be achieved at the cost of an unacceptably high degree of repetition of the available evidence. On balance, when taking this disadvantage into account, along with the fact that the thesis is based upon the study of one individual's career, the adoption of a chronological approach appeared to be the most logical method of proceeding.

The first chapter is intended to serve as an introduction to fitzThomas's family background and to the kind of society in which he operated. To that end, it will provide an outline of the fluctuating fortunes of the Geraldines of Offaly during the century following Maurice fitzGerald I's first landfall at Wexford in 1169. The outline will describe the manner in which the family gradually but steadily expanded its power and landed wealth as well as discussing the more important political and military activities conducted by members of the lineage during that period. In addition, a brief description of the tenurial and administrative structures existing in the Offaly region immediately before John fitzThomas became lord of Offaly will be provided.

The second chapter will be devoted to the period between 1283 and 1293. In the first instance, it will provide an account of the minority and the brief career of Gerald fitzMaurice III, fitzThomas's immediate predecessor. The remainder of the chapter will concentrate upon the early stages of John's career. After outlining the available evidence concerning fitzThomas's background and immediate family, the circumstances by which he became lord of Offaly will be described. This will be followed by an account of the manner in which he acquired great estates in the province of Connacht, which will lead to a discussion of his ties to two successive chief governors, namely Stephen de Fulbourne and the archbishop of Dublin John de Sandford. FitzThomas's relationship with de Sandford will be examined at some length in order to emphasise the critical importance of the assistance which he received from the archbishop. Consequently, John's first campaign against the Irish of Offaly will be set within this context, as will his first recorded journey to England in 1291. The chapter will conclude by describing fitzThomas's establishment of a personal link to King Edward I, and by outlining the tangible benefits which he gained as a result.

The third chapter will cover the critical period between 1293 and 1298. Its main focus will be upon the two intense power struggles conducted by fitzThomas during this time, namely, with William de Vescy, lord of the liberty of Kildare and chief governor of Ireland, and with the most important magnate on the island, Richard de Burgh, earl of Ulster, and upon their consequences for fitzThomas himself and for his family. First, it will examine the rising tensions between de Vescy and fitzThomas in 1293 before going on to describe the extraordinary tactics adopted by the lord of Offaly in 1294 to neutralise his adversary. This will be followed by an account of the best known episode in fitzThomas's career, namely his attempt in the winter of 1294-5 to achieve supremacy in Connacht through the expedient of attacking the earl of Ulster and his followers in an explosion of lawlessness known to contemporaries as 'the time of disturbance'. Within this context, a detailed examination of the breakdown in public order in Kildare, which will include a discussion of the question of the extent to which fitzThomas colluded with the Irish of Offaly during this period will be provided. The remainder of the chapter will be devoted to the misfortunes which befell fitzThomas as a result of his actions and to his successful attempt to rehabilitate himself in the eyes of his king. Thus, an account of John's penitential journey to England in the summer of 1295 will be provided, along with a discussion of Edward I's response to the lord of Offaly's misdeeds which will be placed within the context of the king's pressing need for military assistance arising from the deteriorating situation in Scotland and France. This will be followed by detailed accounts of fitzThomas's participation in the Scottish campaign of 1296 and the Flanders campaign of 1297-8. In both cases, the focus of the discussion will be upon issues such as fitzThomas's terms of service, the size and composition of his contingent and most importantly, upon the flow of royal patronage which ensued after the campaigns ended.

The fourth chapter will examine the period between 1297 and 1308, and its primary focus shall be upon fitzThomas's activities and objectives as a landowner. In the first instance, it will examine the manner in which John's feud with Richard de Burgh was ended. Consequently, the terms of the agreement made between the two men in October 1298 will be described at some length, which will lead to a discussion of fitzThomas's withdrawal from Connacht and his subsequent failure to secure lands elsewhere in Ireland in compensation. This will be followed by a discussion of how the royal policy of purchasing lands and

rights in Ireland in general, and of its acquisition of the liberty of Kildare in 1297 in particular opened up new opportunities for fitzThomas to consolidate his position within the region. After giving some consideration to the state of fitzThomas's financial health at the close of the thirteenth century, the question of his behaviour towards absentees will be addressed. In particular, his protracted legal battles with Agnes de Valence during the 1300s will be described in some detail, in order to reveal something of fitzThomas's dynastic ambitions, his dealings with the Irish administration, his cultivation of local officials and his attitude to the rule of law. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the significance of the relationship between John fitzThomas and his son-in-law Edmund Butler, which will be set against the background of a diminution in the importance of John's ties to his king during the last years of Edward I and the reign of Edward II.

The fifth chapter will cover the same time span as the fourth, namely the period from 1297 to 1308, but from a different perspective. Its main objective will be to outline fitzThomas's military activities in the marches of Kildare and during his participation in the expedition to Scotland of 1301–2. Initially, the fundamental security problem faced by both John fitzThomas and his ally Piers de Bermingham will be examined with reference to the attitudes of their neighbours, tenants and fellow aristocrats, namely the Irish dynasties of the midlands, and to the objectives and concerns of the Anglo-Irish community as a whole as expressed in the statutes of the 1297 parliament. This will be followed by a description of the magnates' endeavours to maintain order in the marches during the period extending from the aftermath of 'the disturbance' to their departure from Ireland in 1301 to take part in the campaign in Scotland. An account of fitzThomas's involvement in the campaign will then be provided, which will again concentrate upon issues such as his terms of service and his contingent's size and composition, and will be followed by a discussion of the rewards subsequently bestowed upon him by King Edward. The remainder of the chapter will deal with the magnates' activities in the Kildare marches upon their return from Scotland. First, the manner in which the security situation in western Kildare deteriorated progressively between 1302 and 1305 will be outlined. Next, a detailed description of Piers de Bermingham's massacre of the O'Connor Falys in June 1305 will be provided, which will lead to a discussion of the extent to which the Irish administration and fitzThomas himself were guilty of complicity in the

atrocities. The chapter will conclude by examining the efforts of fitzThomas and de Bermingham to retain control of the region between 1305 and 1308, in the face of the general uprising by the midlands dynasties which was triggered by the murders. Within this context, the damage inflicted upon the Anglo-Irish settlements west of the Barrow will also be discussed.

The sixth and last chapter will concentrate on the period between 1307 and 1316. Initially, fitzThomas's expansion of his landed interests in Kildare will be outlined, and his activities on behalf of his associates within the region will be discussed. This will be followed by an account of his conflict with the de Lacys in Meath in 1309, which will lead to a discussion of his participation in the parliament held at Kilkenny in 1310. Thereafter, the chapter's focus will shift to Limerick, and to the steps taken by John fitzThomas to secure his hold upon the Geraldine properties there after the death of Agnes de Valence in December 1309. Thus, a description of the way in which he successfully recovered the Limerick estates will be followed by an account of his attempts to establish a relationship with his new tenants, which will be placed within the context of fitzThomas's public displays of his status and wealth towards the end of his life. This will be followed by a discussion of fitzThomas's participation in the defence of the marches of Kildare after hostilities broke out anew in 1311 which will emphasise the rise to prominence of John de Bermingham. The second half of the chapter will be devoted to the crucial impact of the Bruce invasion upon the fortunes of fitzThomas himself and upon the longer-term fortunes of his family. In the first instance, a detailed account of the part played by John fitzThomas in the defence mounted by the Anglo-Irish against the Scottish invaders, from the initial landing in May 1315 to the debacle at Arscoll in January 1316 will be provided. Next, the damage inflicted by the Scots upon fitzThomas's estates in western Kildare will be described within the context of a broader discussion of the significance of the negotiations which John conducted with the king's envoy John de Hothum in February 1316. This will be followed by an account of fitzThomas's last journey to England that spring, which culminated in his elevation to the earldom of Kildare in May 1316. Finally, after a discussion of the likely rationale behind King Edward II's decision to create the earldom of Kildare for John fitzThomas, the chapter will conclude with the new earl's death near Maynooth and burial in the Franciscan Friary of Kildare in September 1316.

At this point, it may be useful to set out the terminological conventions adopted in the presentation of this work. First, John fitzThomas and his predecessors have been referred to as 'lords of Offaly' throughout, rather than as 'barons of Offaly', the usage favoured by Orpen, because fitzThomas styled himself as *dominus de Offaly*. Secondly, for the sake of convenience, a simplified nomenclature has been used to describe the different ethnic groups living in Ireland at the close of the thirteenth century. To be specific, the terms 'Irish', 'Anglo-Irish' and 'English' have been employed where an Irish annalist would have used the terms 'Gaedhil', 'Gall' and 'Saxain' respectively. For similar reasons, common anglicised forms of Irish surnames such as 'O'Connor Faly' have been used.

Chapter 1

The emergence of the Geraldines of Offaly, 1169–1268, and a description of Offaly, c. 1285

The pioneering exploits of Maurice fitzGerald I during the initial phase of the Anglo–Norman invasion of Ireland ensured him a portion of the victors' spoils. Thus, after King Henry II awarded the kingdom of Leinster to Strongbow to be held as a liberty, the earl of Strigoil showed his appreciation for Maurice's efforts by granting him the middle cantred of Offelan, a district situated in the north of the modern Co. Kildare.¹ When Maurice, who appears to have been in his fifties when he first arrived in Ireland, died in 1176, this territory passed to his eldest son William. However William, the ancestor of the barons of Naas, divided his inheritance with his younger brother Gerald, who thereby acquired lands around Maynooth and Rathmore.² Moreover, Gerald fitzMaurice I also succeeded in becoming the first Geraldine lord of Offaly, a region which lay on the western borders of the old kingdom of Leinster. This crucial expansion in the territorial interests of the ancestor of the Geraldines of Offaly was achieved through the expedient of marrying Eva, daughter and heiress of the original grantee, Robert de Bermingham.³ In addition to consolidating their hold upon their properties in Leinster, both William and Gerald fitzMaurice I were involved in the Anglo–Norman thrust into Munster. To be specific, in the 1190s, along with a third brother named Thomas, they took part in the occupation of county Limerick.⁴ Consequently, William acquired what was to become the manor of Carrickittle while Thomas, the ancestor of the Geraldines of Desmond took possession of Shanid. More pertinently, by gaining control of Croom in central county Limerick before his death in 1204, Gerald fitzMaurice I laid

¹ Orpen, 'The FitzGerald, barons of Offaly', p. 99. See Appendix 5 for a map of the region.

² *Ibid.*, p. 100.

³ *Ibid.*, pp 101–4.

⁴ See Empey, 'The settlement of the kingdom of Limerick', pp 12–13.

the foundations for his descendants' acquisition of a secondary cluster of estates in Limerick, including Adare and Grene, in a gradual process which was largely undertaken by his son and successor, Maurice fitzGerald II.⁵

Maurice fitzGerald II, second lord of Offaly came of age in 1215 and died in 1257.⁶ There is little doubt but that his long career was of critical importance to his lineage's emergence as both important landholders and as a major political force within the lordship of Ireland. Despite the best propagandistic efforts of Gerald of Wales, it is clear that during the initial stage of the invasion, Maurice fitzGerald I was merely a trusted subordinate of Strongbow, its main driving force, and as such did not possess the means to pursue his own political agenda. Similarly, as far as the surviving sources can tell, Gerald fitzMaurice I's political career was unexceptional, and his death in 1204 meant that the Geraldines of Offaly were not directly involved in the first great conflict to erupt amongst the colonists, namely the clash between the adherents of William Marshal and the supporters of King John led by Meiler fitzHenry, the chief governor.⁷

In stark contrast however, Maurice fitzGerald II's career was spent at the forefront of affairs within the lordship. Most importantly perhaps, he was clearly identified with the group of individuals including Richard de Burgh, Hugh de Lacy the earl of Ulster, and Geoffrey de Marisco, who sought to exploit the confusion within the kingdom of Connacht following the death of Cathal Croibhdhearg O'Connor in 1224, by resurrecting de Burgh's moribund claims to the province.⁸ Admittedly, this group's initial attempt to overrun Connacht was undone as a consequence

⁵ Orpen, *Normans*, ii, pp 145–178. See Appendix 6 for a map of the Geraldine estates in Limerick.

⁶ Orpen, 'The Fitzgeralds, barons of Offaly', p. 101; Frame, *Colonial Ireland, 1169–1369*, p. 29.

⁷ *N. H. I.*, ii, pp 134–8. Of course, Meiler's descent from Nest, daughter of Rhys ap Twdr, prince of south Wales and husband of Gerald of Windsor, meant that he was a close relative of the Geraldines. (See Orpen, *Normans*, i, p. 18). It might also be worth noting that the quarrel between fitzHenry and the Marshal centred upon the custodianship of Offaly during Maurice fitzGerald II's minority. (Ó Cléirigh, 'The impact of the Anglo-Normans in Laois', p. 9).

⁸ Orpen, *Normans*, iii, pp 158, 163–76.

of the fall of Hubert de Burgh, justiciar of England, in 1232.⁹ However, Maurice's achievement in becoming the first member of his lineage to be appointed to the office of chief governor in 1232 proved to be of crucial importance to the furtherance of the 'expansionist' magnates' aims.¹⁰ In particular, the lord of Offaly exploited Henry III's quarrel with Richard Marshal, the principal opponent in England of the king's favourites Peter des Roches and Peter des Rivaux, to good effect. To be specific, in April 1234, Maurice, acting in his capacity as justiciar, clashed with Richard Marshal in a skirmish on the Curragh of Kildare which left the lord of Leinster mortally wounded.¹¹ On one level, fitzGerald's deed, which was perpetrated against his own liege lord, blackened his reputation amongst several English annalists, and gained him the enmity of the Marshal's brother and successor Gilbert.¹² More importantly however, it also earned him the trust of King Henry III, who was to retain him in office until 1245.¹³ Moreover, as Richard de Burgh and Hugh de Lacy also sided with the king on this occasion, the Marshal's elimination inaugurated an era of harmonious relations between Henry III and these magnates, which facilitated a massive expansion of their power and territorial interests in the north and west of Ireland.¹⁴

The first manifestation of this phenomenon occurred when the Irish magnates successfully renewed the conquest of Connacht under the leadership of Richard de Burgh. Significantly, Maurice fitzGerald II used his office as chief governor to play a prominent part in the campaigns against the Irish rulers of Connacht which took place between 1234 and 1237.¹⁵ For example, in 1235 he exercised his authority to lead the feudal hosts of Leinster and Munster into the western province behind the

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp 177–80; Frame, *Colonial Ireland, 1169–1369*, pp 61–2.

¹⁰ Orpen, *Normans*, iii, p. 179; *H. B. C.*, p. 161.

¹¹ *N. H. I.*, ii, p. 164; Orpen, *Normans*, iii, pp 61–72.

¹² Orpen, *Normans*, iii, pp 66, 74; *N. H. I.*, ii, p. 168.

¹³ *H. B. C.*, p. 161.

¹⁴ Frame, *Colonial Ireland, 1169–1369*, p. 62.

¹⁵ For detailed accounts of the campaigns, see Orpen, *Normans*, iii, pp 182–9, and Walton, *The English in Connacht*, pp 72–82.

royal banner.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, Richard de Burgh, the principal beneficiary of the conquest rewarded Maurice handsomely for his assistance by granting him lands around Kilcolgan and Ardahan in Co. Galway, and Leyney in Co. Sligo. Furthermore, fitzGerald benefited from the actions of Hugh de Lacy, earl of Ulster, to whom de Burgh had bestowed extensive territories in northern Connacht in appreciation of his part in the conquest, when de Lacy granted the bulk of this land, situated in counties Sligo and Mayo to the lord of Offaly. In itself, de Lacy's grant facilitated the development of the great Geraldine manorial centre of Sligo. However, the earl went further, and also granted Maurice fitzGerald II lands and rights within Ulster itself, namely in Fermanagh and Tír Conaill.¹⁷ This particular grant was especially important to the family for two reasons. In the first place, during the remainder of his life, Maurice mounted a vigorous attempt to impose his overlordship upon the Irish dynasties such as the O'Donnells, who ruled western Ulster.¹⁸ Secondly, although Maurice's own efforts were ultimately unsuccessful, it is clear that the aspiration to realise this goal, which would result in the Geraldines of Offaly exerting control over a vast swathe of territory ranging from the Mayo coast to the borders of Tyrone, remained as a key ambition amongst his successors.

On a broader level, Maurice fitzGerald II's career as lord of Offaly is significant because of the occurrence of a phenomenon which was entirely beyond his control. During the 1240s, the political face of the lordship of Ireland was transformed by a series of dynastic accidents which resulted in the extinction in the male line of three families who had wielded enormous power in the island during the first half of the thirteenth century. Thus, the death of Anselm Marshal in 1245 resulted in the division of the great lordship founded by Strongbow in Leinster between his five sisters and their heirs, who tended to be absentees. Similarly, Walter de Lacy, lord of Meath died in 1241, and his lordship was shared between his two grand-daughters. Lastly, Hugh de Lacy, earl of Ulster, Maurice's partner

¹⁶ *N. H. I.*, ii, p. 164; Orpen, *Normans*, iii, p. 182.

¹⁷ Orpen, *Normans*, iii, pp 194–200, 205–8. For an exhaustive analysis of the settlement of Connacht, see Walton, *The English in Connacht*, pp 83–202.

¹⁸ Frame, *Colonial Ireland, 1169–1369*, pp 29–30; Orpen, *Normans*, iii, 257–9, 267–8.

in the conquest of Connacht died in 1242, and his earldom reverted to the crown.¹⁹ Hence, the fortuitous removal from the lordship of the descendants of the leading figures of the initial phase of the conquest of Ireland meant that by default, the Geraldines of Offaly were catapulted into a position of greater prominence on the island than they had hitherto enjoyed.

Finally, shortly before his death in 1257, Maurice fitzGerald II made a decision concerning the disposal of his inheritance and land acquisitions amongst the members of his family which was to have important long-term consequences. A quitclaim preserved in the *Red Book of Kildare* reveals that fitzGerald decided to split the Geraldine properties in two.²⁰ Thus, most of the territorial acquisitions made by him, including the lands in Connacht and the rights to western Ulster were allocated to his second son, Maurice fitzMaurice. This meant that the 'core' Geraldine properties, including the lordship of Offaly and the estates in eastern Kildare and Limerick were destined to come into the hands of the underage heir of Maurice's eldest son, Gerald fitzMaurice II, who had died whilst in the king's service in Gascony in 1243.²¹

The heir in question, namely Maurice fitzGerald III, third lord of Offaly, had entered his inheritance by the mid-1260s.²² Although his career as lord of Offaly was brief, it provides several useful insights into some of the family's key preoccupations including its political concerns in Ireland as well as its desire to deepen its links to the ruling dynasty in England. In the first instance, the massive expansion in the power and territorial possessions of the de Burgh family which was occasioned by the grant of the dormant earldom of Ulster to Walter de Burgh, lord of Connacht in 1263, caused a fundamental shift in the relationship between the two lineages.²³ While the de Burghs and

¹⁹ Frame, *Colonial Ireland, 1169–1369*, p. 63; Orpen, *Normans*, iii, pp 260–5.

²⁰ *Red Bk. Kildare*, no. 31.

²¹ Orpen, *Normans*, iii, pp 259–60.

²² He was of age by September 1264. See CPR 1258–66, pp 350–2.

²³ Orpen, *Normans*, iii, pp 244–5. For the date of the granting of Ulster to de Burgh, see Frame, *Ireland and the Barons' wars*, p. 164.

Geraldines had co-operated to good effect during the conquest of Connacht, the changed circumstances placed the two families in competition with each other for supremacy in northern Connacht and western Ulster. Thus, during the winter of 1264–5, this rivalry led to the outbreak of the first major de Burgh–Geraldine conflict, in which the two families engaged in a bitter civil war, causing widespread devastation and destruction throughout Ireland.²⁴ As far as the Geraldines were concerned the situation was exacerbated by the actions of Aodh O'Connor, the newly-installed king of Connacht, who took the opportunity to waste their properties in both Connacht and in Offaly itself.²⁵ Apart from the material damage caused by the feud, the episode also reveals a great deal about the political realities within the lordship of Ireland. First, it graphically demonstrated the drastic steps which the Geraldines, led by Maurice fitzGerald III and his uncle Maurice fitzMaurice, were prepared to take in order to achieve their ends. Most notoriously, at Castledermot in December 1264, the pair seized and imprisoned the Irish justiciar Richard de la Rochelle, and two Irish magnates, namely Theobald Butler and John de Cogan.²⁶ Moreover, it is important to note that, despite the destruction caused and the fact that the Geraldines had entered into open rebellion, when the conflict was brought to an end in April 1265, they do not appear to have suffered any sanctions for their temerity.²⁷ More importantly perhaps, it is clear that the basic question at issue, namely which lineage would dominate the north-west of the island, remained unresolved.²⁸

With the benefit of hindsight, it is apparent that the dual failure of the Dublin administration to either end the feud or to punish the

²⁴ Orpen, *Normans*, iii, pp 241–4; *N. H. I.*, ii, pp 183–4.

²⁵ Orpen, *Normans*, iii, pp 244–5.

²⁶ *N. H. I.*, ii, p. 183.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 183–4; Orpen, *Normans*, iii, p. 244.

²⁸ The fact that the Geraldine – de Burgh feud broke out during the climax of the baronial crisis in England raises the obvious possibility that the two conflicts were connected. Lydon has bluntly argued that 'domestic circumstances are sufficient to explain' the dispute (*N. H. I.*, ii p. 182). In a paper devoted to the issue, Frame has concluded that de Burgh's acquisition of Ulster did in fact stem from his adherence to the royalist cause. However, he was not able to demonstrate that the Geraldines had ever sided with the baronial reformers (Frame, 'Ireland and the Barons' wars', pp 164–6).

Geraldines for their deeds set a precedent which was to have serious consequences for the stability of the lordship in the longer term. More immediately however, the re-establishment of an uneasy peace gave Maurice fitzGerald III the opportunity to further his family's interest through the tried and trusted expedient of making himself useful to the king. Thus both Maurice fitzGerald III and Maurice fitzMaurice rallied to the royalist side during the critical phase of the great struggle between the reforming barons and King Henry III which had convulsed England since 1258. The pair came to England to assist the king's eldest son, the lord Edward at the time when the decisive battle of Evesham was fought in August 1265, and participated in the subsequent pacification of areas of rebel support. In 1266, the recently-widowed lord of Offaly's timely adherence to the royalist cause paid dividends, when he married Agnes, daughter of William de Valence, who had a major stake in the lordship of Ireland, being the lord of Wexford by virtue of his marriage to Joan de Munchensey, one of the Marshal heiresses. More strikingly, William also happened to be one of King Henry's Poitevin half-brothers.²⁹ Obviously, marriage to the king's niece meant that Maurice had succeeded in gaining close access to the ultimate source of patronage and favour, a development which in itself was a telling indication of the Geraldines' power and importance at that juncture. More broadly, it might not be too fanciful to suggest that by marrying Agnes, Maurice had acquired a valuable 'trophy' for the Geraldines. In a sense, her arrival in Ireland symbolised the self-confidence of an aristocratic house which had risen over the course of a century from relatively humble origins to becoming one of 'the two most powerful settler families' within the lordship, along with the de Burghs.³⁰

As events transpired, Maurice fitzGerald III drowned in the Irish sea in 1268, a mere two years after making his glittering match.³¹ Hence, any plans which his family may have had to exploit their royal connection came to naught, and the lordship of Offaly was forced to endure a lengthy minority until 1285. Moreover, given his untimely death, the

²⁹ Frame, 'Ireland and the Barons' wars', p. 161; Ó Cléirigh, 'The absentee landlady and the sturdy robbers', p. 101.

³⁰ Frame, 'Ireland and the Barons' wars', p. 158.

³¹ *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p. 290.

wisdom of Maurice's marriage to Agnes can be called into question. To be specific, the generous terms of their nuptial agreement, which included the settlement of all the family's Limerick properties upon the marriage, subsequently caused serious problems for the fourth and fifth lords of Offaly.³² Nevertheless, the temporary abeyance of the lordship between Maurice's premature death in 1268 and the accession of his son and heir Gerald fitzMaurice III in 1285 appears to be an appropriate point at which to bring this brief sketch of the Geraldines of Offaly's history to a close.³³ Before doing so however, it might be worthwhile to comment upon the more noteworthy aspects of the family's outlook and behaviour during the first century after the invasion, in an effort to discern any collective traits shared by them which could contribute to an understanding of the mentality of John fitzThomas, the fifth lord.

In the first place, the writings of Gerald of Wales confirm that the family arrived in Ireland with a highly formed sense of self-awareness, based in the main upon their military prowess. Moreover, it is highly likely that their experiences in Ireland reinforced this aspect of their collective identity, as there is no doubt but that the Geraldines of Offaly continued to be a highly militarised lineage. Most obviously, they participated in most of the great expansionary thrusts undertaken by the colonists against the native rulers during the first century of the lordship. On one level, this consistent support for a 'forward policy' strongly suggests that the family's attitude towards the Gaelic Irish nobility was essentially hostile. Furthermore, the fact that the bulk of their land acquisitions were gained by the sword, albeit indirectly, is unlikely to have escaped their collective memory. Secondly, the killing of Richard Marshal in 1234 and the capture of the chief governor in 1264 demonstrate that successive generations of Geraldines were quite prepared to take extreme measures in the pursuit of their own objectives. Finally, the behaviour of the relevant family members after perpetrating these deeds shows that they appreciated the advantages of remaining on good terms with the king of England. Thus, Maurice fitzGerald II continued to serve Henry III faithfully as chief

³² Ó Cléirigh, 'The absentee landlady and the sturdy robbers', pp 104–7.

³³ Although Gerald fitzMaurice III appears to have been born in early 1265, it is likely that he was considered to have been of age by 1285 (*Chart. St Marys*, ii, p. 290; *CDI* 1285–92, nos. 29, 56).

governor whilst taking part in the conquest of Connacht, while Maurice fitzGerald III's efforts on behalf of the lord Edward during the Barons' wars facilitated his marriage to King Henry's niece. Indeed, it could be argued that the key lesson learned by the lineage from the experiences of the second and third lords of Offaly was that even the most outrageous or reprehensible actions taken in Ireland could be set to one side, if they were followed by a conspicuous display of loyalty to the king. Overall then, if one were to attempt to predict the behaviour of a lord of Offaly in the late thirteenth century by analysing the behaviour of his predecessors before 1268, the evidence suggests that he would be likely to be an individual who placed great emphasis upon his martial abilities, who was prone to outbursts of 'Geraldine audacity', but who was also keenly aware of the potential benefits accruing from a good relationship with his king.³⁴

There is no doubt but that the formation of any individual's outlook and perspectives is greatly influenced by his family's traditions and experiences. By the same token, the physical environment which he inhabits, in terms of its geography and the manner in which its society is organised, plays an important part in shaping his behaviour. Insofar as the Geraldines of Offaly were concerned, the successive expansion of their territorial interests into Munster, Connacht and Ulster transformed them into figures of island-wide importance. Nevertheless, as their employment of the title *dominus de Offaly* suggests, and the divisions of property undertaken by Maurice fitzGerald II in the 1250s and Maurice fitzGerald III in 1266 confirm, the lineage always considered their holdings in Kildare in general and in Offaly in particular to be their 'heartland'.³⁵ Consequently, in order to set the activities of John fitzThomas into a local context, it might be worthwhile to provide a sketch of the region in the 1280s, by describing the administrative structures operating in Kildare and the Geraldines' tenurial arrangements, by outlining the topographical features and settlement patterns existing within Offaly, and by identifying the Geraldines' more powerful Irish and Anglo-Irish neighbours.

³⁴ Orpen, *Normans*, iv, p. 115.

³⁵ For details of the property divisions, see *Red Bk. Kildare*, no. 31; Ó Cléirigh, 'The absentee landlady and the sturdy robbers', p. 101. For examples of the use of the title, see Ó Cléirigh, 'The absentee landlady and the sturdy robbers', p. 102; *Red Bk. Kildare*, nos. 111, 113, 114.

When Gerald fitzMaurice III came of age in 1285, the Geraldine manors of Maynooth and Rathmore and the lordship of Offaly itself were part of the liberty of Kildare, an entity which was enjoyed by the largely absentee heirs of William Marshal I's fourth daughter, Sibyl Ferrers. In the aftermath of the Anglo-Norman invasion, the region which came to be known as Kildare had been created by the newcomers, by amalgamating four pre-existing political subdivisions of the kingdom of Leinster together. These units, which were described by the Anglo-Normans as cantreds, were: Offelan in the north; Omurthy in the south; Laois in the south-west; and Offaly in the north-west. Hence, the geographical area of medieval Kildare was considerably larger than that of the modern county of the same name, as it also encompassed the eastern half of modern Co. Offaly and the north-eastern half of modern Co. Laois.³⁶ As Kildare was a liberty rather than a royal county, most of the rights and prerogatives usually associated with the crown were exercised on behalf of the liberty-holders, namely the heirs of Sibyl Ferrers. Thus, with the exception of the four pleas of the crown (arson, rape, treasure trove and forestall) all 'county pleas' arising in Kildare were heard in the liberty court, which was based in the town of Kildare itself. Similarly, in a manner which mirrored the situation to be found in the great English palatinates, it was the lord's peace which ran in Kildare.³⁷ In practice, by 1285 Agnes de Vescy, Sibyl's eldest daughter, was acting as the effective lord of the liberty.³⁸

Kildare was organised on the model of the royal administration. It was presided over by a seneschal, 'the principal military, administrative and judicial officer of the whole area', who was assisted by a

³⁶ Otway-Ruthven, 'The medieval county of Kildare', pp 181-3. Medieval Kildare also included the barony of Arklow in modern Co. Wicklow, an anomaly created 'by the desire to keep the lands of a particular tenant in the same administrative unit' (*ibid.*, p. 183). See also Appendix 5.

³⁷ Otway-Ruthven, 'The medieval county of Kildare', pp 186-191. See also Orpen, *Normans*, iii, p. 80. For a general discussion of the functioning of liberties in Ireland, see Hand, *English law in Ireland 1290-1324*, pp 113-34. As far as Kildare is concerned, it should be noted that its crosslands were subject to the jurisdiction of the sheriff of Dublin.

³⁸ Theoretically, Agnes shared the profits of the *corpus comitatus* with three of her sisters, Matilda, Eleanor and Agatha (Otway-Ruthven, 'The medieval county of Kildare', pp 187-9).

chancellor and a treasurer.³⁹ In addition to representing the lord of Kildare's interests, the seneschal was also responsible for carrying out royal business in the liberty, such as the collection of debts owed to the king by people living within its borders. Hence, he took oaths to both the king and to the lord of Kildare.⁴⁰ Finally, day-to-day government business in Kildare was conducted by a sheriff, who was distinct from and subordinate to the seneschal, and four chief serjeants, one for each cantred including Offaly. Thus, the sheriff performed such duties as holding the county court and supervising the serjeants. The chief serjeants actually performed most of the routine administrative tasks in Kildare, such as executing writs, collecting amercements and debts, and empanelling juries. In addition, each chief serjeant acted as the coroner in his particular cantred.⁴¹

As far as the Geraldines of Offaly's tenurial arrangements are concerned, the most important point is that they held their lands in Kildare by military tenure. However, the situation had been complicated by the careful apportioning of demesne lands, judicial revenues and feudal services amongst the Marshal heirs in the partition of 1247.⁴² Before the partition, the Marshals had been tenants-in-chief to the crown for the entire region. Consequently, the Geraldines held the lordship of Offaly directly of them for the service of twelve knights, and the manors of Maynooth and Rathmore indirectly, (with the barons of Naas acting as mesne lords) for the service of three and a half knights.⁴³ After the partition however, the feudal services due from Kildare were divided between the heirs of Sibyl Ferrers and the heirs of her younger sister, Eva de Braose. Regrettably, no feodary specifying the disposition of Kildare's knight's fees between Sibyl and Eva has survived.⁴⁴ As a result, it is unclear

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp 188–9.

⁴⁰ Hand, *English law in Ireland 1290–1324*, p. 116; Otway-Ruthven, 'The medieval county of Kildare', p. 195.

⁴¹ Otway-Ruthven, 'The medieval county of Kildare', pp 193–5. See also *eadem*, 'Anglo-Irish shire government in the thirteenth century', pp 1–28.

⁴² For a detailed analysis of the partition of Leinster, see Orpen, *Normans*, iii, pp 79–110.

⁴³ Otway-Ruthven, 'Knight's fees in Kildare, Leix and Offaly', pp 165, 178.

⁴⁴ Otway-Ruthven, 'Knight's fees in Kildare, Leix and Offaly', p. 163.

as to whom the knight's fees due from Maynooth and Rathmore were owed. However, there is no doubt but that the lordship of Offaly was held of the principal lord of the honour of Dunamase, Edmund Mortimer of Wigmore.⁴⁵

Thus, when Maurice fitzGerald III entered his inheritance in 1285, he found himself in the somewhat unusual position of holding his lordship of Offaly of one absentee, namely Edmund Mortimer lord of Dunamase, while being subject to the jurisdiction of another, namely Agnes de Vescy, lord of the liberty of Kildare. The lordship of Offaly was situated on the western borders of the old kingdom of Leinster, beyond the strategic Barrow river valley. With the exception of a portion of territory located within modern Co. Kildare which the lords of Kildare retained for themselves, the lordship of Offaly was roughly coterminous with the pre-invasion subkingdom of Uí Failge. Hence, it encompassed an area now represented by the baronies of Portnahinch and Tinnahinch in modern Co. Laois, and the baronies of Philipstown, Geashill, Warrenstown and Coolestown in modern Co. Offaly.⁴⁶ The northern portion of Offaly (approximately the baronies of Warrenstown and Coolestown) was known as Tethmoy, and it appears that the bulk of this territory was held of the Geraldines by the de Berminghams of Carbury.⁴⁷ In addition that part of the modern parish of Cloughjordan situated in the baronies of Warrenstown and Coolestown was actually part of the lordship of Trim, a geographical anomaly which seems to have arisen from the region's political divisions before the invasion.⁴⁸

Topographically, Offaly's interior was dominated by large tracts of bog, marsh and forests, which were interspersed with 'islands' of cultivable land.⁴⁹ Not surprisingly, the region's challenging physical features impeded the kind of intensive Anglo-Norman settlement which

⁴⁵ Otway-Ruthven, 'Knight's fees in Kildare, Leix and Offaly', pp 165-6, 178.

⁴⁶ Otway-Ruthven, 'The medieval county of Kildare', pp 181-2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 182. For the de Bermingham's exertion of overlordship in Tethmoy see Nicholls, 'The land of the Leinstermen', p. 541.

⁴⁸ Otway-Ruthven, 'The partition of the de Verdon lands in Ireland in 1332', p. 411.

⁴⁹ Smyth, *Celtic Leinster*, pp 152-5.

took place elsewhere in Leinster. Nevertheless, the Geraldines established several manorial centres within the area. The two most important of these were Lea, which was located on a bend of the Barrow and served as their *caput*, and Rathangan, a pre-invasion royal centre of the kingdom of Uí Failge.⁵⁰ Significantly, both of these centres were situated on the eastern fringes of Offaly, close to the more densely settled districts in Kildare proper, a fact which supports the general supposition that English settlement in Offaly remained sparse. Nevertheless, the Geraldines did not ignore the interior completely. For example, they occupied Geashill, another Uí Failge royal centre located in a fertile district in the heart of Offaly, and built a castle there.⁵¹ Moreover, it has been noted that several other surviving references to lands in the more remote western portion of Offaly are expressed in a manner which suggests actual occupation by Anglo-Normans.⁵² However, there seems little doubt but that the population of Offaly always remained predominantly Irish, which raises the question of the Geraldines' relationship with the region's previous owners, the pre-Norman ruling dynasties of Uí Failge.

Before the coming of the Anglo-Normans, the three most important dynasties in Offaly were the O'Connor Falys, the O'Dempseys and the O'Dunnes. Broadly speaking, the O'Connor Falys were dominant in northern Offaly, while the O'Dempseys ruled the territory known as Clann Máel Ugra, or Clanmaliere (now the barony of Portnahinch), and the O'Dunnes were established in Uí Riacáin or Iregan (now represented by the barony of Tinnahinch).⁵³ The available evidence suggests that, in the immediate aftermath of the invasion, the Irish rulers of Offaly accommodated themselves to the new order relatively easily.⁵⁴ However, it is difficult to account for their activities, outlook and organisation with much confidence thereafter. For example, the Irish annals provide absolutely no information about the inhabitants of Offaly

50 Orpen, 'The FitzGerald, barons of Offaly', p. 109; Smyth, *Celtic Leinster*, p. 34.

51 Smyth, *Celtic Leinster*, pp 34, 109; *CDI 1171-1251*, no. 195.

52 Nicholls, 'The land of the Leinstermen', pp 541-2; *Red Bk. Kildare*, nos. 71-2.

53 *N. H. I.*, ii, p. 24; Smyth, *Celtic Leinster*, pp 74-6.

54 Ó Cléirigh, 'The impact of the Anglo-Normans in Laois', pp 8-9.

between the late 1220s and the 1280s, and the later genealogies purporting to show the descent of the leading families are extremely defective.⁵⁵ To make matters worse, references to the Irish in the sources produced by the newcomers are almost equally unforthcoming. However, the Irish dynasts re-emerged into the historical records in the 1270s, and it appears that they had managed to retain some degree of internal cohesion intact. For example, an administrative document dating from the mid 1270s records the gift of a horse to 'O'Dempsey', a title which implies a survival of lordship.⁵⁶ Hence, given the unpromising nature of Offaly's topography, it is likely that the Geraldines and the de Berminghams had contented themselves with exercising overlordship over the pre-existing population groups in exchange for annual tribute. Certainly, a relationship of this sort existed in Longford, between the de Verduns and the O'Farrells, where a similar situation obtained.⁵⁷ In any event, it is clear that when the quality of sources referring to Offaly begins to improve, the Irish of the region can be seen acting in a purposeful, organised fashion. Unfortunately for the local colonists, it also becomes apparent that the activities of the Irish of Offaly were directed towards the task of destroying their settlements.

The patchy nature of the available sources means that it is not possible to provide a definitive reason as to why the region slid, apparently precipitously, into serious conflict. It should be noted that by the 1280s, unrest was not confined to Offaly but was widespread throughout the midlands, as the local Irish dynasties, under competent leaders such as Cairbre O'Melaghlin and An Calbhach O'Connor Faly exerted considerable pressure upon the settlers dwelling in their midst. The theories proposed by historians to explain the phenomenon have ranged from starvation amongst the Irish, to a perceived 'crisis of lordship' occasioned by the extinction of the Marshal family.⁵⁸ It also seems extremely likely that the absence of a resident lord of Offaly contributed significantly to the problem, especially when it is considered that many of Maurice fitzGerald III's

⁵⁵ K. Nicholls, 'The land of the Leinstermen', p. 542.

⁵⁶ *CDI*, 1252-84, no. 1389, p. 258.

⁵⁷ Otway-Ruthven, 'The partition of the de Verdon lands in Ireland in 1332', pp 413-4.

⁵⁸ *N. H. I.*, ii, pp 256-7, 264; Frame, 'Two kings in Leinster', pp 158-160.

followers perished with him in the shipwreck of 1268.⁵⁹ Be that as it may, the first recorded outbreak of trouble in the region occurred in 1272, when the chief governor, who happened to be Maurice fitzMaurice, led an expedition into Offaly.⁶⁰ Regrettably, nothing more is known about this particular episode. However, during the 1270s and early 1280s, it is clear that conflict continued sporadically. Thus, by 1276, a garrison commanded by Sir Walter L'Enfaunt had been established in Geashill, in the heart of the lordship.⁶¹ More dynamically, in 1279 and again in 1280, the justiciar Robert D'Ufford felt obliged to march as far as the new town of Leys 'to conquer the Irishmen of Offaly, rebels against the king'.⁶² Four years later, a Government memorandum refers in passing to the collection of carts and the levying of funds in order to pacify Offaly.⁶³ Similarly, the seneschals of Kildare seem to have mounted punitive expeditions against the Irish of Offaly. For example, the account preserved in the Irish Pipe Rolls of the seneschal Robert de Flattisbury, records that several Irish leaders, including An Calbhach O'Connor Faly and the chief O'Dempsey, agreed to hand over 100 cattle and 100 marks in exchange for having peace at some point after 1280.⁶⁴ Undoubtedly, the unrest had a detrimental effect upon the financial attractiveness of Offaly to the Anglo-Irish. For example, in July 1283, a Kildare jury noted that 'Oregan', the territory in Offaly which was mainly inhabited by the O'Dunne dynasty, had been worth £90 13s 4d per annum in peacetime, but was now worth less than half that amount, being 'wasted by the war of the Irish'.⁶⁵ A year later, the gravity of the challenge posed by the Irish dynasties became clear when, in a sharp escalation of the conflict, they managed to burn Lea castle itself.⁶⁶ Thereafter, relations between the two nations in Offaly remained essentially hostile.

⁵⁹ Flower, 'The Kilkenny Chronicle in Cotton Ms', p. 332.

⁶⁰ *DKPRI*, 36, p. 24.

⁶¹ *DKPRI*, 36, p. 64.

⁶² *CDI*, 1252-84, no. 2291.

⁶³ *ibid.*, nos. 2333-4.

⁶⁴ *DKPRI*, 36, p. 73.

⁶⁵ *Cal. Inq. P.M.*, II, no. 437.

⁶⁶ *Clyn*, p. 9.

However, it should be noted that, given the scale of the unrest throughout the midlands, the other magnates who had interests in the region shared the same problem with the Geraldines of Offaly. Amongst the more notable individuals whose holdings were being threatened in 1285 were Piers de Bermingham of Carbury, Edmund Mortimer of Wigmore and lord of Dunamase, Gilbert de Clare earl of Gloucester and lord of Kilkenny, and the successors to Walter de Lacy's lordship of Meath, namely Theobald de Verdon and Geoffrey de Geneville. In terms of their background and social status, these magnates were a mixed group. Some, like de Bermingham, were permanent residents in Ireland, some like de Geneville, de Verdon and the earl of Gloucester spent lengthy sojourns there, while others, like Edmund Mortimer usually resided in England. Like the Geraldines of Offaly, the main threat to Piers de Bermingham was posed by the O'Connor Falys, in alliance with some Meath dynasties such as the O'Melaghlins. Similarly, the earl of Gloucester's holdings in the southern midlands were being harassed by the MacGillaPatricks, while Edmund Mortimer's manors in Laois, which were located to the south of Offaly were menaced by the O'Mores. Lastly, the holdings of de Verdon and de Geneville, which lay to the north and west of Offaly, were vulnerable to the efforts of the local Irish dynasties, including the O'Molloys, Mageoghegans, O'Melaghlins and Foxes.⁶⁷ As far as the Geraldines were concerned, de Geneville's stake in the region is of particular interest. For in 1283, the lord of Trim engaged in a course of action which appears to have been designed to hasten the return of a resident lord to Offaly.

⁶⁷ For examples of the disturbances in the midlands, see *AnnClon*, s.a. 1283; Otway-Ruthven, 'The partition of the de Verdon lands in Ireland', pp 410-11; Empey, 'County Kilkenny in the Anglo-Norman period', pp 89-91; Ó Cléirigh, 'The impact of the Anglo-Normans in Laois', pp 14-15.

Chapter 2

The career of Gerald fitzMaurice III and the rise of John fitzThomas, 1283–1292

In December 1283, a business transaction between a Poitevin and a Savoyard precipitated the re-emergence of a resident lord of Offaly, after a hiatus of fifteen years. William de Valence, the king's uncle and lord of Pembroke and Wexford, sold the marriage and the custody of the lands of the heir of Maurice fitzGerald III, third lord of Offaly, to Geoffrey de Geneville, lord of Trim, for £1200.¹ On the surface, Geoffrey's willingness to part with such a large sum is surprising, given that the heir, Gerald fitzMaurice III, was approximately 19 years of age at the time, which meant that the lord of Trim would only enjoy the custody for two years.² However, it is likely that de Geneville bought the custody for the specific purpose of marrying Gerald to his own daughter Joan.³ The details of Gerald fitzMaurice's upbringing and of his subsequent career as fourth lord of Offaly are sketchy. In July 1268, he was orphaned at the age of three and a half, following the drowning of his father along with a shipload of his followers.⁴ Immediately after Maurice's death, Edward, the lord of Ireland, granted his custody to Thomas de Clare, who sold it in 1270 to William de Valence for £2,333 13s 4d. The fact that Gerald was de Valence's ward raises the possibility that his education and upbringing took place in England, in circles close to the king.⁵ If that was the case, presumably de Geneville's purchase of his custody meant a return to Ireland, to take up his responsibilities as heir to the lordship of Offaly. Significantly, Geoffrey's acquisition of December 1283 did not bring him control of all of the properties of Gerald's father, which had in fact been subjected to a tripartite division. In the first instance, following the death of Gerald's mother before August 1266, Maurice fitzGerald III had married William de Valence's daughter Agnes. The terms of the generous marriage agreement which he made with her meant that after Maurice's death, Agnes retained possession of the family's properties in Limerick, as well as one third of the manors in Kildare itself, for the rest of her

¹ *CDI 1252–1284*, no. 2163.

² Flower, 'The Kilkenny Chronicle in Cotton Ms', p. 332; *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p. 290.

³ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 33.

⁴ *AnnClon.*, s.a. 1268; 'The Kilkenny Chronicle', p. 332.

⁵ *CCR 1272–79*, p. 45; *CDI 1252–1284*, no. 866; *GEC*, X, p. 377.

life.⁶ Furthermore, in 1275, Roger Mortimer of Wigmore successfully asserted his right to hold the custody of all the Geraldine lands within Offaly itself, as tenant-in-chief of the crown.⁷ Hence, de Geneville gained custody of those Geraldine properties within Kildare which lay outside Offaly, of which the most valuable was the manor of Maynooth, and of diverse estates scattered in locations in Tipperary, Limerick and Thomond. While it is not known whether Roger Mortimer's successor, Edmund relinquished responsibility over his share of the inheritance to Gerald before he came of age, it appears probable that de Geneville did so. In any case, it seems as though Gerald was behaving like the *de facto* lord before he attained his majority. On the surface, the fact that a Gerald fitzMaurice is recorded as having brought his vassals to serve the king in Wales in 1284 would appear to support this view. However, this particular individual is more likely to have been Sir Gerald fitzMaurice of Ballylaan, a Desmond Geraldine.⁸ Nevertheless, other evidence that Gerald was acting as lord of Offaly while still underage has survived. For example, in 1285, he succeeded in bringing a lawsuit before the king's bench in England, a comparatively rare achievement for an Irish magnate.⁹ The case was directed against his stepmother Agnes de Valence, and was an attempt to regain possession of the estates which she held. Given both the legal strength of her claim, and more particularly her kinship with the king, his failure to do so is not surprising.¹⁰ The fact that the case was heard at all demonstrates an ability to interact with the crown, which may have been a product of an English upbringing; however, in 1285, Gerald had far more pressing problems on his hands than an inconvenient stepmother. Specifically, he had to deal with a grave challenge to his authority within the lordship of Offaly itself.

It was noted earlier that in June 1284, the castle of Lea, which served as the *caput* of the lordship of Offaly, was taken and burned, apparently by an alliance of the Irish of Offaly and western Meath.¹¹ Hence, Gerald had entered his inheritance at a time when the military defence of its western portion demanded urgent attention, and it is best to view his career

⁶ CDI 1293–1301, no. 672.

⁷ CDI 1252–1284, no. 970.

⁸ CDI 1252–1284, nos. 1622, 1912, 2151, 2310. See also CDI 1285–1292, nos. 169, 341, 371.

⁹ CDI 1285–1292, nos. 29, 56; G. Hand, *English law in Ireland*, pp 14–19.

¹⁰ CDI 1285–1292, no. 56.

¹¹ See Chapter 1, pp 27–8; CPR 1272–81, p. 13; AI, s.a. 1283; Grace, p.40.; Clyn, p. 9.

within that context. Indeed, concrete defensive considerations probably played a large part in his marriage to Joan de Geneville. Her father, whose liberty bordered Offaly, was experiencing similar problems in the early 1280s, and clearly, from his perspective, it would be advantageous to have a friendly resident lord *in situ* beside the marches.¹² Similarly, the properties which were worst affected by the turmoil were located within Offaly and were in the custody of Edmund Mortimer. His own lands around Dunamase were equally vulnerable to pressure from the Irish of the midlands, which may have made him more willing to relinquish control to Gerald in an effort to re-establish some sense of order in the region. It is possible that the court case taken on Gerald's behalf against his stepmother in 1285 was actually an effort to acquire enough revenue to try to reassert his authority in Offaly. For in that same year, he mounted an expedition to do so.

The *Annals of Clonmacnoise* describe his action in terms of conquest and invasion, lending credence to the possibility that the Anglo-Irish had lost control of western Offaly. Gerald's targets were the Irish of Offaly, or, as the annalist Clyn phrased it, 'his' Irish of Offaly.¹³ Significantly, according to the *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, Geoffrey de Geneville and Piers de Bermingham, a magnate with lands in Carbury, in western Kildare, also participated in the venture. However, the combined efforts of the three magnates notwithstanding, the expedition was a disaster. The *Annals of Clonmacnoise* state that the Irish of Offaly, with the assistance of the Irish of western Meath led by Cairbre O'Melaghlin, defeated the colonists in the field capturing many prisoners in the process. Chief amongst them was the lord of Offaly.¹⁴ Neither the length of Gerald's captivity nor the terms of his release are recorded. However, he was probably free by March 1286, when his attorney, John de Punchardon, lodged a claim in Dublin to the Geraldine manors of Inchiquin and Youghal in Cork on his behalf.¹⁵ It is likely that he travelled to England that spring, as in May 1286, king Edward granted him the right to hold a weekly market and annual fair at Maynooth.¹⁶ This grant effectively marks the

¹² *AnnClon*, s.a. 1283; Otway-Ruthven, 'The partition of the de Verdon lands in Ireland', pp 410–11.

¹³ *AnnClon* s. a. 1285; *Clyn*, p. 10.

¹⁴ *AnnClon*, s. a. 1285; *Clyn*, p. 10; *Grace*, p. 40.

¹⁵ *CDI* 1285–1292, no. 1142.

¹⁶ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 141. As far as his successor was concerned, royal grants usually coincided with sojourns in England.

end of Gerald's traceable career. Possibly, the experience of being captured broke his health, as although hostilities in Offaly continued, he is not recorded as having taken part in the defence of the marches thereafter. In any case, at some time around July of 1287 Gerald died, childless, at the age of 22.¹⁷

On the surface, it seems as though Gerald had a brief, rather undistinguished, career as lord of Offaly. However, the brevity of his career and the paucity of sources available in themselves make it difficult to assess his performance accurately. For example, the surviving evidence regarding his actual exercise of lordship comes from later periods, such as a court case dating from 1308 which noted that Gerald had enfeoffed John de Punchardon of a tenement at Kilmorry, near Rathangan.¹⁸ Similarly, with the exception of his attorney, the same John de Punchardon, the composition of his retinue, if he had time to build one, is irrecoverable. Nevertheless, he undeniably failed to achieve either of his identifiable objectives, namely the recovery of property from his stepmother and the re-imposition of control upon western Offaly. Notwithstanding this, Gerald's tenure as lord of Offaly was of crucial importance to his family, as his last recorded deeds ensured that the lordship remained in Geraldine hands. Being childless, his nearest relative and customary heir was his aunt, Juliana, the daughter of Gerald fitzMaurice II. However, just before he died, Gerald took steps to disinherit her.¹⁹ The surviving evidence does not explicitly reveal the rationale behind his action. The theory that Gerald believed that Juliana, as a woman, was incapable of dealing with the insurgent Irish of Offaly is superficially attractive. However, it is considerably weakened by the fact that in 1287, she had an adult son, John, by her first husband, John de Cogan the younger. John de Cogan III was a magnate of some importance in his own right, whose estates in north Cork bordered the Geraldine properties in central Limerick held by Agnes de Valence.²⁰ As Juliana's heir, he would have a vested interest in maximising the profitability of the lordship of Offaly. Furthermore, the difficult conditions existing there would not have held many fears for him, as he had already served with the king in Wales in 1282 and had been permitted to bring his own rebellious Irish into the king's peace in 1283.²¹ This implies that fitzMaurice

¹⁷ M. Archdall, *Monasticon Hibernicum*, ii, p. 255.

¹⁸ *CJR* 1308–14, p. 82.

¹⁹ *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 40, 41, 136.

²⁰ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 47; Orpen, *Normans*, iii, pp 119, 214.

²¹ *CPR* 1281–92, pp 31, 67.

had other motives for disinheriting Juliana. While personal animus between nephew and aunt cannot be discounted, the actual identity of Gerald's successor supports the explanation first advanced by Orpen and subsequently generally accepted, namely that Gerald, wishing to keep the inheritance in Geraldine hands, disregarded customary law and transferred it to a male representative of the family.²² There are parallels available from elsewhere in Ireland, during the reign of Edward I, of a great degree of importance being attached to the transmission of a family's inheritance through the male line. The most revealing example of a lineage making an effort to ensure that its properties stayed within the family dates from 1299, when a detailed set of instructions was drawn up by Henry son of Simon de Rochford, specifying the manner and order in which his property should devolve, so as to ensure that a male de Rochford always exercised lordship.²³ A similar example, involving the de Laone family, dates from 1288.²⁴ In any event, whatever his motives were, in June of 1287 Gerald began to transfer ownership of his properties, and, according to Clyn, leadership of the family, to his first cousin once removed – the hitherto obscure John fitzThomas fitzMaurice.²⁵

John fitzThomas became the fifth lord of Offaly at a time when his lineage faced extinction. Maurice fitzMaurice, the most powerful family member of recent years, whose main interests lay in Connacht and Munster, had died in 1286.²⁶ In fact, following Gerald's death in 1287, John appears to have been the last surviving male in the family. FitzThomas himself came from a junior branch of the Offaly Geraldines, as his father, Thomas fitzMaurice, was a younger son of Maurice fitzGerald II.²⁷ Thomas is a rather shadowy figure. The seventeenth century O'Clery Genealogies state that he was baron of Offaly, and credit him with the construction of the castle at Geashill.²⁸ The former assertion is clearly erroneous and the latter, while possible, is not supported by other evidence. On balance, these claims are most

²² G. H. Orpen, 'The FitzGeralds, barons of Offaly', pp 110–13.

²³ *CJR* 1295–1303, pp 325–6; R. Frame, *English Lordship in Ireland, 1318–61*, p. 22; Hand, *English law in Ireland*, p. 173; Devitt, 'The Barony of Okethy', pp 277–285.

²⁴ *CDI* 1285–1292, no. 453.

²⁵ *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 40, 41; *Clyn*, p. 10.

²⁶ *AC*, s.a. 1286.

²⁷ His ancestry was established by Orpen in 'The FitzGeralds', pp 110–13.

²⁸ Pender, 'The O'Clery book of genealogies', p. 184.

likely to have been the handiwork of antiquarians attempting to enhance fitzThomas's pedigree for the benefit of his illustrious descendants.

Contemporary documentation of Thomas's life is extremely sparse. It is known that at some point after 1257 he was granted land at Banada in Sligo by his elder brother Maurice fitzMaurice, and the O'Clery Genealogies note his presence there. The Annals of Connacht record his death in 1271, in Maurice's castle at Lough Mask.²⁹ Beyond these bare details, the only other fragmentary evidence extant suggests that Thomas may have had a clerical background. A papal dispensation dating from 1257 and a court case taken in 1261 both refer to a Thomas fitzMaurice who was a churchman.³⁰ Admittedly, although he was from Ireland, the Thomas filius Mauricii referred to in the papal document was based in Orléans at the time. Nonetheless, it would not in itself have been an unusual occurrence had a son of Maurice fitzGerald II entered the church. Although a definitive case for Thomas's clerical status cannot be made, it does raise the intriguing possibility that the fifth lord of Offaly's legitimacy was doubtful. Perhaps for this reason, or more probably because Thomas fitzMaurice himself was such an obscure character, the identity of John fitzThomas's mother has not been ascertained. A later tradition names her as Rose, daughter of Richard de St Michael, lord of Reban, in Kildare.³¹ A match between the Geraldines of Offaly and the St Michaels seems plausible, as both families held land in Kildare.³² However, the subsequent lack of links between fitzThomas and the St Michael family makes it less likely that the tradition is accurate. Essentially, fitzThomas's parents made too faint an impression upon the surviving documentation to provide much assistance in sketching John's background. As far as John himself is concerned, his activities cannot be traced until after his cousin's premature death.³³ Nevertheless, it is possible to sketch some of the details of his upbringing. For instance, although his place and date of birth are unknown, he must have been born before 1266 to have been of age in June 1287. Similarly, it is likely that any siblings that he may have had did not survive childhood,

²⁹ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 74; *AC*, s.a. 1271; Pender, 'O'Clery Genealogies', p. 179.

³⁰ Theiner, *Vetera Monumenta*, p. 76, no. CXCIX; *Cal. Pap. Reg.*, I, p. 345; Sheehy, *Pontifica Hibernica*; ii, no. 437; *NAI RC 7/1*, p. 401.

³¹ R. Lascelles (ed.), *Liber Munerum Publicorum Hiberniae*, I, pt. 1, p. 34.

³² Otway-Ruthven, 'Knights' fees in Kildare, Leix and Offaly', p. 170.

³³ An entry in the Red Book (*Red Bk Kildare*, no. 42; TCD MS 9825, f10v) purporting to be from 1285 is almost certainly from 1302. See *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 190.

given the complete lack of references to them after John's recorded career began. It is more difficult to establish where fitzThomas was likely to have been raised. For instance, it would not have been unusual for John to have been brought up in the household of a magnate like his uncle, Maurice fitzMaurice, but the sources give no hint of such an arrangement. If this possibility is disregarded, then his father's Sligo lands suggest a Connacht background. The likelihood of a western upbringing is strengthened by the fact that John can be shown to have exercised lordship in that province, at a manor called Summerhudorum, before March 1288.³⁴ However, Thomas fitzMaurice's death in 1271 coincided with a major campaign conducted by the O'Connor king of Connacht which, in tandem with the de Burgh – Geraldine feud of the 1260s, had devastated the Geraldine estates in Sligo as well as those in Offaly itself, such as Lea.³⁵ Obviously, such a strife-torn environment was not conducive to raising children, so it is possible that John spent his early years in the safety of those Geraldine properties, such as the great manor of Maynooth, which were located in the more peaceful parts of Ireland. Ultimately though, John's youth and early career remain enigmatic, and it is most likely that his obscurity before 1287 is an accurate reflection of his relative unimportance until he became lord of Offaly.

In the wake of Gerald fitzMaurice's death, John fitzThomas was faced with a number of threats to his position as the new lord of Offaly, the most serious of which was his uncertain grasp upon Gerald's inheritance. In the first place, the overall value of the inheritance was lessened by the necessity to provide for Gerald's widow, Joan de Geneville, who was assigned lands in Maynooth.³⁶ More seriously however, it transpired that John's legal claim to the inheritance had been weakened because the transfer of seisin between himself and Gerald had been botched. Thus, an inquisition taken a quarter of a century later revealed that Gerald had died before the process of enfeoffment could be completed for some of the Geraldine properties. In those manors where John had failed to secure the tenants' fealty, the inheritance reverted to Gerald's nearest heir – Juliana de Cogan.³⁷ From fitzThomas's perspective, the

³⁴ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 16. The documents is an acknowledgement of a debt to fitzThomas by his bailiff at Summerhudorum, one Gogodebus de Rupe. It was dated at Tuam and refers to the sheriff of Connacht.

³⁵ *AC*, s.a. 1265, 1270, 1271; *Clyn*, p. 8; *Grace*, p. 36.

³⁶ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 33.

³⁷ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 136.

full extent of the problem is not clear. He appears to have gained control of three of the family's 'core' manors, those of Maynooth, Lea and Rathangan. His control over the family property in Tipperary was more dubious, as three years later, Juliana sued him in an effort to recover the manor of Portland. However, it is certain that John failed to secure the reversion rights to the properties currently enjoyed by Agnes de Valence.³⁸ As Agnes was still very much alive in 1287, John's failure in this regard did not have immediate consequences. In general terms however, the botched succession can be seen as a significant, if involuntary, hostage to fortune given away at the start of fitzThomas's lordship.

The second major threat to John was one which he shared with Gerald fitzMaurice, namely, the continuing existence of the Irish of Offaly. Admittedly, the situation had improved since Gerald's disastrous humiliation at the hands of Cairbre O'Melaghlin and An Calbhach O'Connor Faly in 1285. Most importantly, An Calbhach himself had been captured by Walter L'Enfaunt and brought to peace in the following year.³⁹ However, the situation appears to have been endemically unstable, and the region slid back into conflict within a year of fitzThomas's succession.⁴⁰ On the surface then, it appears that at the beginning of fitzThomas's career, he was in an even more precarious position than his predecessor had been. Apart from the problems caused by the family's sometime tenants, the Irish of Offaly, John's legal position was dubious. And yet, notwithstanding these handicaps, within six years he had become one of the most powerful magnates in Ireland.

Heretofore, this remarkable feat has usually been explained in terms of John's own overweening ambitions and general lawlessness.⁴¹ Undoubtedly, naked ambition was essential to such a meteoric rise, but on closer examination, it seems clear that a number of external factors were fundamentally responsible for his success. Ironically, the most important of these was the manner in which opportunities fell to him as a result of the fact that his family faced extinction. The aged Maurice fitzMaurice had died before October 1286, leaving two adult daughters as his heirs.⁴² One daughter,

³⁸ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 136; *CDI 1285–1292*, no. 622.

³⁹ *Grace*, p. 40; *Clyn*, p. 10; *DKPRI*, 37, p. 27; *CDI 1285–1292*, no. 558.

⁴⁰ *CDI 1285–1292*, no. 559.

⁴¹ See for example, Orpen, *Normans*, iv, p. 113; Richardson and Sayles, *The Irish parliament in the middle ages*, p. 248; *N. H. I.*, ii, pp 185–7.

⁴² *AC*, s.a. 1286; *CPR 1281–92*, p. 252.

another Juliana, had married Thomas de Clare in 1274, and had at least two sons by him.⁴³ The other, Amabilia, was a childless widow.⁴⁴ Barely six months after John became the *Capitaneus Geraldinorum*, Amabilia appeared before the chief governor, Stephen de Fulbourne, at Cong in Mayo. In his presence, she agreed to grant fitzThomas all of the lands and tenements which she would inherit from her father. The bulk of the properties which she listed were located in Connacht and Ulster, specifically in Tír Chonaill, Sligo, Lough Erne, Fermanagh, Lough Mask and Ardahan. In addition to those properties, Amabilia also included a secondary cluster of estates in Munster, namely Corcomohide, Corkaguiney, Kinsale, Inch, Inchiquin and Youghal.⁴⁵ Her reasons for granting away her inheritance are not explicitly recorded. However, it is most likely that, as with her cousin Gerald fitzMaurice, she was motivated by a sense of family awareness which benefited John fitzThomas at the expense of the de Clares. In any event, her action sent John on his way to becoming a great magnate. Admittedly, he did not profit immediately from his good fortune. The actual division of Maurice fitzMaurice's estates between his daughters did not get under way until 1289, and was complicated and delayed further by the forceful insistence on the part of Maurice's widow, Emelina de Longéspee, that she should receive equitable treatment.⁴⁶ Consequently, John only began to gain control in October 1289, and the process does not appear to have been completed until September 1293.⁴⁷ At that point, he had acquired land in Galway, Mayo, Sligo (including his father's estate), Tír Chonaill and Fermanagh.⁴⁸ Not surprisingly, John's good fortune had wider ramifications in Ireland. Specifically, by fortuitously acquiring such large tracts of land, fitzThomas was moved to the forefront of Connacht society at a time when the province's political dynamics had become particularly fluid.

During the late 1280s, the colony in Connacht and Ulster underwent a political transformation brought about, in the main, by generational changes amongst the dominant magnates of the region. Maurice fitzMaurice's death occurred in 1286, the same year as the return to Ireland of

⁴³ *Cal. Carew MSS*, v, p. 324; *Cal. Inq. P.M.*, iv, no. 54; *Chyn*, p. 13.

⁴⁴ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 32.

⁴⁵ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 87.

⁴⁶ *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 60–2, 129; NAI RC 7/3, p. 37.

⁴⁷ *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 32, 34, 93–4.

⁴⁸ *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 32, 34, 85, 91–4.

Richard de Burgh, earl of Ulster and lord of Connacht.⁴⁹ De Burgh lost little time in asserting his authority over the Irish chieftains of Connacht and Ulster, as in that year he mounted an expedition which forced them into submission, after which the hostages of Connacht, Cenél Conall and Cenél nEogain were handed over to him.⁵⁰ He also entered a mutual assistance agreement in September 1286 with a group of Scottish and Irish magnates including Thomas de Clare, known as the Turnbury band. By then, Maurice fitzMaurice was either dying or already dead. Through his marriage with Maurice's daughter Juliana, Thomas de Clare was the immediate heir to half of his lordship, while his eldest son stood ultimately to gain Amabilia's share of the inheritance. The exact purpose of this agreement was not stated, but the fact that fitzMaurice's possessions theoretically included Tír Conall and Fermanagh, combined with the inclusion of Scottish magnates, suggests that it was connected to a proposed attempt to subdue western Ulster.⁵¹ However, before any such scheme could be put into effect, Thomas de Clare died, in September 1287, and six months later, John fitzThomas began the process of acquiring Amabilia's half of the inheritance.⁵² From de Burgh's point of view, the opportunity of consolidating his dominance over the region with de Clare's assistance had been lost, to be replaced by the threat posed by the emergence of a Geraldine rival. There had been considerable antipathy between the de Burghs and Geraldines a generation earlier, culminating in the famous feud of the 1260s.⁵³ One of the causes of that conflict was a dispute between the two families about the nature of de Burgh lordship over the Geraldine properties in north Connacht and Ulster. Possibly this question led to tensions developing between the two men from the beginning. However, the transition from tension to open conflict was ensured, ironically, by the policies of the Dublin government in a manner which reveals the benefits which could accrue to a magnate with close links to the administration.

At this point, the government was heavily involved in the administration of Connacht, in particular the region west of the Shannon

⁴⁹ Orpen, *Normans*, iv, p. 112.

⁵⁰ AC, s.a. 1286.

⁵¹ J. Stevenson, *Documents illustrative of the history of Scotland*, i, no. 12; Duffy, *Ireland and the Irish Sea Region, 1014–1318*, pp 151–55.

⁵² Orpen *Normans*, iv, pp 99–104; *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 87; *Cal. Inq. P.M.*, IV, no. 54.

⁵³ Frame 'Ireland and the barons' wars', pp 164–6; *N. H. I.*, ii, p. 183; *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 9.

known as the king's cantreds.⁵⁴ It has been suggested that the government viewed De Burgh's control over the O'Connor hostages in Connacht with some alarm, presumably because of the possible destabilising consequences within the king's cantreds.⁵⁵ Cathal son of Conchubhair O'Connor of the Clan Murtough segment of the dynasty, had been king of Connacht since 1280, and presumably it had been his hostages that de Burgh had acquired in 1286. However, he was deposed by his brother Manus in 1288. De Burgh responded promptly by leading an army against Manus, but he was met by the new king, who was accompanied by 'MacGerailt' at Roscommon, and the earl was forced to back down.⁵⁶ The available evidence suggests that 'MacGerailt', or John fitzThomas, was acting on behalf of the Dublin government. The Irish annals, when describing the confrontation, state that John was with 'the people of the king', a term usually used to describe official forces. Furthermore a letter from Edward I in 1298 reveals that fitzThomas had been ordered to campaign in Connacht 'against the king's enemies and rebels' in 1288 by Archbishop Stephen de Fulbourne, spending £515 while doing so. De Fulbourne was dead by June 1288, and as it is unlikely that John could have raised such a sum before becoming lord of Offaly, the campaign in question seems to have been the 1288 action against the earl of Ulster.⁵⁷ The possibility that de Fulbourne, and then his successor John de Sandford, archbishop of Dublin, were using fitzThomas as a counterweight to the earl of Ulster is strengthened by the fact that the government can be shown to have been bolstering John's position in Connacht from the beginning. Specifically, Amabilia's decision to enfeoff fitzThomas was supported, if not instigated by de Fulbourne, as her initial declaration of intent to transfer her inheritance to her cousin was made before him at Cong in February 1288.⁵⁸ De Sandford continued this policy, as a year later Amabilia repeated her intentions before him in Dublin.⁵⁹ It is probably not a coincidence that shortly afterwards the division and apportioning of Maurice fitzMaurice's Connacht lands began, and was carried out so expeditiously that readjustments had to be made later.⁶⁰ In fact, the co-operation between de Sandford and

⁵⁴ See for example, H. Walton, *The English in Connacht*, pp 287–95.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

⁵⁶ *AU, AFM, AC*, s.a. 1288.

⁵⁷ *CDI 1293–1301*, no. 518; *H. B. C.*, p. 375; Walton, *The English in Connacht*, pp 286–7.

⁵⁸ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 87.

⁵⁹ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 85.

⁶⁰ *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 60–62, 129.

fitzThomas was by no means limited to keeping a check upon the earl of Ulster in Connacht, but also extended into Offaly.

In September 1288, the archbishop widened the traditional scope of a chief governor's operational duties by calling a royal service and launching a massive attack upon the Irish of Laois and Offaly, beginning a war that dragged on for more than a year. A month later, as the war had not concluded before the obligatory forty days of military service expired, he commissioned three magnates, Geoffrey de Geneville, Piers de Bermingham and fitzThomas, to help him guard the marches.⁶¹ These actions, it has been widely noted, went far beyond the usual responses of chief governors to events in the midlands. Indeed, it has been suggested that the campaign was specifically mounted for John's benefit.⁶² While it is more likely, given the duration of the war, that the midlands Irish had become so much of a threat that they forced de Sandford to act, he can be seen to be keeping in close contact with fitzThomas throughout the period of military crisis. His actions regarding Amabilia's land transfers in February 1289 have already been mentioned. In January 1289, de Sandford also witnessed the earliest extant charter in which John referred to himself as '*dominus de Ofaly*'. In this charter, fitzThomas granted the Cistercian abbey of Rosglas three oak trees per annum from his forest of Lea, for the souls of his father, his mother and, significantly, for his benefactor Gerald fitzMaurice.⁶³ In April of that year de Sandford witnessed, and possibly instigated, a military indenture between John and his neighbouring magnate, Piers de Bermingham, who was guarding the marches from Rathangan northwards to Thetmoy.⁶⁴ The indenture seems to have paved the way for a new offensive against the Irish of Offaly, launched after May 1289.⁶⁵ Nicholas de Clere, the treasurer, claimed expenses of £200 for paying the pair to march with an army against the king's enemies, and the *Annals of Connacht* record a clash in 1289 between 'MacMuiris', presumably fitzThomas, and 'MacFeorais', or de Bermingham, and An Calbhach O'Connor Faly and 'the rest of the princes of Leinster'.⁶⁶ Again, as in 1285, the settlers were heavily

⁶¹ CDI 1285–1292, no. 559.

⁶² J. F. Lydon, *N. H. I.* p. 266; R. Frame, *The Dublin Government*, p. 101; J. Claffey, *Richard de Burgh*, p. 114.

⁶³ C. McNeill, 'Reports on Rawlinson MSS', p.2.

⁶⁴ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 11.

⁶⁵ A casualty of the campaign was still alive in May 1289 – CDI 1285–1292, no. 475.

⁶⁶ CDI 1285–1292, no. 964; AC, s.a. 1289.

defeated, and Clyn noted that 'lord John fitzThomas lost many horses and grooms', in the aftermath.⁶⁷ The defeat underlined the extent to which de Sandford was committed to maintaining stability in the midlands and to maintaining fitzThomas's position. In September of 1289, he again led an army into Laois and Offaly, ending the war by October 4. Interestingly, his account of the campaign suggests that fitzThomas himself had been either captured or trapped in Offaly, as one of the costs incurred was a sum of £11 13s 4d for 'the expenses of the rescue of John fitzThomas'. At the time, de Sandford believed that the expedition had been an outstanding success, as he informed the king that 'the Irish as well of Offaly as of Leys came into the king's peace and were never hostile again'.⁶⁸ Certainly, his efforts had some effect upon the chieftains. A new set of debts owed by them to have peace appears on the pipe rolls, and there is a record of fines being paid via the abbot of Rosglas in 1289.⁶⁹ However, the victory was not as complete as de Sandford thought. A letter from January 1292 reveals that An Calbhach O'Connor Faly had been forced to promise to pay 1000 marks and to supply hostages in order to secure his release from prison, presumably following his capture in 1286 by Walter L'Enfaunt.⁷⁰ The hostages, including An Calbhach's brother Maolseachlainn, had been handed over, but if the Anglo-Irish fought the war of 1288–9 for defensive purposes, their ineffectuality as a deterrent to further Irish hostility is obvious. Moreover, de Sandford's campaign provided An Calbhach with a valuable hostage of his own. The unfortunate in question was Sir John de Fulbourne, a nephew of the former justiciar, the late archbishop of Tuam, who had been captured while taking part in the 1289 invasion as a member of de Sandford's household. His captivity lasted until June 1290, when he was released in exchange for the O'Connor Faly hostages in Dublin castle, and for a pardon of the 1000 marks owed by An Calbhach. Similarly, a year later, John de Hothum, a royal clerk, refused to accept an income derived from revenue accruing from the Offaly marches.⁷¹ These events may seem trivial in themselves, but they demonstrate that in the immediate aftermath of de Sandford's best efforts, a

⁶⁷ AC, s.a. 1289; *Clyn*, p. 10. However according to Clyn, the defeat was incurred in 1288.

⁶⁸ *CDI 1285–1292*, no. 559.

⁶⁹ *DKPRI*, 37, p. 46; *CDI 1285–1292*, no. 559.

⁷⁰ *CDI 1285–1292*, no. 1018.

⁷¹ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 13; *CDI 1285–1292*, nos. 541, 558, 585, 698, 997, 1018.

region of Offaly still existed which was completely out of official reach, and also that at least one Irish leader had retained the capacity to disturb the peace.

However, the archbishop's campaign did bring peace, for a short time at least. The entire episode highlights the close relationship that had been formed between the archbishop and the young magnate, and its successful outcome was undoubtedly to fitzThomas's advantage. For the next eighteen months, both Connacht and Offaly appear to have remained quiescent. After his check in 1288, the earl of Ulster did not immediately make any overt moves against either fitzThomas or his ally, Manus, king of Connacht. The only location in which de Burgh's actions might be construed as being hostile was in western Meath. Gerald fitzMaurice's old adversary, Cairbre O'Melaghlin, remained in rebellion in 1289–90. As a result, the government campaigned against him, with the help of Manus O'Connor, the new king of Connacht, and Cairbre was finally killed in 1290 by a MacCoghlan. However, it appears likely that de Burgh had been assisting O'Melaghlin. A William de Burgh fought MacCoghlan at the time of Cairbre's death, and later that year, the earl himself attacked MacCoghlan in explicit revenge for killing O'Melaghlin.⁷² Notwithstanding de Burgh's apparent alienation from the administration, fitzThomas used the more tranquil conditions after the end of the war in Offaly to strengthen his legal grasp over his newly acquired properties. Even before this, he had gone into the property market in his own right. As early as March 1289, one 'Mauricius Mac Murkud' quitclaimed property near Lough Mask to him.⁷³ A month later, fitzThomas acquired land from Nicholas Chevre, the bishop of Leighlin, who granted him property in the Kildare marches at Tippercathan in Oboy in modern Co. Laois.⁷⁴ More importantly, he grappled to surmount the problems which arose out of his efforts to take effective control of Amabilia's share of Maurice fitzMaurice's estates. An orderly redistribution of property was greatly hampered by the confusion generated by the deaths, in rapid succession of three magnates, Gerald fitzMaurice, Maurice fitzMaurice and Thomas de Clare, whose properties were heavily intermixed due to marriage agreements. The basic problem was made considerably worse by the myriad claims put forward by Amabilia's stepmother, Emelina de Longéspee, a major landholder in her own

⁷² *AnnClon, AC, ALC, s.a. 1290.*

⁷³ *Red Bk Kildare, no. 51.*

⁷⁴ *Red Bk Kildare, no. 39.*

right.⁷⁵ Immediately after the end of the war in Offaly, John took control of Amabilia's share of the manors of Ardahan and Lough Mask in Connacht, and apparently, Kinsale in Waterford.⁷⁶ However, the division of the inheritance had been carried out without reference to Emelina's rights as Maurice fitzMaurice's widow. Emelina, who usually lived in England, had returned to Ireland in August 1288 to conduct a wide-ranging and largely effective defence of her claims.⁷⁷ In this case, she caused the escheator to eject John from the three manors shortly after he had received seisin. Emelina's basic aim appears to have been to have her portion of the inheritance established, so as to sell it to the heiresses. Thus by July 1290, having recovered her share of Ardahan from fitzThomas and her stepdaughters, she quitclaimed her rights to the manor back to Amabilia.⁷⁸ However, the manors of Lough Mask and Kinsale were not sold back so quickly, and were still a bone of contention between fitzThomas and the escheator in August 1291.⁷⁹

In a similar fashion, friction developed between John and Amabilia's sister, Juliana, widow of Thomas de Clare. One example was a clash over control of the manor of Corcomohide in Limerick. The actual ownership of the manor turned on the question whether or not Maurice fitzMaurice had granted it to Juliana and Thomas de Clare on their marriage. Shortly after de Clare's death in August 1287, Juliana convinced the justiciar, Stephen de Fulbourne, that Maurice had done so, and thus regained possession. However, in January 1290, at the eyre of Limerick, Amabilia, as Maurice's heir, gained seisin of a moiety of the manor from Juliana, and promptly granted it to fitzThomas. This was done despite warnings in court that Amabilia had no rights to the property. Nevertheless, John enjoyed possession of the property for a year and a half before Juliana could persuade the escheator to expel him.⁸⁰

While John fitzThomas was attempting to secure as large a slice as possible of Maurice fitzMaurice's estates, he can also be seen to be trying to come to terms with the consequences of Gerald fitzMaurice's botched transmission of the lordship of Offaly to him. His nervousness about his legal

⁷⁵ Orpen, *Normans*, iii, pp 214, 265.

⁷⁶ *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 93, 94; *CDI 1285–1292*, no. 940.

⁷⁷ *CPR 1282–91*, p. 299.

⁷⁸ *CDI 1285–1292*, no. 940; *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 61, 62.

⁷⁹ *CDI 1285–1292*, no. 940.

⁸⁰ *CDI 1285–1292*, no. 940; *NAI RC 7/2*, p. 183.

claim to the inheritance is shown by his extraction of quitclaims from Amabilia, covering all of the lands and claims that Gerald had possessed.⁸¹ While Amabilia's rights to the lordship of Offaly were highly tenuous, Juliana de Cogan was an altogether different prospect. She was viewed as Gerald's legal heir, and it may not be a coincidence that she acknowledged that she owed a debt of 500 marks to the overlord of Offaly, Edmund Mortimer, in October 1290.⁸² During the first three years following Gerald's death, she appears to have let fitzThomas enjoy possession of the 'core' Offaly manors unmolested. However, if the surviving evidence concerning the manor of Portland in Tipperary is typical, the same is not true for the more peripheral Geraldine manors. In April 1290, Juliana petitioned parliament at Westminster, claiming that John had unjustly disseised her of this property and that consequently she was unable to get justice in Ireland. As a result, she was permitted to take the case again, but there is no evidence to suggest that she did so.⁸³ Possibly, she had despaired of getting a favourable result against an individual who was evidently in favour with the government in Dublin. However, the fact that Emelina de Longespée and Juliana de Clare had few difficulties in doing so, taken in conjunction with her next recorded dealings with fitzThomas, suggest another possibility. In late 1287, the tenement of Dunquin in Kerry had been taken into the king's hands because of the death of Thomas de Clare. Three years later, Juliana, acting as Gerald fitzMaurice's heir, took a court action in which she claimed that the fourth lord of Offaly had been in possession of the tenement at his death, and duly gained seisin. Immediately afterwards, she enfeoffed fitzThomas with the property.⁸⁴ Juliana's apparently contradictory actions during this period are open to several different interpretations. When attempting to assess her motives, it is worth remembering that in addition to her son, John de Cogan III, who was already a powerful man, she also had to provide for her son by her second marriage to John de Penryes, whose name was also John.⁸⁵ Within that context it could be argued that her apparent hostility towards fitzThomas was, in effect, a negotiating ploy, designed to force him

⁸¹ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 88.

⁸² Walton, *The English in Connacht*, p. 285; *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 73; *CJR* 1305–07, pp 425–6; *CCR* 1288–96, p. 149.

⁸³ *CDI* 1285–1292, no. 622.

⁸⁴ *CJR* 1305–07, pp 425–6.

⁸⁵ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 33.

into granting her a reasonable level of compensation in exchange for waiving her rights to the inheritance. Alternatively, she may have wished to keep fitzThomas away from the most potentially lucrative aspect of her inherited rights – the reversion of the manors held by Agnes de Valence, so that the ultimate beneficiary, John de Cogan, would make a better provision for his half-brother. If that was so, then enfeoffing fitzThomas with property in Kerry could be seen as an attempt to buy him off. In any case, whatever her intentions in 1290 were, her subsequent dealings with her cousin make it clear that he fully intended to acquire all of the properties and rights enjoyed by the third and fourth lords of Offaly.

If fitzThomas's relationship with his cousin Juliana de Cogan was initially rather uncertain, he does appear to have accomplished at least one major achievement in the early years of his lordship – the assumption of *de facto* pre-eminence amongst the landholders of Kildare. Admittedly, explicit details of this are rare. Ideally, such a development would be traced through the minutiae of local court proceedings, where its hallmark, a web of alliances and relationships, would come to light through the testimony of those involved. Unfortunately however, the court records of the liberty of Kildare do not survive. Nevertheless, there is enough evidence to shed some light upon the phenomenon. The most obvious starting point is fitzThomas's military activity in Offaly in 1288–9, a year after he succeeded Gerald. It will be recalled that in September 1288, fitzThomas was commissioned to guard the marches from Rathangan southwards to Ballymadun. The actual size and composition of the forces that John employed to carry out the task was not officially recorded, being, in essence, a private army hired for a fixed sum. However, de Sandford undertook to guard the southernmost stretch of the marches himself, from Ballymadun to Kilkenny, and his account of his gubernatorial activities includes a detailed breakdown of the composition and cost of maintaining a ward there. De Sandford was paying for 22 esquires with war horses and 80 'vassals', at a total cost of £584 for the year. It seems likely that fitzThomas's retinue was at least of a similar size and cost a comparable amount, especially when his 1289 invasion of Offaly is taken into account.⁸⁶ Unfortunately, the identities of the individuals who served with him are largely unknown. Two exceptions to this general obscurity exist, and both are revealing. The *Annals of Connacht* note that one Meiler d' Exeter was killed in the course of John's defeat at the hands of An Calbhach O'Connor Faly. Meiler appears to have

⁸⁶ *CDI 1285–1292*, no. 559; *AC*, s.a. 1289.

been from Connacht, where the d' Exeter family had strong connections, which suggests that John drew men from that province to help him to take over in Kildare from Gerald fitzMaurice.⁸⁷ On the other hand, the identity of the other individual known to have served with fitzThomas makes it clear that he also drew upon Kildare men for military purposes. This was Piers de Bermingham of Thetmoy – perhaps the best known of John's associates. As a marcher lord with estates in Carbury in western Kildare, de Bermingham shared the problem of encroachment by the O'Connor Falys with his Geraldine neighbour, and he had also been assigned a stretch of march to defend by de Sandford in 1288.⁸⁸ As this would indicate, Piers was an important man in his own right, being, for example, sufficiently important to merit a personal summons to serve with the king in Gascony in June 1294.⁸⁹ Yet, despite this, Piers made an indenture with fitzThomas in April 1289, in which he promised fealty and service to the lord of Offaly.⁹⁰ It was suggested earlier that de Sandford was in fact the driving force behind the agreement, but its very existence is an indication of fitzThomas's newly gained influence within Kildare.

Apart from the example of Piers de Bermingham, the evidence provided by the witness lists to fitzThomas's charters also suggests that in general, westerners did not dominate his following. In fact, an analysis of their identities reveals a preponderance of individuals from Kildare amongst them. Undoubtedly, this is partially due to the skewed nature of the surviving charters, with their Kildare bias. However, they clearly show that from the beginning of his career as lord of Offaly, John was capable of attracting the men who were accustomed to administering the liberty of Kildare into his following. For example, Sir John de Punchardon and Sir William Cadel were two of John's closest associates in the early stages of his career.⁹¹ Significantly, both men had considerable administrative experience, being former seneschals of the liberty of Kildare⁹². In fact de Punchardon, who had also been Gerald fitzMaurice's attorney, appears to have given up the seneschalship of the liberty in order to perform a similar function for John fitzThomas in Offaly.⁹³

⁸⁷ AC, s.a. 1288, 1289; CDI 1285–1292, nos. 215, 271, 475.

⁸⁸ AC, s.a. 1289; CDI 1285–1292, no. 559.

⁸⁹ CDI 1293–1301, no. 153.

⁹⁰ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 11.

⁹¹ See for example, *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 10, 30, 33, 39, 85, 116.

⁹² DKPRI, 36, p. 50; DKPRI, 37, p. 27.

⁹³ McNeill, 'Reports on Rawlinson MSS', p. 2.

FitzThomas's relationship with men like de Punchardon and Cadel is revealed, in the main, through their presence on witness lists. However four documents have been preserved in the Red Book of Kildare, of which Piers de Birmingham's indenture is the earliest, which explicitly record the existence of a link between fitzThomas and a named individual, expressed in monetary terms. In the light of the current debate upon the origins and efficacy of the concept known as 'bastard feudalism', they merit closer examination.⁹⁴ De Birmingham's agreement is the most widely known of the quartet, being a straightforward military indenture, made in time of war.⁹⁵ Strikingly however, the other three do not appear to have been drawn up with military assistance in mind. The next one was made in February 1290 with one Henry de Berkeley.⁹⁶ De Berkeley was a lawyer, a serjeant pleader from Limerick, who had been a servant of Maurice fitzMaurice. It was this latter connection which made him useful to fitzThomas.⁹⁷ The timing of the agreement strongly suggests that de Berkeley was hired to deal with Juliana de Clare, with whom John was then in dispute over the manor of Corcomohide. This suspicion is strengthened by the fact that a court case taken in 1307 revealed that in late 1290, John had enfeoffed de Berkeley with the land in Dunquin which he had been given by Juliana de Cogan, and which rightfully belonged to the de Clare family.⁹⁸ In all probability, the other two agreements, which were made with William de Athy and John de Hothum on the same day in June 1291, were intended to supply John with legal assistance for a similar purpose.⁹⁹ Although the exact nature of that purpose is unclear, an examination of the agreements' context and timing provides a possible explanation. De Athy, who was also a serjeant pleader, was from Kildare, as his name suggests.¹⁰⁰ In return for his services, De Hothum was promised ten marks rent per annum from the manor of Maynooth.¹⁰¹ Given their shared Kildare background, it is possible that these agreements are connected to

⁹⁴ See for example, Crouch, Carpenter and Coss, 'Debate : Bastard Feudalism revisited', pp 165–203.

⁹⁵ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 11.

⁹⁶ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 14.

⁹⁷ *CDI 1285–1292*, no. 1142.

⁹⁸ *CJR 1305–07*, pp 425–6.

⁹⁹ *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 12, 15.

¹⁰⁰ *CJR 1295–1303*, pp 106, 125.

¹⁰¹ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 13.

fitzThomas's dealings with Juliana de Cogan. Undoubtedly however, their timing suggests that John was ordering his affairs at home before embarking upon a quest to gain influence in the ultimate centre of power – the royal court in England.

John travelled to England for the first time in June 1291, on a visit that lasted between six and eleven months.¹⁰² He rapidly gained access to the king's ear, and by July he had secured royal intervention into the difficulties that he had been experiencing with the Irish escheator regarding the manors of Corcomohide, Lough Mask and Kinsale.¹⁰³ John definitely made a favourable impression upon Edward I, who, for example, granted him some deer from the royal forest of Bernwood, in Buckinghamshire, in December 1291.¹⁰⁴ More importantly however, the king entrusted him with a great deal of authority in Ireland. Edward personally appointed him to be the keeper of the royal castles of Roscommon and Rinndown, a position of immense influence and strategic importance within the king's cantreds of Connacht, which John took up in November 1292 after his return from England.¹⁰⁵ In May 1292 the king also granted him the power to negotiate peace terms with the king's Irish enemies within and without his own lands, on the proviso that peace would only be actually granted with the assent of the chief governor.¹⁰⁶ Overall, from fitzThomas's perspective, his journey to England was a major success, as his dealings with Edward meant that he returned home with a tangible enhancement of his power in Connacht, and with his scope for dealing with the O'Connor Falys considerably widened. His achievement raises the question as to how a previously obscure individual could gain such ready access to the king. The answer lies in fitzThomas's relationship with the archbishop of Dublin, John de Sandford, who had relinquished the office of chief governor in November 1290.¹⁰⁷ De Sandford was a trusted advisor of King Edward, and in March 1291, the king summoned him to England, where he performed a wide range of functions, from taking part in the deliberations over the Scottish succession to officiating at the marriage of Edward's eldest daughter, Eleanor.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² *CDI 1285–1292*, nos. 916, 1103.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, no. 940.

¹⁰⁴ *CCR 1288–96*, p. 209.

¹⁰⁵ *CDI 1293–1301*, no. 98; Richardson and Sayles, *Rot. parl. hac. inediti* p. 41.

¹⁰⁶ *CDI 1285–1292*, no. 1103.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 964.

¹⁰⁸ Murphy, *The archbishops and administration of the diocese of Dublin*, p. 121.

Critically, when John travelled to England in 1291, it is explicitly recorded that he went in de Sandford's company.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, John's royal gift of three deer was matched by one of twelve to de Sandford on the same day.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, in January 1292, De Sandford himself guaranteed a loan of £200 which John borrowed from some Italian bankers.¹¹¹ The archbishop, it seems, was taking the opportunity to introduce his protégé to King Edward and the court.

Overall, there can be little doubt but that de Sandford was instrumental in facilitating fitzThomas's rise, both as chief governor in Ireland and afterwards in England. Presumably, the archbishop's patronage was a reward to John for the services which he had rendered to the government from 1288 onward. In fact, to judge from some of fitzThomas's activities in England, he could be regarded as being part of de Sandford's household in the early stages of his career. In particular, John emerges as a member of a group of individuals, close to de Sandford, who had helped him to administer the lordship. For example, in November 1291, the English barons of the exchequer heard a case involving one John de Valle, who had been incarcerated in Fleet prison on suspicion of committing serious fraud in Ireland. FitzThomas agreed to mainprise him, as did Thomas de Sandford, William de Oddingeseles and Geoffrey de Geneville, all of whom had connections to the archbishop.¹¹² Thomas de Sandford's name would suggest that he was a relative, a supposition strengthened by the fact that he appears to have profited from the archbishop's death.¹¹³ De Oddingeseles, a Warwickshire knight, had acted as de Sandford's deputy in 1289. Furthermore, after de Sandford's death, de Oddingeseles and his wife came into the possession of a large amount of the archbishop's chattels.¹¹⁴ De Geneville, the lord of Trim, had acted in concert with the archbishop in Connacht in July 1288 following the death of the justiciar of the time, Stephen de Fulbourne, and also served him in the midlands during the war in Offaly of 1288–9.¹¹⁵ Interestingly, de Geneville, like

¹⁰⁹ *CDI 1285–1292*, no. 916.

¹¹⁰ *CCR 1288–96*, p. 209.

¹¹¹ *CDI 1285–1292*, no. 1019.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, no. 993.

¹¹³ *CDI 1293–1301*, no. 275.

¹¹⁴ *CDI 1285–1292*, no. 559; *CDI 1293–1301*, no. 275;

J. T. Gilbert, *The Viceroy of Ireland*, p. 112.

¹¹⁵ *CDI 1285–1292*, nos. 559, 593

the archbishop, guaranteed fitzThomas's loan from the Italian financiers.¹¹⁶ In April 1292, de Valle was required to find a further set of mainpernors. The second group again included fitzThomas as well as two other men with links to de Sandford, John de Fulbourne, who had recently been released from An Calbhach O'Connor Faly's prison, and who had served as a member of the archbishop's household, and Walter L'Enfaunt junior, whose father had acted as de Sandford's deputy in 1289.¹¹⁷ Overall, there seems little doubt but that fitzThomas was indeed involved with a coterie of de Sandford's associates. Significantly however, this evidence dates from a time when the group's potential to influence affairs in Ireland had declined, due in the main to the changing role of its leader, the archbishop. Most obviously, its importance lessened when de Sandford's tenure as chief governor ended in November 1290.¹¹⁸ More importantly perhaps, the archbishop never returned to Ireland. In June 1294, the king sent him to the mainland of Europe, on a mission to further an anti-French alliance, and he died upon his return to England the following October.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, apart from the archbishop himself, it appears as though figures like de Oddingeseles and Thomas de Sandford had also left Ireland after 1291.¹²⁰ In any case, de Sandford's absence, and the resultant disintegration of what might be described as his retinue, were to have serious implications for John fitzThomas. Following his return home in the second half of 1292, the privileges and appointments bestowed upon him by king Edward should have confirmed and strengthened his profitable role as a useful tool of government. However, this was far from the case. Instead, for the first time in his career, John was forced to endure the uncomfortable experience of being out of official favour.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 1019

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, nos. 559, 698, 997

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 964

¹¹⁹ *CDI 1285–1292*, no. 874; *CDI 1293–1301*, nos. 7, 119, 177; Murphy, *The archbishops and administration of the diocese of Dublin*, p. 121.

¹²⁰ *CDI 1293–1301*, no. 119; PRO E.13/17/m. 6d.

Chapter 3

Conflict, disgrace and rehabilitation : FitzThomas as lord of Offaly, 1293–1298

Upon John fitzThomas's return home from his successful début in England, he rapidly became embroiled in an extraordinary sequence of disputes which ultimately cast his very survival as a magnate into doubt. Undoubtedly, some of the problems which befell fitzThomas in 1293 were of his own making, and stemmed from his activities in England. In particular, the role that he played in mainprising John de Valle in 1291 and 1292 led him into serious trouble. For de Valle had been the bailiff of Agnes de Valence in Ireland, and she had been responsible for having him imprisoned in Fleet. An audit of his accounts had revealed that he had received £5300 from Agnes's estates over an unspecified period, but he was unable to account for it all. The sum of £426 was definitely missing, and he also lacked receipts for a further £1023, which he claimed to have paid to merchants, hence his imprisonment. In November 1291, it was proposed to release de Valle so that he could explain himself to the English treasurer and barons of the exchequer, on condition that he find four mainpernors, who would be liable to pay the missing £426 should he fail to appear before the exchequer court. At this stage, fitzThomas, along with Thomas de Sandford, William de Oddingeseles and Geoffrey de Geneville undertook to mainprise de Valle. When the case opened, the English barons of the exchequer rapidly decided that they would need to appoint auditors in Ireland, and in April 1292 they selected the Irish treasurer and the Irish chief justice of common pleas for the task. At this point John de Valle asked that the case be postponed to give him time to find the receipts from the merchants, who he claimed were from Lombardy, Hainault and Brabant, and so could not be located. Agnes de Valence agreed, provided that if de Valle failed to turn up after the postponement that he should be charged with the whole £1023. De Valle accepted this condition, and so was ordered to find a new set of mainpernors to guarantee the £1023 and to appear before the barons again in January 1293. Significantly, John fitzThomas again mainprised the bailiff, as did with several other associates of de Sandford, as well as a group of magnates of the second rank, such as Sir James Keating. However, in January 1293 when the case was reconvened, de Valle failed to turn up and Agnes

claimed victory by default. Consequently, the barons of the exchequer ordered the Irish justiciar to start legal proceedings against de Valle's mainpernors for failing to produce him in court.¹

FitzThomas's motives for going to such trouble for de Valle were not specifically stated. However, the fact that de Valle was the bailiff of the woman whose occupation of the Geraldines' Limerick estates was depriving fitzThomas of a considerable amount of revenue is unlikely to have been coincidental. Unfortunately, the court proceedings did not state precisely when the alleged fraud took place. Possibly, the fact that many of de Valle's mainpernors participated in the war in Offaly in 1288–9 may offer a clue. It may be that de Valle had been persuaded, at a time of military crisis, to siphon off some of the absentee lady's income into the war effort. On balance however, it is more likely that de Valle and his mainpernors had conspired together in a failed attempt to defraud Agnes de Valence. In any event, by Trinity term of 1293, John and the other mainpernors were facing official requests to produce either de Valle himself or the embezzled funds. When they failed to do so, fitzThomas became liable to pay his share of the debts, which amounted to roughly £277.² In the long run, the case was destined to have serious implications for fitzThomas. However, by the time his liability was established, he had more serious problems to face. In particular, he had quarrelled bitterly with William de Vescy, John de Sandford's replacement as chief governor.

William de Vescy arrived in Ireland to take up his office in November 1290.³ To an extent, his appointment marked a break in recent royal policy concerning the justiciarship, in that de Vescy was an English magnate of some importance, being lord of Alnwick in Northumbria, and one of the unsuccessful contenders for the Scottish throne, following the death of the Maid of Norway in 1290.⁴ However, his personal background may explain Edward I's reason for appointing him. De Vescy was an experienced administrator, his most important post being the custodianship of the Royal forests north of the Trent, to which he was appointed in June 1285, and which he retained while in Ireland. He also had some experience of border warfare, having served against the Welsh in

¹ *CDI* 1285–1292, no. 993; *CJR* 1295–1303, p. 102; PRO E.13/17/ mm. 6, 6d.

² *Ibid.*

³ *CDI* 1285–1292, no. 964.

⁴ *H. B. C.*, p. 58; Prestwich, *Edward I*, p. 358.

1277 and 1282.⁵ Furthermore, and perhaps most critically from an Irish perspective, he had recently inherited the principal share in the liberty of Kildare.⁶ It seems reasonable to suggest that the king decided to send a man with experience of border conditions to administer a lordship in which one of the major security problems lay in a region over which he personally exercised judicial authority. During his tenure as chief governor, de Vescy certainly took the opportunity to reassert forcefully his seigneurial rights as the lord of Kildare. This course of action led him into an array of serious disputes with important individuals such as the abbot of St Thomas's abbey in Dublin, and the bishop of Kildare.⁷ In fact, it is clear that de Vescy's dual role as chief governor and lord of Kildare aroused widespread resentment within Ireland in general, and within the liberty of Kildare in particular. For example, a roll of Irish petitions sent to the parliament held at Westminster after Michaelmas 1293 has survived which is exclusively devoted to de Vescy's conduct in Ireland. Significantly, all but two of the petitions are complaints about his behaviour in Kildare.⁸ Consequently, it is not surprising that he came into conflict with the liberty's most powerful secular magnate – John fitzThomas.

The clash between de Vescy and fitzThomas was immortalised by Richard Stanihurst, the sixteenth century Geraldine propagandist, who portrayed the episode as a triumph of the aristocratic spirit over the machinations of time-serving officialdom.⁹ However, the surviving documentation makes it clear that the truth of the matter was considerably more complex. The broad outlines of their dispute can be reconstructed using the evidence from the Westminster parliament of Michaelmas 1293. In that year, the *Annals of Ulster* record that John fitzThomas 'went to the king in England'.¹⁰ In fact, his purpose was to travel to the Westminster parliament in order to level four complaints against de Vescy.¹¹ It has been suggested that relations between the two men

⁵ CPR 1281–92, pp 179, 320, 388, 492; *Parl. Writs*, i, pp 223, 246.

⁶ Gilbert, *Viceroy*, p. 111.

⁷ Richardson and Sayles, *Rot. parl. hac. inediti*, pp 31–33, 38–41; *CDI* 1293–1301, no. 106.

⁸ Richardson and Sayles, *Rot. parl. hac. inediti*, pp 30–45.

⁹ Stanihurst, pp 199–201.

¹⁰ *AU*, s.a. 1293.

¹¹ Richardson and Sayles, *Rot. parl. hac. inediti*, p. 30.

were poor from the beginning of de Vescy's tenure as chief governor, and the tenor of fitzThomas's first complaint against the chief governor supports this view.¹² John fitzThomas alleged that as early as Michaelmas 1291, while he was in England with the archbishop of Dublin, the chief governor tried to undermine his authority as lord of Offaly. To be specific, John claimed that de Vescy, in collusion with Agnes de Valence, had induced Juliana de Cogan to implead him in the court of Kildare, in order to disinherit him of all his lands within the liberty. This charge was denied by de Vescy, who had also travelled to England, who replied that he had merely purchased the reversion of Geashill, which was in Juliana's gift, for £40.¹³ At the least however, the petition reveals that fitzThomas's relationship with Juliana de Cogan was still uneasy in the autumn of 1291 and that de Vescy attempted to exploit the fact. Interestingly, this petition also suggests that fitzThomas had fallen out with Agnes de Valence before he mainprised John de Valle. In fact, the timing of de Valle's initial release from prison, in November 1291, makes it just possible that John's support of her embattled bailiff was a spontaneous reaction in retaliation for news from Kildare to the effect that Agnes was involved in a plot to disinherit him.¹⁴ On balance, it is plausible that de Vescy and de Valence would act in concert to discomfit a common rival. Within this context, it is worth noting that they moved in similar circles in England. For example, in May 1293, Agnes and de Vescy's wife dined together as guests of the lord Edward.¹⁵ Furthermore, after de Valle defaulted, de Vescy, in his capacity as chief governor, expedited his orders to recover the debts with alacrity.¹⁶

In addition to questioning fitzThomas's title to the lordship of Offaly, de Vescy appears to have been harrassing John's Irish tenants. In his second petition, John alleged that de Vescy attempted, as lord of Kildare, to deny the king's peace to some unnamed individuals to whom John referred as 'his Irish of Offaly'. For his part, de Vescy asserted that these same individuals had committed felonies within the liberty of Kildare and that it was his duty to prosecute them.¹⁷ On the face of it, the crux of the

¹² Walton, *The English in Connacht*, p. 295.

¹³ Richardson and Sayles, *Rot. parl. hac. inediti*, pp 34–5.

¹⁴ *CDI 1285–1292*, no. 993.

¹⁵ PRO E.101/353/18/m. 5d.

¹⁶ PRO E.13/17/m. 6d; *CJR 1295–1303*, pp 104–5.

¹⁷ Richardson and Sayles, *Rot. parl. hac. inediti*, pp 44–5.

dispute seems to have been little more than a conflict between their respective rights to deal with the Irish of Offaly. However, de Vescy did not limit himself to prosecuting a few felons. Notoriously, he ordered a royal service to be mustered at Kildare on July 24 1293, to campaign against the king's enemies of Offaly. This service was cancelled on July 1 by the king himself, on the grounds that it would tend to be injurious to the king's lieges. Edward also took the unusual step of directing the Irish chancellor and treasurer to ensure that his orders were carried out.¹⁸ It has been suggested, given the royal intervention and fitzThomas's subsequent parliamentary petition, that the real target of de Vescy's abortive service was in fact fitzThomas himself.¹⁹ However, this interpretation probably overstates the gravity of the situation. Admittedly, it is possible that John was using the Irish of Offaly to exert illicit authority within Kildare and that de Vescy was motivated to take such desperate action out of genuine alarm. Undoubtedly, some of John's subsequent dealings with the Irish were highly dubious.²⁰ However, the possibility that de Vescy was making a genuine attempt to pacify the region should not be discounted. Although there do not appear to have been large-scale hostilities in the marches of Kildare since de Sandford's campaign of 1288–9, the situation had remained tense. For example, it is worth noting that payments were still being made to secure the defence of the marches in May 1290.²¹ Moreover, it should be acknowledged that there is no evidence to suggest that John had colluded with the Irish of the midlands before de Vescy proclaimed the royal service. Significantly de Vescy did not accuse fitzThomas of wrongdoing within Kildare at the Westminster parliament. Overall, before concluding that the cancellation of the royal service implies that de Vescy and fitzThomas were on the brink of civil war, it might be worth examining the other complaints made against de Vescy concerning his conduct as lord of the liberty of Kildare.

As far as fitzThomas was concerned, the third and fourth accusations which he levelled against de Vescy were relatively innocuous. Thus, John alleged that de Vescy had failed to respect royal letters of protection obtained by him, presumably during his English

¹⁸ *CDI* 1293–1301, nos. 62–64.

¹⁹ *N. H. I.*, ii, p. 186.

²⁰ See for example, *CJR* 1295–1303, p.190.

²¹ *CDI* 1285–1292, nos. 643, 647.

sojourn of 1291–2.²² Lastly, he charged that de Vescy's sheriff and seneschal had illegally extracted amercements from John's men for neglecting to use official weights and measures.²³ It could be argued that these petitions are evidence that de Vescy was deliberately singling out and harassing his most powerful local rival by abusing his seigneurial rights. However, an examination of the other petitions relating to Kildare does not support this view. For example, none of the other Kildare plaintiffs appear to have had close connections with fitzThomas. More significantly, they had similar, if not more serious complaints to make. For example, two petitions by Edmund Mortimer and the men of Kilcolgan and Jacobstown, alleged that de Vescy's men had actually committed homicides whilst illegally distraining goods.²⁴ Presumably, if fitzThomas could have alleged homicide, he would have. Furthermore, allegations of abuse concerning weights and measures were also made by the bishop of Kildare.²⁵ Similarly, Edmund Mortimer complained that de Vescy had ignored a proclamation of the king's peace on behalf of one 'Neel', with damaging consequences for Mortimer's people.²⁶ On reflection, it is important to emphasise that, in the main, the liberty of Kildare had been administered by local men on behalf of absentees, a situation which obviously risked the usurpation of the nominal owners' rights. Because of this, when de Vescy came to exercise lordship personally, it would have been surprising had he not come into conflict with the magnates of the region, both clerical and lay. To a great extent, the difficulties which he had with fitzThomas should be seen within this context. Given the broad opposition to de Vescy's rule which surfaced at the Michaelmas parliament, it is reasonable to assume that the king was already aware that his chief governor was causing problems by July 1293. Therefore it seems likely that when he cancelled the royal service, Edward was primarily acting on foot of complaints by men like Edmund Mortimer and the abbot of St Thomas's about the justiciar's behaviour, rather than to prevent de Vescy and fitzThomas coming to blows.

Nevertheless, de Vescy's bid for the reversion of Geashill strongly suggests that John fitzThomas had fallen out with the lord

²² Richardson and Sayles, *Rot. parl. hac. inediti*, pp 31–2.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp 43–4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 36, 39.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 38–9.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 37–8.

of Kildare by the time that he left for England with de Sandford in 1291. Within this context, it may have been antipathy towards fitzThomas which led de Vescy to reverse previous government policy towards the earl of Ulster, John's principal rival in Connacht. The Anglo-Irish annals record that in 1291, de Vescy led an army into Ulster to help the earl to subdue O'Hanlon, a highly unusual action on the part of a chief governor.²⁷ In addition, it may be significant that de Vescy had also aroused the ire of the Desmond Geraldine Thomas fitzMaurice, who was on good terms with his Offaly kinsman.²⁸ FitzMaurice accused de Vescy of releasing 'John O Donekuth', who was being held as a hostage for the good behaviour of Domhnall Ruadh MacCarthy while he was in England, with disastrous consequences. However, de Vescy's explanation, that he had acted upon the advice of Thomas's attorney, William Barry, seems plausible, especially as Thomas failed to show up to press the petition.²⁹ In stark contrast however, another petition relating to matters outside Kildare shows abundant evidence of personal hostility between de Vescy and fitzThomas. Significantly, it was the only petition on the roll in which de Vescy was the complainant, and he alleged that John fitzThomas had been guilty of outrageous behaviour in Connacht in early 1293. The background to his allegation lay in the endemic segmentary disunity which afflicted the O'Connor dynasty of Connacht. Through the efforts of John fitzThomas, a government-backed candidate, namely Manus O'Connor had been king of Connacht since 1288. However, Manus died in early 1293, after an illness of three months. Fortunately, the *Annals of Connacht* provide a detailed account of the events following his death. They state that Manus was succeeded by Aodh son of Eoghan, of the Clann Cathail Crobhdhearg segment of the dynasty, and crucially, that Aodh '*do rigad don Giustis*', or that he was made king by the justiciar, William de Vescy. However, they continue by noting that after only ten days, Aodh son of Eoghan was imprisoned, that fifty of his men were slain and the others plundered by John fitzThomas and his erstwhile foe, the former king, Cathal Ruadh of the Clann Murtough, who thereupon reassumed the kingship. There matters rested for three months until Cathal Ruadh was 'treacherously killed', in an apparently unrelated episode, by Ruadhrí, son of Donnchadh

²⁷ *Chart. St. Mary's*, ii, p. 320; *Grace*, p. 40; Frame, *The Dublin Government* p. 416.

²⁸ *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 9, 30.

²⁹ Richardson and Sayles, *Rot. parl. hac. inediti*, pp 35–6.

Riabhach O'Connor. Aodh son of Eoghan was then released, and was reinstated as king, again through the power of the justiciar.³⁰

Significantly, the version of events given by de Vescy in his complaint against fitzThomas was broadly similar. He stated that, following the death of the king of Connacht, he went to the province to install a new king, in order to keep the peace. De Vescy implicitly admitted that Cathal Ruadh was a candidate for the kingship, but claimed that because Cathal Ruadh had refused to come into his presence despite having a safe conduct, he went ahead and installed Aodh son of Eoghan. De Vescy then accused fitzThomas, with Cathal Ruadh, of invading the king's lands, capturing the new king, stealing 120 cattle and killing 60 of the king's men. The chief governor concluded his charges against John by accusing him of having received Cathal Ruadh in Roscommon castle, to the king's damage. Throughout his version of events, he stressed that fitzThomas was responsible for maintaining the king's peace in the region. In his reply, John stated that as the kingship of Connacht was disputed between de Vescy's candidate and Cathal Ruadh, he attempted to mediate between the two. However, he continued, the sheriff of Connacht advised him that the justiciar's candidate was suspected of stealing a horse worth 10 marks and so fitzThomas, in aid of the sheriff and in pursuance of his peacekeeping duties, arrested the new king. He went on to accept that he had taken the cattle, but asserted that this was a precautionary measure adopted to prevent the justiciar's king from stealing them. He concluded by flatly denying that he had harboured Cathal Ruadh, killed any of the king's lieges or indeed done anything that was contrary to the king's peace.³¹ In the most detailed analysis of these extraordinary events, it has been suggested that de Vescy was motivated to act as kingmaker in an effort to curb the burgeoning influence of fitzThomas, who had recently been installed as the keeper of Rinndown and Roscommon castles in the region and that consequently, John's riposte was essentially an act of pique, directed at Aodh son of Eoghan simply because he was de Vescy's candidate.³² Undoubtedly, Cathal Ruadh was an unlikely beneficiary of fitzThomas's patronage, having been deposed by him five years earlier. Furthermore, John's subsequent defence of his imprisonment of Aodh on the grounds that he was a suspected horse

³⁰ AC, s.a. 1293.

³¹ Richardson and Sayles, *Rot. parl. hac. inediti*, pp 41–2.

³² Walton, *The English in Connacht*, pp 301–2.

thief sounds disingenuous, to say the least. However, it would be equally unwise to take de Vescy's protestations of lofty-minded devotion to duty at face value and it is likely that personal animosity played a major part in his decision to intervene.³³ Nevertheless, the fact remains that fitzThomas did not deny the most serious charge levelled against him by de Vescy, namely that he had imprisoned the officially appointed king for three months, presumably in the face of direct instructions to the contrary, until the death of his own candidate forced John to set Aodh son of Eoghan free. On balance, when King Edward granted the custody of Roscommon and Rinndown castles to fitzThomas, it is unlikely that he could have foreseen that his generosity would have had such rapid and destabilising results.

Be that as it may, it is worth noting that fitzThomas's quarrel with de Vescy appears to have shaken his sense of security. In particular, John seems to have been alarmed by the manner in which de Vescy had attempted to use Juliana de Cogan's status as Gerald fitzMaurice III's legal heir to undermine his position in Offaly. Hence, in July 1293, fitzThomas moved decisively to come to a mutually satisfactory arrangement with Juliana de Cogan. John's solution to the problem can be reconstructed by using four documents which have survived in the *Red Book of Kildare*.³⁴ In particular, the two documents which can be dated to July 1293 reveal hard bargaining between the two cousins, conducted in different locations and witnessed by different groups of people. Essentially, the agreement finalised between them consisted of a recognition by Juliana that the inheritance of the lordship of Offaly should fall to John fitzThomas and his heirs, which was sealed by her surrender to John of all rights that she might have inherited from her nephew, her brother, or her grandfather. In exchange, Juliana was to possess Maynooth manor for the rest of her life, and her son John de Penrys would hold the manors of Athlacca and Uregare in Limerick and a carucate at Rathmore in Kildare from John, after he regained them upon the death of Agnes de Valence.³⁵ Thus, for as long as Juliana lived, fitzThomas had secured himself against further legal challenges to his authority as lord of Offaly. Similarly, it may be significant that the *Annals of Ulster* record that in 1293, John re-edified the ruined castle at Sligo before travelling to England to make his complaints against de

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

³⁴ *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 30, 33, 73, 116.

³⁵ *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 33, 73.

Vescy.³⁶ At the least, it is likely that his actions in early 1293 had the effect of permanently alienating Aodh son of Eoghan O'Connor.

In any event, as far as King Edward was concerned, the charges levelled against de Vescy at the Westminster parliament left him facing an unwelcome dilemma. On the one hand his chief governor was clearly unpopular, within his own liberty at least, and if the allegations made against him were substantively truthful, he had infringed the royal prerogative. On the other hand, a provincial magnate whom he had recently personally entrusted with peacekeeping responsibilities had openly defied the royal representative in Connacht. Not surprisingly, the response of Edward and his advisors was highly cautious. In the first place, de Vescy was retained as chief governor, and returned to Ireland in December 1293.³⁷ Moreover, fitzThomas was not removed from the custodianship of Roscommon and Rinndown castles.³⁸ The majority of the petitions were neither upheld nor dismissed, as they had generated conflicting testimonies. Consequently, the king decided to suspend judgement upon the allegations until further investigations could be carried out.³⁹

On 10 December 1293, Edward I commissioned three Irish officials to investigate the accusations levelled against William de Vescy at the parliament held at Westminster in Michaelmas 1293. The officials so commanded were William de Estdene the treasurer, Walter de la Haye the escheator and Robert Bagot, a justice of the bench. The terms of their appointment stipulated that the findings of the investigation were to be sent back to England in time to be considered at the next parliament, which was due to be held in Easter 1294.⁴⁰ However, it appears as though the commissioners did not begin their task until 29 March 1294.⁴¹ A surviving roll of inquisitions shows that they made a start by examining the allegations made by the two churchmen involved, namely the abbot of St Thomas's in Dublin and the bishop of Kildare, as well as those concerning lesser figures such as Roger Galwey and the men of Castledermot. On

³⁶ *AU*, s.a 1293; *Red Bk Kildare*. no. 129.

³⁷ *CDI* 1293–1301, no. 103.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, nos. 98, 183.

³⁹ *CPR* 1292–1301, p. 108.

⁴⁰ *CPR*, 1292–1301, p. 108

⁴¹ *CDI* 1293–1301, no. 106.

balance, the evidence presented by the juries about these cases supported the complaints that de Vescy, or at least the officials of his liberty, had been behaving in a high-handed manner. For example, the charge that de Vescy had maliciously delayed giving seisin of his temporalities to the abbot of St Thomas's for seven weeks was upheld. Similarly, Thomas Darcy, the seneschal of Kildare, was found to have been pocketing the amercements which he had levied illegally from people living in the crosslands of Kildare, outside of his jurisdiction.⁴² However, it appears that before the commissioners could proceed further, their investigation was overtaken by events.

Three weeks previously, on 5 March 1294, the Irish eschaetor Walter de la Haye had replaced William de Vescy as chief governor, by order of the king.⁴³ Arguably, this move could be seen as nothing more than a necessary first step in the investigative process. However, there may have been a more serious reason for de Vescy's dismissal. Unlike de Vescy, John fitzThomas did not return to Ireland immediately after the conclusion of the Michaelmas parliament. Details extracted from the English exchequer's memoranda rolls demonstrate that John was in fact still in London in early 1294.⁴⁴ Subsequent events strongly suggest that he used his time there to undermine William de Vescy's credibility with the king. At any rate, on April 1 1294, the Irish council met at Dublin. Its purpose was to discuss a serious charge brought by de Vescy against fitzThomas. The composition of the council was bolstered for the occasion by the presence of two English magnates, the earl of Gloucester and John de Hastings as well as the earl of Ulster and *aliorum baronum et magnatum*. Both de Vescy and fitzThomas were also present. At the council meeting, de Vescy accused fitzThomas of defaming him before the king and his council in England. Specifically, de Vescy alleged that fitzThomas had falsley informed Edward about an attempt on de Vescy's part to induce John into swearing an oath against the king. In answering the charge, FitzThomas acknowledged that no oath had been asked of him, but he then added that if questioned further, he would have more to say. De Vescy and the earl of Gloucester then asked him to continue, upon which John produced a document which he swore replicated the words

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ PRO E. 352/87/m.6.

⁴⁴ CDI 1293–1301, nos. 116, 117

actually used by de Vescy. According to this document, de Vescy had made three statements to fitzThomas. First, he had observed that the people of Ireland would be well able to keep their lands and franchises without the king. Second, de Vescy had called the king 'the most perverse and dastardly knight of his kingdom'. To be specific, de Vescy had told John that the king had shown himself to be a coward outside Kenilworth castle during the barons' wars thirty years earlier, when Sir Roger Clifford had been forced to shame Edward into advancing towards Simon de Montfort. Lastly, de Vescy had invited fitzThomas to discuss these points with his friends, and if they assented, 'then all would be well'. The document concluded with a statement that John was aware that de Vescy's words were 'against our lord the king and his state' and that he was informing the council in order to 'save my fealty'. Not surprisingly, William de Vescy denied all of the charges, called John a traitorous liar, and challenged him to a duel. John then again swore that everything in the contents of the document was true, and offered to prove it with his body. The matter was adjourned for two days, but when it was reconvened the two magnates merely restated their positions. Thereupon, de la Haye and the council, with the agreement of the two contestants, decided that the duel should be fought in Dublin on 22 July 1294.⁴⁵

However, once news of the impending crisis reached the king's ears, his rapid reaction ensured that events took a different course. On 18 April, Edward wrote to the commissioners with his first response. Having informed them of his intention to hold a parliament at Westminster in the near future, he provided them with a set of instructions which were to be implemented by 14 June at the latest. The commissioners were ordered to expedite their investigation of the complaints made against de Vescy six months earlier, notwithstanding the 'wager of *battel*' between de Vescy and fitzThomas. When that task was accomplished they were to travel to England in person, having appointed a suitable person to administer the office of chief governor in their absence. Upon arrival at Westminster, they were to produce the findings of the investigation as well as the documentation relating to the defamation plea which had given rise to the proposed duel.⁴⁶ Immediately after dispatching this letter, the king appears to have given the matter further thought. Three days later he sent a

⁴⁵ CDI 1293–1301, no. 147; *Rotuli parl.*, i, pp 127–127b.

⁴⁶ CDI 1293–1301, no. 135.

further list of orders to Dublin which repeated the initial commands and included several significant additions. The commissioners were now directed to bring de Vescy and fitzThomas with them to England so that they could appear before the king on 14 June. Edward also decided that the duel should take place at Westminster, on the day previously fixed upon in Dublin. Finally, he ordered that in the meantime the case should not proceed further in Ireland.⁴⁷ Clearly, Edward's intention was to take control of the conduct of the case personally. Indeed, it has been noted that is not surprising that he took it out of the hands of a relatively insignificant figure like de la Haye, given the gravity of the issues involved.⁴⁸

At this point, it might be useful to discuss the allegations which John made against de Vescy which were extraordinary by any standards. Perhaps their most remarkable feature was the considerable trouble to which John went while presenting them so as to make them appear to be authentic. Yet, for all the formality of their delivery, the accusations of treason and defamation both seem rather threadbare. For a start, it is noteworthy that fitzThomas failed to mention either a time or a place in which the conversation with de Vescy took place, sparing him the necessity of producing corroborating witnesses. The allegation that de Vescy had committed treason had a grain of truth in it, as he had begun his career as an opponent of the lord Edward, during the barons' war.⁴⁹ However after making his peace with the royalists in 1267 there is no evidence to suggest that de Vescy was anything other than a loyal subject and servant of the king. Furthermore, even if it can be assumed that he was guilty of treason, in the light of the events of 1293 it seems incredible that de Vescy would have chosen fitzThomas, of all people, with whom to form a seditious conspiracy. As for the scurrilous comments imputed to de Vescy about the king's character, Prestwich has observed that no other contemporary source makes any allusion to the alleged incident outside Kenilworth castle.⁵⁰ On balance therefore, the weight of the evidence suggests that the charges were nothing more than fabrications on fitzThomas's part.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 137.

⁴⁸ G. Hand, *English law in Ireland*, p. 146.

⁴⁹ CPR 1258-66, p. 314.

⁵⁰ M. Prestwich, *Edward I*, p. 50.

In all likelihood, Walter de la Haye and his colleagues set out for England on the 4 June, the date upon which William fitzRoger was appointed *custos*.⁵¹ Regrettably, information on the progress of the dispute during the six weeks following is rather sketchy. For example, although the king appears to have held a parliament at Westminster in late June 1294, it is impossible to establish whether or not the two disputants actually appeared before it.⁵² The next detailed evidence comes from the end of July. Significantly, by then king Edward himself was no longer in Westminster, having based himself in Hampshire since the end of June.⁵³ On the day before the duel was due to be held, he wrote to William March the bishop of Bath and Wells and treasurer of England, with the instructions that in the event of de Vescy or fitzThomas actually turning up on the appointed day, the treasurer was to send them to him. However, his message was delayed and the letter did not reach Westminster until 23 July by which time de Vescy had made a dramatic appearance in court.⁵⁴ On Thursday 22 July, William appeared before the king's bench at Westminster. He came equipped as an armed knight, complete with an armoured war horse, a lance, a shield, a poniard, a coat of mail and other equipment, and offered to defend himself against fitzThomas. John was then solemnly called upon, but failed to appear. Given his absence, de Vescy sought victory by default, but the court, apparently presided over by William March, adjourned the case until Monday 26 July.⁵⁵ After de Vescy learned that the king had sent fresh instructions, he came before the treasurer two days early, on 24 July. FitzThomas was again both called and failed to appear, and de Vescy repeated his claim to victory by default. Instead, the case was adjourned until 28 July, on which day de Vescy was to come before the king 'wherever he was in England'.⁵⁶ William then travelled to Hampshire, and appeared before the king at Fareham. He asked the king and his council to grant him justice immediately, because of John's default. For the third time, John was solemnly called and for the third time he failed to appear. At this point de Vescy could reasonably have expected to have been granted victory.

51 *CDI 1293–1301*, no. 273.

52 *H. B. C.*, p. 549.

53 *The Itinerary of Edward I, 1291–1307* (Lists and Index Society, vol. 132), pp 58–60.

54 *Rotuli Parl.*, i, pp 128–128b.

55 *Rotuli Parl.*, i, pp 128–128b.

56 *Rotuli Parl.*, i p. 128b.

Instead however, Edward declared that he was too busy to consider it, and adjourned it to the following May.⁵⁷ This decision proved to be decisive. It is true that the case continued until August 1295, but with the benefit of hindsight it can be seen that the king's refusal to take punitive steps against fitzThomas in July 1294 marked the effective end of the crisis.⁵⁸

On reflection, several aspects of the episode should be examined in greater detail. In particular, issues like fitzThomas's motivation, the nature of the king's response and the affair's consequences in Ireland deserve further scrutiny. Overall, it appears as though John fitzThomas first raised doubts in the king's mind about the his chief governor's reliability, and then returned home and perjured himself in order to destroy de Vescy's credibility. Obviously, this raises the question of his motivation. FitzThomas's actions from Michaelmas 1293 onwards make it clear that he sought de Vescy's removal from Ireland.⁵⁹ However, it could be argued that de Vescy had been so compromised by the complaints made against him at the Westminster parliament of 1293 that his long term future as justiciar had been rendered untenable thereafter. Indeed, the unfavourable tenor of the surviving inquisitions taken by the commissioners supports this view.⁶⁰ Undoubtedly however, fitzThomas did not choose to wait and let events take their course and his spectacular intervention of April 1294 had the effect of ensuring de Vescy's recall. After all, the king was highly unlikely to persevere with a chief governor who had had a formal accusation of treason levelled against him. Possibly, the anecdote about the king's behaviour before Kenilworth castle was a neat reminder to Edward of de Vescy's youthful disloyalty. In addition, it can be safely assumed that the king, whose prowess as a knight was renowned throughout Christendom, did not take kindly to reports that he was actually a coward.⁶¹ Nevertheless, it seems highly unlikely that fitzThomas would be willing to perjure himself and risk royal sanctions merely to rid himself of an already beleaguered chief governor. Instead, the explanation for his actions can probably be found by considering the principal focus of John's ambitions in Ireland at the time, namely the province of Connacht. Within

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 132–4.

⁵⁹ Richardson and Sayles, *Rot. parl. hac. inediti*, pp 31–2, 34–5, 44–5.

⁶⁰ *CDI 1293–1301*, no. 106.

⁶¹ Prestwich, *Edward I*, p. 312.

that context, retention of the custodianship of the royal castles of Roscommon and Rinndown was of crucial importance to him, if he were to entertain any hope of controlling the O'Connor dynasts. However, his conduct in Connacht during the spring of 1293 came within the ambit of the commissioners' investigation into de Vescy's misdeeds.⁶² The surviving evidence suggests that his hold upon the castles was as much at risk from a thoroughgoing investigation as was de Vescy's grasp upon the justiciarship.⁶³ Consequently, it is worth noting that it appears as if John's allegations against de Vescy were made before the relevant inquisitions could be taken.⁶⁴ Therefore, it is likely that fitzThomas, in an effort to maintain his level of influence in Connacht, was actually attempting to forestall an unwelcome investigation through the expedient of making even more serious accusations against de Vescy.

With the benefit of hindsight, it can be seen that regardless of his original motivation, when John raised such serious issues in Dublin he made royal intervention in the crisis inevitable. Obviously, this state of affairs left fitzThomas in the invidious position of being dependent upon a favourable reaction from Edward. Taken as a whole, the king's handling of the affair lacked decisiveness, especially when it is contrasted with his response to the quarrel between the earls of Gloucester and Hereford in 1291–2.⁶⁵ In part, this was because Edward was, as he informed de Vescy, preoccupied with more serious matters. By April 1294, England was teetering on the brink of war with France.⁶⁶ Even so, certain aspects of the king's conduct of the case seem unusually slipshod. For example, his initial orders to de la Haye and the other commissioners in April 1294 stipulated that the inquisitions concerning de Vescy be completed. However, by July he was no longer insisting on this, and it seems as though nothing further was done.⁶⁷ Furthermore, Edward's behaviour in July 1294 and August 1295 makes it quite clear that he was not interested in establishing the facts of the matter, but wished to see the affair

⁶² Richardson and Sayles, *Rot. parl. hac. inediti*, pp 41–2.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, AC, s.a. 1293.

⁶⁴ CDI 1293–1301, nos. 135, 137.

⁶⁵ Prestwich, *Edward I*, pp 348–51.

⁶⁶ *Rotuli Parl.*, i, p. 133b; Prestwich, p. 378–9.

⁶⁷ CDI 1293–1301, no. 137; *Rotuli Parl.*, i, p. 133.

settled as quietly as possible.⁶⁸ The fact that de Vescy failed to obtain justice from the king suggests that Edward had already decided to remove him from office, and the crisis merely hastened his departure. As for fitzThomas, it is worth observing that there is no evidence available to suggest that he ever left Ireland, let alone travelled to Westminster. In any event, his failure to turn up in Westminster went without formal punishment. This is not to say that Edward was inclined to believe his allegations. On the contrary, he appears to have lost favour with the king. To be specific, John's name is conspicuously absent from the lists of those Irish magnates who were summoned to Gascony in both June and August 1294.⁶⁹ On balance, it appears as though he was being censured for the trouble that he had caused by being denied the opportunity to serve in France.

With the exception of being prevented from making his foreign debut, the consequences of the episode were largely positive for fitzThomas. Most immediately, nothing more was heard of the investigation into his behaviour in Connacht, and his influence there was left undiminished. His quarrel with de Vescy was also resolved. After his final removal from office in June 1294, de Vescy never returned to Ireland. Although he retained his lordship of Kildare until 1297, when it came into the king's hands, he posed no further threat to fitzThomas's ambitions.⁷⁰ Some measure of the thoroughness of his removal from Kildare politics can be grasped by noting that amongst sixteenth century writers, a general consensus existed that it was de Vescy who had failed to turn up for the duel, forfeiting his lands as a result.⁷¹ The final beneficial consequence for John fitzThomas concerned the identity of the de Vescy's replacement as chief governor. In October 1294, Edward appointed Sir William de Oddingeseles to the office.⁷² It will be recalled that de Oddingeseles had been a close associate of fitzThomas's old patron, Archbishop John de Sandford. Obviously, the appointment of a friendly figure to the chief governorship would always be a welcome development for a magnate. In this case however, de Oddingeseles's presence was of particular importance

⁶⁸ *Rotuli Parl.*, i, pp 133–4.

⁶⁹ *CDI 1293–1301*, no. 153; *Parl. Writs*, i, pp 262–3.

⁷⁰ *CDI 1293–1301*, nos. 365, 373, 481.

⁷¹ *Grace*, pp 42–3; *Stanihurst*, pp 198–201

⁷² *CDI 1293–1301*, no. 166.

to fitzThomas, as his appointment coincided with the most controversial phase of John's entire career.

By 1294, fitzThomas had established himself as a leading figure in Connacht, with the lands which he had acquired from his cousin Amabilia forming the largest portion of his interests in the province.⁷³ Moreover, he had also begun to acquire property in the area around Roscommon, presumably as a result of his custodianship of the royal castle there.⁷⁴ However, John's success engendered increasing tensions in the region. Most obviously, fitzThomas had created problems for himself in 1293 when he had alienated the ruling O'Connor king, Aodh son of Eoghan, by attempting to depose him.⁷⁵ In 1294, Aodh retaliated by razing John's newly-rebuilt castle at Sligo.⁷⁶ Walton has suggested that fitzThomas believed de Burgh to be the instigator of Aodh son of Eoghan's attack upon Sligo.⁷⁷ Although no evidence links the earl and the king until 1296, this seems to be plausible, given the earlier friction between John and earl Richard.⁷⁸ Perhaps the most important point to be made about the burning of Sligo castle is that it took place within the context of what appears to have been a determined effort on the part of fitzThomas to challenge de Burgh's supremacy within Connacht. The first evidence that John was preparing for a possible conflict dates from the early Autumn of 1294, when he can be seen to be attempting to amass as much money as possible. For example, the Plea Rolls from Michaelmas 1294 reveal that fitzThomas was trying to recover debts due to his family that had been incurred two decades previously.⁷⁹ Furthermore, he targeted the properties held by Agnes de Valence, the absentee widow of Maurice fitzGerald III. On 6 October 1294, in an action which was to have serious consequences for fitzThomas in the future, his servants seized Agnes's estates in Limerick and Kildare on the pretext that she had died.⁸⁰ While it is impossible to prove conclusively that John was raising a war chest, the tensions between the two magnates

73 See Chapter 2, pp 37–9.

74 *CDI* 1293–1301, no. 604.

75 *AC* s.a. 1293.

76 *AC* s.a. 1294.

77 Walton, *The English in Connacht*, p. 305.

78 *AC*, s.a. 1296.

79 *NAI EX* 2/1 pp 2–3; *NAI RC* 7/3 pp 214–6.

80 *CJR* 1295–1303, pp 236–7.

undoubtedly degenerated into open conflict. Although the exact date of the outbreak of hostilities is unclear, there is some evidence to suggest that it took place as early as September 1294.⁸¹ What is certain is that the seriousness of the problem escalated dramatically in December. Notoriously, on or around the 11th day of that month, de Burgh was captured and incarcerated in fitzThomas's castle of Lea.⁸² Stanihurst adds that the earl was actually taken prisoner in Meath by one Sir John de la Mare.⁸³ Although no contemporary annal records this detail it seems quite likely, given that de la Mare was subsequently singled out for exemplary punishment by de Burgh and that he also had other connections with fitzThomas.⁸⁴ The earl was held in captivity for a total of three months before being released on 12 March 1295.⁸⁵ Not surprisingly, both the Irish and the Anglo-Irish annals note that the entire island was thrown into a state of 'confusion' or 'disturbance' as a result.⁸⁶ Some idea of what this 'disturbance' entailed can be grasped from fitzThomas's behaviour in Connacht. After the burning of Sligo castle, it is clear that John considered Aodh son of Eoghan to be a threat to his position. Accordingly, John and his ally Piers de Bermingham did in fact launch 'a great and treacherous raid ... on Connacht' in 1294.⁸⁷ Interestingly, the order of entries in the *Annals of Connacht* suggests that the raid took place after the capture of the earl. Their objective appears to have been the removal of Aodh son of Eoghan, as the *Annals of Connacht* refer to their belief that they had succeeded in deposing him. However, the annalist continues by stating that this was not the case.⁸⁸ Indeed, Aodh managed to retain his grasp upon the kingship of Connacht until his death in 1309.⁸⁹ Apart from fitzThomas's raid into Connacht, it is clear that disorder and violent acts were widespread throughout Ireland. For example, in 1295 de Burgh's control over Ulster was weakened when Brian O'Neill, his nominee as lord of Cinél Eoghan

81 CDI 1293–1301, 273; CJR 1295–1303, p.176.

82 Clyn, p. 10; AC, s.a. 1294; Grace, pp 42–3.

83 Stanihurst, p. 201.

84 CJR 1295–1303 pp 30, 235.

85 Chart. St Marys, ii, p. 323.

86 Ibid.; AC, AU, ALC s.a. 1294.

87 AC, s.a. 1294.

88 Ibid.

89 N. H. I., ix, p. 158.

was defeated and killed by his rival Domhnall O'Neill.⁹⁰ Further afield, the seneschal of Wexford took special measures to defend the area, specifically because of the disturbance.⁹¹ There are also scattered references to trouble in the records of the central administration. For example, when the Irish treasurer reported that it had not been possible to collect any part of the tax known as the fifteenth during Hilary term 1295, he cited the imprisonment of the earl as being partially responsible.⁹² Indeed, a quarter of a century later, the collectors of the fifteenth in Meath were released from part of their liability because of the disturbances arising from the earl's capture.⁹³ Similarly, the Irish chancellor complained to the king that he had been obliged to spend his own money '*en Irlaunde en tens del truble kuant sire Iohan le fizThomas aveyt pris le counte de Ulvestere*'.⁹⁴ Somewhat ironically, the most detailed evidence about the nature of fitzThomas's actions and motives during his struggle against de Burgh actually comes from Kildare itself.

Between July 1297 and April 1298 a general eyre was held in the newly-formed county of Kildare. The calendared records of the eyre and the related rolls of gaol delivery contain a mass of detail about daily life in Kildare, and as such are useful sources for a study of the locality's settlement patterns and administrative structures.⁹⁵ More pertinently, the records provide abundant evidence about the levels of crime and lawlessness that obtained in the area during the 1290s. Significantly, the eyre proceedings reveal a society which had recently endured an extended period of turmoil. In fact, they were dominated by reports of crimes committed 'in the time of disturbance' and by descriptions of large-scale robberies carried out by John fitzThomas and his followers. However, before describing these activities, it must be acknowledged that at first glance there are at least two difficulties involved in using the records of the eyre. First, the eyre records are not complete. In the main, the evidence from the wealthiest cantred of Kildare, that of Offelan, has not survived with the resultant skewing of the balance of the evidence in favour of the less

⁹⁰ AC, s.a. 1295.

⁹¹ CJR 1295–1303, p. 148.

⁹² CDI 1293–1301, no. 191.

⁹³ Rot. pat. Hib., pp 27–8.

⁹⁴ Sayles, *Affairs of Ireland*, p.40.

⁹⁵ CJR 1295–1303, pp 167–208.

densely settled cantreds of Leys and Offaly.⁹⁶ Second, and more seriously, there is a problem with dating the events described in the eyre records accurately. None of the reports on the wrongdoing which occurred during 'the time of the disturbance' were dated precisely. Moreover, the records which implicate fitzThomas in breaches of the king's peace do not refer specifically to the disturbance. Nevertheless, these problems can be largely surmounted by analysing the evidence. It is clear that John's misdeeds took place in late 1294 and early 1295.⁹⁷ As far as the crimes which took place during 'the time of disturbance' are concerned, the similarity between the phraseology used in the annals to describe the aftermath of the capture of de Burgh and that used in the eyre records is unlikely to be coincidental. It seems reasonable to assume that the crimes which occurred during 'the disturbance' were contemporaneous with the conflict between fitzThomas and de Burgh. Furthermore, a close reading of the eyre records reveals that the crimes of 'the disturbance' possess lists of culprits and descriptions of types of wrongdoing that are similar to those committed by fitzThomas.⁹⁸ They are in fact describing the same events. This apparent disparity can be explained by the fact that the details of the robberies came from the presentments of the county jurors during the eyre proper, whereas most of the specific references to the disturbance came from the rolls of gaol delivery. On balance, it is safe to assume that the eyre proceedings do provide a record of the key events which took place in Kildare at the time when John fitzThomas and the earl of Ulster were at loggerheads.

It has been observed that crime of all kinds rose spectacularly during the disturbance.⁹⁹ Certainly, the proceedings of the eyre make it clear that the common people of Kildare took advantage of the occasion to settle old scores and help themselves to their neighbours' property. For example, one James Boys tracked his enemy Adam son of Ralph to Meath and killed him there.¹⁰⁰ Somewhat more typically, John son of Walter Maddok robbed Hamo Cheure of a cow, and Thomas son of Nicholas of a pig.¹⁰¹ Some of them also appear to have fraternised with the

⁹⁶ Hand, *English law in Ireland*, p.109.

⁹⁷ *CJR 1295-1303*, pp 71, 191.

⁹⁸ For example see *CJR 1295-1303*, pp 176, 191, 194, 198.

⁹⁹ *N. H. I.*, ii, p. 187.

¹⁰⁰ *CJR 1295-1303*, pp 195-6.

¹⁰¹ *CJR 1295-1303*, p. 201.

Irish. For instance, William Mey, John le Hore and four others were charged with 'being present at the making of oath with Irishmen against Englishmen to break the king's peace, in the disturbance'.¹⁰² However, the eyre proceedings also make it obvious that the crimes committed by the ordinary people pale into insignificance when compared with the scale of John fitzThomas's enthusiastic law-breaking. FitzThomas bears the responsibility for taking a band of followers on a rampage of robberies, extortion and homicides in Kildare during the disturbance. His company is known to have robbed the town of Clane in the cantred of Offelan, the town of Reban in the cantred of Leys and the barony of Dunlost in the cantred of Omurthy.¹⁰³ The Geraldine *caput* of Lea appears to have doubled up as the earl of Ulster's prison and a collection point for booty.¹⁰⁴ Several of fitzThomas's associates such as Walter L'Enfaunt, John de Boneville and Oliver fitzEynon were also accused of taking part in the disorders.¹⁰⁵ Indeed one of them, William Cadel, was stated to have 'slain many Englishmen'.¹⁰⁶ However, fitzThomas's most notorious deed was undoubtedly the robbery of the town and castle of Kildare of 'money, cloth, wheat, oats, malt, oxen, cows, sheep and pigs' to the alleged value of £1000.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, John also appears to have occupied the castle for some time, as he appointed his servant, Jordan Walsh, to be its janitor.¹⁰⁸ Significantly, no record survives describing any attacks upon fitzThomas's own properties. It seems beyond doubt that he was the principal instigator of the disorders that arose.

John's robbery of Kildare castle is of particular interest because it raises the issue of his dealings with the midlands Irish during the disturbance. Most historians who have examined the period have accused him of forming an alliance with them.¹⁰⁹ Primarily this is due to the surviving evidence about the robbery of Kildare, which appears to incriminate him decisively. Both the *Dublin Annals* and a record of a court case held in Dublin note that the rolls and tallies of the liberties of Kildare

¹⁰² *CJR* 1295–1303, p. 193.

¹⁰³ *CJR* 1295–1303, pp 193, 202.

¹⁰⁴ *CJR* 1295–1303, p. 181.

¹⁰⁵ *CJR* 1295–1303, pp 191, 203–4.

¹⁰⁶ *CJR* 1295–1303, p. 206.

¹⁰⁷ *CJR* 1295–1303, p. 190.

¹⁰⁸ *CJR* 1295–1303, p. 203.

¹⁰⁹ For example, *N. H. I.*, ii, p. 186; Frame, *The Dublin Government*, p. 112.

were burned, in Kildare castle, by none other than John's old adversary an Calbhach O'Connor Faly.¹¹⁰ The annals date the event to 1294, and the entry is placed after an item noting the capture of de Burgh. They also state that the town and country of Kildare were wasted by the English and the Irish. Most damagingly, the eyre returns reveal that fitzThomas had some O'Connors in his company when he robbed Kildare.¹¹¹ Before commenting upon fitzThomas's culpability, it might be worth making some observations about the participation of the midlands Irish in the disturbance. Although references to robberies and murders committed by the Irish occur frequently throughout the eyre records, it is difficult to ascertain when the crimes took place. Those activities which can be dated range from the late 1280s to 1298.¹¹² Nonetheless, it seems that at least one dynasty was at war during the disturbance. One eyre return noted that a thief named Thomas Shorthond was murdered by 'the Odimpsies'.¹¹³ As the jurors usually named suspected criminals individually, this collective usage suggests that it was the O'Dempsey lordship which had become hostile. It is likely that the O'Mores were also active as two of them had taken 'pledges from the faithful people of Leys for victual, and extorted money, so that the country is impoverished'.¹¹⁴ However, the dynasties appear to have been acting upon their own initiative. The *Dublin Annals* state that there was great famine in Ireland from 1294 to 1296, and this may have provided their main motivation.¹¹⁵ The activities of the O'Connor Falys underlines this point. Apart from their involvement in the robbery of Kildare, they continued in a state of sporadic warfare from late 1295 to 1298, long after the disturbance had died down.¹¹⁶ It seems probable that while the activities of the Irish dynasties made a dangerous situation worse, they were essentially pursuing their own agenda.

The fact that the disturbance occasioned a resumption in hostilities between the colonists and the Irish makes fitzThomas's apparent collusion with his erstwhile enemies even more serious. FitzThomas had

¹¹⁰ *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p. 323; *CJR 1295-1303*, p. 118.

¹¹¹ *CJR 1295-1303*, p. 190.

¹¹² *CJR 1295-1303*, pp 175, 208.

¹¹³ *CJR 1295-1303*, p. 176.

¹¹⁴ *CJR 1295-1303*, p. 168.

¹¹⁵ *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p. 323.

¹¹⁶ *CJR 1295-1303*, pp 172, 174, 197, 208.

been granted a licence to treat with what were called 'Irish enemies' in 1292, and it has been suggested that this was one of the causes of friction between de Vescy and himself.¹¹⁷ Obviously the latitude provided to him by such a licence provided him with the opportunity to come to an understanding with the Irish dynasties if he so wished. However, it is worth noting that John was not accused of forming an alliance with them in the course of the eyre proceedings. Also, the fact that he had some O'Connors with him when he robbed Kildare may not be as significant as it first appears. After all, John was lord of Offaly and presumably had some O'Connor tenants on his estates. Significantly, the Christian names which predominate amongst the O'Connors in John's company were not those in common use amongst the leading O'Connor Faly dynasts of the time.¹¹⁸ Admittedly, one of fitzThomas's followers, a William son of Colin O'Connor was later declared to be a felon who appears to have operated from a base outside of the land of peace.¹¹⁹ As far as William's case goes, the worst that can be said of John is that he employed a man who was or who became a felon. Nevertheless, the bald fact remains that fitzThomas looted the castle of Kildare at around the same time as did the most dangerous Irish warlord in the region. This remarkable community of interest, however temporary, raises questions about the motives behind John's activities during the disturbance.

The robbery of Kildare certainly suggests that John was taking vengeance upon de Vescy for his former high-handedness. It is also possible that fitzThomas wished to see the destruction of the liberty's rolls and tallies quite as much as an Calbhach, notwithstanding his triumph over de Vescy earlier in 1294. However he may have had another reason for attacking de Vescy's *caput*. At the time, an associate of the Red Earl named Nigel le Brun was seneschal of Kildare, and fitzThomas may have been attempting to neutralise an ally of his principal enemy.¹²⁰ In order to clarify John's intentions, it might be useful to identify his other victims. Apart from Kildare, fitzThomas's other main targets were Reban, Clane and Dunlost. Reban was held by the St Michael family to which John's mother may have belonged.¹²¹ Unfortunately, there does not appear to be an

¹¹⁷ Frame, *The Dublin Government*, p. 112.

¹¹⁸ *CJR 1295-1303*, p. 190; *N. H. I.*, ix, p. 150.

¹¹⁹ *CJR 1295-1303*, p. 169.

¹²⁰ *CDI 1293-1301*, nos. 580, 685.

¹²¹ Otway-Ruthven, 'Knights' fees in Kildare, Leix and Offaly', p. 170.

obvious motive for this attack, as John's relationship with the family at the time and afterwards does not seem to have been unduly strained.¹²² The attacks upon Clane and the barony of Dunlost are more revealing. Both were in the hands of Adam de Stanton, an individual who is not recorded as having played an active part in the disturbance.¹²³ But he was one of the earl of Ulster's greatest tenants in Connacht, which presumably is not a coincidence.¹²⁴ On balance therefore, although John was undoubtedly motivated in part by a desire to revenge himself upon de Vescy, the disturbance in Kildare may be best understood within the context of the conflict between de Burgh and fitzThomas over supremacy in Connacht.

Richard de Burgh finally regained his liberty on 12 March 1295.¹²⁵ The *Dublin Annals* state that his release was at the behest of the king's council at a parliament held in Kilkenny.¹²⁶ The *Annals of Connacht* go further and ascribe his freedom to the intervention of King Edward.¹²⁷ It should not be assumed however, that fitzThomas had been browbeaten into dispensing with his valuable prisoner. On the contrary, all the evidence suggests that the earl's release was a highly conditional affair. De Burgh was in fact exchanged for Walter son of John de Burgo and Henry de Burgo, who were deemed to be 'noble hostages of the earl's own kin' by the *Annals of Connacht*.¹²⁸ Furthermore, the attitude of the Dublin government is instructive. De Burgh's release was not accompanied by any official sanctions against fitzThomas. On the contrary, William de Oddingeseles the chief governor proved himself to be a useful ally of fitzThomas's by issuing him with a pardon for himself and his men.¹²⁹ Most importantly, de Burgh was not freed until fitzThomas had achieved his primary 'war-aim'. In a deed witnessed at Kilkenny by an important group of Irish magnates, the earl surrendered all his rights and claims to everything that fitzThomas held in Connacht.¹³⁰ John's resort to violence

¹²² See for example PRO C. 47/10/15 no. 8.

¹²³ Otway-Ruthven, 'Knights' fees', pp 168-9.

¹²⁴ Otway-Ruthven, *Medieval Ireland*, p.95.

¹²⁵ *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p.323.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ AC, s.a. 1295.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*; CJR 1295-1303, p. 131.

¹²⁹ CJR 1295-1303, p. 191.

¹³⁰ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 9.

had been successful, at least on paper. Nonetheless, it is difficult to believe that de Burgh had really accepted an outcome which clearly had been forced upon him under duress.

However, before the earl of Ulster had a chance to retaliate, a crisis developed in Leinster which forced the quarrelling magnates to act in concert, at least temporarily. After being at peace for many years, the Irish of the Leinster mountains began to attack their Anglo-Irish neighbours. According to the *Dublin Annals*, in 1295 they wasted Leinster and burned Castledermot.¹³¹ Several explanations have been put forward for their renewed hostility, including a suggestion that the outbreak might have been due to the unsettled period of de Vescy's justiciarship, and a proposal that it was connected to the great Welsh rebellion of 1294–5.¹³² Although both suggestions are plausible, it is likely that the chaos engendered by the disturbance, along with the famine conditions, were also major contributory factors. The individual who had to deal with this dangerous situation was the Desmond Geraldine Thomas fitzMaurice. FitzMaurice had become *custos* of Ireland in April 1295, following the death of William de Oddingeseles.¹³³ If fitzMaurice had any desire to punish his distant relative for his misdeeds he was constrained by his pressing need for troops to fight the Leinster Irish. He himself travelled from Munster and campaigned in the mountains for 31 days, being joined for shorter periods by both de Burgh and fitzThomas as well as several other magnates.¹³⁴ In fact the surviving evidence suggests that fitzMaurice, like de Oddingeseles before him had no intention of treating John harshly. It seems as though fitzThomas remained in good standing with the Dublin government until at least May 1295. Despite all that he had done, on the 5th of that month he was reappointed to the keepership of the castles of Rinndown and Roscommon by the council, albeit with some conditions attached.¹³⁵ Two weeks later, fitzMaurice ordered the chancellor to issue pardons to two of John's followers for all breaches of the king's peace up to the date of de

¹³¹ *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p.323.

¹³² Frame, *The Dublin Government*, p. 92; Duffy, *Ireland and the Irish sea region*, 1014–1318, pp 147–50.

¹³³ *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p. 324.

¹³⁴ *CDI 1293–1301*, no. 273.

¹³⁵ *CJR 1295–1303*, p. 8.

Burgh's release.¹³⁶ Even as late as July, two associates of de Burgh's were forced into promising to make good all trespasses committed against fitzThomas, Piers de Bermingham and John de la Mare.¹³⁷ However, by then any concessions granted by the Dublin government were of limited use to John. In an abrupt reversal of fortune, fitzThomas's triumph over de Burgh was rendered worthless by the intervention of the king, who commanded him to come to England to explain his actions.¹³⁸

Edward, having learned of John's activities from the chancellor and presumably also from de Burgh decided to put him on trial in Westminster for the capture of the earl and 'for other offences ... committed in Ireland against the king and the king's peace'.¹³⁹ FitzThomas was facing the greatest crisis of his entire career. The consequences of being convicted could be devastating for both himself and for his family, as forfeiture was a possibility. Obviously, under those circumstances there was no question of him failing to appear. While at Westminster, he was brought to task by William de Valence lord of Pembroke, in an action on behalf of his daughter Agnes, who was still very much alive. De Valence exploited fitzThomas's weak position by obliging him to make a handsome apology to Agnes in parliament, and to promise to fully recompense her for the damages inflicted upon her. Furthermore, in an action which had long-term importance, John acknowledged her life interest in his family's estates in Limerick and Kildare.¹⁴⁰ Incidentally, the English traitor Thomas Turberville judged fitzThomas's plight to be sufficiently newsworthy to pass on to his French paymasters. In an intercepted letter to the provost of Paris, he wrote '*E sachez ke jo trovay sire Johan le fiz Thomas a la curt le rey, pur treter pes entre luy et le cunte ... de Ulvester*'.¹⁴¹ In any event, John himself had more important problems to face. On 16 August, his case against William de Vescy was finally heard.¹⁴² At this stage, the first hint emerges

¹³⁶ CJR 1295–1303, p. 71.

¹³⁷ CJR 1295–1303, p. 30.

¹³⁸ CJR 1295–1303, p. 72.

¹³⁹ CDI 1293–1301, no. 246.

¹⁴⁰ *Rotuli parl.*, i, p. 130b.

¹⁴¹ *Bartolomaei de Cotton Monachi Norwicensis Historia Anglicana*, p. 305. For Turberville's treason, see Edwards, 'The treason of Thomas Turberville, 1295', pp 296–309.

¹⁴² *Rotuli parl.*, i, pp 132–4.

that although John was in serious trouble, the king did not intend to make an example of him. The entire proceedings were dismissed on the grounds that Walter de la Haye had conducted the initial proceedings incorrectly.¹⁴³ In fact, it appears as though fitzThomas managed to come to some sort of understanding with Edward. A week after the de Vescy case was quashed, the king sent the Dublin administration a copy of an agreement made between them. John while protesting that he could prove his innocence but 'being unwilling to enter the ways of litigation with the king' had submitted himself to the king's will 'touching all charges against him'. He had gone on to declare that he would abide by any decision arrived at by Edward, on pain of forfeiture of lands, life and limb. FitzThomas was then permitted to return home, on condition that he would fulfil two key conditions. First, he was to find immediately 24 mainpernors, each with at least 24 marcates of land in fee who would guarantee his compliance. The names of the mainpernors were to be before the king 'wherever he might be' by November 11. Second, he had to agree to appear before the king in person at a time of Edward's choosing to hear what was in store for him.¹⁴⁴ Undoubtedly, John could consider himself to be extremely fortunate to have secured such an outcome. His fate now depended upon royal discretion rather than upon the result of a trial in which he would almost certainly be the loser. Obviously, it was now in his best interests to make himself useful to the king. In the meantime however, it is clear that John was out of favour and he was finally dismissed from his office as keeper of the royal castles of Roscommon and Rinndown.¹⁴⁵ However, despite these setbacks, the fact remains that John emerged from his visit to England relatively unscathed.

While still in England, fitzThomas succeeded in finding three mainpernors, namely Walter L'Enfaunt, Peter le Butiller and Henry de Vernoyl.¹⁴⁶ On his arrival in Ireland he set about finding the remaining 21. Given that John's influence was supposedly strongest in Kildare and Connacht, their identities are surprising.¹⁴⁷ In the first instance, there are some interesting omissions from the list, chief amongst them being Piers de

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹⁴⁴ *CDI 1293-1301*, no. 246.

¹⁴⁵ *CJR 1295-1303*, p. 73.

¹⁴⁶ *CDI 1293-1301*, no. 246.

¹⁴⁷ *BL Add. Ms 4790 f.52v.*

Bermingham. Moreover, the only individuals to mainprise fitzThomas who definitely had a Kildare background were Walter L'Enfaunt and William Cadel. Similarly, none of the mainperners appear to have had Connacht origins. The startling fact is that the bulk of them came from Munster. Furthermore, on closer examination, nearly all of them were tenants of one man – Thomas fitzMaurice, the leading Desmond Geraldine.¹⁴⁸ Obviously, this list of mainperners is highly significant. At the very least, it provides the most striking demonstration of the existence of Geraldine solidarity to occur during fitzThomas's lifetime. More fundamentally, it raises questions about the true extent of John's power and popularity in Kildare and Connacht. It could be that some of the core members of his following such as John de Punchardon, were not sufficiently wealthy to mainprise their lord. Also, it is possible that Thomas fitzMaurice, after learning of the conditions placed upon John's freedom, had assembled the necessary mainperners from amongst his own tenants before fitzThomas's return to Ireland. Nevertheless, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that John's wholesale failure to attract backers from either of his main spheres of influence is an indication that there was widespread disapproval of his actions during the disturbance. It has been observed that fitzThomas's actions meant that he bore partial responsibility for a permanent degradation in the stability of the lordship.¹⁴⁹ It is tempting to speculate that John's neighbours shared this view.

The fact that John appears to have been held in disapprobation both at home and at court raises a very serious point. In retrospect, his behaviour during the disturbance appears to have been both wildly reckless and adventuristic. In particular, fitzThomas conducted his operations on such a scale and against such an important individual that it seems that he was bound to attract royal retribution. Arguably, the possibility that John himself believed that such a desperate course of action could succeed is the most incomprehensible aspect of the whole episode. However, it should be acknowledged that from fitzThomas's perspective, there were several reasons for being confident that bold decisive action might achieve the desired result. Most obviously, his recent triumph over de Vescy would support that view. Furthermore, he may have calculated that with de Oddingeseles in office as chief governor, the central

¹⁴⁸ See Appendix i on the mainperners.

¹⁴⁹ *N. H. I.*, ii, p. 188.

administration would be slow to move against him. If that was so, then the evidence suggests that he was correct in this surmise. Presumably he was also aware that a generation previously his family had confronted the de Burghs in the same fashion without incurring royal displeasure.¹⁵⁰ Lastly, it is just possible that fitzThomas believed Edward to be too pre-occupied with the crises in France, Wales and Scotland to pay too much attention to Irish affairs. However, with the benefit of hindsight, it can be seen that any such calculations and assumptions were base upon an over-confident reading of the situation. It was mentioned earlier that the king seems to have deliberately excluded John from the opportunity to serve in Gascony. This implies that he was already harbouring doubts about John's conduct and reliability before he learned of the capture of de Burgh. Moreover, the disorders engendered by the disturbance coincided with a particularly dangerous phase in Edward's campaign against the rebel Welsh, when he was relying upon Irish resources to supply his army.¹⁵¹ The fact that fitzThomas's activities were causing problems for the Irish administration at such a crucial point cannot have endeared him to the king. As far as the earlier de Burgh-Geraldine clash is concerned, it is worth recalling that it took place during an English civil war, when the hard-pressed lord Edward was actively seeking allies.¹⁵² It is safe to assume that he would be less disposed to deal with lawbreakers leniently in 1295. Lastly, although neither de Oddingeseles nor fitzMaurice may have been eager to denounce fitzThomas to the king, the evidence suggests that the same cannot be said for the chancellor Thomas Cantok.¹⁵³ Taking all these factors together, fitzThomas should have dissuaded himself from employing such extreme measures. In general, it appears as though Stanihurst's colourful explanation, that John 'waxed loftie of mind' has the virtue of combining simplicity with the essential truth.¹⁵⁴

After he sent fitzThomas home, King Edward seems to have retained some concern that the feud with de Burgh would break out anew. Although there is no direct evidence of renewed fighting between

¹⁵⁰ *Clyn*, p. 8.

¹⁵¹ Lydon, Ireland's participation in the military activities of English kings, pp 170–173.

¹⁵² See Frame, 'Ireland and the barons' war', pp 158–167.

¹⁵³ Sayles, *Affairs of Ireland*, p. 40.

¹⁵⁴ *Stanihurst*, p. 201.

the two magnates, on 18 October the king wrote to both men, warning them to keep the peace, with a threat of forfeiture in the event of non-compliance being added in John's case.¹⁵⁵ However, at this time, it is clear that Edward's primary interest in Ireland was centred upon its ability to provide him with men, money and materials for his military campaigns. For by October 1295, the king was facing a military crisis. In addition to prosecuting the war with France which had broken out in June 1294, the king also had to cope with the challenge to his authority posed by the burgeoning attempt on the part of the Scots to regain their independence.¹⁵⁶ Against this background, Edward's appointment of John Wogan to the office of chief governor in place of William de Oddingeseles, which took place on the same day that the admonitory letters to de Burgh and fitzThomas were issued, was highly significant.¹⁵⁷ Wogan's appointment can be viewed as the launch of a new royal policy, which called for the exploitation of Ireland's resources on an unprecedented scale. This policy was to have major implications for the future prosperity of the lordship, but it also had an immediate political impact. The king's first instructions to the new justiciar were to prepare a massive military expedition from Ireland to serve in Scotland.¹⁵⁸ Significantly, Edward also made it known to both fitzThomas and the earl of Ulster that he wished them to participate in the campaign.¹⁵⁹ From the magnates' perspective a new era of opportunity had emerged, in which it would be possible to gain royal favour through the mechanism of overseas service. Thus, the path was cleared for fitzThomas to rehabilitate himself.

Wogan took up his duties in Ireland in December 1295, and moved swiftly to prevent a recurrence of hostilities between the earl and John fitzThomas. A parliament held by him in January 1296 sanctioned the release of the de Burgh hostages still being held by John, and was probably the occasion on which Wogan secured a two year truce *inter Comitem Ultonie et Johannem Filium Thome, et Geraldinos*.¹⁶⁰

155 CDI, 1293–1301, no. 268.

156 Powicke, *The thirteenth century*, pp 611–3, 642–8.

157 CDI, 1293–1301, 267.

158 *Ibid*, no. 269.

159 *Parl. Writs*, i, p. 269; CDI, 1293–1301, no. 270.

160 *CJR* 12951303, p. 131; *Chart. St Marys*, ii. p. 325. Although the entry is recorded under the year 1295, the Dublin annalist began the year on March 25, the feast of the incarnation.

Subsequent evidence suggests that the terms of the truce included a commitment on the part of the Dublin government to set up a commission which would adjudicate on the justice of the protagonists' grievances and would attempt to find an equitable solution.¹⁶¹ However, it seems plain that in early 1296, Wogan achieved a postponement rather than a resolution of the dispute, despite the king's promise to provide 'speedy justice' to the pair. Not surprisingly, a degree of friction continued to exist between the two men, the truce notwithstanding. For example, in late January 1296 fitzThomas came before the Common Bench in Dublin, apparently claiming that de Burgh owed him £100,000.¹⁶² On the face of it, the amount involved seems absurd, and it might be nothing more than a scribal error. It may also be significant that there is no evidence that the case proceeded any further. Perhaps Wogan's failure to resolve the dispute might best be seen within the context of his mission to organise an expedition to Scotland. It could be argued that his objective was to pacify the lordship temporarily, without alienating either individual, in order to ensure that both men served overseas. In any event, preparations for the expedition continued in both the lordship and England. On 3 January 1296 the king issued writs to 28 of the lordship's leading magnates, including fitzThomas, Walter Lenfaunt and William Cadel, asking them to be at Whitehaven in Cumbria by 1 March.¹⁶³ Some indication of John's standing within the lordship can be gleaned from the fact that his name appeared third on the list, after those of the earl of Ulster and the lord of Trim, king Edward's close friend Geoffrey de Geneville. However, matters became more complicated thereafter. As things stood, the Irish magnates were under no obligation to serve overseas. Consequently, some of the lordship's leading magnates adopted tough bargaining tactics when negotiating their proposed passage to Scotland. In particular, a letter from a royal messenger to the king describes how individuals like Theobald Butler, Thomas fitzMaurice and above all Richard de Burgh haggled and prevaricated with him, in the hope of receiving favourable terms of service, which included higher rates of pay than was customary and pardons for past transgressions.¹⁶⁴ Interestingly, the messenger did not name John fitzThomas amongst their number.

¹⁶¹ *CJR* 1295–1303, pp 234–6.

¹⁶² *NAI RC* 7/4 (Plea rolls), p. 29.

¹⁶³ *CDI* 1293–1301, no. 315; *Parl. Writs.*, i, p. 277.

¹⁶⁴ Stevenson, *Documents illustrative of the history of Scotland*, ii, pp 124–5.

Obviously, this omission may be due simply to the non-survival of a similar report about John. Alternatively, it could indicate that fitzThomas, by forbearing to drive an excessively hard bargain with the royal representative, was actually attempting to ingratiate himself with the king. Whatever fitzThomas's attitude may have been, it appears that the excessive demands of the other magnates contributed to a delay in the organisation of the expedition, and in fact it did not depart until the end of April or the beginning of May.¹⁶⁵

According to the *Annals of Connacht*, Wogan set sail for Scotland accompanied by 'the principal Gaill of Ireland', including 'MacGearailt, i. Ioan Fi Tomas'.¹⁶⁶ The army brought by the justiciar numbered more than 3000 men and constituted the greatest Irish force to serve overseas during the reign of Edward I.¹⁶⁷ Somewhat ironically, the expedition's tardy departure meant that it reached Scotland after serious Scottish resistance had collapsed in the wake of the battle of Dunbar on 27 April 1296.¹⁶⁸ Nevertheless, King Edward retained the Irish in his service for several months, and the last contingents did not leave for home until 6 September. It has been suggested that the king wished to overawe the Scots by mounting a massive display of military power, and that consequently, the Irish contingents were a welcome addition to his army. Edward also appears to have employed them in mopping-up operations, particularly in mountainous regions, where the mobility of the lightly-armoured horsemen known as hobelars could be put to good use.¹⁶⁹ At any rate, compensation for the loss of horses was paid to several individuals and references to the brutal behaviour of the Irish troops can be found in annals from both England and Ireland.¹⁷⁰

There is not a great deal more evidence about the actual activities of the expedition while in Scotland.¹⁷¹ However, the administrative records concerning the Irish contingent contain a mass of

¹⁶⁵ Lydon, 'An Irish army in Scotland, 1296' in *Irish Sword*, v, pp 185–6.

¹⁶⁶ AC, s.a. 1296.

¹⁶⁷ Lydon, 'Irish army', p. 186.

¹⁶⁸ Lydon, 'Irish army', p. 186; Powicke, *Thirteenth century*, p. 614.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, pp 186–7.

¹⁷⁰ CDI 1293–1301, nos. 320, 369; AC s.a. 1296; Gransden, *Chronicle of Bury St Edmonds*, pp 131–2.

¹⁷¹ Lydon, 'Irish army', p.186.

detail about its organisation and composition which in turn sheds some light upon the social status and military reputation enjoyed by fitzThomas at the time. On a personal level, the pay accounts confirm that John was deemed to be amongst the first rank of Irish magnates. In common with individuals like Theobald Butler, Jon de Boneville and Maurice de Rochford, he was, initially at least, given the rather unusual classification of 'baron' rather than the more normal 'banneret', and was paid at the rate of 4s *per diem*.¹⁷² More significantly perhaps, the records demonstrate that fitzThomas's military skills were held in high esteem. The army as a whole was divided into two commands, the one under John Wogan and the other under the earl of Ulster. Not altogether surprisingly, John served with the justiciar.¹⁷³ However, the army was subdivided further. As the various contingents arrived at their points of embarkation in the course of April 1296, they were assigned to one of nine leaders, of whom John fitzThomas was one.¹⁷⁴ In fact, by the time that the campaign drew to a close, John, who was now being described as a banneret, was leading a major component of Wogan's command, consisting of himself and another banneret, eight knights, 31 squires, 25 hobelars, three crossbowmen and 239 foot.¹⁷⁵ Incidentally, at least some of fitzThomas's troops seem to have seen action, as the second banneret, Philip de Barry was promoted to that rank in July 1296.¹⁷⁶ In addition to revealing John's military standing, the expedition's pay accounts also provide some idea of his personal military resources. FitzThomas went on the government payroll on 16 April 1296. At that stage, his cavalry contingent consisted of himself, two knights, 15 squires and 25 hobelars. In addition he had some infantry leaders with him, namely one centenar, or commander of 100 foot, and seven vintenars, who led units of 20 men.¹⁷⁷ At first glance, the size of John's contingent appears to be quite small, especially when the chaos wrought by him during 'the disturbance' is considered. Presumably however, he left a portion of his retinue behind to defend his estates against the Irish and possibly also

¹⁷² PRO E.101/5/26 m. 2.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ PRO E.101/5/26 m. 7.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ PRO E.101/5/26 m. 4d.

¹⁷⁷ PRO E.101/5/26 m. 2; Prestwich, *War, Politics and Finance under Edward I* (London, 1972), p. 106.

against the earl of Ulster, who seems to have consolidated his position in Connacht by securing the submission of the provincial king, Aodh son of Eoghan O'Connor, prior to the expedition's departure.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, as was mentioned earlier, he only brought infantry commanders with him, as the expedition's foot soldiers were raised and paid separately.¹⁷⁹ Finally, it is worth observing that his peers like Theobald Butler brought similarly-sized contingents to the first musters.¹⁸⁰ On balance then, it is likely that John's initial contingent represented his surplus military capacity rather than his entire following in Ireland, especially as its size compared favourably with those assembled by his fellow magnates, with the significant exception of Richard de Burgh.¹⁸¹

FitzThomas departed for Ireland from Furness on 6 September 1296.¹⁸² Six days later, King Edward rewarded all those who had served with the expedition by issuing a general pardon for all transgressions previously committed in Ireland.¹⁸³ Interestingly, neither John nor the earl of Ulster appear to have been satisfied with this general pardon. In fact, de Burgh, who had provided nearly half of the manpower for the expedition, secured an individual pardon for himself on 5 September.¹⁸⁴ Significantly however, its terms explicitly excluded any misdeeds perpetrated during his conflict with fitzThomas. For his part, John also seems to have felt the need for a greater degree of protection than that afforded by the general pardon. By November 1296 he had either travelled in person or had sent a representative to Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk, where a parliament was being held in order to further his case. On 26 November the king issued pardons to several of fitzThomas's associates, including Sir William Cadel, for their good service in Scotland.¹⁸⁵ As the pardons were based upon testimony provided by John, it seems probable that fitzThomas was actually in attendance at court. In any event, eleven days earlier, John himself had

¹⁷⁸ AC, s.a. 1296.

¹⁷⁹ See Prestwich, *War, Politics and Finance*, pp 92–113.

¹⁸⁰ PRO E.101/5/26 m.2. For example, Butler brought 2 knights, 37 squires, 2 crossbowmen, 2 centenars and 10 vintenars.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* De Burgh assembled a force of 69 squires, 51 hobelars, 3 centenars and 500 foot.

¹⁸² Lydon, 'Irish army', p. 187.

¹⁸³ CDI 1293–1301, no. 324.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 315.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 354.

received an individual pardon for all of his transgressions except those touching the conflict between himself and the earl of Ulster.¹⁸⁶ In effect, fitzThomas had secured the same conditions as had Richard de Burgh the previous September. On one level, the fact that the pardons gained by both de Burgh and fitzThomas were conditional suggests that the king, whose thoughts had turned to the war against France, was still loath to resolve their conflict speedily. Overall however, the cumulative effect of the service performed by fitzThomas and de Burgh in Scotland, along with the consequential grants of individual pardons to both men provides a good example of the potential advantages available to an Irish magnate who was willing to cultivate a personal relationship with the king.

From the perspective of an Irish magnate, attendance at court or at the English parliament in person or by proxy had another practical advantage, in that it enabled them to interact with those aristocrats who were resident in England but had interests in Ireland. For John fitzThomas, the most important individual to fall into that category was Agnes de Valence, the widow of Maurice fitzGerald III. At this point, it is worth reiterating that de Valence, who was present in Bury St Edmunds when parliament was held there in November 1296, was in possession of a great proportion of the estates of the Geraldines of Offaly in Munster and Leinster.¹⁸⁷ To be specific, Agnes held a life interest in the Geraldines' Limerick properties under the terms of her marriage agreement with Maurice, to which were added the manors of Rathmore, Geashill and a third part of Maynooth, which comprised her widow's dower. Her father William had exacted an acknowledgement of this fact from fitzThomas in August 1295, while the latter was in England awaiting the king's judgement upon his misconduct during 'the disturbance'.¹⁸⁸ Nevertheless, Agnes's relations with John remained poor thereafter. There were two principal reasons for this state of affairs. In the first place, there is evidence to suggest that fitzThomas continued to try to gain a degree of control over the estates held by Agnes in dower following his return to Ireland in late 1295. In particular, a problem arose in relation to the manor of Geashill, which was located in the marches. A common bench case held in late 1295 reveals that when a vacancy arose in the manorial church, fitzThomas, with the support

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, no. 344.

¹⁸⁷ *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 36, 37.

¹⁸⁸ *Rotuli parl.*, i, p. 130b.

of the bishop of Kildare, succeeded in presenting a successor to the office.¹⁸⁹ Not surprisingly, de Valence challenged his right to do so, and instigated proceedings which dragged on for three years.¹⁹⁰ Interestingly, insofar as this episode is concerned, it is clear that John's efforts at self-aggrandisement backfired badly. In November 1296, while at Bury St Edmunds, Agnes granted the manor of Geashill and its appurtenances to John's principal rival, the earl of Ulster.¹⁹¹ The second main reason for Agnes's disaffection with fitzThomas stemmed from his behaviour in 1292–3, when, in common with several other leading figures within the lordship, he became a mainpernor for John de Valle, her former bailiff in Ireland, whose accounts were found to be nearly £1500 in arrears. De Valle's default in early 1293 meant that by law, fitzThomas was left in the position of owing £277 1s 1d to de Valence. By April 1297 at the latest, the administration in Dublin was actively engaged in an attempt to recover the arrears from de Valle's mainpernors on Agnes's behalf.¹⁹² Significantly, its success in doing so varied from individual to individual. Some of the mainpernors such as Geoffrey de Geneville and Walter Lenfaunt, who had close connections to the government, made arrangements with Agnes's attorneys to repay their share of the debt. However, it clear that the administration encountered much greater difficulties in recovering the money from characters like Sir James Keating and John fitzThomas.¹⁹³

In one sense, fitzThomas's obduracy can be viewed as a sign of continuing animosity on his part towards de Valence. Indeed, it is highly unlikely that he looked upon her disposal of Geashill to de Burgh favourably. However, there are other indications that by the spring of 1297, John was suffering from acute financial embarrassment. For example, in April 1297 the sheriff of Kildare explicitly stated that he was unable to collect money for Agnes because fitzThomas's lands had already been seized.¹⁹⁴ While the possibility that fitzThomas had induced his local sheriff to under-estimate his resources cannot be discounted, it may also be the case that John was experiencing genuine financial difficulties. As it seems

¹⁸⁹ *CJR* 1295–1303, p.75; *NAI RC* 7/3, p. 339; *RC* 7/4 pp 86–88.

¹⁹⁰ For example, see *NAI RC* 7/4, pp 102, 133; *RC* 7/5, pp 26, 43.

¹⁹¹ *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 36, 37.

¹⁹² *CJR* 1295–1303, p. 102.

¹⁹³ *CJR* 1295–1303, pp 102, 104–5.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, pp 104–5.

somewhat unusual that one of the lordship's principal magnates should find himself in such straitened circumstances, it might be worthwhile to review the chief revenue sources available to fitzThomas at this time. In theory, John's extensive holdings in Connacht should have guaranteed him a considerable income, if the valuations taken in the late 1280s following the death of Maurice fitzMaurice are reliable.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, despite the conflict with de Burgh, John continued to consolidate his property interests in the province. For example, in November 1295 he acquired the rights to the half-cantred of Croidhe Chairbre possessed by one Henry de Cogan.¹⁹⁶ Nevertheless, it is highly likely that the turbulence that had racked the province since 1293 had had a negative impact upon his estates' profitability. In particular, it is worth recalling that as recently as 1294, Aodh son of Eoghan O'Connor had caused extensive damage to the bastion of Geraldine power in Connacht, when he destroyed Sligo castle and ravaged the lands around it.¹⁹⁷ The bulk of fitzThomas's other estates were situated within the lordship of Offaly, which had been granted to him by his cousin Gerald fitzMaurice III just before the latter's death in 1287. However, the available evidence suggests strongly that by 1297, Offaly's economic potential was in serious decline. For example, John, in his capacity as lord of Offaly held the wardship of the estates of Robert St Michael of Reban from March 1295 onwards.¹⁹⁸ A common bench case taken in 1297 revealed that the revenues accruing from the St Michael properties had been sharply reduced. Ominously, the reason given was because of 'the wars of the Irish'.¹⁹⁹ Evidently, the political instability within the region which dated back to at least the late 1270s but had worsened sharply in the mid-1280s, was taking its toll. Given the difficulties present in both Connacht and Offaly, the impression that the resources available to John fitzThomas were outstripped by the scope of his ambitions seems quite plausible.

To make matters worse for fitzThomas, 1297 also saw a new challenge to the legality of his hold upon the inheritance of Gerald fitzMaurice III. According to the agreement entered into on 22 July 1293, Juliana de Cogan, Gerald's aunt and heir general quitclaimed all of her

¹⁹⁵ *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 60, 113.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, no. 63.

¹⁹⁷ *AC*, s.a. 1294.

¹⁹⁸ *PRO C.47/10/15*.

¹⁹⁹ *NAI RC 7/5*, p. 261.

rights away to fitzThomas, pertaining to both the estates which he actually had in his possession and to those which would revert to the family following the eagerly anticipated demise of Agnes de Valence.²⁰⁰ However, by 1297, Juliana was dead. In or before that year, John de Cogan III her son and heir, instituted legal proceedings against John fitzThomas in an effort to recover the title to the properties, notwithstanding the contract made by his mother.²⁰¹ His motivation for doing so has not survived, but it is at least possible that his attention was drawn to the inheritance by fitzThomas's trespasses upon Agnes de Valence's properties in 1294, or by the subsequent legal disputes over the advowson to the manor of Geashill. In any event, as various entries in the Irish Patent Rolls and the *Red Book of Kildare* make clear, his case was at least partially upheld.²⁰² On one level, de Cogan's successful assertion of his rights raises questions about the extent to which his mother made a free choice to surrender her rights to fitzThomas four years earlier. The fact that she did so in private, at Maynooth raises further doubts about the propriety of the transaction.²⁰³ Be that as it may, both the timing and the fact of the new situation posed obvious difficulties for John fitzThomas, and he rapidly entered into negotiations with his cousin to seek a compromise solution.

The details of the bargain struck between the two men has been preserved in the *Red Book of Kildare*, in the form of three documents which were drawn up in April 1297.²⁰⁴ The first document was completed in the Dominican friary at Cork on 4 April, and the fact that the chief governor John Wogan was also in the city at that time suggests that he played an active role in the negotiations. In essence, the document was a covenant between the two men which outlined the manner in which the Geraldine properties held by Agnes de Valence in Leinster and Munster would be disposed of following her death. Significantly, it presupposed that de Cogan would be the initial beneficiary following that eventuality. However, de Cogan undertook to enfeoff fitzThomas with half of the Limerick estates within two weeks of gaining seisin. FitzThomas's share was to be that half extending from Croom towards Limerick city, while de

²⁰⁰ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 73

²⁰¹ *Rot. pat. Hib.*, pp 4–4b.

²⁰² *Ibid*; *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 46–8.

²⁰³ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 73.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*, nos. 46–8.

Cogan would retain the half from Athlacca towards Kilmallock. In addition, with the exception of the manor of Rathmore, de Cogan undertook to grant the Leinster properties to fitzThomas. For his part, fitzThomas undertook to hold the properties of de Cogan, and promised to wear his robes as a sign of his lordship. A standard set of safeguards was included in the agreement, including an oath upon the gospels, an agreed penalty clause of £20,000 to be paid in the event of non-compliance by either party, and the creation of duplicate sealed copies of the document.²⁰⁵ Twenty days later, another agreement was drawn up by the two men, in de Cogan's castle at Ballynamona in Cork.²⁰⁶ The essential features of both were broadly similar, although in the later document, de Cogan's superior title to the inheritance was given a greater emphasis. Furthermore, it went into more exact detail about the manner in which Agnes's land in Limerick would be divided. Interestingly, fitzThomas now agreed that in addition to himself, two of his associates would also wear de Cogan's robes as a token of his lordship. Lastly, the second agreement was accompanied by a quitclaim made by de Cogan to fitzThomas. Not surprisingly, given fitzThomas's recent problems with Agnes de Valence, the quitclaim was for Geashill and both the manor and the advowson of the church there were specifically included.²⁰⁷

In addition to supplying the bare details about a compromise between two cousins, the agreements are of broader interest, as they provide a number of valuable insights into the social attitudes prevalent amongst at least some of the aristocracy of the lordship in the late thirteenth century. On a general level, the careful agreement concerning the number of robes to be worn by fitzThomas and his associates highlights the extent to which great significance was attached to such a symbolic gesture.²⁰⁸ More importantly perhaps, the documents were drawn up by two scions of one of the lordship's most prominent settler lineages. Both agreements provide confirmation of the view that their awareness of being part of such an extended family group did have an influence upon their outlook and sense of obligation. For example, both agreements highlight

²⁰⁵ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 48.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 46.

²⁰⁷ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 47.

²⁰⁸ For a discussion of the function and importance of robes, see F. Lachaud, 'Liveries of Robes in England, c. 1200 c. 1330', pp 279–298.

the continuing importance of the achievements of Maurice fitzGerald II to the family, nearly half a century after his death. More tangibly, the documents show that a sense of Geraldine solidarity was at least understood, if not actually practised in reality. Thus, in the wake of a standard clause in which both men agreed to support each other against all men, saving their fealty to the king, they added another rider, absolving themselves from acting against '*consanguineorum de cognomine utriusque parentele*'. Furthermore, the documents provide more evidence that, by the end of the thirteenth century, the Geraldines had developed a marked antipathy to the concept of female inheritance. To be specific, the cousins agreed that in the event of either one of them dying without male heirs, the other would inherit the properties in their entirety. Of course, there is a certain irony present in this situation, given that de Cogan's claim to the properties devolved from his mother.²⁰⁹ Finally, apart from revealing something of the social attitudes held by fitzThomas and de Cogan, the second agreement also sheds light upon the fact that relations between fitzThomas and the earl of Ulster continued to be tense in 1297. De Cogan inserted a clause into the agreement absolving him from supporting fitzThomas against Richard de Burgh. Significantly however, he went on to undertake that if the earl were to commit grave injustices against fitzThomas, he would come to his cousin's aid. Possibly, this last promise was the decisive factor which persuaded fitzThomas to agree to accept the greater degree of subservience implicit in wearing of three robes instead of one.²¹⁰ Be that as it may, it is clear that from fitzThomas's perspective, the terms of the compromise constituted a severe reverse when compared to the deal which he had struck with Juliana. Nevertheless, it could be argued that by not disinheriting him altogether, de Cogan treated him with both fairness and prudence, especially when the host of other difficulties facing fitzThomas are taken into account. On balance, fitzThomas did as well as he could reasonably have expected.

By the early summer of 1297, John fitzThomas was facing a formidable set of financial, legal and political challenges to his position in Ireland, which, it must be admitted, were largely of his own making. Fortunately for him, the policies of Edward I provided him with an opportunity to ameliorate his difficulties. Following the apparent

²⁰⁹ *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 46, 48.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, no. 46.

subjugation of the Scots, the king turned his attention towards the continuing war with France. At the parliament held at Bury St Edmunds in November 1296, Edward put forward his plan to exploit his alliance with the Count of Flanders by launching a two-pronged attack upon the French.²¹¹ The successful prosecution of such an ambitious scheme would have entailed a massive mobilisation of all of the military strength and economic wealth available to the English crown. Hence, it is highly likely that Edward had included the resources of the lordship of Ireland in his calculations from the start. However, political developments in England made an Irish contribution even more welcome. Edward's determination to campaign in Flanders provoked the greatest political crisis of his reign and came close to causing an outbreak of civil war in England.²¹² One of the most important consequences of the conflict was that the king encountered great difficulties in raising a sufficient number of troops for his expeditionary force in the face of widespread baronial resistance to the enterprise.²¹³ It was against this troubled background that Edward sent letters to Ireland in May 1297, seeking the assistance of his loyal subjects there. On 4 May 1297, the king wrote to John Wogan, ordering him to organise an Irish contingent for the expedition. Interestingly, Edward's ideas about the most suitable composition and deployment of the Irish force differed from those put into effect for the Scottish expedition of 1296 in several respects. In particular, he sought to set a limit of 400 men to the size of the contingent's cavalry arm, as a method of ensuring that the participants would be sufficiently well equipped. Edward also appears to have drawn upon the Scottish experience to form a definite opinion on the relative merits of the Irish magnates. Thus, when he commanded Wogan to secure the services of the 'good men of Ireland' for the expedition, he made specific mention of both the earl of Ulster and of John fitzThomas. To achieve that end, the justiciar was ordered to postpone the resolution of their quarrel for as long as possible.²¹⁴ Simultaneously, Edward wrote to thirty of the lordship's leading magnates to inform them of his desire that

211 Prestwich, *Edward I*, p. 391.

212 *Ibid*, pp 412–435.

213 Lewis, 'English forces in Flanders, August–November 1297' in Hunt, Pantin and Southern, *Studies in medieval history presented to Frederick Maurice Powicke* (Oxford, 1948), pp 310–12.

214 *CDI 1292–1301*, no. 399.

they should accompany him to Flanders. In essence, the king told the magnates that they should seek further information about the details of the expedition from John Wogan, and that they should begin to make suitable preparations for their journey.²¹⁵ Lastly, Edward sent a general letter to Ireland addressed to all his lieges, which reiterated his message to the magnates.²¹⁶ The list of individuals to whom the king wrote personally is worth closer examination, as it appears to reflect both the identities and the relative standing of the lordship's military élite in 1297. Again, fitzThomas's high military status is demonstrated by the fact that he was ranked third on the list of magnates, after Richard de Burgh and Geoffrey de Geneville. Furthermore, it is worth noting that at least three of John's known associates, namely Piers de Bermingham of Thetmoy, Walter Lenfaunt junior and William Cadel were deemed to be sufficiently prominent to merit individual invitations.²¹⁷

During the summer of 1297, further royal instructions followed the initial invitation to serve overseas. For example, the king had originally requested the Irish magnates to present themselves in London by July 7.²¹⁸ However, on May 17 he wrote to them again, postponing the date of assembly to 1 August, because of the distance involved.²¹⁹ Similarly, on July 8, Edward authorised the Irish treasurer to finance the transport costs of the earl of Ulster, John fitzThomas 'and their allies'.²²⁰ However, in a repetition of the pattern of events in 1296, the Irish magnates failed to set out by the date specified by the king. Again the primary reason for the delay appears to have been the grasping attitude displayed by the Irish magnates when they entered negotiations with Wogan about the terms of their service. FitzThomas's attitude is instructive in this regard. Given the extent of his own domestic difficulties in 1297, the prospect of overseas service, with its attendant possibilities of financial reward and royal patronage should have been an intrinsically attractive option for him. Furthermore, the king had specifically instructed John Wogan to emphasise

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, no. 396 *Parl. Writs*, i, pp 280–281.

²¹⁶ *CDI 1292–1301*, no. 397.

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, no. 396; *Parl. Writs*, i, pp 280–281.

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, no. 404.

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, no. 404. *Parl. Writs*, i, p. 283.

²²⁰ *CDI 1292–1301*, no. 420; PRO E.101/233/3 m.51.

that the Irish would serve with him personally.²²¹ Nevertheless, the available evidence suggests that in common with Richard de Burgh, John appears to have viewed the weakness of the king's position as an opportunity to be exploited. Admittedly, precise negotiating positions comparable to those available for the 1296 expedition to Scotland have not survived. However, in the case of fitzThomas, at least some of his key demands can be reconstructed from subsequent references to them in a variety of sources. Significantly, all of them have some bearing upon his domestic situation. Thus, it is known that he successfully negotiated for higher wages than was usual.²²² Secondly, he sought immunity from prosecution and debt collection while in Flanders.²²³ Lastly, he secured a prest of £40 towards the cost of fortifying Lea castle.²²⁴ Incidentally, this prest may have occasioned the construction of the castle's gatehouse and curtain wall, which archaeologists have dated to the late thirteenth century.²²⁵ In any event, the most important point to be made is that fitzThomas did ultimately strike a deal with John Wogan, and that by September 1297 at the latest, he had committed himself to going to war with his king.²²⁶

FitzThomas's participation in the Flanders campaign has been approached from several different angles by Irish historians. For example, the episode has been cited within the context of a study of the massive contribution made by the lordship of Ireland to the military activities of the English crown.²²⁷ Similarly, John's participation has been used to demonstrate that overseas service on behalf of the king of England was a common and a desirable occurrence for the magnates resident in Ireland during this period.²²⁸ In addition, John's experiences in Flanders have also been scrutinised by N.B. Lewis, an English historian. Lewis, who was writing in 1948, was primarily interested in analysing the strength and

²²¹ CDI 1292–1301, no. 399.

²²² Lewis, 'English forces in Flanders', p. 313.

²²³ CDI 1293–1301, no. 461.

²²⁴ *Ibid*, no. 438; PRO E. 101/233/2 (Issue roll, Michaelmas 1297 – Trinity 1298).

²²⁵ For example, see Leask, 'Irish castles : 1180 to 1310' in *The Archaeological Journal*, 93 (1937), pp 173–5.

²²⁶ BL Add Ms. 7965 (Wardrobe A/C 25 Edward I), f. 68v.

²²⁷ Lydon, 'Irish levies in the Scottish wars, 1296–1302', in *Irish Sword*, v, pp 208–17.

²²⁸ For example, Frame, 'The defence of the English lordship, 1250–1450', p. 76.

composition of the royal army in Flanders.²²⁹ To this end, he employed an account in the Wardrobe Book of Edward I's 25th regnal year, which set out the wages paid to the expeditionary force from the beginning of August to 16 November 1297.²³⁰ Amongst his discoveries was the fact that John was in the government's pay from 22 September 1297. Furthermore, Lewis noted that his contingent of 2 knights and 56 squires was in receipt of higher wages than their English counterparts. Specifically, the Irish knights were being paid 2s 9d *per diem* and the Irish squires 1s 4d *per diem*, instead of the standard wages of 2s and 1s *per diem* respectively, and the account clearly stated that this was as a result of the agreement made between fitzThomas and John Wogan. On the strength of this account Lewis concluded, not unreasonably, that John's contingent arrived in Flanders on 22 September, and remained there until the end of the regnal year at least. However, on closer examination, this interpretation seems highly problematic.

In fact, there are strong grounds for believing that the wages account is extremely misleading, and that although fitzThomas was indeed in the government's service from 22 September onwards, he was nowhere near Flanders during the period covered by it. In the first instance, the account, which appears to have been drawn up retrospectively, does not specify the dates upon which John was actually paid.²³¹ Moreover, the available evidence points to John's continuing presence in Dublin in late September. Some time previously, king Edward had sent Adam Broun and Richard de Manton, two clerks of the Wardrobe, to Ireland in order to collect the lordship's surplus revenue. On 24 September, John Wogan issued a writ of *liberate* to the Dublin exchequer, authorising the payment of £3000 to Richard and Adam, who were to bring the money to the king. Simultaneously, the pair were allocated 400 marks 'for expenses of John fitzThomas and his company for coming to the king with horses and arms in the war of France'.²³² Lastly, in Michaelmas term of 1297, or after 29 September, John was paid £40 to fortify Lea castle, by agreement with Wogan. Tellingly, the details recorded on the relevant issue roll note that fitzThomas was 'about to proceed to the king'.²³³ The weight of this

²²⁹ Lewis, 'English forces in Flanders', pp 310–18.

²³⁰ BL Add. Ms. 7965.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, f. 67v.

²³² PRO E.101/232/25 mm 5 & 6.

²³³ PRO E.101/233/2 m.1.

evidence seems to rule out the possibility that John fitzThomas had left Ireland before the beginning of October at the earliest. The evidence provided by the contents of two other administrative documents makes it extremely unlikely that he reached Flanders during the period covered by the Wardrobe account. The first document is a letter which king Edward sent to John Wogan from Flanders on 23 October. The king wrote that he had just examined the terms of the agreements made by Wogan with the earl of Ulster, John fitzThomas and others of Ireland regarding their proposed service in Flanders. He informed Wogan that as he believed that the terms were 'rather hard', the justiciar should withdraw from the agreements as courteously as possible. Crucially, Edward also stated that it was his will that the magnates 'should remain in Ireland on this occasion'.²³⁴ The wording of the letter clearly implies that as late as 23 October, the king believed the Irish magnates to be still at home. As it is highly improbable that fitzThomas could have arrived in Flanders without Edward's knowledge, it seems safe to assume that he had not done so by this date. Furthermore, the second document reveals that John fitzThomas was still in England on 17 November, the day after the Wardrobe account ends. In a letter to the English chancellor, Edward of Caernavon, the king's eldest son and regent, authorised the supply of three does and two oak stumps from the forest of Bansted in Surrey to fitzThomas, who was then travelling towards London to the king.²³⁵ Nonetheless, the evidence of the Wardrobe book clearly shows that John was in receipt of nearly £300 in wages, drawn out of the English Wardrobe, from the two clerks assigned by Wogan to pay for his transportation costs.²³⁶ In effect, it appears as though fitzThomas's contingent was paid for at least 52 days service which they actually spent in Ireland and England.

In all probability, this unusual situation arose out of a stipulation in the terms of John fitzThomas's agreement with Wogan, whereby John and his contingent would begin to earn their wages upon mustering at Dublin. Undoubtedly, this had been the case during the 1296 campaign, when John had been in the government's pay for a fortnight before departing for Scotland.²³⁷ If this interpretation is correct, then

²³⁴ *CDI* 1292–1301, no. 452; *CCR*, 1296–1302, p. 69.

²³⁵ *PRO SC.* 1/26/169; *CCR* 1296–1302, p. 138.

²³⁶ *BL Add. Ms.* 7965, f. 68v.

²³⁷ *PRO E.* 101/5/26 m2, m2d.

fitzThomas's force mustered in Dublin on 22 September, tarried in the city for a considerable period, but had left before the royal cancellation of the Irish expedition reached John Wogan. The reasons for such a delay are now unclear but it is quite possible that John and his troops were awaiting the appearance of other contingents in Dublin. For example, there seems little doubt but that Richard de Burgh had agreed to serve in Flanders.²³⁸ Alternatively, the ultimate non-participation of the earl of Ulster in the Flanders campaign, which from an Irish perspective is one of its more significant features, may have had a simple explanation. If King Edward's letter of 23 October arrived in Ireland before the earl had finalised his preparations for departure, Wogan would have been obliged to cancel the agreement made with him, despite the fact that fitzThomas, his main rival was already in service. In any event, the delays had one important consequence. Despite the heavy expenditure upon fitzThomas and his contingent, by the time that he came into direct contact with the English administration in November 1297, a truce had been agreed in Flanders.²³⁹ In a manner reminiscent of the events in Scotland in the previous year, John fitzThomas had again arrived too late to influence events.

Somewhat surprisingly, it appears as though King Edward was still anxious to bring the lord of Offaly to Flanders. Regrettably, no wardrobe account has survived which would confirm that he continued to draw the king's pay after the end of the twenty-fifth regnal year. However, it seems clear that he did actually remain in England. More strikingly, on 24 November the king wrote a remarkable letter to fitzThomas. After noting that he expected to have enough troops in Flanders 'to resist his enemies ... if need be', he continued by stating that he believed that he would be safer if he were surrounded by those 'of whose valour and constancy he has heretofore made trial'. Consequently, fitzThomas was ordered to be in Sandwich by 7 December, ready to cross to Flanders.²⁴⁰ By any standards, the king's letter marked a major reversal of fortune for a man whose very survival had been in doubt eighteen months previously. Thereafter, the pace of preparations quickened. On 4 December, John and some of his associates were granted immunity from prosecution and respite of debt collection until the following April, because they were

²³⁸ CDI 1292–1301, no. 452; CCR 1296–1302, p. 69.

²³⁹ Prestwich, *Edward I*, pp 390–400.

²⁴⁰ CCR 1296–1302, p.187; *Parl. Writs*, i, p. 306.

'going across the seas'.²⁴¹ However, further delays arose before his departure. Ten days after he received his immunity from prosecution, fitzThomas was issued with yet another set of embarkation instructions. On this occasion, he was ordered to be in London, prepared to cross to Flanders, by 2 January 1298.²⁴² This reason for this last delay is unclear. Possibly, fitzThomas, had learned of the instructions to Wogan which cancelled his service, and had turned back for home before the king's countermanding letter of 24 November reached him. In any event, this last set of movement orders was carried out. A final set of letters of protection was issued on behalf of one of his contingent on 24 December, and they had definitely reached Flanders by the end of January at the latest.²⁴³ Specifically, on 20 January, in a series of Chancery Warrants issued in Ghent, several individuals were granted pardons for committing robberies and other felonies in Ireland, for coming to the king in Flanders in the company of John fitzThomas.²⁴⁴ In a sense, John's arrival meant that King Edward's investment in his contingent, which had begun four months earlier, had not been a complete waste of money.

Unfortunately, while John's presence in Flanders can be demonstrated, the available sources do not provide any specific details about his actual activities there. As the truce with the French held, they did not see action against their supposed enemy. However, in all likelihood, fitzThomas's contingent took part in the brutal suppression of the revolt by King Edward's erstwhile allies, the citizens of Ghent, in February.²⁴⁵ Nevertheless, although John's activities cannot be traced, the various pardons and letters of protection issued to the men in his contingent bear further analysis. On one level, it is interesting to note that there was at least one Irishman, Nicholas Omolmi, in his company.²⁴⁶ More importantly perhaps, the composition of his contingent has some bearing upon the theory that the wars of Edward I facilitated the development of the professional captains of mercenaries who were so effective during the reign of Edward III. A striking feature of the named individuals in fitzThomas's

²⁴¹ CCR 1296–1302, p. 188.

²⁴² *Ibid*, p. 190.

²⁴³ PRO SC. 1/26/190.

²⁴⁴ *Cal. Chanc. Warr. 1244–1326*, pp 84, 86.

²⁴⁵ Johnstone, *Annales Gadenses*, pp 6–7.

²⁴⁶ *Cal. Chanc. Warr. 1244–1326*, p. 84.

contingent was the preponderance of men such as Walter Lenfaunt and John Harald, who were already closely associated with John.²⁴⁷ This strongly suggests that fitzThomas at least chose his contingent from amongst his associates of long standing rather than engaging in short-term recruitment in the open market.

It is likely that John returned to England with the king, as he spent at least some time in his company in April, in a period which confirmed that his relationship with Edward had indeed improved considerably.²⁴⁸ For example, he had secured pardons for several more of his company by late March.²⁴⁹ Furthermore, he induced the king to order an enquiry into the non-payment of £515 which, he claimed, had been owed to him since his campaign in Connacht in 1288 on behalf of Stephen de Fulbourne.²⁵⁰ FitzThomas also exploited his newly-won favour to bring his grievances against Richard de Burgh to Edward's attention. On April 11, the king ordered John Wogan to investigate John's allegation that the earl and his men had committed 'enormous transgressions ... and grievances' against him since the justiciar had secured the truce between the two magnates.²⁵¹ A week later, fitzThomas successfully raised the murder of his associate Sir Richard Harold, a veteran of the Scottish campaign in 1296, at the hand of the de Burgh faction. In this case, Edward ordered Wogan not to readmit the perpetrators into the king's peace unless they stood trial for the death, 'because of John's good service in Flanders'.²⁵² While in England, fitzThomas did not limit himself to petitioning the king, but also took the opportunity to go into the property market. On 25 April, he entered into a rather complex set of interlocking agreements with Emelina de Longespée, who was both the absentee widow of his uncle, Maurice fitzMaurice and an Irish heiress in her own right. The agreement had three key components. First, Emelina granted her portion of the manors of Timogue, Saint Fintans and Morett to John.²⁵³ In turn, John granted Emelina the use of the great manor of Maynooth for life, in exchange for a rent of £200 *per annum* and a

²⁴⁷ CCR 1296–1302, p. 188.

²⁴⁸ CCR 1296–1302, p. 156.

²⁴⁹ *Rot. pat. Hib.*, p. 5.

²⁵⁰ CCR, 1296–1302, p. 156.

²⁵¹ CDI 1293–1301, no. 514.

²⁵² *Ibid*, no. 519.

²⁵³ *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 82–4.

payment of £40 in ready cash. Moreover, Emelina undertook to restore Maynooth to John if he paid her £200 within two years of the agreement being made.²⁵⁴ Before discussing the intrinsic importance of this agreement, it should be noted that it provides a possible date for another of fitzThomas's land deals. At some point during the justiciarship of John Wogan, fitzThomas purchased the castles and lands belonging to Sir Alan la Zouche at Timogue and Morett for 250 marks.²⁵⁵ On balance, it seems likely that his transactions with Emelina and Alan occurred at around the same time. In itself, the agreement raises several interesting issues. Most obviously, the agreement offers an insight into the true value of Maynooth manor, as opposed to the suspiciously low figures usually found in official extents and valuations.²⁵⁶ Furthermore, the fact that in effect, fitzThomas was obliged to mortgage Maynooth to acquire Morett and Timogue strengthens the impression that he was under financial pressure in the aftermath of 'the disturbance'. Lastly, and possibly most importantly, fitzThomas's new estates were all located in the extreme marches of Kildare, which suggests that the lord of Offaly was confident of his ability to extract revenue from the region, despite the pessimistic outlook contained in both the legislation of the 1297 parliament and in the returns of the eyre of Kildare. Overall, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that John returned home satisfied with his deeds.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid*, nos. 69–70.

²⁵⁵ *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 80–81.

²⁵⁶ For example, see *Red Bk Kildare* no. 122.

Chapter 4

John fitzThomas as lord of Offaly, 1298–1308 : Withdrawal from Connacht and consolidation in Kildare.

In September 1298, it became obvious that John fitzThomas had successfully redeemed himself in the eyes of his king. In that month, following the untimely death of Thomas fitzMaurice, John's Desmond Geraldine kinsman and benefactor, a royal letter arrived in Ireland making it known that fitzThomas's application to hold the wardship of fitzMaurice's lands and the marriage of his underage heir should 'be looked upon with favour.'¹ The king's action confirms that John's service overseas had enabled him to regain access to the royal favour which had greatly facilitated his initial rise to prominence. Indeed, the timing of this particular act of royal generosity adds weight to the possibility that fitzThomas played some part in the Scottish campaign of the summer of 1298.² However, the rehabilitation of John's reputation in Ireland was a rather different matter. Most importantly, his dispute with Richard de Burgh remained unresolved. In fact, the surviving evidence suggests that the truce which had been arranged between the two magnates by John Wogan in January 1296 had come under strain by the spring of 1297.³ For example, in June 1297 a court noted that Walter and Henry de Burgh, the hostages 'of the affinity of the earl' who had been released by fitzThomas in January 1296, had since been perpetrating homicides and robberies 'in

¹ AC, s.a. 1298; *CJR*, 1295–1303, pp 230–1. Ultimately however, custody of fitzMaurice's heir Thomas fitzThomas was bestowed upon his maternal grandfather, Thomas de Berkeley (*CPR* 1292–1301, p. 569).

² *CCR*, 1302–07, p. 142. This reference states that the bishop of Carlisle was 'to be acquitted of ... his farm of the castle of Carlisle ... as the king learns ... that the herbage in the meadows ... had been so consumed by the horses of the king ... and of other magnates and subjects coming to Scotland, ... to wit by the horses of Reginald de Gray, John de Havering, John Wogan justiciar of Ireland, and John son of Thomas, bringing Welshmen and Irishmen to the king in Scotland in the 26th year of his reign [20/11/1297– 19/11/1298] to the amount of £13 11s 10d'.

³ For the truce agreement of 1296, see Chapter 3, pp 82–3.

Munster and elsewhere'.⁴ Similarly, the petitions presented to the king by fitzThomas in the wake of his successful service in Flanders were dominated by the dispute. For example, John complained that the earl's men had committed 'enormous transgressions' against him in Connacht, in breach of the truce.⁵ Rather more improbably, John suggested that the destruction of his manor of Rathangan whilst he was in Flanders was actually perpetrated by de Burgh's Irishmen, although John's own rebellious tenants of Offaly were the most likely culprits.⁶ Finally, fitzThomas also raised the murder of his associate Sir Richard Harold at the hands of the de Burgh faction, before Easter 1297.⁷

The death of Richard Harold is worth examining in some depth for two reasons. First, it illustrates the seriousness of the divisions within the colony in the aftermath of 'the disturbance'. Indeed, in a letter written to the king in July 1297 which described the state of Ireland, the chief governor and treasurer cited the incident as a potential source of disruption to the lordship's tranquillity, although they also reported that in general, Ireland was at peace, 'according to its fashion'.⁸ Secondly, the surviving information relating to it suggests that the de Burgh faction had gained the upper hand in Ireland. The proceedings of a court case held on May 12 1297 reveal that Harold was killed by one Hugh son of John de Burgh, who also robbed the goods of Richard's father, Sir John Harold, the sheriff of Limerick. Significantly, it appears as though insofar as the robbery was concerned, Hugh was acting at the instigation of his father John de Burgh senior, and that the earl himself and John de Burgh junior were also implicated in the robbery, inasmuch as they received Hugh after the event. After the killing, Sir John Harold succeeded in having Hugh and his accomplices outlawed in the county court of Limerick, utilising his office as

⁴ *CJR 1295–1303*, p. 131.

⁵ *CDI 1293–1301*, no. 514.

⁶ PRO SC. 8/176/8763.

⁷ *CDI 1293–1301*, no. 519.

⁸ Sayles, *Affairs of Ireland*, p. 48. As the evidence cited below demonstrates, Sayles misdated this letter by a year.

sheriff of that county.⁹ When John fitzThomas intervened in the case in April 1298, it was to try to ensure that Hugh and the other perpetrators were not re-admitted into the king's peace unless they stood trial for the death. Although John's 'good service which he had rendered to the king in Flanders' meant that he succeeded in this goal, by then his allies had more serious problems to face.¹⁰ For in his understandable eagerness to implicate the de Burghs in the death of his son, Harold had foolishly impleaded the earl, John de Burgh senior and John de Burgh junior in both the robbery and the homicide, thus leaving himself open to a counter-claim for false accusation. Hence, in July 1297, the earl was formally acquitted of having any involvement in the homicide, and promptly sought damages for defamation from Harold. One year later, Sir John Harold was ordered to pay the earl the massive sum of 400 marks, 'having consideration of ... the infamy put upon him'.¹¹ Moreover, the award was not merely an empty gesture, as the records show that de Burgh was making a determined effort to collect the money in Hilary term 1299. Similarly, Harold's removal from the office of sheriff of Limerick at around the same time may not have been coincidental.¹²

The fact that fitzThomas and his allies encountered hostility from the de Burgh faction is only to be expected. However, the extremely rigorous treatment meted out to Sir John Harold raises the possibility that the Irish administration as a body also still viewed fitzThomas with disfavour, or at least with suspicion. Arguably, some of their dealings with John support that viewpoint. By way of illustration, their handling of fitzThomas's acquisition of the custodianship of the lands and heir of Thomas fitzMaurice suggests that the administration doubted the wisdom of their royal master's generosity. Upon first learning of the grant, the royal officials took advantage of an ambiguously phrased directive to query whether King Edward had really intended to grant John custody of the lands as well as of the heir. After the king wrote back to confirm that this was indeed the case, a full council meeting was held in which it was

⁹ *CJR 1295-1303*, p. 120.

¹⁰ *CDI 1293-1301*, no. 519.

¹¹ *CJR 1295-1303*, p. 121; Otway-Ruthven, 'Anglo-Irish shire government', p. 27.

¹² *CJR 1295-1303*, pp 120-1, p. 228.

decided to accede to the king's command, having first taken sufficient securities from fitzThomas to ensure that he would discharge his obligations correctly.¹³ Admittedly, this particular episode caused John little more than a three month delay before taking control of the Desmond lands. However, it seems significant that the contemporaneous grant by King Edward to fitzThomas of the issues of a royal service to enable him to build a fortalice at Rathangan evoked a similarly dilatory response from the administration.¹⁴ If it is true that John fitzThomas was facing a combination of overt de Burgh hostility and covert administrative disapproval, it is understandable that John sought, or was persuaded to reach an understanding with the earl. Moreover, given de Burgh's dominating position within the lordship, it is not surprising that when John finally did come to terms with de Burgh, on October 22 1298, he was forced to accept an exceptionally hard bargain.

That day, the two men came before John Wogan at Athboy in Co. Meath and put their seals to an indentured agreement.¹⁵ John formally acknowledged his trespass in incarcerating the earl in Lea castle for thirteen weeks. His atonement took both symbolic and practical forms. As far as the former was concerned, fitzThomas agreed to surrender Lea castle to de Burgh, to give up his own person to the earl, and to be held in his prison at de Burgh's pleasure. Similarly, his associate, Sir John de la Mare, who appears to have effected the actual capture of the earl, was to be incarcerated for a year.¹⁶ For his part, de Burgh agreed to restore Lea castle to fitzThomas and also, in a clause which indicates the depths of ill-feeling between the protagonists, to grant him life and limb. More importantly, 'as amend for his trespass' John made a series of far-reaching concessions to the earl. First, he agreed to deliver 120 librates of land in Connacht, Ulster and Uriel to de Burgh. Secondly, the earl was granted the marriage of fitzThomas's eldest son. Presumably, this was the individual named Gerald

¹³ *CJR* 1295–1303, pp 230–1; *DKPRI* 38, pp 40–1.

¹⁴ *CJR* 1295–1303, pp 230, 362–3; *CDI* 1302–07, no. 48.

¹⁵ The following discussion is based upon the text of the indenture preserved in *CJR* 1295–1303, p. 235. The site may have had some symbolic significance, as Stanihurst stated that the earl was taken prisoner in Meath in 1294 (*Stanihurst*, p. 201).

¹⁶ *Stanihurst*, p. 201.

whose death is recorded in 1303.¹⁷ Thirdly, upon his release from de Burgh's prison, John was to do him homage, 'binding himself and his heirs to serve the said earl and his heirs for all time, saving the fealty of the king of England'. Lastly, the concessions which fitzThomas had extorted from de Burgh in the supportive presence of William de Oddingeseles, the late justiciar, were to be annulled. Perhaps the only consolation which John could derive from these terms was that de Burgh's freedom of action concerning his son Gerald's marriage was expressly limited. Specifically, the earl agreed that he should either marry Gerald to one of his own marriageable daughters 'if it pleased him', or to return him unmarried within a specified period of time.¹⁸ Apart from that, the peace agreement can only be viewed as a humiliating reverse for fitzThomas and, correspondingly, as a triumph for de Burgh. Arguably, the fact that John undertook to enter the earl's prison is the most striking confirmation of the new balance of power in Ireland, although it should be noted that his incarceration, if it ever took place, was of short duration as he was definitely free on 20 November 1298.¹⁹ Nevertheless, further measures were also adopted which suggest that a thoughtful effort to end the quarrel was being made. In general, it appears as though a consensus was reached to the effect that the origins of the feud lay in the fact that the two magnates' spheres of influence were dangerously entangled. Consequently, the general thrust of the additional measures was to facilitate John fitzThomas's complete withdrawal from Connacht, Ulster, Tirconnel and Uriel.

To be specific, the indenture called for a comprehensive valuation, to be carried out by a team of assessors nominated by both men, of fitzThomas's lands in Ulster, Connacht and Uriel, after which they would all be delivered to de Burgh. If those estates were found to be worth more than 120 librates, the earl would compensate John by granting him lands worth the balance in Leinster and Munster. In addition, the disputed territories in Tirconnell, which appear to have been at the root of the

¹⁷ *AFM*, s.a. 1303; *Chart. St Marys'*, ii. p. 331.

¹⁸ The indenture twice refers to 'the new year'. From the context, the new regnal year, starting on 20 November, seems to be the correct reading.

¹⁹ *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 71-2.

conflict, were dealt with in a similar fashion.²⁰ The earl was to implead fitzThomas for them, and if successful, would hold them 'quit for all time'. But if John were to retain them in court, he was to deliver them to de Burgh in exchange for more lands in Leinster and Munster. The process of valuation was to begin on the morrow of the new year, and both parties undertook to co-operate fully in the task. In the meantime, fitzThomas was to retain the lands. Finally, upon completion of the process, the two protagonists agreed that thereafter, 'all the contests and ill will which were between them in the past' would be set aside. Before discussing the consequences of the agreement, it might be worthwhile to note two details contained within its body which are relevant to the issues of John's general status and landed possessions. First, its preamble refers to de Burgh and fitzThomas as 'noble barons', one of the few occasions in which John was so styled, rather than the more usual 'lord of Offaly'. Secondly, the indenture appears to contain the only extant reference to landholding on the part of the Geraldines of Offaly in Louth. Perhaps, he held these lands of his relatives the barons of Naas, who did have possession of property in that region.²¹

When viewed from the perspective of the Geraldines of Offaly as an aristocratic lineage, John's proposed *rapprochement* with the earl of Ulster was of huge significance. FitzThomas agreed, on paper at least, both to undo the great achievements in Connacht of his grandfather Maurice fitzGerald II and indeed to abandon his own patrimony of Banada.²² Presumably, the irony inherent in such a decision was not lost on his contemporaries. After all, John's rise to prominence was largely created by the determination of his cousins, Gerald fitzMaurice III and Amabilia to retain as much of the Geraldine inheritance as possible within the family's control. Moreover, it is probable that the very actions which led to fitzThomas's disgrace and to the prospect of being removed from Connacht were actually triggered by his desire to fulfil his grandfather's thwarted ambitions in western Ulster. Hence, it seems safe to assume that the immediate psychological impact of the agreement upon the sense of prestige

²⁰ Walton, *The English in Connacht*, p. 306.

²¹ *Cal. Gormanston Reg.*, p. 155.

²² See Chapter 2, p. 35.

and self-confidence of the Geraldines and their adherents was considerable. By way of illustration, in general, fitzThomas's career is only rarely mentioned in the Anglo-Irish narrative sources. However, his conflict with de Burgh, both in terms of the earl's capture and its eventual outcome, are striking exceptions to this rule.²³ Those events appear to have left an enduring impression upon the memories of subsequent generations of colonists and natives, to judge from the relative abundance of references to them, an impression which, presumably, reflects contemporary opinion.²⁴

Nevertheless, if considerations of prestige and self-confidence are left to one side, it is possible to argue that the broader terms of the agreement were not completely disastrous for the Geraldines. In the main, the land-exchange scheme was a reasonably equitable attempt to find a solution to a conflict of interests between two aristocratic lineages which had twice resulted in widespread instability in the space of less than thirty years.²⁵ As such, the question of the agreement's authorship is of some interest. Obviously, in theory King Edward had both a duty and a vested interest in re-establishing order within the lordship, and in fact, in the immediate aftermath of fitzThomas's penitential journey to Westminster in August 1295, the king promised 'speedy justice' to both men.²⁶ Thereafter however, his desire to have them serve overseas led him to adopt a delaying, if not a prevaricating policy as far as a resolution was concerned.²⁷ His contribution to the solution is uncertain. Admittedly, Edward preferred to communicate with Wogan *via* confidential messengers rather than by committing his thoughts to paper, when dealing with sensitive issues such as acceptable terms for magnates on overseas service. Nevertheless it may be significant that his surviving correspondence with his justiciar does not contain references to a possible solution to the conflict. Perhaps the broad outlines of the agreement were conceived by the king and his English ministers, who then delegated its execution to Wogan, whose

²³ For example, *Clyn*, p. 10; *Chart. St Marys'*, ii. pp 323, 325-6; *Grace*, p. 45.

²⁴ For example, *Stanihurst*, p. 201; *Cal. Carew MSS*, v, p.p. 125; Pender, 'O'Clery Genealogies', p. 179 no. 2171.

²⁵ *NHI*, ii, pp 183-4.

²⁶ *CDI 1293-1301*, no. 268.

²⁷ See for example, *CDI 1293-1301*, no. 399.

detailed local knowledge would be essential in order to implement it successfully. As for the protagonists themselves, their subsequent behaviour reveals much about their respective attitudes to the scheme and, by extension, to their part in its formulation. Not unexpectedly, de Burgh could be said to approve of the terms of the agreement, and he appears to have co-operated with the authorities as they began to put it into effect. On the other hand, fitzThomas's actions demonstrate a decided reluctance to fulfil his side of the bargain.

In fact, difficulties arose almost immediately. Less than five months after the indenture was sealed, de Burgh complained that fitzThomas had put off procuring the six valuers to be chosen by him. The administration responded by ordering the sheriff of Kildare to summon John, at his manor of Maynooth, to appear before Wogan on 16 March 1299 to explain himself. The government also threatened to conduct the valuations in his absence should he fail to appear. In the event, both men turned up, with fitzThomas being unable to deny that he was at fault for the failure to extend his lands.²⁸ Nevertheless, at that point the two magnates appear to have made some definite progress towards a resolution of the problem. First, John granted and promised to warrant to the earl 120 librates of land in his manors of Loughmask, Dunmouhgherne [? Roundfort, Co. Mayo], Kilcolgan, Sligo, Banada, Críoch Cairbre and Fermanagh in amend for his trespass.²⁹ Secondly, the scheme for land-exchange was reiterated, with de Burgh specifying the estates which he proposed to grant to John. These were Balydunegan in Co. Carlow, and Tiperacht and Tristillaneragh in Co. Tipperary. If they did not suffice, the deficiency would be made up from the earl's lands in Lysrotheragh [? Lisronagh] and Grellagh in Tipperary. Thirdly, the mechanics of the land evaluation process were outlined. The king's court assigned four individuals 'to take the extent by the valuers chosen by the parties', namely the eschaetor Walter de la Haye, the justices John de Ponte and Simon de Ludgate, and William de Barry. The valuers chosen by de Burgh and fitzThomas were to meet in Kilcolgan on 27 April to begin the extent, and were to remain until the task was finished. In the event of either set of valuers failing to do their duty, the

²⁸ *CJR* 1295–1303, p. 235.

²⁹ See also Claffey, Richard de Burgh, p. 157.

court's assignees were empowered to choose replacements. Upon completion of the valuation exercise, the court's nominees were to deliver seisin of those tenements to be exchanged to fitzThomas and de Burgh, who were then to make letters of quitclaim to each other. Finally, the four assignees were to inform Wogan of their actions on 22 June.³⁰ Before discussing the implementation of this plan, two further observations may be made. Firstly, the marriage-alliance proposed in the original indenture was not mentioned, which suggests that the idea had been quickly dropped. Secondly, and possibly more significantly, John was 'to have writs of assistance to distrain his valuers to come'. This could simply be another indication that in general, fitzThomas experienced difficulties in managing his Connacht holdings.³¹ Alternatively, it could signify a level of hostility on the part of the Geraldine tenants towards de Burgh, whose adherents had, after all attacked them five years earlier. Regrettably, the surviving evidence concerning this vital period of fitzThomas's career is too sketchy to reconstruct the subsequent sequence of events satisfactorily. However, it is certain that the exchange of land did not proceed smoothly.

The actual date of transfer is open to question. Some evidence indicates that fitzThomas had retained an involvement in Connacht as late as 1301.³² On the other hand, it seems as though John did make an effort to extend his estates there at some point in 1299. In the course of a debt-collection case preserved on the plea rolls of 9 February 1299, the sheriff of Limerick reported on his failure to arrest one Nicholas de Sandford, a clerk. The sheriff stated that Nicholas had been staying with Felim MacCarthy until John fitzThomas came to Connacht, when the clerk joined him to help extend his lands there. In fact, de Sandford, who may have been related to the late archbishop of Dublin, was a close associate of fitzThomas.³³ The phraseology of the court proceedings makes it impossible to pinpoint exactly when John extended his properties. However, Nicholas had finally been incarcerated for his Limerick debts by

³⁰ *CJR 1295-1303*, pp 235-6.

³¹ See also, Walton, *The English in Connacht*, p. 166.

³² *NAI RC 7/7 (Plea rolls)* pp 77, 214-5, 296, 284.

³³ *CJR 1295-1302*, p. 233; *PRO SC 8/71/3502*.

October 1299, at which time fitzThomas mainprised him.³⁴ Therefore, it seems most likely that de Sandford helped John to extend the lands between March and October 1299.³⁵ FitzThomas definitely led an army into Connacht to assist his associate Gerald Tyrell, while the latter was sheriff of Roscommon, between November 1298 and Michaelmas 1299, which suggests that at that point, fitzThomas was still co-operating with the authorities.³⁶ More concretely, the Sligo estates had been transferred by 1300, when the earl of Ulster began to construct a castle at Ballymote.³⁷ In fact, there is little doubt but that by the end of 1301, John fitzThomas had handed most of his Connacht properties over to de Burgh. However, it is also clear that the land-exchange scheme had not worked properly.

In late 1301, John petitioned the king to complain about the implementation of the terms of his indenture with the earl of Ulster.³⁸ He accused Simon de Ludgate and John de Ponte, the judges assigned to oversee the extending of the earl's lands of behaving in a biased fashion. According to fitzThomas, they excluded his three valuers from the proceedings, appointed 'three suspected persons' in their place, who, without John's assent, failed to extend de Burgh's land at all, with the result that the earl acquired all of John's properties without exchanging any of his own in return. The final accusation at least was essentially accurate, as in 1333, all of the properties which were earmarked by the earl for transfer to fitzThomas were still in de Burgh hands.³⁹ Although the king ordered an investigation into John's allegations on 18 December 1301, it did not have any discernible effect upon the situation in Ireland if indeed it was ever carried out.⁴⁰ Given the paucity of surviving sources, it is not possible to provide an explanation for the ultimate failure of the land exchange

³⁴ *CJR 1295-1303*, p. 294.

³⁵ Apparently, fitzThomas and de Sandford were both in Adare in Limerick on 22 February 1299 (*Black book of Limerick*, p. 107).

³⁶ Walton, *The English in Connacht*, p. 319; NLI MS 760, p. 178; NAI EX 2/1 p. 113.

³⁷ *AFM* s.a. 1300.

³⁸ SC. 8/200/9969; *CDI 1293-1301*, no. 835.

³⁹ Claffey, *Richard de Burgh*, pp 159-160.

⁴⁰ *CDI 1293-1301*, no. 835.

scheme. All that can be said is that to judge from evidence recorded in the *Red Book of Kildare*, fitzThomas felt sufficiently aggrieved by this turn of events to try to sabotage de Burgh's efforts to take control of the Connacht lands. In August 1302, the earl alleged that John had failed to honour a commitment previously made by him to warrant de Burgh's title to various properties in Connacht, including Loughmask and Conmaicne Chúile.⁴¹ As a result, the earl called upon four witnesses to that commitment for confirmation of his claims. Clearly, de Burgh's actions imply that he had already been given seisin of these properties. An examination of the identities of the four witnesses strengthens this view. Two of the witnesses, Nigel le Brun and Eustace le Poer were adherents of the earl of long standing, and as such could be expected to support his interpretation of events. However, the other pair, Walter L'Enfaunt and Nicholas Chevre, bishop of Leighlin were associates of fitzThomas. The fact that de Burgh was confident enough to call upon them in order to back up his allegations seems to confirm that fitzThomas had indeed already granted away his Connacht properties. If that was the case, then it is difficult to view his refusal to warrant the earl's title as anything but a futile exercise committed out of pique.

The last remaining document which is relevant to the Geraldine withdrawal from Connacht also comes from *The Red Book*, where it was preserved twice. In June 1302, William de Burgh forgave John for all transgressions committed by him up to the feast of Holy Trinity of that year, which fell on 17 June.⁴² In return, John agreed to pay William £80 pounds in silver, and also to grant him all the lands which Gerald fitzMaurice had held in the tenement of Lissavally, near Clare in Connacht. While this agreement shows that fitzThomas still retained some

⁴¹ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 192.

⁴² *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 42, 190; TCD MS 9825 (*The Red Book of Kildare*), f. 10v. The first of these documents is dated to 17 June 1285, while the second is dated to 10 June 1302. It seems that both dates are incorrect. In no. 42, the copyist appears to have simply substituted *terciodecimo* for *tricesimo* when recording the regnal year. The problem with no. 190 is slightly more complex, as it is clearly dated as *decimo die Junii anno supradicto*. However, John was being forgiven for transgressions committed up to 17 June. Hence, for the given date to be accurate, de Burgh would have to have given John a week's licence to behave as he pleased – a rather unlikely scenario. On balance, the most likely date for this document to have been drawn up is 17 June 1302.

possessions in Connacht in 1302, it does not explain why he felt empowered to grant the lands to William, rather than to the earl. It may be significant that Lissavally was located outside of the Geraldines' core Connacht territories, in a district dominated, somewhat ironically, by the de Cogan family.⁴³ Possibly, the terms of the indenture were only meant to apply to those properties in which John was the immediate tenant of the earl. In any event the agreement has a broader significance. On one level, by coming to terms with William de Burgh despite the aborted land exchange scheme, fitzThomas clearly signalled his readiness to end the long-running feud between the two lineages. More importantly perhaps, this divestment marks John's last recorded action as a Connacht landholder. From henceforth, he was free to concentrate upon the consolidation of his other interests in Leinster and Munster. In particular, the effects of one strand of royal policy meant that new opportunities were opening up in the Geraldines' original heartland – Kildare itself.

It has been observed that one of King Edward's less attractive character traits was revealed by his keen and unscrupulous participation in the English property market.⁴⁴ This insight is certainly borne out by the crown's behaviour in Kildare, where, from the 1280s onwards, it engaged in the large-scale acquisition of properties and rights from the numerous absentees who had interests in the region. For example, in 1281 Christiana de Marisco granted her Irish lands to the king, which included half of the manors of Kilkea and Castledermot.⁴⁵ Similarly, in 1299 John de Mohun surrendered lands in Moone to King Edward.⁴⁶ However, the most significant royal acquisition was conducted with John fitzThomas's enemy William de Vescy, lord of the liberty of Kildare. In February 1297, de Vescy surrendered both his lands and his jurisdictional rights to the king.⁴⁷ At this point in time, it is clear that William was keen to make adequate provisions for his only surviving son, who was a bastard

⁴³ Orpen, *Normans*, iii, p. 214.

⁴⁴ McFarlane, *The nobility of later medieval England*, pp 248–67.

⁴⁵ Otway-Ruthven, 'Medieval county of Kildare', p. 196.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *CDI 1293–1301*, nos. 365, 373–5, 385.

known as William of Kildare. It seems highly likely that the surrender of William's Irish lands was part of a bargain struck with the king, which was designed to copperfasten the younger William's position in English society.⁴⁸ Interestingly, the rights of de Vescy's coheirs were completely ignored, and subsequently, they were obliged to fight a lengthy legal battle before their claims were recognised.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the most significant point to be made about the agreement is that it marked the effective end of de Vescy involvement in Ireland. Admittedly, King Edward ordered John Wogan to restore the liberty to de Vescy for life in June 1297, but this action was nullified by the former justiciar's death within a month.⁵⁰ In fact, the administration's long-term plans for the region were revealed several months earlier. The first statute recorded from the famous parliament of 1297 outlined a large-scale reorganisation of local government within the lordship of Ireland. As far as Kildare was concerned, the parliament agreed that the county, 'which was formerly a liberty intente to the county of Dublin' should henceforth be

a county by itself, together with the Crosslands and other lands of the parceners of the lordship of Leinster contained within the precinct of the same, totally discharged from the sheriff of Dublin. And that a sheriff be there as now is.⁵¹

The conversion process was underway by 5 May 1297, when in the course of a common plea case held before Wogan, it was noted that 'a sheriff is newly created there in place of a seneschal'.⁵² Presumably, the resurrection of de Vescy's liberty halted proceedings, if only temporarily. In any event, the transformation of Kildare from private liberty to royally administered county was completed by John Wogan in the course of the general eyre of the county, which was launched by him on July 21 1297.⁵³ According to the justiciary rolls, the first action undertaken by Wogan was to redefine the

⁴⁸ For example, see *CDI 1293-1301*, no. 372.

⁴⁹ Otway-Ruthven, 'Medieval county of Kildare', p. 195.

⁵⁰ *CDI 1293-1301*, nos. 414-5, 426.

⁵¹ *Stat. Ire. John-Henry V*, pp 197-9.

⁵² *CJR 1295-1303*, p. 112.

⁵³ *CJR 1295-1303*, p. 167.

geographical jurisdiction of Kildare's coroners in order to integrate the region's Crosslands, which heretofore had been separately administered, with the county's four cantreds.

Interestingly, the new structure provided for a single coroner to be responsible for all of the lands beyond the river Barrow, a district which included much of fitzThomas's lands, including his *caput* of Lea.⁵⁴ Furthermore, from the surviving records of the eyre, it would appear that Wogan, in addition to finalising the conversion process, also conducted an investigation into the rights and privileges claimed by the county's magnates. These reveal that not unexpectedly, the local magnates were accustomed to operating with a considerable degree of autonomy on their own property. Specifically, the records note that all those in the county who held courts, such as John fitzThomas and Peter de Bermingham, alleged that they were entitled to exercise important localised judicial rights and freedoms of their own. Both men claimed the right to hold pleas of *Vetitum Namium* and bloodshed of Englishmen, and also to take fines from Irishmen, except for felonies.⁵⁵ Interestingly, the tenor of Wogan's initial reaction to this assertion, 'let them be spoken to', is rather ambiguous. Possibly, he felt that the exercise of such freedoms ran counter to the interests of the king. However, there is no evidence to suggest that he ever attempted to curb the local franchises, nor indeed that he would have had any legal basis for so doing.⁵⁶

In general, it is clear that William de Vescy's withdrawal from Kildare was to have major long-term consequences for John fitzThomas. Most immediately, it seems safe to assume that John welcomed the termination of his personal enemy's interest in the region. More fundamentally, for the rest of his life, his position as the region's dominant resident Anglo-Irish magnate remained unchallenged. In fact, the strength of his position became evident during the decade following de Vescy's surrender of his liberty. On one level, several references recorded in the justiciary rolls provide some inkling of the practical consequences of

⁵⁴ *CJR 1295–1303*, p. 167.

⁵⁵ *CJR 1295–1303*, p. 174.

⁵⁶ See Hand, *English law in Ireland*, pp 113–134.

fitzThomas's local dominance. For example, in 1305 one Walter Nyvel acknowledged in court that he had entered into a written covenant with John in which the lord of Offaly agreed to provide 'help and counsel' to Walter in his efforts to recover some land in Kildare from John de la Hyde. Significantly, although the exact terms of the agreement were not spelled out, it is clear that fitzThomas's services to his new client came at a price.⁵⁷ Similarly, in the same year it was noted that several men fled the county, 'for fear of John son of Thomas'.⁵⁸ However, it should be noted that John fitzThomas faced some considerable difficulties when attempting to consolidate his position within the region. Most seriously, he was forced to cope with a dangerous military challenge from the Irish dynasties of the western marches of Kildare.⁵⁹ But he also had problems of a more mundane, financial nature.

A good deal of evidence has survived which gives the impression that John was under financial pressure throughout the decade following the surrender of the liberty. For example, it was noted earlier that when acquiring the manors of Morett and St Fintan from Emelina de Longespée in April 1298, John was forced to adopt the expedient of effectively mortgaging the great manor of Maynooth to her for life, albeit with the option of recovering the manor if he paid the sum of £200 to her within two years.⁶⁰ However, this arrangement rapidly ran into difficulties. By November 1298, Emelina's attorneys had discovered that they were unable to derive any income from the manor, as it was 'weighed down' by debts which fitzThomas already owed to both the king and to several unnamed merchants. The situation was made worse by the fact that by then, John appears to have already received £200 in rent for the manor from Emelina. Consequently, he was obliged to permit her agents to levy this sum out of the goods and chattels on his other properties.⁶¹ Similarly, it is known that shortly afterwards, fitzThomas was also in debt to John de

⁵⁷ *CJR 1305-07*, p. 52.

⁵⁸ *CJR 1305-07*, p. 463.

⁵⁹ See Chapter 5 below.

⁶⁰ *Red Bk Kildare*, 69-70.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, nos. 71-2.

Hastings, a Marshal heir who held lands in Oboy in Carlow.⁶² To be specific, a court case taken before John Wogan in January 1299 reveals that de Hastings had encountered problems in his attempts to collect a debt of £40 which fitzThomas had earlier acknowledged to be due to him. In this case, Wogan ordered the royal officials of Dublin and Carlow to levy the deficiency from the goods and chattels of fitzThomas's guarantors, several of whom can be identified as long-standing associates of the lord of Offaly.⁶³ To take two examples, Gerald Tyrell had served as John's constable in Roscommon castle in May 1295, while Sir William Cadel had participated in 'the disturbance' and had also served with fitzThomas in Scotland in 1296.⁶⁴ Interestingly, the efficacy of Wogan's mandate to the royal officers to collect the debt was rather limited, and in fact, by May 1299 the seneschal of Carlow was trying to ignore his instructions altogether.⁶⁵ The seneschal's reluctance to perform his duty is highly significant in that it casts doubt over the true extent of John fitzThomas's monetary problems. Unquestionably, John was under some degree of financial pressure at this time. Most obviously, he was indebted to the crown until 1301, when his debts at the Dublin exchequer were pardoned in return for his participation in the expedition to Scotland.⁶⁶ However, it is probable that as far as his dealings with de Longespée and Hastings were concerned, fitzThomas was exaggerating his financial difficulties. The crucial factor in both cases is that the individuals concerned were primarily based in England and the Welsh marches respectively.⁶⁷

In general, throughout his career, John fitzThomas displayed a marked reluctance to honour any commitments entered into

⁶² Orpen, *Normans*, iii, p. 105.

⁶³ *CJR* 1295–1303, p. 218.

⁶⁴ *CJR* 1295–1303,, p. 206; *CJR* 1305–07, p. 255; *CDI* 1293–1301, no. 354.

⁶⁵ *CJR* 1295–1303, pp 250–1.

⁶⁶ See Chapter 5.

⁶⁷ *CPR* 1281–92, pp 252, 381, 389, 414; *CPR* 1292–1301, pp 36, 38, 202, 360, 450; *CDI* 1293–1301, nos. 20, 31, 39, 147; Johnstone, *Edward of Carnarvon*, p. 74. Hastings came to Ireland in 1294 in the company of Gilbert de Clare earl of Gloucester, which may have been the occasion on which fitzThomas incurred the debt to him.

with absentees. The experience of Gerard de Orum, a member of the king's household further illustrates this point. In July 1300 King Edward rewarded de Orum 'for his long and faithful service' by granting an income of £100 *per annum* out of the issues of the lands of Thomas fitzMaurice, the Desmond Geraldine.⁶⁸ Consequently, it fell to John fitzThomas, in his capacity as the custodian of the Desmond estates, to pay this amount to de Orum. However, it appears that problems arose almost immediately. For example, on 24 April 1302, at Devizes in Wiltshire, John, along with Theobald de Verdon and Alan fitzWarin acknowledged that they owed £105 to de Orum.⁶⁹ The circumstances by which they became indebted to Gerard were not recorded, but as far as fitzThomas was concerned, rent arrears from the Desmond lands are the most likely cause. There is some evidence to suggest that fitzThomas provided some rents in the region to Gerard before Easter 1306.⁷⁰ However, a court case held before John Wogan in August 1306 confirms that notwithstanding this provision, in general the lord of Offaly was not fulfilling his obligations to de Orum properly. It transpires that Gerard had been forced to complain to the king that, to his loss, 'the greatest part of the money' due to him for the previous five years and more 'which John should have paid long ago' was in arrears. As a result, Wogan ordered the sheriff of Limerick to distrain the available corn and other goods in the manor of Newcastle Connell and to deliver them to one John de Barry to keep until fitzThomas paid the money to Gerard. The sheriff later made a return to the effect that the chief serjeant of Limerick had only been able to deliver corn worth £15 15s from Newcastle Connell to de Barry. Significantly however, it transpired that the royal officials of Limerick were not executing the precepts of their mandate wholeheartedly. Master Elizeus of Lucca, who was acting as de Orum's attorney, complained of their negligence, alleging that they had failed to seize the livestock possessed by fitzThomas at Newcastle.⁷¹

⁶⁸ CPR 1292–1301, p. 524; PRO SC 1/26/20.

⁶⁹ CCR 1296–1302, p. 580.

⁷⁰ CJR 1305–07, p. 211.

⁷¹ CJR 1305–07, pp 290–1.

It is not known whether Master Elizeus's efforts on behalf of his employer met with any success in this particular instance. However, the proceedings of another court case held at Limerick before Wogan on 8 January 1308 reveal that at that point, de Orum and fitzThomas were still at loggerheads over the Desmond estates. Interestingly, according to de Orum, John fitzThomas appears to have tried to reach some kind of settlement with him. In August 1307, he demised the manor of Killyde to the king's valet, which suggests that Gerard was being given the opportunity to collect his revenues directly. However, de Orum alleged that fitzThomas had immediately reneged on the agreement. To be specific, he claimed that one William Wolf had 'extorted' 20 pounds in silver from the issues of Killyde of Michaelmas term 1307, despite having been informed of the change in ownership. Finally, in order to back up his allegations, Gerard produced fitzThomas's letters patent relating to the demise of the property. For his part, William Wolf appeared before the court, informed it that he was John fitzThomas's 'receiver of moneys' in Connell, and agreed that he had collected 10 marks in rent from Killyde, which he handed over to his master. Although the records of the case have been imperfectly preserved, it appears as though Wolf claimed that in so doing, he was merely carrying out fitzThomas's orders. As fitzThomas was absent from the hearing, Wogan ordered him to come before him on 27 January in order to clarify matters, along with the other two parties, at which point the case was reconvened. Again, the incompleteness of the court proceeding makes it impossible to learn of its final outcome. Nevertheless, the surviving evidence tends to support de Orum's allegations. First, William Wolf was acquitted of wrongdoing after fitzThomas acknowledged that he had indeed been acting on his orders. Secondly and more importantly, it is clear that notwithstanding the physical evidence supplied by de Orum to the contrary, fitzThomas denied that a transfer of property had taken place, stating that 'he does not believe that seisin of the manor was granted to Gerard by covenant made between them'.⁷² On the surface, John's cavalier behaviour towards de Orum in the presence of the chief justice of Ireland betokens a self-confidence bordering upon reckless arrogance. In fact, his attitude was quite understandable, given the outcome of his turbulent dealings with

⁷² *CJR 1308-14*, pp 1-2.

Agnes de Valence, the absentee who undoubtedly had the greatest influence upon his career.

It was noted earlier that by April 1297, the Irish administration was trying to collect the debt owed to Agnes by her former bailiff, John de Valle, who had defaulted in January 1293, by seizing the goods and rents of his surviving mainpernors, including John fitzThomas. Moreover, it is clear that individuals such as Geoffrey de Geneville and Walter L'Enfaunt who had close connections with the government, were making arrangements to pay up, while the various sheriffs and seneschals were having much less success with characters like Keating and fitzThomas.⁷³ However, between 1297 and 1303, it is not possible to trace de Valence's efforts to recover the money owed to her by fitzThomas. In fact, in general, with one important exception, little is known about her Irish business affairs during this period. Possibly this is merely due to gaps in the sources. Alternatively, as fitzThomas's military service in Scotland and Flanders earned him immunity from prosecution while on campaign and pardons for his transgressions, it is possible that Agnes was deterred from attempting to pursue her claims.⁷⁴ But it is more likely that a personal bereavement, the death around July 1297 of her elder son John, was the decisive cause. By October, Agnes had decided to travel to Hainault in order to uphold the rights of her younger son Baldwin to the lordship of Beaumont and she left England in November with her son, her personal knights, chaplains and damsels, not to return until 1300.⁷⁵ However, while there may have been a lull in Agnes's pursuit of her rights during this period, there was no question of John fitzThomas remaining idle. In November 1299, Agnes paid a fine of 100 marks to the king in order to have a charter confirmed. Significantly, the charter in question was a copy of her marriage agreement with Maurice fitzGerald III, made 33 years previously.⁷⁶

⁷³ *CJR*, 1295–1303, pp 104–5.

⁷⁴ *CDI* 1293–1301, nos. 344, 436, 438, 461.

⁷⁵ *G.E.C., Peerage*, x, p. 17.; *CCR*, 1296–1302, p. 66; *CPR*, 1292–1301, pp 290, 293, 313, 316, 354; *CDI*, 1293–1301, nos. 580, 581.

⁷⁶ *CDI* 1293–1301, nos. 671–2; *CPR* 1292–1301, p. 451. Agnes actually purchased an *inspeximus* of an *inspeximus* made in August 1266 by Edward as lord of Ireland, in which he confirmed a charter of Sir John de Verdon granting the Geraldine properties in Limerick jointly to Maurice fitzGerald III and Agnes. It seems that

In fact, it appears as though John had begun to plan a legal challenge to her possession of the Geraldine estates by setting his lawyers to examining the family archives, looking for flaws in her tenurial rights. During the latter half of the thirteenth century, there is no hint that the manors which Agnes held were anything but Geraldine property. However, at some time before May 1299, it appears that Christiana de Mariscis unsuccessfully attempted to implead Agnes in an action of *mort d'ancestor* for the manors of Athlacca in Limerick and Rathmore in Kildare. On this occasion, the action failed because de Valence possessed letters of protection from the king, granting her immunity from cases taken concerning her Irish properties. Consequently, Christiana petitioned the king informing him of the situation and asked to have Agnes's protection removed, so that she could 'have common law'. Although the endorsement on this petition states that Edward acceded to Christiana's request, two years later she was obliged to petition the king again, in order to complain that despite her earlier demand, Agnes's letters of protection encompassing all of her Irish properties had been renewed.⁷⁷ On the surface, the sudden determination of Christiana de Mariscis to establish her rights to these two manors is somewhat unusual. While the fact that she was a de Ridelsford heiress meant that she may have had a claim to the estates which dated back to the early thirteenth century, she had not previously shown any interest in them.⁷⁸ It is reasonable to conjecture therefore, that at the very least, John fitzThomas had drawn her attention to them. This interpretation of events is considerably strengthened by John's actions in the aftermath of his participation in the Scottish campaign of 1301. In March 1302, he travelled to Langley near Windsor, where he drew up an agreement with Christiana which reveals his interest in her actions. Under the terms of the agreement, he undertook to pursue the case for Christiana, bearing all the costs, on condition that she would grant him the properties, and that they would share any damages accruing to Christiana, if

Maurice had granted the properties to de Verdon specifically in order to effect their settlement upon his new wife.

⁷⁷ Brooks, 'The family of Marisco', pp 66 -7; PRO SC. 8/9/421; *Rotuli. parl.*, i, p. 466b; CPR 1292-1301, p. 418.

⁷⁸ See Brooks, 'The de Ridelesfords', p. 54; and Empey, 'The settlement of Limerick', pp 1 -25.

the case was won.⁷⁹ Their efforts to take control of Rathmore and Athlacca were successful to the extent that from November 1304 onwards, both of the disputed manors were excluded from the letters of protection which Agnes routinely secured from her royal first cousin.⁸⁰ Thus, fitzThomas had acquired a legal weapon against Agnes which hung over her head for the rest of her life.⁸¹

Initially at least, John and Christiana tried to exploit their legal advantage. For example, in a letter to John Wogan issued in November 1305, the king noted that Christiana's attempts to take an action of *mort d'ancestor* against Agnes had been frustrated by the death of Robert de Littlebury, one of the justices assigned to the case. As a result, Wogan was ordered to appoint a replacement so that the case could be held.⁸² However, it seems as though the litigants did not continue to pursue this opportunity. The most likely explanation for their reluctance is that John fitzThomas belatedly came to realise the implications of his actions. In 1281, Christiana had surrendered all of her lands and rights in Ireland to the king in return for an annual pension.⁸³ Consequently, a successful prosecution of the action against Agnes de Valence would be to the ultimate benefit of the crown rather than to fitzThomas. In fact, it is clear that the English administration were aware of this fact. Thus, in November 1304, when the English chancery issued letters patent bestowing royal protection to Agnes's Irish lands, it made an exception for 'any demands of Christiana de Marisco in respect of lands which would come to the king after the death of Christiana'.⁸⁴ In any event, by then John fitzThomas had resorted to using more forceful methods to recover the properties.

The first sign of unusual activity to surface in the official records dates from 22 March 1303, when letters patent were issued in

⁷⁹ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 59.

⁸⁰ *CPR 1301-07*, p. 291; *CDI 1302-07*, no. 366.

⁸¹ *Cal. chanc. warr.*, 1244 - 1326, p.242; *CPR 1307-13*, pp 29, 102.

⁸² *CCR 1302-07*, pp 305-6 ; Ball, *The Judges of Ireland*, i, pp 58-9.

⁸³ Otway-Ruthven, 'Medieval county of Kildare', p. 196.

⁸⁴ *CPR 1301-07*, p. 291.

England informing all lieges and bailiffs in Ireland 'lest anyone should intrude on the lands of Agnes de Valence', that she was alive and in good health on the day on which the letters were made.⁸⁵ The proceedings of a court case held two years later reveals what had happened. Essentially, John fitzThomas had repeated his performance of 1294 by seizing Agnes's Irish properties.⁸⁶ Allegedly, on 12 January 1303, 'feigning maliciously that [Agnes] was dead', John took her 'lands and goods, wheat, barley, oats and other grain to the value of £680; affers, oxen, cows ... and other animals to the value of £300' despite the fact that her goods were under the king's protection. Upon becoming aware of John's actions, Agnes had the letters patent stating that she was still alive sent to Ireland, and on 23 April John was ordered to restore the properties to her. FitzThomas however, 'despising the mandate' did not comply.⁸⁷ Instead, he became embroiled in a lawsuit with his cousin John de Cogan, as to which of them had the better title to the estates in Limerick. On 6 June 1303, an assize of *mort d'ancestor* was taken at Kilmallock before John de Ponte and Alexander Bickenor concerning 'the land which John fitzThomas holds'.⁸⁸ Not surprisingly, given fitzThomas's actions, no mention was made of the agreements made by the two magnates in 1297 to share the properties between them. In fact, the assize was limited to establishing whether John de Cogan's uncle, Maurice fitzGerald III had held the estates on the day he died and '*si idem Johannes propinquior heres eius sit*', or if de Cogan was his nearest heir. The jurors, quite truthfully, affirmed that Maurice had held the manors on the day he died and that de Cogan was indeed the third lord of Offaly's nearest heir. As a result, the court ruled that de Cogan should recover seisin from fitzThomas, who was declared to be in mercy for unjustly detaining the manors. However, it appears as though this particular pair of judges showed undue bias in favour of de Cogan. In any event, John fitzThomas immediately appealed against the decision, citing a number of technical issues. His most important contention was that de Ponte and Bickenor should not have taken the assize, because it was already being

⁸⁵ CDI 1302–1307, nos. 189,190.

⁸⁶ CJR 1295–1303, pp 236–7.

⁸⁷ CJR 1305–07, pp 75–6.

⁸⁸ Red Bk Kildare, no. 105.

heard by de Ponte and Thomas Cantok, the Irish chancellor. FitzThomas's appeal was finally heard in Easter term 1304, when his version of events was supported by Cambinus Donati, the sheriff of Limerick. As a result, the judgement against John fitzThomas was nullified and he recovered his costs. On one level, this case offers a glimpse of the way in which factional interests and personal connections could affect the outcome of a court hearing. For example, in general terms it is noticeable that during this period, Cambinus Donati tended to cooperate with fitzThomas. Furthermore, on the face of it, the fact that a senior figure in the Irish administration like Thomas Cantok was prepared to preside over the case despite the royal instructions to hand the properties over to Agnes appears significant. However, the most important point to be made about the action is that fitzThomas's victory was pyrrhic. Six months earlier, in Michaelmas term 1303, Agnes de Valence had brought an action of *novel disseisin* before John Wogan against both fitzThomas and de Cogan, and had recovered seisin of all of her estates.⁸⁹ But on this occasion, John fitzThomas did not leave peacefully. Instead, it was alleged, 'increasing his former trespass..., he threshed and carried away her corn, drove off her cattle, broke her chests, took her goods found there..., threw down certain houses and burned the timber of them, cut the trees of the garden and hedges, caused two iron-bound carts and four ploughs to be burned ..., and imprisoned her bailiffs for three days until they gave him the rents and issues levied to her use ... in contempt of the king'.⁹⁰

By any standards, fitzThomas's behaviour towards Agnes de Valence in 1303 was remarkable. Admittedly, it is quite conceivable that initially, he had genuinely believed that Agnes was dead, and that the robust manner in which he occupied her estates was designed to forestall similar action by his rival John de Cogan. However, the fact that he appears to have both completely ignored a direct command to withdraw from the manors and then gone on to compound his wrongdoing by looting the properties, again raise questions about the general soundness of his judgement. Indeed, when it is considered that since 1295 at the latest, fitzThomas was aware of the importance of the de Valence family in

⁸⁹ CJR 1305-07, p. 76; *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 105.

⁹⁰ CJR, 1305-07, pp 75, 236, 240.

England, and also that the default of John de Valle meant that he already owed Agnes a large sum of money, the wisdom of his deeds becomes all the more doubtful. As far as the surviving evidence can tell, John never attempted to justify his actions. Nevertheless three alternative reasons for his apparent recklessness in 1303 suggest themselves. The first, and simplest explanation is that John's judgement was clouded by grief. It is known that Gerald, his eldest son and heir, named after his benefactor Gerald fitzMaurice III, died in this year.⁹¹ Regrettably, as the precise date of his death was not recorded, this theory cannot be validated.⁹² Another possibility is that circumstances forced John to adopt the expedient of seizing Agnes's goods, money and rents. In particular, there is little doubt but that the military situation in the marches of Kildare was deteriorating at this time.⁹³ Lastly, it may be that John's violent behaviour towards Agnes was related in some way to the participation of an Irish army in the Scottish campaign of 1303. For example, his refusal to obey the king's orders to hand the estates back to Agnes in April might have been based upon a calculation that Edward's needs for troops outweighed any desire to protect his cousin's interests in Ireland. Alternatively, while it is probable that fitzThomas's ultimate non-participation in the campaign was at least partially due to the action of *mort d'ancestor* taken against him by John de Cogan, the possibility that he was actually left behind as a punishment for his contempt for the king's command to hand the Limerick properties back cannot be discounted. Within this context, the fact that John Wogan also remained at home may be significant.⁹⁴ If this was in fact the case, then it is possible that John's display of wanton vandalism after Agnes recovered seisin was motivated by a sense of pique, having been deprived of the opportunity to enjoy the benefits which usually accrued to a magnate after an overseas campaign. In any event, whatever John fitzThomas's motives were, it is certain that his actions had infuriated Agnes de Valence. For the next five years, John faced

⁹¹ *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p. 331; *AFM*, s.a. 1303.

⁹² Gerald's death was noticed in 1303 in annals of both Gaelic and Anglo-Irish origin. Given the difference between the two cultures' method of dating the new year, it can be assumed that he died between 25 March and 31 December 1303.

⁹³ See Chapter 5.

⁹⁴ Lydon, 'Edward I, Ireland and Scotland', p. 47. FitzThomas's conduct towards de Valence supports Lydon's suggestion that Wogan may have remained behind in Ireland because John and his associates presented a threat to the peace.

a massive effort by Agnes, using her royal connections to the utmost, to obtain justice and compensation for his trespasses against her and, simultaneously, to recover the money which he owed to her for the de Valle default.

In April 1304, King Edward, noting 'the many outrages and despites which had been committed in Ireland against the king's cousin Agnes de Valence by Sir John fitzThomas ..., in manner of open robbery' and the fact that she had not yet received redress, ordered the English council to discuss the problem.⁹⁵ Their response was to order John Wogan, either to resolve the case or to send the parties to appear before the king at the next parliament in England. Despite this unambiguous command, the case was not opened until October 1304, when it was promptly postponed until the following January, at which time it was postponed again until May.⁹⁶ Clearly, Agnes's grievances were not at the top of the Irish administration's agenda. However, she refused to accept their reluctance to act against fitzThomas, and at the parliament held in Westminster in February 1305, she lodged a petition with the king outlining her plight. First, she estimated that John's three incursions upon her property had cost her the improbably high sum of £3000 in damages. She then went on to complain that although she had sued for three years at great expense, she had recovered none of the misappropriated chattels. More seriously, she accused John Wogan, the Irish treasurer and the Irish eschaetor of negligence, and alleged that her inability to recoup her damages was due to the *favour qe la dit Justice a ver le dit Monsir Johan*. As a result, the officials were duly penalised, and were ordered to expedite the case.⁹⁷ Although another English writ was sent out to speed up the process in April, the case was heard, as originally scheduled, in May 1305. From Agnes's perspective, the conditions in which the case was held were not ideal. In particular, as John Wogan was still in England, the hearing was presided over by his deputy, Edmund Butler, who happened to be John

⁹⁵ *Cal. chanc. warr.*, 1244–1326, p. 212.

⁹⁶ *CJR*, 1305–07, p. 76.

⁹⁷ Maitland (ed.), *Memoranda de Parlamento*, pp 240–3; PRO SC. 8/145/7243. She appears to have recovered 60 marks in damages from John Wogan (CCR 1302–07, p. 325).

fitzThomas's son-in-law, having married his daughter Joan in 1302.⁹⁸ In any event, Agnes's attorneys reiterated the charges against fitzThomas, claiming on this occasion that her losses and damages amounted to £2200.⁹⁹ Ironically however, her use of English connections now proved to be her undoing.

After the charges were read, fitzThomas's lawyers did not attempt to justify his trespasses. Instead, they contended that John could not answer the allegations, as they were contained in a writ out of the English chancery, rather than one from the Irish chancery, and that it would be 'against the common laws and customs of this land' to do so. For their part, Agnes's attorneys argued that English writs were acceptable in Ireland, and noted that 'from the time of the conquest innumerable writs were directed to the justiciar' from the English chancery to do justice to plaintiffs. Therefore, they asserted, the case should be awarded to de Valence, on the basis that fitzThomas had failed to reply to the charges. Not altogether unexpectedly, Butler decided to postpone the case until June, by which time John Wogan was expected to have returned to Ireland. Significantly, when the case was reopened on 4 July after Wogan's return, fitzThomas's legal arguments were supported by a group of Irish magnates, including the earl of Ulster, Geoffrey de Geneville, Edmund Butler, Eustace le Poer and Piers de Bermingham. On behalf of themselves 'and the whole community', they stated that it would be against 'the liberties granted to their ancestors, and the common customs hitherto used in this land', if fitzThomas was compelled to answer Agnes's English writ, particularly because she could have used an Irish writ to recover her losses. Hence, they asked that the proceedings be halted.¹⁰⁰ As it happened, conditions in Ireland in July 1305 dictated that Wogan would react unfavourably to Agnes's plea, even before the merits of the Irish magnates' legal argument were taken into account. To be specific, a major security crisis had erupted in the Leinster marches, which had become disturbed in the aftermath of Piers de Bermingham's assassination of 'the captains of the Okoneghors' in June.¹⁰¹ As a result,

⁹⁸ *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p. 331; *Cal. Ormond deeds, 1172-1350*, nos. 470, 474, 491.

⁹⁹ *CJR 1305-07*, pp 75-6.

¹⁰⁰ *CJR 1305-07*, pp 76-8; *Cal. chanc. warr.*, 1244-1326, p.253.

¹⁰¹ See Chapter 4.

Wogan and the council were 'too much occupied at present about the ordering of peace in the marches' to deliberate upon de Valence's case properly, and so the case was postponed again until 8 July. The seriousness of the problem is underlined by the fact that at the same time, John fitzThomas was obliged to set out for Offaly, to fortify the marches there. Against this unsettled background, it is not surprising that when the case reopened, Wogan promptly took the opportunity to delay proceedings, by referring the problem of the correct use of writs to the king.¹⁰² In November 1305, King Edward, faced with a united front of Irish magnates, decided that John fitzThomas 'has answered well', and ruled in his favour, which meant that Agnes was obliged to begin her suit all over again, this time using Irish writs.¹⁰³ This she did, and her complaints concerning fitzThomas's trespasses of 1294 and 1303 were restated before Wogan in April 1306. Interestingly, by this stage she had reduced her estimate of the damages inflicted upon her to the more plausible sum of £1300. In any event, the court ordered the summoning of juries from Kildare and Limerick, who were to testify in July. At that time, the Kildare jury met, stated that Agnes had indeed been trespassed against, and assessed her losses at £110 rather than the £300 which she had claimed. The Limerick jury on the other hand initially failed to appear, but after they had been re-summoned and the sheriff penalised, they turned up, and assessed Agnes's losses in that county to be £606, rather than the £1000 claimed. Finally, in January 1307, four years after the second act of trespass, Agnes was awarded her money back, with another £70 added for damages.¹⁰⁴ However, it is very doubtful that it was ever actually paid to her. What is certain is that in the last reference to this case in the *Calendar of the Justiciar Rolls*, which dates from May 1307, and refers to the damages awarded, Agnes's attorneys had only managed to extract the sum of £8 from fitzThomas.¹⁰⁵

So, Agnes's highly powered and tenacious effort to get justice for the trespasses ended with a legal victory, albeit one of dubious

¹⁰² *CJR* 1305-07, p. 78.

¹⁰³ *Cal. chanc. warr.*, 1244-1326, p. 253.

¹⁰⁴ *CJR*, 1305-07, pp 236-7, 240-1, 281.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 393.

efficacy. All the while, her action to recover the money misappropriated by John de Valle from his surviving mainpernors ground on.¹⁰⁶ The court records show that by November 1304, royal officials were active in trying to bring in the debt.¹⁰⁷ In that same month yet another English writ was sent to Wogan ordering him to expedite collection.¹⁰⁸ As far as fitzThomas was concerned, the fact that he had twice acted as de Valle's guarantor meant that his debt to de Valence, which came to approximately £277, was considerably greater than the amounts owed by the other mainpernors. Before 1305, it is not possible to judge the administration's degree of success in its efforts to recover the money from John. However, to judge from the difficulties which it subsequently experienced, it is unlikely to have been more than minimal. Thus, in March 1305, the sheriff of Limerick came before the *custos*, fitzThomas's son-in-law Edmund Butler, and reported that he had seized fitzThomas's rents in the region, to the value of £24 6s 8d as well as 16 affers and 16 oxen worth £5 6s 8d, for which he could find no buyers. At the same time, Robert Braynock, the chief serjeant of Offelan made the rather improbable claim on behalf of the sheriff of Kildare that Agnes's attorneys had given John fitzThomas respite for the debt. Not surprisingly, her attorneys denied that any such respite had been given, and the officials of both counties were ordered to continue their efforts, and to report back in May. When they came before Butler again, the situation in Limerick had actually worsened. Walter Maunsel, the county's chief serjeant reported that the seized livestock still remained to be sold 'because no-one dares buy them'. Moreover, he also noted that the rents which had been taken into the king's hands by March had since been levied by Edmund Butler's own bailiffs, as fitzThomas had 'long since' assigned them to the *custos* as part of his daughter's dowry. For his part, the sheriff of Kildare reported that he had seized 23 crannocks of corn from John's manor of Rathangan as well as 12 oxen and 4 affers. However, he continued, fitzThomas had taken the corn back 'and expended it about the war in Offaly', and he could find no buyers for the livestock.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, all of

¹⁰⁶ See Chapter 2, pp 34–5.

¹⁰⁷ *CJR* 1305–07, p. 213.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.5.

¹⁰⁹ *CJR*, 1305–07, pp 6–8.

John's other goods had already been taken into the king's hands because of the debts which he owed to two individuals named Gerard Chymbard and William Fautenel.¹¹⁰ Thereafter, the royal officials' returns were delivered to Thomas de Essex, Agnes's seneschal in Ireland to bring to England.¹¹¹ Not surprisingly, however, this progress report did not satisfy Agnes, and in October 1305, yet another English writ ordering the Irish administration to collect the debt was issued.¹¹²

Accordingly, the various sheriffs and seneschals responsible for collecting the money were summoned before John Wogan in January 1306 in order to report upon their progress.¹¹³ The sheriffs of Limerick and Kildare made a statement to the effect that they had failed to make any significant headway with fitzThomas. But this time, Agnes's attorneys challenged their returns. It transpired that Cambinus Donati the sheriff, and Walter Maunsel, the chief serjeant of Limerick had been lying. Not only had they failed to collect several rents which fitzThomas had been receiving, but they had never actually seized any of his livestock either. It was the same story in Kildare, where Albert de Kenleye the sheriff, and Robert Braynock his chief serjeant were accused of acting falsely in John's favour. They had claimed to have seized corn and livestock from John's share of Maynooth manor and from Rathangan, but Agnes's attorneys asserted that they had done nothing of the sort, and moreover that the sheriff had not taken John's other lands and goods into the king's hands for the debt allegedly owed by fitzThomas to Gerard Chimbard. On the contrary, Agnes's attorneys contended that the Kildare officials had failed to seize John's available rents, said to be worth 200 marks *per annum*. The two officials could not deny these allegations, but claimed that 'they dared not make other [returns] for fear of John fitzThomas'. Similarly, Agnes's

¹¹⁰ *CJR, 1305–07*, pp 7–8. As Gerard Chimbardi was a leading member of the society of the *Riccardi* of Lucca, who still had investments in Irish property as late as 1310, it seems quite plausible that fitzThomas was indebted to him in 1305. (M. O'Sullivan, *Italian merchant bankers in Ireland*, pp 74–5, 128.) Similarly, William Fautenel, a merchant of the company 'of the sons of Bettory of Lucca' also had long-lasting connections with Ireland (Craig, *The memoranda roll of the Irish exchequer*, ii, p. 550).

¹¹¹ *CJR, 1305–07*, p. 8.

¹¹² *CJR, 1305–07*, p. 204.

¹¹³ For the following paragraph, see *CJR, 1305–07*, pp 204–13.

attorneys also accused Philip de Valle, sheriff of Kerry of ignoring his orders completely.¹¹⁴ As a result, the officials from Kildare, Limerick and Kerry were duly penalised and ordered to report back in March 1306. When they did so, the sheriff of Kildare stated that he would be in a position to collect £20 from John in May, while the sheriff of Kerry declared that he had taken his fields of corn to the value of £7 6s 8d into the king's hands. However, the sheriff of Limerick had a far more dramatic report to make. He said that his serjeant had made an effort to round up some of John's livestock, but that a group of fitzThomas's men, led by one Robert de Roche, with their great following of Irishmen had taken them back by force and had driven them into Kerry. Furthermore, while John did have crops growing which could be seized, no one dared guard them. Lastly, fitzThomas's *betaghs*, or unfree Irish tenants, had fled *en masse* into Thomond before the serjeant could reach them. Notwithstanding this, he was ordered to arrest the livestock rustlers, seize the crops and chattels, and to report back again the following month. When he did, it was to admit total failure: the rustlers could not be found, 'because they are wanderers, sometimes in Kerry, sometimes in *Offalia*; fitzThomas had assigned the lands away to Gerard de Orum; all of his goods and chattels had been removed from Limerick; and his tenants were still lying low in Thomond. This state of affairs left John Wogan with a major dilemma. On the one hand he had a duty to implement the royal mandates, while on the other he could hardly allow such chaos to continue. He opted for stability, and ordered that further execution of the writ be ceased. Significantly, Agnes's attorneys agreed that all that could be done had been done at that time. Thereafter, for the rest of her life, Agnes does not appear to have attempted to make any further efforts to recover the debt, although she did try to collect the damages awarded to her against the sheriff and serjeant of Limerick.¹¹⁵ Several reasons for her loss of interest suggest themselves. First, it may be that the death of Baldwin, her last surviving son had sapped her enthusiasm for the struggle.¹¹⁶ Alternatively, it is possible that she had tacitly agreed to maintain the *status quo*, perhaps in return for fitzThomas's forbearance regarding the claims of Christiana de Mariscis in respect to Rathmore and

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p 211.

¹¹⁵ *CJR*, 1308–14, pp 58, 101, 114.

¹¹⁶ Ó Cléirigh, 'The absentee landlady and the sturdy robbers', p. 114.

Athlacca. Finally, she may simply have come to accept that in the final analysis, fitzThomas's local connections were more effective than her royal kinship.

In general, Agnes's experiences in Ireland raise several important issues. On one level, her court battles with John fitzThomas have been employed to demonstrate various aspects of the interaction between the Irish administration and its English counterpart.¹¹⁷ Moreover, the difficulties which she encountered in getting justice done are a telling reminder of the chasm between legal theory and practice in the lordship of Ireland.¹¹⁸ Within this context, it is worth noting that while fitzThomas was undoubtedly her main protagonist, her problems were not exclusively of his making, as individuals like Sir James Keating proved to be equally adept at frustrating her intentions. For example, in March 1305, William son of Richard, sub-serjeant of Tipperary, made a complaint against Keating. He stated that he had seized 200 of James's sheep, as part of the campaign to recover the de Valle debts, but that James had taken them back. Furthermore, when he next encountered James, the knight had proceeded to insult him and then to beat him. In his defence, James replied that he had understood that the serjeant was driving his sheep in deep snow, and 'because he would not suffer his sheep to perish of hunger and cold', he had taken them home again.¹¹⁹ He also admitted that he had struck William on the head with his hand, but claimed that it was not malicious. Edmund Butler, who was presiding over the case declared that, given William's office, the incident was contrary to the dignity of the king, and he committed James to gaol to await the king's mercy. But the important point is that he was released from prison a day later, and had secured a full pardon for his trespass at the behest of Eustace le Poer and Piers de Bermingham within the month.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Hand, *English law in Ireland*, pp 141, 146, 151, 157;
Richardson and Sayles, *Irish parliament in the middle ages*, p. 249.

¹¹⁸ See also, Devitt, 'The barony of Okethy', p. 301.

¹¹⁹ *CJR 1305-07*, p. 45.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

More pertinently, John fitzThomas's quarrel with Agnes provides useful insights into his character, into the goals which he cherished as the head of the Geraldines of Offaly and into the degree of power and influence which he wielded in the lordship of Ireland. As far as his motivation is concerned, it is clear that his unrelenting hostility towards Agnes can best be explained as another manifestation of the same ambition which had led him into conflict with the earl of Ulster during the 1290s. Throughout his life, John consistently attempted to recover the inheritance bequeathed to his family by his grandfather Maurice fitzGerald II, although his difficulties with Agnes confirm that his tendency to pursue this objective without displaying sufficient regard for the possible consequences of his actions was an equally consistent feature of his career. Nevertheless, while John failed to wrest control of the Limerick properties from Agnes's hands during her lifetime, it is worth noting that in sharp contrast to the humiliating reverse which he suffered at de Burgh's hands, he emerged comparatively unscathed from his conflict with Agnes. On reflection, several complementary factors contributed to this relative success. In the first instance, the most obvious advantage possessed by fitzThomas was the ease with which he was able to intimidate, or suborn, the local officials like Cambinus Donati or Albert de Kenleye so that they frustrated the attempts made by de Valence's attorneys to distrain his goods and rents. More importantly perhaps, the legal battles starkly reveal the practical limitations of the Dublin administration's ability to control the behaviour of a great magnate like fitzThomas. From John's point of view, the fact that neither royal policy, with its innate bias towards Agnes, nor the strict application of law were likely to work in his favour led him to resort to tactics which clearly ran counter to what was deemed to be acceptable behaviour. However, notwithstanding his acts of trespass and his refusal to obey a series of royal mandates, the administration was remarkably reluctant to exert itself fully in the defence of Agnes's rights, despite the fact that her actions against him were well supported, effectively argued and legally sound. To an extent, poor timing lay behind the effective failure of her efforts to obtain justice. From Agnes's perspective, the central problem was that during the 1300s, the administration was forced to grapple with the military challenge posed by the Irish of Leinster. For example, it was noted earlier that one of her lawsuits was postponed in July 1305 because of the administration's preoccupation with march defence. More significantly, during this period John fitzThomas distinguished himself as one of the

lordship's most effective bulwarks against the depredations of the Irish of the midlands.¹²¹ Indeed, even as his disputes with Agnes reached their climax, he was actually maintaining a garrison in her manor of Geashill, in the extremities of the marches.¹²² Given John's proven military usefulness, it made little sense for the government to devote its time and resources to a campaign which harassed both fitzThomas himself and his *betaghs*, on behalf of a distant absentee, no matter how just her cause. In a sense, Wogan and the administration were forced into choosing between Agnes's rights, representing law, and their own need to maintain fitzThomas, the unlikely representative of order. Ultimately, to Agnes's detriment, they took the pragmatic decision to leave him alone.

Overall then, fitzThomas's disputes with Agnes de Valence demonstrate the leverage which his martial qualities allowed him to bring to bear upon the Irish administration. However, the quarrel also reveals the increasing importance to him of his relationship with his son-in-law Edmund Butler. It was noted earlier that there are grounds for suggesting that fitzThomas was not judged to be completely reliable by John Wogan and the other permanent members of the Irish council. Perhaps the most striking indication of this possibility is that John Wogan never entrusted him with the office of deputy, during the justiciar's frequent and lengthy sojourns in England. Thus, unlike the earl of Ulster or his cousin William de Burgh or even Maurice de Rochford, a magnate of middling rank, fitzThomas was deprived of the opportunity to dovetail official responsibility with his own self-interest, in the manner perfected by his grandfather Maurice fitzGerald II.¹²³ In sharp contrast, Edmund Butler, who twice served as *custos* of Ireland in Wogan's absence, definitely enjoyed the confidence of the justiciar and the council.¹²⁴ During his first stint as *custos*, between September 1304 and May 1305, Butler proved himself to be an invaluable ally. As far as John's disputes with Agnes de Valence were concerned, Edmund was doubly useful to his father-in-law. Thus, in his

¹²¹ See Chapter 4.

¹²² *CJR* 1305-07, pp 8, 270.

¹²³ *H. B. C.*, p. 165.

¹²⁴ *H. B. C.*, p. 165. See also H. Wood, 'The office of chief governor of Ireland, 1172-1509', pp 210-11.

official capacity as chief justice, he helped to stall Agnes's plea of trespass.¹²⁵ Furthermore, during the campaign to recover the funds misappropriated by John de Valle, Edmund conveniently neglected to query the highly dubious returns made by the local officials. More importantly perhaps, in his private role as a magnate in his own right Butler backed fitzThomas's objections to the use of English writs and, prevented the seizure of John's Limerick rents by levying them himself.¹²⁶

In addition to assisting fitzThomas's frustration of de Valence's efforts to secure justice, Edmund also used his period in office to further another business interest of his father-in-law. In February 1302, King Edward rewarded John for his service in Scotland by directing John Wogan to grant 60 librates of land to fitzThomas himself, and to provide a benefice to the value of £100 *per annum* to the lord of Offaly's second son Thomas.¹²⁷ However, Wogan had neglected to carry out the king's orders. Perhaps his tardiness was simply due to the generally parlous state of the lordship's financial health caused by the king's incessant demands for resources to fund his military adventures. Alternatively, it is possible to view Wogan's reluctance to fulfil the royal mandate as a protest against the disruption and instability in Ireland which stemmed from fitzThomas's treatment of Agnes de Valence. In any event, by August 1304 John fitzThomas had secured a fresh set of instructions from King Edward, stating that 'the king marvels much' that nothing had been done, and directing Wogan to expedite matters.¹²⁸ Consequently, Edmund Butler took advantage of his role as *custos* in the absence of Wogan to attempt to implement the royal instructions regarding the grant of land. Interestingly, Butler made no effort to speed up the proposed provision of a benefice to Thomas fitzJohn, and it appears that the claim was subsequently abandoned. Presumably, the death of Gerald, John's eldest son and heir the previous year had rendered the privilege redundant. Undoubtedly however, the land

¹²⁵ *CJR* 1305–07, pp 75–8.

¹²⁶ *CJR* 1305–07, pp 6–8; *Cal. chanc. warr.*, 1244–1326, p. 253.

¹²⁷ *CPR* 1301–07, p. 21; *CCR* 1296–1302, p. 519. See also Chapter 4.

¹²⁸ *Cal. Chanc. warr.*, 1244–1326, p. 232; *CPR* 1301–07, p. 259. The timing of these grants suggests that although he did not personally participate, fitzThomas had sent some associates to the Scottish campaign of 1303–04.

grant was still high on fitzThomas's list of priorities. King Edward had directed John Wogan to conduct some valuations of the crown lands in Ireland, and to inform him of 'the extents and places', so that a charter granting the a suitable amount of land could be made for fitzThomas. Thus, in January 1305 Edmund Butler caused this mandate to be read out before the council, and solicited its members' opinions. Interestingly, the council's preferred location for the grant was the royal manor of Newcastle Mackinegan in Wicklow, 'where is a castle very weak, and in a strong march'. As a second option, they suggested that 'if it would please the king', the lands of John de Mohun, 'the greater part of which is in the land of peace' were also available. Undoubtedly, from fitzThomas's perspective the acquisition of de Mohun's lands, which were mainly in Kildare and in the land of peace would be preferable to the acquisition of Newcastle Mackinegan.¹²⁹ Arguably, the council's desire to grant march land to John was a vote of confidence in his ability to manage the resurgent Irish of the Leinster mountains, but it seems more likely that they were actually registering their general disapproval of fitzThomas's lawless behaviour by minimising the benefit of the grant to him. However, they did agree to conduct an extent of Newcastle, which was duly carried out in February 1305, and which revealed that the manor yielded approximately £62 annually. They decided not to conduct an extent of de Mohun's lands, which had been valued in 1299, as 'it is feared that if extended anew, the extent would be worth less than before'. Instead, they sent a transcript of the original extent, which stated that de Mohun's lands were worth £56 12s *per annum*, along with the Newcastle valuation, to the king for his consideration.¹³⁰

Significantly however, despite this effort by Butler, nothing further was done about the grant by either the Irish administration or by King Edward. In fact, John fitzThomas was still complaining about its non-implementation in 1315.¹³¹ The reason for the effective shelving of the grant is not clear. However, it heralds a new and unwelcome element in fitzThomas's career. From this point onwards, the value of John's

¹²⁹ *CJR* 130507, pp 27–20; Otway–Ruthven, 'Medieval county of Kildare', p. 196.

¹³⁰ *CJR* 1305–07, pp 27–30; *CDI* 1302–07, no. 335.

¹³¹ Phillips, *Documents*, p. 259.

relationship with the crown diminished significantly. It seems as though several factors contributed to the loosening of his ties to the crown. On one level, it is possible that his treatment of Agnes de Valence soured his relationship with Edward I during the last years of the latter's reign. At the least, it is unlikely that the aged king felt particularly inclined to advance the cause of his first cousin's chief persecutor. More importantly perhaps, after Edward I's death, there is little doubt but that John's relationship with his successor was not as close. Given the fact that the two men knew each other since at least 1301 when fitzThomas served under the Prince of Wales in Scotland, the possibility of a personality clash cannot be completely excluded.¹³² However, it is more likely that the combination of the absence of the opportunity to perform military service, with the closely related lack of frequent personal contact was the decisive cause of John's failure to secure further royal patronage. By way of illustration, it is known that fitzThomas and Edmund Butler sent petitions to the new king before November 1307.¹³³ The contents of the petitions have not survived, but it seems reasonable to assume that for his part, John was pressing Edward II to move on the land grant. However, the significant point is that the response generated by the petitions contrasted sharply to the reaction which fitzThomas secured in April 1298 and February 1302 having performed military service. On this occasion, no royal mandates were issued bestowing favours to the king's faithful and well-beloved liege. Fundamentally, King Edward II owed him nothing. As a consequence, fitzThomas could no longer rely upon royal patronage to further his interests in Ireland.

¹³² See Chapter 4 .

¹³³ *Cal. chanc. warr.*, 1244–1326, p. 267. FitzThomas appears to have sent more petitions shortly afterwards which arrived during the brief period when Piers Gaveston acted as regent of England (*Cal. chanc. warr.*, 1244–1326, p. 270; Chaplais, *Piers Gaveston*, pp 35–6).

Chapter 5

John fitzThomas as lord of Offaly, 1298–1308 : War in the marches and service overseas.

It is clear that by 1297, the most serious threat to fitzThomas's ambitions to consolidate his position in the Kildare region came from the military challenge posed the Irish dynasties of the midlands. In the aftermath of 'the disturbance', both the O'Connor Faly's and the O'Dempsey's remained broadly hostile to the settlers. Thus in April 1296, one Robert Typer pleaded that his robbery of 42 cattle from An Calbhach O'Connor Faly was justified, because An Calbhach was not at peace at the time.¹ Three months later Diarmait O'Dempsey, the most prominent member of his dynasty, was responsible with his following for killing one Robert son of Laurence in the cantred of Leys.² Similarly, in April 1298, during the trial for spying and robbery of an individual named Gillecolm Omoran, it was noted that he was 'a man of Calvaugh Oconeaghur now against the king's peace', and Gillecolm was duly found guilty and hanged.³ Most seriously perhaps, in the course of the eyre of Kildare, it was explicitly stated that certain districts such as Irth in Offaly and Clonboyne in Leys, were outside the land of peace and were permanently unamenable to the county's law enforcement officials.⁴ Admittedly, the justiciary rolls also reveal that the warfare was sporadic. For example, in 1296 Diarmait O'Dempsey was not outlawed for the death of Robert son of Laurence because he had subsequently been received into the king's peace.⁵ However, the damaging cumulative effect of the dynasts' activities can be gauged from the fall in the profitability of lands located in western Kildare. For example,

¹ *CJR 1295–1303*, p. 197.

² *CJR 1295–1303*, p. 169.

³ *CJR 1295–1303*, p. 208.

⁴ *CJR 1295–1303*, pp 168–170, 183, 191.

⁵ *CJR 1295–1303*, p. 169.

in January 1298, an extent was taken of the lands formerly held by William de Vescy in Ireland in order to provide a dower for his widow. The jurors returned that his lands at Allen 'in the march of Offaly' were now uncultivated because of 'the war of the men of Offaly' and that his lands in Carbury now rendered nothing because of the effects of the same war.⁶ Similarly, when the diocese of Kildare was assessed c. 1302 in order to levy the ecclesiastical tax known as the tenth, Offaly was deemed to be a less lucrative source of income than were its neighbouring cantreds to the east.⁷

The proximity of Laois and Offaly to the strategic Barrow river valley made a strenuous resistance to this particular Irish resurgence inevitable. Within that context, the statutes passed by the famous parliament of 1297 have a dual importance. First, on a general level, they demonstrate that both the colonists and the administration appreciated the magnitude of the public order problems which faced them. Second and more particularly, they can be considered to be a kind of template for the resolution of those problems. Insofar as magnates like fitzThomas are concerned, it is noteworthy that several of the statutes emphasised the manner in which they had actually contributed to the lordship's unsettled state.⁸ In particular, the prohibitions laid upon the practices of certain 'great men' who had been in the habit of marching their armies through lands at peace and of quartering their surplus kerne upon their neighbours, can be seen as both a rebuke for earlier behaviour and a rather forlorn attempt to curb the magnates' tendencies to conduct private warfare.⁹ Apart from admonishing the lordship's magnates, several of the measures adopted emphasised a 'commonwealth' approach. Thus, absentees were to be forced to contribute towards the costs of defence, the king's highways were to be kept clear, truces with the Irish were to be universal, and, perhaps most strikingly, the king's lieges were to be forcibly encouraged to adopt tonsorial and sartorial fashions which were appropriate to their status as

⁶ CDI 1293–1301, no. 481.

⁷ Orpen, *Normans*, iv, pp 48–9.

⁸ See also Kaeuper, *War, justice and public order*, pp 184–199, 225–31, 260–8. Within the context of Kildare, Kaeuper's broad observation that in general, the aristocracy was in fact the most serious threat to public order seems particularly apposite.

⁹ *Stat. Ire. John–Henry V*, pp 202–5.

Englishmen.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the contents of two other statutes demonstrate that the defensive organisation outlined by the parliament was fundamentally dependant upon the military resources of the very magnates who were being censured elsewhere. Specifically, the obligation placed upon them to maintain wards in the marches, taken in conjunction with their envisaged function as keepers of the peace in the absence of the justiciar, ensured a leading role in security matters for aristocrats like fitzThomas and Piers de Bermingham.¹¹ In fact, the events of the decade following the 1297 parliament confirm that both John fitzThomas and Piers de Bermingham did indeed make a great effort to maintain a semblance of order in the midlands.

Before describing the magnates' activities in greater detail, it may be worthwhile to make a number of generalised observations about the practical difficulties which they faced in the marches of Kildare. It was noted earlier that notwithstanding the existence of urban settlements like the New Town of Leys, most of the Anglo-Irish centres beyond the river Barrow such as Lea or Geashill were isolated outposts, surrounded by the indigenous population. Moreover, and crucially, that population's had retained its pre-invasion leadership largely intact.¹² This basic truth gave rise to conditions within the marches which can appear, on initial examination, to be somewhat paradoxical. For example, the land of 'Irth' or more correctly *Áireamh*, which was officially deemed to be outside of the land of peace, was actually little more than a stone's throw from Lea castle.¹³ More importantly perhaps, the precarious nature of Anglo-Irish control over the region raises the issue of the complex relationship which existed between aristocrats like John fitzThomas and Piers de Bermingham on the one hand, and their fellow aristocrats such as An Calbhach O'Connor Faly and Diarmait O'Dempsey on the other. The latter pair were of course prime examples of what are called the king's Irish felons or enemies in official

¹⁰ *Stat. Ire. John-Henry V*, pp 199, 205-11.

¹¹ *Stat. Ire. John-Henry V*, pp 199, 213.

¹² See Chapter 1, pp 25-7.

¹³ See A. P. Smyth, *Celtic Leinster : towards a historical geography of early Irish civilisation, A.D. 500-1600*, map at frontispiece, plates XI-XVI; Fitzgerald, 'Historical notes on the O'Mores', maps facing pp 1, 3.

documents. However, this dehumanising legal nomenclature tends to obscure the fact that the same 'felons' were also both neighbours to, and at least in name, tenants of fitzThomas and de Bermingham.¹⁴ Regrettably, in fitzThomas's case, concrete evidence which would delineate the exact nature of the tenurial relationship is not forthcoming.¹⁵ However, it seems reasonable to assume that he was content to exercise overlordship over the Irish chieftains in exchange for annual tribute, presumably in the form of livestock, in a similar fashion to that which operated in Annaly between the de Verduns and the O'Farrells.¹⁶ Certainly, it is known that Piers de Bermingham did so, as in the course of the eyre of Kildare it was recorded that he had taken a horse from one 'Donnechuth Oconewhor' for his rent, which turned out to be stolen.¹⁷

Nevertheless, at the risk of stating the obvious, it seems unlikely that the Irish aristocracy ever willingly accepted the permanence of this arrangement. It could be argued that in practical terms, the payment of such tribute was little more than a continuation of the position that existed before the Anglo-Norman invasion, when the rulers of western Kildare were subjected to the overlordship of the kings of Leinster.¹⁸ However, this would ignore the very significant loss of status and wealth suffered by the dynasties in the aftermath of the invasion.¹⁹ Even if the vexed question of their effective disenfranchisement from the protection of English law is left to one side, the fact remains that large swathes of their landed properties were expropriated by the ancestors of fitzThomas and de Bermingham.²⁰ It might be worth recalling that John fitzThomas's *caput* of Lea was located in

¹⁴ See R. R. Davies, *Domination and Conquest*, pp 112–19, for a discussion of legally expressed racism.

¹⁵ The valuations of the Geraldines' Kildare properties which were conducted following the death of Thomas fitzJohn in 1328 did not supply the identities of the tenants of the manors of Lea or Geashill. (*Red Bk Kildare*, 123, 126)

¹⁶ A. J. Otway-Ruthven, 'The partition of the de Verdon lands in Ireland', pp 413–4.

¹⁷ *CJR* 1295–1303, p. 174.

¹⁸ *NHI*, ii, pp 21–8.

¹⁹ Ó Cléirigh, 'The impact of the Anglo-Normans on Laois', pp 8–9, 13–14.

²⁰ See Otway-Ruthven, 'The request of the Irish for English law', pp 261–9; *Eadem*, 'The native Irish and English law', pp 1–16.

the core O'Dempsey territory of Clannmalieri, while his manor and town of Rathangan grew out of the site from which the O'Connor Falys had once ruled the kingdom of *Uí Failge*.²¹ Similarly, although the Cistercian abbey of Rosglas, or Monasterevin enjoyed fitzThomas's patronage, it was actually an O'Dempsey foundation.²² Unfortunately, the chieftains of western Kildare do not appear to have generated any documentary evidence in the form of a local annal or a bardic poem which has survived.²³ Consequently, any attempt to appraise their attitude towards their Anglo-Irish overlords using contemporary evidence must draw upon a variety of rather unsatisfactory sources. These range from documents produced in an Irish *milieu* which were compiled and have their primary focus elsewhere, through chartularies such as the *Red Book of Kildare* which were assembled for the very families who had dispossessed them, to the consistently hostile perspective which can be found in the records produced by the Dublin administration and in the literary output of the Anglo-Irish. It may be worth noting that by the mid-fifteenth century, it is clear that the O'Connor Falys at least had retained an awareness of the extent of their losses and were actively engaged in an attempt to reverse the process.²⁴ In any event, during the period under review, the Irish dynasties of the Kildare marches displayed the same pattern of behaviour as their counterparts in Meath, Tipperary and Kilkenny.²⁵ Whenever the opportunity presented itself, they attempted to detach themselves insofar as they could, from both the lordship of Ireland's administrative structure and more importantly, from their subservience to their overlords. This essentially hostile outlook had serious implications for magnates such as fitzThomas and de Bermingham. In essence, if they wished to retain control of the marches, they would be obliged to maintain a position of clear military superiority on a permanent basis.

²¹ Smyth, *Celtic Leinster*, map at frontispiece, pp 34, 68.

²² *Med. relig. houses*, p. 142; C. McNeill, 'Reports on Rawlinson MSS', p. 2.

²³ MacNiocaill, *The medieval Irish annals*, pp 13–37; Simms, *From Kings to Warlords*, p. 3.

²⁴ Ó Cléirigh, 'The O'Connor Faly lordship of Offaly, 1395–1513, pp 91–3; O. Bergin, *Irish bardic poetry*, pp 284–5.

²⁵ For example, see Empey, 'County Kilkenny in the Anglo-Norman period', pp 89–91.

However, the need for perpetual vigilance did not preclude widespread social interaction between natives and settlers. In fact, it is clear that ties were formed at all levels of society. For example, the findings of the eyre of Kildare confirm that inter-racial contact was commonplace amongst the ordinary settlers of Leys and Offaly.²⁶ Interestingly, the eyre's findings also implicate one of de Bermingham's officials, namely Roger his serjeant, in the felonious activities of 'the Irish robbers of Offaly'.²⁷ Admittedly, law-breaking officials were not rare in any part of the lordship of Ireland.²⁸ However, the case of Isabella Cadel was a more serious matter. In April 1302, Isabella and her maid Fynewell [Fionnghuala ?] Seyuyn were brought before the justiciar John Wogan, having been arrested on suspicion of having 'art and part' with 'the felons of the mountains' and of espionage on the felons' behalf. Upon examination, Isabella first stated that she dwelt with Diarmait O'Dempsey, who she described as 'her lord'. She continued by informing Wogan that Diarmait had sent her into the mountains to speak with 'certain friends and confederates' of his and then admitted that she was aware at the time that the 'Irish of the mountains' were in fact felons. Isabella concluded her self-incriminating testimony by adding that she brought jewels, which were being sent by the felons as a gift to Diarmait back with her from the mountains.²⁹ When the fate suffered by Gillicolm Omoran four years previously is recalled, the potential seriousness of Isabella and Fynewell's plight becomes apparent.³⁰ On this occasion however, after declaring their chattels to be forfeit, Wogan pardoned the women. While Wogan's decision to exercise clemency was based in part upon 'the simplicity of the women in this affair', his primary motive was to acknowledge 'the praiseworthy service to the king often done' by Isabella's father, the late

²⁶ CJR 1295-1303, pp 192-3, 199.

²⁷ CJR 1295-1303, p. 189.

²⁸ Otway-Ruthven, *Medieval Ireland*, p. 179.

²⁹ CJR 1295-1303, p. 368.

³⁰ CJR 1295-1303, p. 208.

William Cadel.³¹ Cadel, formerly seneschal of the liberties of Kildare and Carlow was also one of John fitzThomas's closest associates.³² It is possible that fitzThomas used his influence to help Isabella. Although it is likely that he was in England on business when her case was heard, the court proceedings record that her release was secured at the request of Sir Geoffrey le Bret and 'other magnates'.³³ Isabella's ordeal is of interest for two reasons. On the one hand, it provides a glimpse of the kind of dubious political manoeuvrings which the complex political structures of the marches demanded of an individual like Diarmait O'Dempsey. More importantly however, it reveals that the loyalties of someone like Isabella, an individual of relatively high social status, could be sufficiently divided so as to allow her to act in a manner which was deemed to be inimical to the colonists' interests. Possibly, her personal circumstances were exceptional. However, to judge from the evidence available, both fitzThomas and de Bermingham had also cultivated close ties with their supposed adversaries. The most obvious example comes from 'the disturbance', when John fitzThomas and An Calbhach O'Connor Faly appear to have acted in concert to effect the sacking of Kildare castle and the destruction of the liberty's records.³⁴ Moreover, two Irish sources suggest that the magnates also had links with An Calbhach which were of a more personal nature. To be specific, in a practice common to aristocrats from either culture, they appear to have been fostering, or at least raising two of An Calbhach's children. An entry from the *Annals of Inisfallen* states that Piers acted as a sponsor at the confirmation of An Calbhach's son Maisir, and its context suggests that the child was actually living with his household.³⁵ In fitzThomas's case, the Remonstrance sent by Domhnall O'Neill to Pope John XXII in 1317 explicitly states that another of An Calbhach's sons had been 'raised continuously in his house ... from the time when he had been lifted from the baptismal font' by John himself. Significantly, this child was said to have borne the

³¹ *CJR* 1295–1303, p. 368. For a discussion of female 'imbecility' in the eyes of the law, see Meek and Simms, *The fragility of her sex?*, pp 7–9.

³² See Chapter 2, pp 47–8.

³³ *CJR* 1295–1303, p. 368; *Red Bk Kildare*, 59; *CCR* 1296–1302, p. 580.

³⁴ See Chapter 3, pp 73–6.

³⁵ *AI*, s.a. 1305.

Christian name of 'John'.³⁶ Admittedly it is likely that the children could function as hostages for their father's good behaviour when the need arose. Nevertheless, the religious nature of their connection with fitzThomas and de Bermingham emphasises that, despite the fact that their long term interests were fundamentally incompatible, social intercourse between the march aristocrats of both races was both more widespread and more significant than the tenor of official rhetoric would suggest.

From the perspective of fitzThomas and de Bermingham, it seems inevitable that their geographical proximity to and social interaction with the Irish dynasts had an impact upon the manner in which they responded to the security problems which faced them. On a human level, it should be recalled that by definition, their military campaigns against their neighbours were intimate, almost familial affairs. More importantly, it could be argued that the magnates' primary concerns were not necessarily identical to those of the wider colonial community as expressed in the statutes of the 1297 parliament. For example, the prohibition placed upon the magnates' retention of more kerne than they could afford to keep may have been intended to protect the interests of less prominent individuals. Nevertheless, if implemented, it would obviously have the effect of reducing the magnates' military capability. Similarly, the statutes directed against 'degeneracy' were not likely to be helpful to the efforts of an aristocrat to preside over the politically fluid and culturally mixed society that had developed in the marches. Lastly, given that same fluidity, it may be advisable to approach the language adopted by the magnates when seeking governmental assistance with a certain degree of caution. The possibility that any particular petition for aid which was based upon an ostensible need to protect the wider community from Irish depredations was actually motivated by a desire to intervene in local Irish dynastic politics for the magnates' exclusive benefit should always be considered.

These reservations notwithstanding, it is clear that during the eyre of Kildare, the justiciar and the county community made an effort to implement at least some of the statutes of the 1297 parliament. For example, the jurors of Leys agreed that 'it would be for the common utility

³⁶ *Scotichronicon*, vi, p. 395; Curtis and McDowell, *Irish Historical Documents*, p. 43.

of the whole country if the pass of Colanagh ... and the passes of Belagh, of Daragh and Kilcorlene be cleared'.³⁷ Similarly, the jurors of Offaly noted that the abbot of Rosglas had failed 'to repair and clear the pass of Grangihokel' and the sheriff was ordered to distrain him to do so.³⁸ The Offaly jurors also reported that several landholders including the earl of Norfolk and the Master of the Templars were neglecting to keep the requisite number of horses at arms on their lands. More importantly, John fitzThomas was also found to be guilty of failing to maintain an adequate defensive establishment at his manor of Rathangan.³⁹ Admittedly he showed himself to be alive to the potential threat posed by the Irish four months later. Just before he departed for Flanders, John secured a prest of £40 towards the cost of fortifying Lea castle.⁴⁰ Unfortunately for him, the Irish did become hostile in his absence, and somewhat ironically given his earlier negligence, they targeted Rathangan, burning its manor and destroying the fortalice there. In May 1298 fitzThomas successfully petitioned the king to have a royal service levied in order to rebuild the fortalice, if the justiciar and council considered it to be 'for the utility of the land'.⁴¹ Earlier, the point was made that fitzThomas blamed the Irish followers of the earl of Ulster for this attack. However, as it is known that An Calbhach O'Connor Faly was at war in April 1298, it is much more likely that in fact, he and his followers were responsible for the deed.⁴² Interestingly, the administration appears to have dragged its feet over the issue, possibly indicating that they believed John to be the author of his own misfortune. In any event consent for the scheme was not secured from the magnates until August 1299. Significantly, when it was noted that John had not been able to build the castle that summer, it was specified that fitzThomas 'shall not put hand to the money or provision until he begin to

³⁷ *CJR 1295–1303*, p. 168.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

³⁹ *CJR 1295–1303*, p. 175.

⁴⁰ *CDI 1293–1301*, nos. 438, 565; PRO E. 101/233/2 (Issue roll, Michaelmas 1297 – Trinity 1298). Although the calendared translation states that the prest was issued to 'fortify' Lea castle, the original word used 'muniendum', has several alternative meanings, such as 'equip' or 'provision'.

⁴¹ *CJR 1295–1303*, pp 230, 362.

⁴² *CJR 1295–1303*, p. 208.

build'.⁴³ In fact, John was still complaining that he had not received the money as late as February 1302.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, the administration did show itself to be willing to assist and supervise an offensive operation against the Irish of Offaly. In the summer of 1299, the council met at Rathwire in Meath in the presence of Theobald de Verdon and Simon de Geneville, who was acting on behalf of his father Geoffrey, the lord of Trim. Having secured the assent of the 'magnates and good men of Meath and county Kildare', they agreed to assist Piers de Bermingham in the war 'which the Irish felons of the parts of Offaly raise against him'. De Bermingham was to receive £100, and in return he undertook to hire an additional 400 footmen for a period of up to 40 days starting from September 9, in order 'to repress the malice' of the Irish of Offaly and to clear their passes. The money was to be raised locally, from de Verdon's tenants, the tenants of the liberty of Trim and the tenants of Kildare. The funds were to be controlled by one Geoffrey Keppagh, who was to ensure that Piers spent the money as agreed.⁴⁵ At the same time, it was agreed that should John fitzThomas wish 'to attack the Irish on the other side of Offaly', he would receive the same level of assistance.⁴⁶ In his case, the funds were to be administered by Maurice Tylagh, who was both the constable of Dunamase castle and the coroner responsible for the region beyond the Barrow.⁴⁷ No direct confirmation that the proposed joint expedition ever took place remains extant. Nevertheless, it is highly likely that some kind of action was taken, as the marches of Kildare appear to have remained quiet between 1299 and, at the earliest, late 1302. During this period, Diarmait O'Dempsey was the only Irish leader whose activities warranted official attention and, as it was noted earlier, he was at least ostensibly at peace.⁴⁸ However, the most significant indication that the marches had been pacified is the fact that in the second half of 1301, both

⁴³ *CJR* 1295–1303, pp 230, 362–3.

⁴⁴ *CDI* 1302–07, no. 48.

⁴⁵ *CJR* 1295–1303, pp 286–7.

⁴⁶ *CJR* 1295–1303, p. 287.

⁴⁷ *CJR* 1295–1303, pp 167, 170.

⁴⁸ *CJR* 1295–1303, p. 368.

John fitzThomas and Piers de Bermingham felt sufficiently secure to participate in a large military expedition to Scotland.⁴⁹

That year, Edward I's continuing difficulties in his efforts to subdue Scotland provided John fitzThomas with a further opportunity to improve his domestic fortunes through military service overseas. The king's plan of action for that summer's campaign called for a two-pronged invasion of Scotland, in which he envisioned the participation of a major contingent drawn from his Irish subjects. Hence, early in February, Edward directed John Wogan to commence the preparations for the expedition by raising funds and arresting shipping.⁵⁰ On 28 March 1301, the task of bargaining with the lordship's magnates over their conditions of service began, when 36 of them received letters from King Edward, notifying them that a team of five officials, including Wogan and the treasurer Richard de Bereford had been empowered to treat with them 'regarding the expedition to Scotland'.⁵¹ Significantly, in the list of individuals who were so informed, fitzThomas's name appears second, after that of the earl of Ulster. The surviving evidence relating to the negotiating process makes it plain that the magnates' behaviour during the equivalent discussions in 1296 and 1297 had left the king under no illusions about their likely attitudes on this occasion. Thus, the negotiating team, which was rapidly strengthened by the addition of Geoffrey de Geneville upon his return from a mission to Rome, was empowered to make important concessions to the prospective campaigners.⁵² Perhaps the most important of these was that the magnates were offered the opportunity to clear their debts at the Dublin exchequer completely. The essential details of the agreements negotiated by Wogan and his associates were outlined in a letter sent to the justiciar by the king on 21 May, in which Edward gave his approval to the bargains. The magnates were to serve for a period of 100 days, with passage to and from Scotland being paid for by the crown. In return, two-thirds of their debts were to be written off immediately. The

⁴⁹ Lydon, 'Irish levies in the Scottish wars', pp 212–16.

⁵⁰ For the background to the expedition, see Lydon, 'Irish levies in the Scottish wars, 1296–1302', pp 209–17.

⁵¹ *CDI 1293–1301*, no. 785; *Parl. Writs*, i, p. 356.

⁵² *CDI 1293–1301*, nos. 799–800.

other one third would be allowed to them 'as wages, compensation for horses lost on campaign, or other expenses incurred'. In the event of either their expenses exceeding their remaining liabilities at the exchequer or of them staying in service for longer than 100 days, 'reasonable wages' were to be paid to them.⁵³ In fact, the wages on offer were actually three times higher than the normal standard.⁵⁴ As far as John fitzThomas was concerned, it is clear that he welcomed the opportunity to clear his debts at the exchequer. As early as 1294, he had claimed that he owed 'a great debt' to the crown for the debts of his predecessor Gerald fitzMaurice III.⁵⁵ More immediately, in November 1298 he acknowledged that his debts to the king and 'other merchants' prevented the implementation of an agreement which he had made with Emelina de Longespée the previous April, whereby she was to have the use of Maynooth manor for life, in exchange for a rent of £200 *per annum*.⁵⁶ Fortunately, the details of the individual bargain struck between fitzThomas and the administration's negotiators has survived.⁵⁷ Broadly speaking, John's conditions of service were similar to those approved in general terms by the king on 21 May.⁵⁸ For his part, fitzThomas agreed to bring 40 men-at-arms, 40 hobelars and 200 foot soldiers to Scotland for a period of 100 days which would commence on 1 July. In return, the administration offered him a variety of forms of payment. First, he was to receive the balance of the £150 awarded to him out of the issues of the royal service proclaimed in Dundalk in 1299 which

⁵³ CDI 1293–1301, no. 809.

⁵⁴ Lydon, 'Irish levies in the Scottish wars', p. 212.

⁵⁵ NAI EX 2/1, p. 3.

⁵⁶ *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 70–2. See also Chapter 4, pp 116–7.

⁵⁷ PRO E. 101/235/2 m.2; CDI 1302–07, no. 151 pp 60–1. In CDI 1302–07, this document is included with two others in an entry which was dated to the Scottish campaign of 1303. In the case of the first two, this was correct, but on the basis of its internal evidence, the third item clearly relates to the 1301 campaign. For example, it refers to the Irish contingent serving with the Prince of Wales, and its description of the conditions of service agreed to by fitzThomas and de Bermingham tallies with those presented in the campaign account presented by John de Hothum on 17 February 1302. See also PRO E. 101/10/1 m.2; CDI 1293–1301, no 849; *PRO Lists & Indexes* no. 35, *List of Various accounts, Exchequer*, p. 155.

⁵⁸ CDI 1293–1301, no. 809.

he was to spend '*pur fermer son chastel entre les Ireys*' at Rathangan.⁵⁹ Second, he was to receive £250 as an advance from the treasury. Third, and most importantly, he was to be released from a debt of £450 which he owed to the crown. Finally, the king was to pay for his passage to and from Scotland. The negotiators also reached an agreement with fitzThomas's associate Piers de Bermingham, who proposed to lead a separate force to Scotland in order to be released from a debt of £460, and who undertook to stay in service for the same length of time as his indented lord. Interestingly, for some reason which is not now apparent, John claimed that 'he would not dare' to bring a smaller force with him, echoing one sentiment expressed by the earl of Ulster, whose particularly exorbitant demands were causing some nervousness amongst Wogan and his negotiating team.⁶⁰

In one important respect at least, the proposed expedition of 1301 differed from both the Scottish campaign of 1296 and the expedition to Flanders in 1297–8. On this occasion King Edward did not, at the outset, offer the Irish the opportunity to serve under him in person. Instead, they were to form part of the army led by the newly-created Prince of Wales, who, in his first major command was to campaign in western Scotland, while his father led the main force in the east.⁶¹ This may have been a factor in the ultimate refusal of the king's most important Irish subject, the earl of Ulster, to participate in the campaign.⁶² Alternatively, as it is clear that de Burgh was holding out for massive concessions from the crown, he may simply have priced himself out of consideration.⁶³ Within this context, it is worth noting that there also appears to have been a distinct lack of enthusiasm on the parts of magnates from both the Ormond and Desmond regions to serve.⁶⁴ In any event, on May 21, upon the expiration

⁵⁹ *CJR* 1295–1303, p. 362; PRO E. 101/235/2 m. 2.

⁶⁰ PRO E. 101/235/2 mm 1–2; *CDI* 1302–07, no. 151.

⁶¹ Hutchison, *Edward II*, pp 33–5; Prestwich, *Edward I*, p. 493; Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, p. 120; Johnstone, *Edward of Carnarvon*, pp 72–81.

⁶² Lydon, 'Irish levies in the Scottish wars', p. 210.

⁶³ PRO E. 101/235/2 mm 1–2; *CDI* 1293–1301, no. 849; *CDI* 1302–07, no. 151.

⁶⁴ *CDI* 1302–07, no. 18; Lydon, 'Irish levies in the Scottish wars', p. 214.

of a temporary truce with the Scots, the king ordered Wogan to set the expedition in train.⁶⁵ Their initial instructions were to make their way to the isle of Arran by 8 July, after which they were to join forces with the Prince of Wales on the mainland at Newcastle-on-Ayr, and the participants in the expedition entered the king's service on 1 July as arranged.⁶⁶ Thereafter, their embarkation appears to have been held up for a brief period, possibly because of a frustrated last-minute effort to induce de Burgh to change his mind.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the Irish annals assert that 'the principal Galls of Ireland, except the earl of Ulster' had arrived in Scotland by mid-July. However, in a telling commentary upon the relative failure of the king to attract magnates of the first rank to serve, the only *Gaill* who were deemed worthy of individual mention were the midlands duo of 'Mac Gearailt' and 'Mac Feorais'.⁶⁸

Militarily, the expedition which began July 1301 and petered out the following January, was an expensive failure, chiefly because of the Scots' refusal, under the command of the Guardian John de Coulis, to engage the invading armies in pitched battle, preferring instead to use harrying tactics.⁶⁹ When summing up the overall impact of the campaign, *The Annals of Connacht* commented succinctly that 'they could not conquer it [Scotland] fully'.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, as far as John fitzThomas was concerned, the experience of overseas service again proved to be highly rewarding. Within that context, the surviving administrative records pertaining to the campaign and its aftermath are worth examining in some depth for two reasons. First, like the corresponding documentation relating to the expedition of 1296, they contain much detailed evidence about the Irish army's organisation and composition, which in turn provides an opportunity to compare the size of fitzThomas's military establishment

⁶⁵ CDI 1293–1301, no. 810.

⁶⁶ PRO E. 101/235/2 m. 2; CDI 1293–1301, no. 849.

⁶⁷ Lydon, 'Irish levies in the Scottish wars', pp 211–2.

⁶⁸ AU, *AnnClon.*, AC, s.a. 1301.

⁶⁹ Johnstone, *Edward of Carnarvon*, p. 79; Hutchison, *Edward II*, pp 345; Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, pp 120–1; Prestwich, *Edward I*, pp 493–4.

⁷⁰ AC, s.a. 1301.

with those possessed by his fellow-participants like Piers de Bermingham, John de Boneville or Maurice de Rochford. Secondly, the customary *tranche* of petitions lodged by fitzThomas once the campaign had ended provides a good overview of the domestic objectives and concerns which pre-occupied him at that particular point in time.

The main sources of information for the Irish contribution to the campaign are the accounts prepared by John fitzThomas's former employee John de Hothum, who had been appointed as the expedition's paymaster.⁷¹ For instance, they confirm that the Irish did indeed join the prince of Wales at Newcastle-on-Ayr and that they went on to serve in Galloway, where they saw some action, although apparently without serious casualties.⁷² More importantly, they show that the Irish contingent's participation in the campaign can be divided into two phases. The first phase covers the pre-arranged service of 100 days, which lasted from 1 July to 8 October. During this time, when they served under the prince of Wales, the contingent's numerical strength was at its peak, consisting of more than 2200 men.⁷³ For accounting purposes, the Irish were grouped around ten leaders, of whom fitzThomas was one. At first glance, by far the biggest section of the army was led by John Wogan, who was responsible for 115 men-at-arms, 146 hobelars and 748 foot.⁷⁴ By way of contrast, fitzThomas's group was considerably smaller, numbering 51 men-at-arms, 61 hobelars and 360 foot.⁷⁵ However, this apparent domination of the force by the justiciar is somewhat misleading, as the troops brought by Maurice de Rochford, John de Boneville and several other magnates were included in Wogan's group.⁷⁶ In fact, if the total tonnage of the ships used to transport Wogan's core following is compared with the equivalent figure for fitzThomas's ships, the result suggests that

⁷¹ PRO E. 101/10/1 mm 1-3; BL Add. Ms. 7966A ff 101, 103v; *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 12-13.

⁷² PRO E. 101/10/1 m.2; BL Add. Ms. 7966A f. 101.

⁷³ Lydon, 'Irish levies in the Scottish wars', pp 212-3.

⁷⁴ Lydon, 'Irish levies in the Scottish wars', p. 214.

⁷⁵ PRO E. 101/10/1 m.2.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

the two men brought contingents of similar size.⁷⁷ A better indication of the relative size of fitzThomas's contribution to the expedition is that his group was considerably larger than those furnished by either Piers de Bermingham or Eustace le Poer, who brought 21 men-at-arms, 44 hobelars and 140 foot, and 23 men-at-arms, 30 hobelars and 56 foot respectively.⁷⁸

Further analysis of the accounts referring to fitzThomas shows that his agreement with Wogan and his associates was honoured.⁷⁹ Thus, the accounts acknowledge that his conditions of service included the ultimate payment of the £150 which had been awarded to him out of the royal service in order to rebuild Rathangan. Similarly, he was in fact paid his advance of £250 by de Hothum before they left for Scotland. Furthermore, the accounts confirm that he had been granted the right to compensation for horses lost in the campaign, as the deaths of five of his contingent's war-horses, with a collective value of £50 6s 8d, was recorded. More importantly perhaps, fitzThomas's desire to be released of his debts at the Dublin exchequer, which came to £450, was fulfilled. Interestingly, he brought a greater number of troops with him than was necessary to clear his debts. Thus, while 40 men-at-arms, 40 hobelars and 240 foot from his contingent served for 100 days without pay for the remission of his debts, a further 10 squires, 20 hobelars and 18 foot were in receipt of wages, which came to £115 16s 8d. The other troops in his force were brought to Scotland by another four individuals in order to clear their obligations to the exchequer. Thus, Robert fitzReginald de Caunteton served on his own with a harnessed horse, Maurice de Caunteton brought 40 foot, one Thomas Orian brought one hobelar and two foot, while 'Dovenald Routh Maccarthi' brought 60 foot. Interestingly, this is not the only recorded connection between fitzThomas and Maurice de Caunteton, who later led a serious rebellion against the justiciar.⁸⁰ A fragmentary record reveals that in

⁷⁷ Lydon, 'Irish levies in the Scottish wars', pp 215–6.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p 214.

⁷⁹ PRO E.101/10/1 m.2; E. 101/235/2 m. 2; BL Add. Ms. 7966A f. 101. Unless otherwise stated, the information contained in the following paragraph is drawn from these sources.

⁸⁰ For de Caunteton's rebellion, see *N.H.I.*, ii, pp 263, 279–80; *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p. 338; *Clyn*, p. 11.

December 1307, fitzThomas undertook to pay £10 for de Caunteton.⁸¹ Unfortunately, it has not been possible to establish the political importance of the two Gaelic Irishmen. For example, the only Domnall Ruad Mac Carthaig to be noticed in *The Annals of Inisfallen* or *Mac Carthaigh's Book* during the two decades bracketing 1301 was the aged king of Desmond who died in February of that year.⁸² Possibly, he may be the same Douenald Roth who held lands in the Desmond manor of Killorglin, county Kerry.⁸³ Nevertheless, the presence of O'Ryan and MacCarthy in John's command serves to underline the fact that fitzThomas's military establishment was ethnically mixed. Within that context, it is regrettable that the pay accounts do not identify any of the individuals who served in Scotland on fitzThomas's behalf. However, two men with connections to fitzThomas, namely his clerk Nicholas de Sandford and Albert de Kenleye, the future sheriff of Kildare were subsequently rewarded for their good service during the campaign.⁸⁴ Hence it is likely that they had accompanied the lord of Offaly on this occasion. Moreover, the social composition of his men-at-arms was recorded. John himself served as a banneret, two others were knights, while the remaining 49 men-at-arms were classified as esquires.⁸⁵ Interestingly, these figures demonstrate that fitzThomas brought a larger force to Scotland with him on this occasion than he had in 1296, when he initially went on the government's payroll with a cavalry component which consisted of himself, two knights, 15 squires and 25 hobelars.⁸⁶ On balance, it seems reasonable to assume that this increase was made possible by the combined effects of the resolution of his feud with Richard de Burgh, and the temporary quiescence of the Irish of Offaly between 1299 and late 1302.⁸⁷

In any event, when the 100 days of agreed service expired on 8 October, the campaign entered its second phase, when the bulk

⁸¹ NAI EX 2/2, p. 253.

⁸² *AI* s. a. 1285–1311; *MIA*, pp 105–07.

⁸³ *DKPRI* 38, p. 97.

⁸⁴ *CDI* 1302–07, nos. 24, 33.

⁸⁵ PRO E. 101/6/5.

⁸⁶ PRO E. 101/5/26 m. 2.

⁸⁷ See Chapter 4 above, pp 105–107.

of the Irish troops, apparently including Piers de Bermingham, returned home.⁸⁸ On the next day, it is recorded that a total of 22 esquires on armoured horses, 8 esquires on unarmoured horses, 41 hobelars and 342 foot from fitzThomas's following left Carlisle for Ireland. The fact that they had to wait at Skinburness for a fortnight before being shipped home added a further £78 15s to the crown's obligations to fitzThomas, while the cost of their passage came to another £29 19s 2d.⁸⁹ Presumably, this segment of fitzThomas's contingent participated in the looting of the royal storehouses which took place while the Irish were delayed at Skinburness.⁹⁰ Thereafter, references to the remnants of the Irish army, who had travelled to the king's winter quarters at Linlithgow by 14 November become more sparse.⁹¹ However, it is certain that John fitzThomas not only served with the king, but remained in his presence for an extended period afterwards. For example, at some stage before 18 December, John took the opportunity to air his complaints to the king about the manner in which the proposed exchange of land between himself and the earl of Ulster had been handled.⁹² Furthermore, a document which was drawn up after the end of campaign reveals that fitzThomas and his greatly reduced following had earned a further £156 16s 8d in wages, expenses and restoration of horses while serving in the king's army.⁹³

Throughout the spring of 1302, the frequency with which fitzThomas's name appears in administrative documents shows that he was in close proximity to, and contact with, his king. In fact, John remained in Britain at least until late April 1302.⁹⁴ He appears to have travelled southwards with Edward during February and March, through

⁸⁸ Lydon, 'Irish levies in the Scottish wars', p. 212. In de Bermingham's case, his name did not appear in a memorandum outlining the debts owed to the Irish who later served with the king (PRO C. 47/3/52 no. 12), and he did not secure any concessions from Edward in February 1302.

⁸⁹ PRO E. 101/10/1 m.2; BL Add. Ms. 7966A f. 101.

⁹⁰ Lydon, 'Irish levies in the Scottish wars', p. 12.

⁹¹ Johnstone, *Edward of Carnarvon*, pp 80–1.

⁹² PRO SC 8/200/9969; CDI 1293–1301, nos. 835, 843.

⁹³ PRO C. 47/3/52 no. 12.

⁹⁴ CCR 1296–1302, p. 580.

Roxburgh, Morpeth, Newcastle-on-Tyne and York.⁹⁵ At the end of March, he parted company with the king temporarily, to meet Christiana de Marisco the de Ridelsford heiress at Windsor, in order to explore the possibility that she might have a claim to the ownership of several Geraldine properties currently in the hands of Agnes de Valence.⁹⁶ However, by April 24, he had rejoined the court at Devizes in Wiltshire.⁹⁷ He appears to have set out for Ireland a short time later, and had arrived home by June 1302.⁹⁸ While in the presence of King Edward, John, like the other magnates who had remained in Britain such as Eustace le Poer, devoted himself to an enthusiastic pursuit of a wide variety of his own business interests. He was most immediately concerned with the large arrears which the crown owed to him because of his most recent military service. After the close of the campaign, John was owed a sum of £198 11s 6d from his period of service with the prince of Wales, and the sum of £156 16s 8d from his time in the company of the king.⁹⁹ As it happened, fitzThomas's efforts to recoup the money appear to have been highly successful. Thus, on 17 February, John de Hothum paid fitzThomas 10 marks towards the first debt, which reduced the arrears to £191 18s 2d.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, two separate copies of the Issue Rolls of the Irish exchequer for Trinity term 1302 confirm that this sum was paid to him at that time. To be specific, they record, under the heading *Gwerra Scocie*, the payment to John fitzThomas of

C. IIII^{xx}. XI li xviiiij. s ij. d qui aretro sunt pro vadiis suis & restauro equorum suorum & passagio hominum et equorum suorum de Scocia in Hiberniam de tempore quo fuit cum Edwardo principe Gallie in ultima guerra domini Regem in Scociam prout patet per compotum Johannis de Hothum ...¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ PRO C. 47/3/52 no. 12; E. 404/481/7 no. 29; CPR 1301–07, p. 21; CCR 1296–1302, pp 516–7, 519; *Itinerary of Edward I*, ii, pp 185–90.

⁹⁶ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 59.

⁹⁷ CDI 1302–07, no. 65; CCR 1296–1302, p. 580; *Itinerary of Edward I*, ii, p. 190.

⁹⁸ *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 42, 190.

⁹⁹ PRO E. 101/10/1 m. 2; C. 47/3/52 no. 12.

¹⁰⁰ PRO E. 101/10/1 m. 2.

¹⁰¹ PRO E. 101/233/17 m. 12; *Ir. Rec. Comm. Reps.* 1810–15, pp 172–3.

In addition, John also recovered most of the £156 16s 8d which was owed to him after his service in the king's army. An undated document specifying the crown's obligations to the campaign's Irish participants reveals that John received 160 marks 3s 4d from the Wardrobe towards this debt, leaving an outstanding balance of £50.¹⁰² However, although a writ of *liberate* authorising the Irish treasurer to pay fitzThomas that amount was issued at Roxburgh on February 18 1302, for reasons which are unclear, he does not appear to have received this payment.¹⁰³ Interestingly, similar writs issued on the same day in favour of individuals like Thomas de Mandeville and John de Hothum were honoured in Trinity term 1302.¹⁰⁴ In any event, this apparent failure was more than offset by John fitzThomas's success in attracting other modes of royal patronage to further his domestic interests.

On a general level, the English rolls of chancery reveal that during the month of February 1302, King Edward conceded a flurry of grants and privileges to those men of Ireland who had remained in his company through the winter.¹⁰⁵ There are at least two ways of viewing the king's motives for dispensing such patronage. First, it should be acknowledged that like any medieval monarch, it was generally perceived that Edward had a duty to reward faithful service. Nevertheless, the main reason for his generosity appears to have been his desire to continue the exploitation of the resources of the lordship of Ireland in his struggle against the Scots. By February 1302 Edward was already planning yet another campaign in Scotland, in which he intended to employ Irish troops. However, his excessive demands for money and supplies from Ireland over the previous five years had put the resources of the Dublin exchequer under serious strain.¹⁰⁶ In fact, this problem had already led to the situation whereby the king's Irish lieges experienced some difficulties in having the

¹⁰² PRO C. 47/3/52 no. 12.

¹⁰³ CDI 1302-07, no. 23.

¹⁰⁴ PRO E. 101/233/17 m. 12.

¹⁰⁵ See CDI 1302-07, nos. 6-24, 28-38, 43-5.

¹⁰⁶ *Parl. Writs*, i, p. 363; Lydon, 'Irish levies in the Scottish wars', pp 213-4; *N.H.I.*, ii, pp 199-201.

promises of wages and compensation made to them fully honoured.¹⁰⁷ Hence, in February 1302, it became expedient for Edward to mount an extravagant demonstration of the advantages which overseas service could bring to an Irish magnate. In any event, he bestowed a wide variety of favours, both judicial and financial, to a set of individuals of diverse social backgrounds. For example, on 15 February, those who had been staying in Scotland in the king's service were pardoned 'for certain felonies and other trespasses committed against his peace before 17 February in the present year', and two Gaelic Irishmen were granted permission 'to use English laws in Ireland'.¹⁰⁸ More prominent individuals received more financially lucrative rewards. Thus, on the same day Thomas de St. John was given the use of 'the king's pools and fishery of Limerick', while three days later, Albert de Kenleye was granted the custody of Kildare castle.¹⁰⁹ In a similar vein, magnates like Eustace le Poer and Maurice de Rochford were granted the privilege of free warren, or hunting rights in their demesne lands.¹¹⁰ For his part, John fitzThomas also benefited greatly from King Edward's *largesse*.

In fact, during the month of February 1302, John fitzThomas secured no less than five separate concessions from his king. In the first instance, on 9 February, like Eustace le Poer and Maurice de Rochford, John was granted free warren in his demesne lands.¹¹¹ Obviously, this grant provides a useful indication of the extent of fitzThomas's landed interests at that point, and consequently deserves to be examined at some length. Not surprisingly, the core Geraldine manors of Maynooth, Rathangan and Lea were included, as was John's recently purchased property of Morett. However, no mention was made of any estates in Connacht, thus confirming that by early 1302, fitzThomas had withdrawn from that province. In fact, of the vast estates which John had acquired from his cousin Amabilia daughter of Maurice fitzMaurice, only

¹⁰⁷ PRO E.101/10/1 m. 2; C. 47/3/52 nos. 11–2.

¹⁰⁸ CCR 1296–1302, p. 515; CDI 1302–07, nos. 11–12.

¹⁰⁹ CDI 1302–07, nos. 15, 24.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, nos. 6, 19.

¹¹¹ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 35; *Cal. Chart. Rolls 1300–26*, p. 24; CDI 1302–07, no. 7.

the manor of Corcomohide in county Limerick was named in the charter. However, the Geraldine manors held by Agnes de Valence, namely Geashill and Rathmore in county Kildare, and Adare, Croom, Athlacca, Uregare and Grean in county Limerick were mentioned. Interestingly, the grant was witnessed by Aymer de Valence, Agnes's younger brother. This particular detail suggests that after coming to an agreement with Agnes's father William in 1295, John fitzThomas was regarded as the legitimate heir to the properties by the de Valence family.¹¹² However, the fact that no mention was made of John de Cogan's claims to the inheritance indicates that fitzThomas was already willing to renege on the equitable division of the estates with the Munster magnate to which he had agreed in 1297.¹¹³

In addition to these lands, fitzThomas was granted free warren in three properties which had not previously been associated with the Geraldines of Offaly, namely Corbaly and Coltagh in Kildare, and Ballyfugnon in county Carlow. In all probability, the appearance of new estates in Kildare reflects fitzThomas's consolidation of his interests in the county following his withdrawal from Connacht. Later evidence from the *Red Book* suggests that these lands were acquired from a branch of the de Rochford family, and according to a sixteenth century survey of the lands of the earl of Kildare, Corbaly at least was still in the family's hands at that point.¹¹⁴ However, it is more difficult to establish the reason for the inclusion of Ballyfugnon in the charter of free warren. The property, which was called 'Ballyignon' in the original charter enrolment, is not mentioned elsewhere in the *Red Book*. Moreover, in the sixteenth century, it was included in neither *The Kildare Rental* nor in the survey of the earl of Kildare's lands.¹¹⁵ Possibly, Ballyfugnon's presence in the charter of free warren can be explained by referring to the land exchange scheme which fitzThomas entered into with Richard de Burgh in 1298. Certainly, the placename 'Ballyfugnon' bears some resemblance to that of 'Ballydunegan' or Dunganstown in county Carlow, a property belonging to the earl of Ulster

¹¹² *Rotuli parl.*, i, p. 130b; *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 136.

¹¹³ *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 45–7.

¹¹⁴ *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 138, 184–7; MacNiocaill, *Crown surveys of lands 1540–41*, pp 163, 285.

¹¹⁵ MacNiocaill, *Crown Surveys of lands 1540–41*, pp 175–6, 307.

which had been earmarked for transfer to fitzThomas in 1299.¹¹⁶ If Ballyfugnon can be identified with Ballydunegan, one possible scenario suggests itself. Although it is clear that, as far as John fitzThomas was concerned, the land exchange scheme did not work out as originally intended, he did succeed in persuading the king to order an investigation into the implementation of the scheme.¹¹⁷ Consequently, it is extremely likely that in the Spring of 1302, fitzThomas still hoped to extract some tangible benefits in return for surrendering his Connacht lands and claims. Within that context, the naming of Ballyfugnon in the charter possibly indicates that he expected to acquire this property at least. However, if this was in fact the case, John's hopes were groundless, as Dunganstown was definitely still in the de Burgh family's hands in 1333.¹¹⁸

By their nature, grants of free warren, being tokens of royal approval, were mainly of symbolic importance.¹¹⁹ However, the next concession to fitzThomas had a distinctly practical significance, and is a good example of the kind of horsetrading conducted between king and magnate in the aftermath of a campaign. Fortunately, the petition from fitzThomas which forms the basis of the concession has survived.¹²⁰ Essentially, John's objective was to resolve two separate issues which were of concern to him by linking them together. First of all, he reminded the king of the debts owed to him for military service performed in Flanders and Ireland. In what is the only reference to fitzThomas being left out of pocket after his service in Flanders, he claimed that 400 marks were due to him from that campaign. The Irish military service referred to was the campaign which John undertook on behalf of Stephen de Fulbourne in 1288, for which he said he was owed £521.¹²¹ In fact, fitzThomas had already raised this particular debt with Edward in April 1298, in a petition which led the king to order John Wogan to investigate the facts of the matter, but nothing

¹¹⁶ *CJR* 1295–1303, p. 236; Brooks, *Knights' Fees*, p. 25.

¹¹⁷ *PRO SC* 8/200/9969; *CDI* 1293–1301, no. 843.

¹¹⁸ *Cal. Inq. P.M.*, vii, p. 372.

¹¹⁹ On the importance of hunting, see D. Crouch, *The image of aristocracy*, pp 305–10.

¹²⁰ *PRO SC* 8/111/5532.

¹²¹ See Chapter 2, pp 39–40.

appears to have been done.¹²² Secondly, fitzThomas petitioned to have the terms by which he held the custody of the lands of his deceased Desmond Geraldine kinsman Thomas fitzMaurice altered. Initially, King Edward granted this custody to fitzThomas in September 1298, in return for an annual payment to the Dublin exchequer of £100.¹²³ However, in July 1300, the king reduced the custody's value to John by granting another £100 *per annum* out of the Desmond estates' issues to Gerard de Orum, a member of his own household.¹²⁴ Hence, in 1302 John fitzThomas asked to be given custody of 100 librates of land without paying anything to the crown, or else to have his annual rent of £100 scrapped. The king first responded to the petition on 17 February, the same day on which John de Hothum presented his campaign accounts which revealed his inability to pay the Irish magnates fully to the Wardrobe.¹²⁵ Edward proposed to redress fitzThomas's grievances by waiving the lord of Offaly's obligation to pay £100 *per annum* to the exchequer for the Desmond custody. However, John was not permitted to take advantage of the new custody terms until such time as he acquitted 'the king of all the debts due to him for his costs and expenses incurred by him in the king's service in Ireland and Flanders'. From the perspective of both parties, this solution was reasonably equitable. Thomas fitzMaurice's eldest son and heir, also named Thomas, was approximately twelve years of age in 1302, which meant that the king was writing off £900 in anticipated revenue, while by his own estimate, fitzThomas was owed £787 13s 4d by the crown.¹²⁶ This particular concession has a wider significance, in that it provides another example of the manner in which the king's widespread military obligations were having a detrimental effect upon the financial resources available to the Irish lordship's administration. Nevertheless, it also underlines the point that as far as magnates like fitzThomas were concerned, the king's spendthrift policies could actually work to their benefit.

¹²² CDI 1293–1301, no. 518.

¹²³ CJR, 1295–1303, pp 230–1; DKPRI 38, pp 40–1.

¹²⁴ CPR 1292–1301, p. 524; PRO SC 1/26/20.

¹²⁵ CCR 1296–1302, p. 516; PRO E. 101/10/1 m.2.

¹²⁶ PRO SC 8/111/5532; CDI 1293–1301, no. 727.

In any event, six days later, the terms of the concession were reiterated without reference to John fitzThomas's obligations to Gerard de Orum.¹²⁷ However, this omission is not as significant as it might appear, as later evidence makes it clear that de Orum retained his interest in the Desmond properties.¹²⁸ On the other hand, the date of the grant's repetition, 23 February, is highly significant. That day, King Edward wrote to the magnates of Ireland, informing them that he intended to mount another campaign against the Scots and would have need of their assistance.¹²⁹ Again, the king's high opinion of fitzThomas's military capabilities is reflected by the fact that his name appears second in the list of Irish magnates, after that of the earl of Ulster. For his part, fitzThomas's eagerness to exploit the king's goodwill is highlighted by the fact that on the same day, he secured a further two concessions from Edward. The first of these had been agreed with Wogan and his associates before setting out for Scotland in 1301 and took the form of a renewed directive to the justiciar to deliver to fitzThomas the balance of the money owed to him for the construction of his fortress at Rathangan.¹³⁰ On the other hand, the second concession was new. For the first and last time in his dealings with John fitzThomas, King Edward decided to reward him with a grant of land. Specifically, John Wogan was ordered to provide fitzThomas with 60 librates of land from the crown estates in Ireland as quickly as possible, where 'it can be done to the least damage of the king, and to the greatest advantage of John'.¹³¹ Undoubtedly as far as fitzThomas was concerned, securing an act of royal patronage of this magnitude constituted a considerable achievement. As a point of comparison, it is worth recalling that the value of this grant was worth half that of the estates which were taken away from John in 1298, as a punishment for imprisoning the earl of Ulster and plunging all Ireland into 'a state of disturbance'.¹³²

¹²⁷ CCR 1296–1302, p. 517; CDI 1302–07, no. 38.

¹²⁸ For example, see CJR 1305–07, pp 290–1.

¹²⁹ *Parl. Writs*, i, p. 363; CDI 1302–07, nos. 46–7.

¹³⁰ PRO E. 101/235/2 m. 2; CDI 1302–07, no. 48; CCR 1296–1302, p. 519.

¹³¹ CCR 1296–1302; p. 519; CDI 1302–07, p. 519.

¹³² CJR 195–1303, pp 234–6.

On the next day, the flow of royal patronage in fitzThomas's direction came to halt, after one major final concession was made to him. John Wogan was mandated, when the opportunity arose, to present Thomas, second son of John fitzThomas, to an ecclesiastical benefice worth the considerable sum of £100 *per annum*, in consideration of the lord of Offaly's service in Scotland.¹³³ This concession is noteworthy on two counts. First, the size of the proposed presentation shows the extent to which fitzThomas enjoyed the king's favour. Secondly, it sheds light upon fitzThomas's familial interests. With the exception of the abortive marriage alliance extracted from him in 1298 as part of the peace agreement with Richard de Burgh, this grant is the first recorded occasion in which John can be seen making provisions for his children's future. In fact, Thomas is the only one of fitzThomas's children about whom any details concerning his childhood and education are forthcoming. A court case held in 1306 reveals that Thomas had been fostered with master Robert Walrand, who was consecrated bishop of Ferns in April 1305.¹³⁴ Interestingly, it appears as though fitzThomas met Walrand's expenses as a tutor through the expedient of presenting young Thomas to the rectory of Maynooth, which was in his gift. In any event, when taken together, the clerical education and the award of a benefice confirm that originally, the future second earl of Kildare was destined for a career in the church. Hence, it seems reasonable to assume that in the early fourteenth century, at least one of the lordship's great magnates was a highly educated man.

Although John fitzThomas was in close proximity to Edward in late April 1302, the proposed presentation of Thomas fitzJohn to a benefice marks the last recorded point of contact between the lord of Offaly and his king during the spring of 1302.¹³⁵ On 5 March, two clerks were appointed as attorneys in England for 'John son of Thomas going to Ireland', and by June 1302 he had returned home.¹³⁶ As the 1301 campaign had been an outstanding success from fitzThomas's point of view, it is likely that upon his arrival home, he was already eagerly anticipating the forthcoming

¹³³ CPR 1301-07, p. 21; CDI 1302-07, no. 51.

¹³⁴ CJR 1305-07, pp 252-3; H.B.C., p. 355.

¹³⁵ CCR 1296-1302, p. 580; *Itinerary of Edward I*, ii, p. 190.

¹³⁶ CPR 1301-07, p. 21; *Red Bk Kildare*, nos. 42, 190.

campaign to Scotland and its attendant opportunities for securing further royal patronage. However, it appears as though renewed tensions in the Kildare marches played a major part in frustrating his wish to participate in the expedition, which finally left Ireland in the summer of 1303. Warning signs of a deteriorating situation began to appear from September 1302 onwards. For example, at some point between September 1302 and October 1304, the community of Kildare reiterated a key statute of the 1297 parliament by ordaining that 'persons having land in the marches should keep guard with horses in full harness'.¹³⁷ Moreover, the sequence of events immediately before the expedition's departure points to trouble in the marches. For example, it seems as though John fitzThomas still intended to travel as late as June 4 1303, when he resigned his office as *custos* of the peace in county Kerry in favour of Maurice fitzThomas, on the grounds that he was going to the war in Scotland.¹³⁸ However, three weeks later his name did not appear amongst the list of magnates who received letters of protection before setting sail.¹³⁹ Significantly, John's son-in-law Edmund Butler was also suddenly ordered to stay at home, despite having brought his contingent to Dublin.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, the balance of probability suggests that Piers de Bermingham was also left behind at the last minute, while the justiciar John Wogan certainly remained in Ireland on this occasion.¹⁴¹ Admittedly, it is likely that fitzThomas's entanglement in an important lawsuit with his cousin John de Cogan also played a part in his decision not to go abroad.¹⁴² Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to suggest that the magnates' failure to go overseas was at least partially caused by their realisation that the Irish of the midlands would avail of the opportunity to take advantage of their absence. Ironically, on this occasion, King Edward, with 'the Earl and many Gaels and Gall ... conquered Scotland', however

¹³⁷ DKPRI 38 (Pipe Roll *a. r.* 32 Ed. I), p. 88; *Stat. Ire. John – Henry V*, p. 201.

¹³⁸ *Rot. pat. Hib.*, p. 5 no. 20.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5 no. 21.

¹⁴⁰ CCR 1302–07, p. 122.

¹⁴¹ Lydon, 'Edward, Ireland and Scotland', pp 47, 56–7.

¹⁴² *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 105; Chapter 4, pp 123–4.

temporarily.¹⁴³ More importantly, as events transpired, the failure of two Scottish expeditions proposed by Edward II in 1309 and 1314 to come to fruition meant that fitzThomas never had the opportunity to serve his king overseas again.¹⁴⁴ Almost by default, one of the most important elements in fitzThomas's career had drawn to a close.

In any event, there is little doubt but that fitzThomas was concerned with the security of his lands in the summer of 1303. For example, in July 1303 he granted his recently-acquired manor and castle of Morett to one 'Nigellus Omorth' in exchange for 40s rent *per annum* and an undertaking on Nigellus's part to assist fitzThomas against all men.¹⁴⁵ At first glance the fact that John was entrusting a march castle to an individual who was obviously Irish appears unusual, not to say foolhardy. However, it should be remembered that details about the nationality of the personnel who manned his other fortresses such as Lea and Rathangan are not available. Within this context, it might be worth noting that there is some evidence to suggest that Roger Mortimer, the nominal lord of Laois had also decided to make use of the native aristocracy. In a treatise explaining the decay of the original conquest of Ireland, the sixteenth-century writer Patrick Finglas claimed that in an effort to maximise the revenues accruing from Laois, 'he that had Donnamause in Leix retained an Irishman, one of the Moores to be his Captaine of Warr in Leix, in defence agenst Irishmen upon that Borders'.¹⁴⁶ In the case of Morett, it should be noted that the name 'Nigellus' or indeed anything resembling it, does not appear amongst the lists of O'More felons who were indicted by the eyre of Kildare.¹⁴⁷ Hence, it seems reasonable to conjecture that in this case, fitzThomas was attempting to employ a 'divide-and-rule' strategy by making use of a member of an O'More family segment which had retained, or adopted an amenable stance towards the colonists.

¹⁴³ AC s.a. 1303.

¹⁴⁴ *Parl. Writs*, ii, div. 2, pp 392–3, 400, 423–4; *Rot. pat. Hib.*, p. 13.

¹⁴⁵ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 76.

¹⁴⁶ Patrick Finglas, 'A Breviat of the getting of Ireland', p. 40.

¹⁴⁷ For example, see *CJR 1295–1303*, pp 168, 193.

Apart from obvious signs of trouble like fitzThomas's failure to campaign in Scotland, other evidence suggests that conditions in both western Kildare and indeed throughout the entire midlands had become highly tense. By the end of 1303, the Irish of the Sliabh Blooms, led by the MacGillaPatrick dynasty, were definitely posing a security threat to the colonists. Thus, in the winter of 1303–4, John Wogan led an expedition into the marches of 'Slefblame to suppress the Irish there'. Significantly, at the same time the sheriff of Kildare was directed to maintain a small military force 'to resist the Irish felons in the parts of Offalie' in order to prevent them from taking advantage of the justiciar's preoccupation with their neighbours to the south.¹⁴⁸ In a further development, one record suggests that Piers de Bermingham may have been acting as a '*custos* of the peace in Offalye' as early as June 1303. Regrettably, it is not possible to establish exactly when he held this office, as the evidence merely refers to an unspecified period between June 1303 and October 1305.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, another source explicitly states that open conflict had broken out in Offaly by the winter of 1304–5. On 13 October 1304, Albert de Kenleye, the sheriff of Kildare, made a return to the effect that he had recently seized 24 crannocks of corn from John fitzThomas's manor of Rathangan for non-payment of a debt.¹⁵⁰ But on 22 March 1305, he reported that John had taken back the corn and 'expended it about the war in Offaly and the construction of the castle of Gesyl'.¹⁵¹ By implication, fitzThomas had seen action in Offaly in the intervening period. Furthermore, the need to construct a castle at Geashill, which is in the north of Offaly, suggests that John was fighting against the O'Connor Faly dynasty.¹⁵² Admittedly, the circumstances under which the sheriff of Kildare made his returns tend to cast the truthfulness of his account into some doubt. For in January 1306, the sheriff was forced to

¹⁴⁸ DKPRI 38 (Pipe Roll *a. r.* 33 Ed. I), p. 101; CJR 1305–07, p. 242.

¹⁴⁹ DKPRI 38 (Pipe Roll *a. r.* 33 Ed. I), p. 99. The entry actually refers to 'James de Bermengham'. However, the original account in question was mutilated and difficult to read. Therefore, as Frame has observed, it is much more likely that the payment was to '[Peter] son of James de Bermengham'. (Frame, 'The Dublin Government', p. 131.)

¹⁵⁰ CJR 1305–07, p. 210.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp 6–8, 210.

¹⁵² Smyth, *Celtic Leinster*, map on frontispiece.

admit that 'for fear of John fitzThomas' he had made false returns, and that in fact, he had never seized the corn in the first place.¹⁵³ However, the court's initial acceptance of his reference to 'the war in Offaly' leaves little room for doubt that by the spring of 1305, some form of conflict involving the O'Connor Falys had in fact taken place. This viewpoint is supported by the actions of fitzThomas's associate Walter L'Enfaunt in March 1305. At that time, Walter acknowledged in court that he owed one Matthew de Millebourne the sum of £40. Significantly, he agreed to pay the debt 'as soon as Matthew shall have brought to Walter the head of Mlaghlyn Okoneghur a felon'.¹⁵⁴

At this point, it might be worthwhile to comment upon the more noteworthy features of the defence of the Kildare marches between 1297 and early 1305. In the first instance, the administration devolved the bulk of the region's peacekeeping duties to fitzThomas and de Bermingham.¹⁵⁵ Secondly, the weight of evidence suggests that despite their vigorous efforts to maintain control by garrisoning their fortresses and mounting expeditions against their Irish neighbours, the initiative to recommence hostilities usually rested with the latter group. As against this, it should be noted that initially at least, John fitzThomas appears to have remained broadly optimistic about his ability to manage the region successfully. To be specific, the government's stated desire that landowners should contribute to the costs of march defence led several absentees to divest themselves of their properties in the region. Thus, in 1298, two such individuals, namely Emelina de Longespée and Alan de la Zouche, sold their interests in the castle and manor of Morett and the manor of St Fintan to the lord of Offaly.¹⁵⁶ However, the events of the summer of 1305 confirmed that any such optimism on fitzThomas's part was singularly unfounded.

On Trinity Sunday, 13 June 1305, Piers de Bermingham plunged the entire region into crisis by perpetrating one of medieval

¹⁵³ *CJR 1305-07*, pp 210-11.

¹⁵⁴ *CJR 1305-07*, p. 44.

¹⁵⁵ Frame, *The Dublin Government*, p. 122.

¹⁵⁶ *Red Bk Kildare*, 69, 75, 80-2, 84.

Ireland's most notorious crimes. All the sources agree on the essential facts of the matter. On that day, Piers had the leading members of the O'Connor Faly dynasty, along with more than twenty of their followers murdered at his castle in Carbury.¹⁵⁷ The most important casualties were Muirchertach O'Connor Faly *rex de Offaly*, his brother Mael Mórda and An Calbhach O'Connor Faly, the dynasty's leading military figure. An English-language poem adds the names 'Gillaboie' and 'Eth Mac Mal More' to the list of known victims.¹⁵⁸ Although it has not been possible to identify these individuals firmly, some possibilities exist. 'Gillaboie' may have been the same 'Gillaboy' who was a follower of Diarmait O'Dempsey, and who is recorded as having robbed a cart full of victuals belonging to the earl of Ulster during 'the disturbance'.¹⁵⁹ Similarly, 'Eth Mac Mal More' may have been the 'Eth O Conewor', who was deemed to be a common robber and who took part in the robbery of the town and castle of Kildare with John fitzThomas in late 1294.¹⁶⁰ According to the *Dublin Annals*, the killings were actually perpetrated by one Jordan Comyn, which seems plausible, as Comyn can be shown to have been an associate of de Bermingham.¹⁶¹ The Irish sources emphasise Piers's deceit and treachery, and it appears as though the O'Connor Falys had come to Carbury expressly at de Bermingham's invitation, in order to take part in a banquet.¹⁶² The lengthiest description and commentary upon the slaughter was provided by the compiler of the *Annals of Inisfallen*. In his eyes, Piers's behaviour was particularly reprehensible because of his religious ties to An Calbhach's son Maisir, who he noted met his end during the massacre by being flung over the castle's battlements. Moreover, the *Annals of Inisfallen* implicated de Bermingham's wife, the intriguingly-styled *In Gaillsech Shacsanach* in the massacre by accusing her of pointing out the locations of any who attempted

¹⁵⁷ *Clyn*, p. 11; *Chart. St Marys'*, ii. p. 332; *AI*, s.a. 1305.

¹⁵⁸ Heuser, *Die Kildare-Gedichte*, p. 164; Seymour, *Anglo-Irish Literature 1200-1582* p. 85. In the original manuscript, the latter name was rendered as 'e[th]em^cmalmore'.

¹⁵⁹ *CJR* 1295-1303, pp 188-9.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 189-90.

¹⁶¹ *Chart. St Marys'*, ii. p. 332; *CJR* 1305-07, pp 55, 119, 232.

¹⁶² *Scotichronicon*, vi, p. 395; Curtis and McDowell, *Irish Historical Documents*, p. 42; *AI* s. a. 1305; *AFM* s.a. 1305.

to hide 'so that many were slain by these warnings'. The annalist also supplied Piers's supposed justification for his deed. Allegedly, de Bermingham declared

that he was not aware that there was a foreigner in Ireland who had not undertaken to slay his Irish neighbour, and he knew that they would slay, as he had slain; and that it was no wonder the foreigners harboured that evil resolution concerning them, for they [the Irish] had avenged themselves thoroughly before they were slain.¹⁶³

Not surprisingly, the massacre evoked strikingly different responses from the colonists and the Irish. The colonists' outlook is best exemplified by the English-language poem composed in Piers's honour after his death in April 1308. The poet warmly praised him for his resolution in ridding the community of the O'Connors' felonious presence, and provided him with the famous epitaph celebrating his dealings with Irishmen:—

Euer he rode aboute
With streinth to hunt ham vte
As hunter doth the hare.¹⁶⁴

In sharp contrast, the reaction of the Irish learned classes, for whom the incident became something of a *cause célèbre*, was one of uniform revulsion.¹⁶⁵ Essentially, their criticisms were focused upon de Bermingham's treachery. For example, the *Annals of Inisfallen* explicitly state that the Irish leaders were at the king's peace when they were murdered. Indeed, the annalist was moved to comment bitterly 'and woe to the Gaedéal who puts their trust in a king's peace or in foreigners after that'.¹⁶⁶ In a similar vein, the author of the Remonstrance sent to Pope John XXII by Domhnall O'Neill in 1317 went so far as to allege that de Bermingham was taken to task for his deed before King Edward himself, albeit to no effect.¹⁶⁷ As is well known, the author went on to cite the

¹⁶³ *AI* s. a. 1305.

¹⁶⁴ Heuser, *Die Kildare-Gedichte*, p. 162; Seymour, *Anglo-Irish Literature 1200–1582* pp 82–5.

¹⁶⁵ *AC*, s. a. 1304; *AI*, *AU*, *AClon*, *AFM* s. a. 1305.

¹⁶⁶ *AI* s.a. 1305.

¹⁶⁷ *Scotichronicon*, vi, p. 395; Curtis and McDowell, *Irish Historical Documents*, p. 42.

episode as a prime example of the endemic treachery practised by the 'middle nation' or the English living in Ireland, which had made it impossible for the Irish chieftains to retain their allegiance to the English crown.¹⁶⁸

Admittedly, the author of the Remonstrance was not inclined to understate the enormity of Piers's crime. It might be worth observing that the similar fates suffered by Brian O'Brien and Art and Muirchertach MacMurrough at the instigation of the Englishmen Thomas de Clare and Stephen de Fulbourne respectively, demonstrate that colonial perfidy was not a vice uniquely associated with the 'middle nation'.¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, given their activities over the preceding two decades, there was a great deal of truth to de Bermingham's alleged gibe that his victims had 'avenged themselves thoroughly before they were slain'. Nevertheless, the ruthlessness and suddenness of his action raises obvious questions about his motives, and the degree to which other interested parties, like the administration or John fitzThomas, were implicated in or had foreknowledge of the massacre. Before discussing these issues, the possibility that Piers was acting on his own initiative without premeditation should be acknowledged. Spontaneous homicides arising out of drunken arguments were not unknown in medieval Ireland.¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, given the weight of the circumstantial evidence in general, and the outraged tenor of the Irish sources in particular, it is more likely that the killings had been pre-planned.

One source actually provides an explicit rationale for the murders. The Kildare poem claims that the 'Irishmen of the land' had hatched a plot to murder the earl of Ulster, Edmund Butler, John fitzThomas and de Bermingham himself. It continues by asserting that having learned of the conspiracy, the intended targets swore to forestall the plot by taking pre-emptive action in concert. According to the poet, the

¹⁶⁸ *Scotichronicon*, vi, pp 395–403; Curtis and McDowell, *Irish Historical Documents*, p. 42.

¹⁶⁹ *Scotichronicon*, vi, p. 395. See Nic Ghiollamhaith, 'Dynastic warfare' pp 73–99 and Frame, 'The justiciar and the murder of the MacMurroughs', pp 226–8 for the background to these murders.

¹⁷⁰ For example, see Simms, 'Guesting and feasting in Gaelic Ireland', p. 89; Clyn, p. 29.

others subsequently 'forgot' their oaths, but nevertheless, Piers did not shirk his responsibilities and on the day appointed, fulfilled his side of the grisly bargain.¹⁷¹ If the poem is accurate, then Piers's behaviour was quite justifiable, but it is difficult to judge whether this alleged conspiracy has any factual basis. Admittedly, the verifiable details contained in the poem, such as the actual date upon which the massacre took place are accurate.¹⁷² Nevertheless, the plot is not mentioned by any other source, and the eulogistic nature of the poem greatly increases the chances that its author was attempting to add lustre to his hero's memory by casting the circumstances of his greatest triumph in the most dramatic light possible. Lastly, it should be noted that the simultaneous elimination of four of the island's greatest magnates would have required a degree of unity of purpose and co-ordination that is not usually associated with Irish dynasts. On balance, the poem's account of an Irish conspiracy can be regarded as being somewhat improbable. The same cannot be said about the possibility that the administration was involved in the massacre.

Most obviously, the episode bears a close resemblance to Henry de Pencoyt's assassination of Muircherteach and Art MacMurrough two decades earlier, which, it has been plausibly argued, was the brainchild of the then chief governor, Stephen de Fulbourne.¹⁷³ Moreover, the government's reaction to the slaughter was telling. There is no serious reason to doubt the *Annals of Inisfallen's* contention that the O'Connor Falys were in the king's peace, however temporarily, when they were murdered. Hence, it appears as though Piers was guilty of breaching the statute which specified that the king's lieges should not attack those Irish who were at peace.¹⁷⁴ However, far from incurring official censure for his recklessness, de Bermingham was actually richly rewarded for his conduct. The Remonstrance accused Piers of selling his victim's heads 'dear to their enemies', while the *Annals of Inisfallen* and the Kildare poet both state that

¹⁷¹ Heuser, *Die Kildare-Gedichte*, pp 163-4; Seymour, *Anglo-Irish Literature 1200-1582*, pp 84-5.

¹⁷² Heuser, *Die Kildare-Gedichte*, p. 164; Seymour, *Anglo-Irish Literature 1200-1582*, p. 85.

¹⁷³ Frame, 'The justiciar and the murder of the MacMurroughs', pp 226-8.

¹⁷⁴ *Stat. Ire. John-Henry V*, p. 207.

the heads were sent to Dublin, where 'much wealth was obtained from the foreigners'.¹⁷⁵ The official documentation confirms these allegations. In July 1305, a writ of *liberate* was issued to the Irish treasurer, authorising him to pay £100 to Piers which had been granted to him by the justiciar and council, with the consent of the earl of Ulster and Geoffrey de Geneville. The official reason for awarding the grant to Piers was to enable him to subdue the Irish felons of the *parentela* of Oconoghers, and to decapitate the chiefs of the same race. Significantly however, the writ also noted that Peter had already sent in the heads of Muircherteach and Maol Mórdha, along with 16 others.¹⁷⁶ The issue roll covering the period from Michaelmas 1305 to Trinity 1306 confirms that the payment was made.¹⁷⁷ While the payment's large size strengthens suspicions that the administration was involved, in itself it does not prove the case decisively. Indeed, the apparent lack of a special effort to fortify the marches in advance of the massacre suggests that the government did not have foreknowledge of Piers's intended course of action. Arguably, if the date upon which the administration appointed de Bermingham as *custos* of the marches was known, its culpability in the massacre could be established definitively. To be specific, it is likely that an appointment made prior to the murders would indicate that the government was attempting to provide Piers with a ready-made cloak of legality to throw over his actions. However, concrete evidence establishing either the starting-date or the duration of his term as *custos* is lacking.¹⁷⁸ As a result, it is not possible to gauge the administration's degree of involvement in the massacre beyond noting that, at the very least, John Wogan and the council were guilty of cynical opportunism when they rewarded de Bermingham for his crime.

John fitzThomas is another obvious potential accomplice, being both the region's leading magnate and de Bermingham's indented lord. Regrettably, apart from the testimony of the Kildare poem, he is not directly implicated in the planning or immediate execution of the

¹⁷⁵ Curtis and McDowell, *Irish Historical Documents*, p. 42; *AI* s.a. 1305; Seymour, *Anglo-Irish Literature 1200-1582* p. 85.

¹⁷⁶ PRO E. 101/233/23 no. 30; *CJR* 1305-07, p. 82.

¹⁷⁷ PRO E. 101/234/7 m. 2.

¹⁷⁸ *DKPRI* 38 (Pipe Roll *a. r.* 33 Ed. I), p. 99.

murders. On the contrary, at first glance his absence from the list of magnates who consented to the payment of de Bermingham's blood money appears to signal his disapproval of the massacre.¹⁷⁹ However, this absence is not as significant as it may seem, and is more likely to be a revealing reflection of John Wogan's opinion of fitzThomas's trustworthiness. During his term of office, Wogan rarely sought John's advice, an aloofness which contrasted sharply with his relations with de Burgh and de Geneville.¹⁸⁰ In fact, there is no reason to believe that John had any qualms about Piers's behaviour. Indeed, if one source is to be believed, fitzThomas was inspired by the massacre to take similar action himself. While painting a broad picture of colonial barbarity, the author of the Remonstrance of 1317 indulged in a stinging attack upon fitzThomas's character. For example, he claimed that three days after the death of an unnamed Irish nobleman who had been his 'gossip' or godfather, John had his head cut off in order to sell it.¹⁸¹ More importantly, he alleged that upon learning of An Calbhach's 'execrable death', at de Bermingham's hands, John took the Irish chieftain's son John, who was his godson and namesake, threw him in prison and 'a few days later he had him, innocent as he was, murdered in no innocent way in the same place'.¹⁸² Although this particular accusation, like the annalistic description of Maisir O'Connor Faly's murder is unsupported by other direct evidence, those allegations contained in the Remonstrance which are verifiable are highly accurate.¹⁸³ Moreover, the subsequent pattern of succession to the O'Connor Faly chieftainship lends credence to both accounts. The children were stated to have been the sons of An Calbhach O'Connor Faly, who was the family's most outstanding military

179 PRO E. 101/233/23 no. 30.

180 But see Richardson and Sayles, *The Irish parliament in the middle ages*, p. 28. They believed that fitzThomas's presence on the witness list of a charter concerning a grant to the earl of Norfolk in July 1302 implies that he was serving on the Irish council (BL Add. MS 4790 f. 96). However, this does not seem altogether convincing.

181 *Scotichronicon*, vi, p. 395. While this allegation raises the intriguing possibility that fitzThomas may have been fostered with an Irish chieftain, it should be noted that the word *compatrinus* can mean godfather, gossip or simply companion (R. Latham, *Revised Medieval Latin word-list*, p. 100).

182 *Scotichronicon*, vi, p. 395; Curtis and McDowell, *Irish Historical Documents*, pp 42–3.

183 See *Scotichronicon*, vi, pp xxi–xxiv for a discussion of the Remonstrance's authorship and reliability.

leader, and in the normal course of events, his offspring would be obvious candidates for the chieftainship. Yet, insofar as the sources can tell, the descendants of Muircherteach, the *rex de Offaly* retained control of the dynasty's leadership without facing a challenge from An Calbhach's descendants.¹⁸⁴ It may well have been the case that after their father's murder, Maisir and John had literally outlived their usefulness in the eyes of their guardians. However, even if this were true, fitzThomas's culpability in the massacre itself, like that of the administration, remains unproven. Indeed it may be significant that less than a fortnight after the massacre, John was in Trim, carrying out the mundane task of witnessing a charter on behalf of the earl of Ulster, rather than, as might be expected, fortifying the marches.¹⁸⁵ Taking all the evidence together, it seems safest to conclude that while there are strong grounds for suggesting that de Bermingham was not acting alone, it is not possible to implicate any of his more likely accomplices satisfactorily.

On another level, the fact of the massacre certainly appears to undermine the theory that the racial attitudes of the march lords differed significantly from those prevailing amongst the wider colonial community. Arguably, the incident and its alleged aftermath offer a chilling insight into the real cultural and racial beliefs held by de Bermingham and by his fellow marcher, neighbour and indented lord, John fitzThomas. The racial hostility evinced by the Kildare poet confirms that the anti-Irish sentiments expressed in the 'cultural' statutes of the 1297 parliament were widespread amongst the colonists in general.¹⁸⁶ If the brutal and contemptuous attitude attributed to Piers in the *Annals of Inisfallen*, and the murder by fitzThomas of An Calbhach's son John are accurate, it follows that for all the closeness of their ties to the Irish aristocrats, at heart the march lords shared the same feelings of racial animosity as the other colonists.¹⁸⁷ However, it may be unwise to explain away the massacre

¹⁸⁴ Pender, *O'Clery genealogies*, p. 131.

¹⁸⁵ *Cal. Gormanston Reg.*, p. 149.

¹⁸⁶ Seymour, *Anglo-Irish Literature 1200-1582* pp 82-5; *Stat. Ire. John - Hen. V*, pp 205-7, 211.

¹⁸⁷ *AI* s. a. 1305. See also J. F. Lydon, 'Nation and Race in medieval Ireland', pp 103-24.

simply as a by-product of de Bermingham's anti-Irishness. Undoubtedly, there is ample evidence available to demonstrate that many colonial aristocrats were quite capable of murdering each other when the need or opportunity arose.¹⁸⁸ Instead, it might be possible to explain the massacre more satisfactorily by trying to establish what it could reasonably have been expected to achieve. On reflection, the simplest solution is probably also the best one, namely that Piers hoped that the decapitation of the leadership of northern Kildare's most powerful dynasty would destroy their capacity to make war. After all, this had been the result of de Pencoit's assassination of the MacMurroughs in similar circumstances in 1282 which brought peace to the Leinster mountains for more than a decade.¹⁸⁹ However, if de Bermingham was attempting to emulate de Pencoit, the events of the following three years revealed the extent of his miscalculation.

As the writ of *liberate* authorising the payment of £100 to de Bermingham makes clear, his action did not have the effect of terminating the 'malice' of the O'Connor Falys.¹⁹⁰ On the contrary, his drastic effort to persuade the Irish of the midlands to return to their former loyalties was completely unsuccessful and, not altogether surprisingly, had quite the opposite effect, triggering violence on a scale which the region had not seen since the events of 'the disturbance' a decade previously. Hence, within a month, fitzThomas was permitted to nominate an attorney to represent him in a court case, in order to allow him to return to 'the parts of Offaly, where a great part of his lands is, to fortify the marches ... which now are much disturbed by the death of the captains of the OKoneghors slain by' Piers de Bermingham.¹⁹¹ Interestingly, at the same time the justiciar and council stated that they were 'much occupied at present about the ordering of peace in the marches'.¹⁹² The level of the administration's concern can be gauged from the fact that John Wogan himself took the unusual step of travelling in person to the marches of Kildare in September 1305, when he

¹⁸⁸ For the most obvious example, see Lydon, 'The Braganstown massacre, 1329', pp 5-16.

¹⁸⁹ Frame, 'The justiciar and the murder of the MacMurroughs', pp 226-8.

¹⁹⁰ PRO E. 101/233/23 no. 30.

¹⁹¹ CJR 1305-07, pp 77-8.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 77.

was based in the New town of Leys.¹⁹³ Despite his presence, the midlands were not brought to peace. For example, in October 1305, the earl of Gloucester led an expedition from Kilkenny into the Sliabh Blooms, and a month later the seneschal of Kilkenny, with many of the magnates of that liberty were still on duty 'in the marches of Slefblame, for the defence of peace'.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, further evidence provides graphic proof that conditions within the marches of Kildare were equally turbulent. In January 1306, the administration both approved of and partially financed a fitzThomas-led attempt to exploit the long-standing enmities that appear to have existed between the O'Dempseys and their Irish neighbours. His efforts stemmed from a petition to the justiciar by one Fyn O'Dempsey seeking assistance against 'divers Irish felons, to wit, Oconughors, Odoynge, McKilfatriks, McYoughgan, and O Malmoy' who were attacking 'him and others who adhere to the king's peace'.¹⁹⁵ At the very least, Fyn's list of enemies, which encompassed most of the important midlands dynasties, serves as a striking reminder of the scale of the problem facing the colonists of western Kildare. However, the council's response to his petition also underscores the central role played by fitzThomas in the attempt to re-stabilise the marches. It agreed to help Fyn by funding 10 equipped esquires at a rate of 8d *per diem*, for a period of ten weeks. Significantly, the personnel and equipment were to be supplied by fitzThomas, who also agreed to provide a further ten equipped horses at his own expense 'to make said war with effect'.¹⁹⁶ As events transpired, the expedition achieved some success. In early April, the O'Dempseys, in the company of 'the foreigners', defeated the O'Connor Falys at Geashill, killing their ally O'Dunne in the process.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, two months later, Fyn and fitzThomas successfully petitioned for £40 in reward for the beheading of 'Odoynge and other

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp 84, 124.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 135, 467–8.

¹⁹⁵ *CJR 1305–07*, p. 215.

¹⁹⁶ *CJR 1305–07*, p. 215.

¹⁹⁷ *AI*, s.a. 1306; *Chart. St Marys*, ii. p. 333. The latter entry states that 'Odympei dux Reganorum' was killed. However, the corresponding entry in the *Annals of Inisfallen* states that Amlaib Ó Duinn, chief of Uí Riagain was killed by the O'Dempseys and by the foreigners. Moreover, the *Justiciary rolls* refer to the beheading of 'Odoynge' (*CJR 1305–07*, p. 270). Hence, it seems clear that the entry in the *Dublin Annals* should read as 'Odoynge dux Reganorum' instead.

felons'.¹⁹⁸ However, on a more profound level, John's partnership with Fyn also reveals something of the essential fluidity of political alliances in the marches. Immediately after the pair were awarded their head money, doubts were raised about the durability of Fyn's adherence to the colonists' cause. Apparently Diarmait O'Dempsey was being held captive by Mageoghegan, and it was feared that Fyn would come to an agreement with the Meath dynast in order to effect his release. Consequently, to ensure Fyn's good service in the future, he was ordered to deliver three named hostages, including his own son, into the custody of fitzThomas and Piers de Bermingham.¹⁹⁹

For his part, de Bermingham was also active in march defence, albeit with somewhat less success than fitzThomas. Thus, although he was awarded £23 'for beheading of divers felons' in June 1306, both Irish and Anglo-Irish annals record that he had been seriously defeated in Meath by Mageoghegan and O'Melaghlin two months previously.²⁰⁰ In fact, the extent of de Bermingham's difficulties and the essentially limited nature of fitzThomas's victory were revealed by another decision taken by the justiciar and council in June 1306. FitzThomas was awarded £28 in aid of the keeping of the castle which he had built at Agnes de Valence's manor of Geashill, for the period between 8 June 1306 and the following Michaelmas. Half of the cost was to be borne by the treasury, and half by the community of Kildare. Significantly, the territory dominated by de Bermingham, namely the cantreds of Carbury and 'Touthemoy' were exempted from the levy. The records of this award are particularly interesting because they also provide some idea of the size of fitzThomas's military commitments in the marches. At this castle alone, John was expected to maintain 20 men-at-arms and 100 footmen, of which he was to keep 10 men-at-arms and 60 footmen at his own expense.²⁰¹ In order to put this figure into perspective, it may be worth noting that the total size of fitzThomas's contingent during the Scottish campaign of 1301-2 came to

¹⁹⁸ *CJR* 1305-07, p. 270.

¹⁹⁹ *CJR* 1305-07, p. 271.

²⁰⁰ *CJR* 1305-07, p. 270; *Chart. St Marys'*, ii. p. 333; *MIA* s.a. 1306, p. 105.

²⁰¹ *CJR* 1305-07, p. 270.

three knights, 41 men-at-arms, 40 hobelars and 342 foot.²⁰² Indeed, it appears as though his need for troops obliged fitzThomas to seek assistance from outside of Leinster. For example, in July 1307 it was recorded that some time previously, one Maurice son of Philip, a captain of kerne had borrowed a horse from the prioress of Connell in Limerick to enable him 'to go to Leinster to John son of Thomas in aid of his war'.²⁰³ It might also be worth considering the impact which the continuous presence of large numbers of armed men had upon the general stability of the Kildare marches. Not surprisingly, it seems that the troops of de Bermingham and fitzThomas were themselves a serious threat to law and order. Thus, in April 1306, one Maurice le Hore was accused of procuring the two magnates' followers to 'destroy the goods of men of the country'.²⁰⁴ However, the most important point to be made about this remarkable concentration of military resources is that it failed to bring the region to peace. For example, Henry Calfe, one of the individuals appointed by the council in 1306 to ensure that the ward of Geashill was maintained properly, was actually killed shortly afterwards, when the O'Mores burned Ballymore Eustace.²⁰⁵ From fitzThomas's perspective, worse was to follow in the following year. In July 1307, the *predones* of Offaly destroyed the castle of Geashill, burned the manor of Lea, and laid siege to the castle there, forcing John and his son-in-law Edmund Butler to relieve its garrison.²⁰⁶ This particularly disastrous reverse is the clearest demonstration of the fact that fitzThomas and de Bermingham had effectively lost control of western Kildare. Consequently, this state of affairs led to a major financial intervention by the administration to rectify matters. For example, in January 1308, fitzThomas and de Bermingham were awarded 50 marks each to subdue 'the king's Irish felons of Offaly', with John being paid £25 13s 4d for campaigning between 16 March and 12 June 1308.²⁰⁷ More significantly perhaps, at the same time, the administration persuaded the earl of Ulster to

202 PRO E. 101/ 10 / 2.

203 CJR 1305-07, p. 453.

204 CJR 1305-07, p. 496.

205 Dowling, p. 17; *Chart. St Marys'*, ii. p. 333; CJR 1305-07, p. 270.

206 *Chart. St Marys'*, ii. pp 335-6.

207 PRO E. 101 / 235 / 9 m.1; PRO E. 372/171 m. 31d; CJR 1308-14, pp 3-4.

come south in order to pacify Muirchertach Mageogheghan, for which service he was awarded 1000 marks.²⁰⁸ On the surface, it appears as though de Burgh's campaign proved to be the decisive factor in the pacification of the midlands. Certainly, in its aftermath, with the significant exception of the killing of Diarmait O'Dempsey at Tullow by the followers of Piers Gaveston in November 1308, the marches of Kildare appear to have been quiet until 1311.²⁰⁹ However, it may be that the death of Piers de Bermingham in April 1308 was an equally significant factor in the restoration of better relations between the two nations in Offaly. When noting his passing, the *Dublin Annals* refer to him as *nobilis debellator Hibernicorum*.²¹⁰ Nevertheless, with the benefit of hindsight, it seems clear that by living up to that epithet, Piers had caused irreparable damage to the settlements of western Kildare.

208 *Ibid.*; *CJR* 1308–14, p. 26.

209 *Chart. St Marys'*, ii. p. 293

210 *Chart. St Marys'*, ii. pp 281, 336.

Chapter 6

The final years : John fitzThomas as lord of Offaly and earl of Kildare, 1308–1316

As the reign of King Edward I drew to a close, it is clear that John fitzThomas's ability to employ his good relationship with the king to further his own ambitions had diminished greatly, mainly because of the lack of opportunity to perform military service overseas. Nevertheless, his loss of royal influence does not appear to have impaired his capacity to consolidate his position by conducting a major expansion of his landed interests. For example, in February of either 1310 or 1311, one John son of Nicholas Dullard transferred all his rights to one messuage and five carucates of land in Athcony to lord John fitzThomas.¹ Not surprisingly, he was particularly interested in procuring lands within the Kildare region. Thus, it is known that he acquired at least three new parcels of property in the county between November 1306 and May 1307. Specifically, he gained lands in Timahoe from one Bynde Wydelok, several properties including Blackhall in Rathmore and Gragesallagh near Maynooth from William le Poer and his wife Egidia, daughter of Adam de Staunton, and a property in a place called Tyrmore, *nunc dicitur Bruyn* from one John de Monte Alto.² In addition to demonstrating that fitzThomas was concentrating his efforts in the Kildare region, the records of these particular property transfers is of interest because the information which they provide about John's title, the identity of his associates and his domestic arrangements, as he entered the last decade of his life. For example, they confirm that fitzThomas both styled himself and was generally known by the title of *dominus de Offaly*.³ Interestingly, in his letter of attorney to Gerald vicar of Laraghbryan authorising him to take seisin of the Timahoe properties, John referred to himself in the first person plural – a telling indication of fitzThomas's

¹ *Rot. pat. Hib.*, p. 16b no. 52.

² *Red Bk. Kildare*, nos. 108–9, 111–15; MacNiocaill, *Crown surveys of lands 1540–41*, pp 232, 282, 285, 289. See also Walton, *The English in Connacht*, p. 314.

³ *Red Bk. Kildare*, nos. 108, 111, 113.

estimate of his own worth.⁴ Furthermore, an analysis of the charters' witness-lists shows that not surprisingly, most of the individuals named were from the Kildare and Carlow regions, and also that fitzThomas still retained the services of long-time associates such as Gerald Tyrell, John de Punchardon and Walter Lenfaunt.⁵ But the most important information to be gleaned from this set of documents concerns fitzThomas's relationship with his immediate family.

The terms of all three property transfers stipulated that the lands were to be held jointly by fitzThomas and his wife Blanche for life.⁶ Upon their deaths, they were to pass to an otherwise unnoticed third son, who was also named John. Significantly, the terms of the charters reveal that the lord of Offaly was determined to prevent the claims of female heirs from fragmenting the family's patrimony. Thus, John fitzJohn's lands were to descend through his male heirs. Furthermore, in the event of his male line becoming extinct, the properties were to revert to fitzThomas's heirs.⁷ On a more human level, these documents are of some interest, being the only records extant which explicitly show fitzThomas making provisions for his wife. Indeed, during John's lifetime, with the exception of a relatively minor grant to the cathedral chapter of Limerick, the surviving contemporary sources do not refer to Blanche at all. Thus, in February 1299, fitzThomas surrendered his rights to the advowson of the church at Corcomohide in county Limerick to the cathedral chapter. He did so for the salvation of the souls of himself and his wife, children, father, mother, ancestors and successors.⁸ However, it should be noted that Blanche's obscurity is probably due to the fact that she does not appear to have been a significant heiress in her own right, rather than to any

4 *Red Bk. Kildare*, no. 114. In a similar transaction at the outset of his career two decades previously, John had been content to use the first person singular (*Red Bk. Kildare* no. 41).

5 *Ibid.*, nos. 108, 113.

6 *Red Bk. Kildare*, nos. 108, 111, 113; BL Add. Ms. 4790 f. 124d.

7 Given the lack of other references to John fitzJohn, and the fact that these properties were in the hands of the earls of Kildare in the sixteenth century, it is likely that he died without heirs (MacNiocaill, *Crown surveys of lands 1540 -41*, pp 232, 282, 285, 289).

8 *Black book of Limerick*, pp 106-7.

deliberate policy on fitzThomas's part. In fact, the details contained in the grant of her widow's dower by her son Thomas fitzJohn in January 1318 demonstrate that fitzThomas had regularly acquired property jointly with her.⁹ Within this context, the fact that along with Thomas fitzJohn, she acted as one of the executors of fitzThomas's will may be a better indication of the true nature of Blanche's relationship with her husband.¹⁰

In addition to consolidating his estates within the Kildare region, fitzThomas can also be seen enhancing his local standing by using his influence to assist individuals who had fallen foul of the law. For example, in December 1310, he renewed his old connection with the family of Nicholas Chevere, the recently-deceased bishop of Leighlin who had granted fitzThomas lands in county Carlow in 1289. During the month following the death of Bishop Nicholas in July 1309, John Chevere and master Ralph le Brun the dean and archdeacon of Leighlin respectively, took the opportunity to forge some documents with the bishop's seal, to the benefit of the dean's son Geoffrey and a priest named Stephen. Consequently, they were mainprised by fitzThomas and Walter Lenfaunt before being found guilty a month later.¹¹ Similarly, two months later, John succeeded in having one James son of Carragh Keating, who had been imprisoned for various felonies, re-admitted into the king's peace upon payment of a fine of £2.¹² Lastly and most importantly, in October 1310 fitzThomas was one of the magnates who secured a pardon for Arnald le Poer in the wake of the murder of John de Bonville, the seneschal of Carlow and Kildare.¹³

Nevertheless, in the years following the death of Edward I, John's activities as a great magnate were by no means limited to the peaceful pursuits of expanding his landed interests and interceding with the administration on behalf of his associates. On the contrary, warfare and conflict continued to feature prominently in his career. Although the

⁹ *Red Bk. Kildare*, no. 138.

¹⁰ *DKPRI* 42, p. 30.

¹¹ *CJR* 1308–14, pp 165–6; *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 39; *H. B. C.*, p. 364.

¹² *CJR* 1308–14, pp 175–6.

¹³ *CJR* 1308–14, pp 163–4.

military intervention of the earl of Ulster and the death of Piers de Bermingham in 1308 had resulted in the temporary pacification of the Irish of the midlands, the security difficulties faced by the Anglo-Irish of Leinster were not resolved. In particular, their settlements in eastern Kildare and southern Dublin continued to face a major threat from the Irish dynasties of the Leinster mountains, a problem which had led William de Burgh, the deputy chief governor, to bring Irish troops from Connacht to campaign in the region.¹⁴ Consequently, it might be expected that the Kildare-based fitzThomas would also be induced to serve in the mountains, especially after the Irish burned the town of Athy.¹⁵ Surprisingly however, the official sources do not record John's participation in either the operations conducted in the autumn of 1308, or in the major offensive launched by Piers Gaveston in May 1309, which led to the subjugation of the O'Byrnes and the re-edification of Newcastle Mckynegan and Castlekevin.¹⁶ While fitzThomas's apparent reluctance to serve could be taken as a sign that his relationship with the king's lieutenant was poor, this does not seem to have been the case. For example, before he left Ireland in June 1309, Gaveston made an effort to ensure John's participation, along with that of the lordship's other leading magnates, in a proposed expedition to Scotland. Thus, he authorised the payment of a prest ammounting to 200 marks to the lord of Offaly, towards his expenses in preparing for the campaign.¹⁷ Hence, explanations for fitzThomas's non-participation in the war against the Irish of the Leinster mountains should be sought elsewhere. In fact, it seems that in 1309, far from assisting the administration to maintain order within the lordship, John was actually employing his military talents to achieve the opposite effect.

The first sign of trouble surfaces in a letter sent by Edward II to John Wogan in December 1309, in which the king ordered the justiciar to pardon the men of Roger Mortimer of Wigmore, for acts of

¹⁴ Otway-Ruthven, *Medieval Ireland*, pp 218–9; Connolly, 'An account of military expenditure in Leinster, 1308', pp 3–5.

¹⁵ *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p. 338.

¹⁶ PRO E. 101/235/20 m. 3; *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p. 338; Hamilton, *Piers Gaveston, earl of Cornwall*, pp 60–1, 149 n. 33.

¹⁷ PRO E. 101/235/11 m.1; E. 372/171 m. 31d; Lydon, 'The enrolled account of Alexander Bicknor', p. 31.

homicide and arson committed by them while 'repelling and pursuing' an alleged invasion of Roger's lands in the parts of Trim, led by 'John fitzThomas, and other malefactors and breachers of the peace of the king's land of Carberye'.¹⁸ Given the fact that John had no landed interests in the Meath region, it is difficult to explain why he should choose to behave in this fashion. It should be noted that there was no previous evidence of tension between Mortimer, the lord of Laois, and fitzThomas, the lord of Offaly. Little is known about the actual conduct of the war. However the evidence which has survived reveals that it was not Mortimer himself who was fitzThomas's primary target, but rather it was the de Lacys, Mortimer's tenants in his newly-acquired liberty of Trim.¹⁹ In February 1310, Wogan sent letters to the main protagonists in the feud, noting that they had agreed before himself and the council to accept the arbitration of Richard de Burgh, and ordering them to desist from inflicting further damage upon each other.²⁰ The individuals named were Walter, Hugh and Richard de Lacy, John fitzThomas and John, son and heir of the late Piers de Bermingham. Similarly, a letter from Edward II to the Irish treasurer the following July referred to the war and contests *entre monsire Johan le fiz Thomas e Johan de Bermengeham de une part e les Lacys e les gentz de Mith' dautre part*.²¹ On balance, fitzThomas probably became embroiled in this particular conflict because of his ties to the de Bermingham family. The reason for de Bermingham's animosity towards the de Lacys is unclear, but the quarrel appears to have been deep-seated, as hostilities between the lord of Tethmoy and his Meath neighbours re-ignited during the Bruce invasion.²² In any case, it appears that the first conflict was brought under control relatively easily. The last Irish reference to the quarrel dates from April 1310, when the de Lacys were ordered to Dublin to appear before the earl of Ulster, Wogan and other members of the council, to hear the

¹⁸ CCR 1307-13, p. 188.

¹⁹ See *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p. 337.

²⁰ *Rot. pat. Hib.*, p. 13b, nos. 58-9.

²¹ Craig, *The memoranda roll of the Irish exchequer*, ii, p. 398.

²² Duffy, *Ireland and the Irish sea region, 1014-1318*, pp 205-6.

administration's instructions concerning their dispute with fitzThomas and de Bermingham.²³

In general, the feud was a prime example of the type of unrest which greatly exercised the parliament held at Kilkenny in February 1310.²⁴ Within this context, it is worth noting that one annalist recorded that a great discord between several magnates was settled at the parliament.²⁵ Furthermore, the fact that the parliament was in session on 12 February, while the letters ordering the warring parties in Meath to desist were issued three days later suggests that the annalist was referring to the de Lacy – de Bermingham dispute.²⁶ The Kilkenny parliament is of particular interest being the only such assembly which fitzThomas is definitely known to have attended. On 12 February, the archbishop of Cashel and the bishops of Ossory, Lismore and Emly, with the bishop-elect of Leighlin 'and other prelates' pronounced a sentence of excommunication upon all those who from henceforth would break the king's peace in the land of Ireland. Significantly, they did so in the presence of and with the assent of many of the Irish magnates, including Richard de Burgh, Wogan, Richard de Clare, John de Barry, Maurice de Rochford and John fitzThomas.²⁷ On the surface, it appears that John's assent to the sentence of excommunication signals a repudiation of the methods which had recently led him into conflict in Meath. However, one annalist noted that the provisions agreed upon in Kilkenny would have been of great use to the land of Ireland, had they been observed.²⁸ FitzThomas's subsequent behaviour shows that the annalist's cynicism was amply justified. For even as the prelates passed their sentence, it seems that John was being drawn into another civil conflict, in this case with his cousin and rival, John de Cogan.

²³ *Rot. pat. Hib.*, p.15, no. 240.

²⁴ *Stat. Ire. John-Henry V*, pp 270–7.

²⁵ *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p. 294.

²⁶ *Stat. Ire. John-Henry V*, p. 274; *Rot. pat. Hib.*, p. 13b, nos. 58–9.

²⁷ *Stat. Ire. John-Henry V*, pp 274–7.

²⁸ *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p. 294.

FitzThomas's war with de Cogan is less well-known than his earlier participation in the unrest in Meath. Nevertheless, as far as the long-term fortunes of his family were concerned, it proved to be of more lasting significance. The conflict was triggered by the eagerly anticipated death of Agnes de Valence. Her end was heralded by letters patent declaring her perfect health in September and December 1309.²⁹ She was dead by December 31, when writs were issued to hold inquisitions post mortem concerning her property.³⁰ On 28 February 1310, the estates which she had built up in England were delivered to her heir, her brother, Aymer de Valence earl of Pembroke.³¹ Not surprisingly however, the disposal of her lands in Ireland proceeded less smoothly. The sequence of events in Ireland following Agnes's death can be reconstructed to an extent by using the evidence provided by an inquisition taken in May 1310 by the Irish eschaetor Nigel le Brun, concerning the manor of Athlacca, which was one of the estates which Agnes had held in Limerick.³² The jurors testified that as soon as John heard that Agnes had died, he entered the manor for the third time, and took possession of it. However, he only enjoyed seisin for ten days, before John de Cogan, claiming to be the lawful heir, ejected fitzThomas's men and took control of the manor himself. In turn, de Cogan only managed to keep the manor in his hands for a day and a night before the administration intervened. One John son of Robert, acting on behalf of the eschaetor, ejected de Cogan, took the manor into the king's hands, and appointed a royal bailiff. Immediately afterwards however, John fitzThomas acted again. According to the jurors, fitzThomas was not confident that the administration would give preference to his claims to the manor over those of de Cogan. Consequently, fearing that he would be disinherited altogether, fitzThomas ordered his men to take the manor back into his own hands, elbowing aside the eschaetor in the process.³³ Not

²⁹ *CPR, 1307-13*, pp 189, 201.

³⁰ *Cal. inq. post mort.*, v, Edward II, no. 203.

³¹ *Cal. fine rolls, 1307 - 19*, p. 58.

³² *Red Bk. Kildare*, no. 136. Unless stated otherwise, the information in this paragraph is drawn from this source.

³³ The evidence from another source indicates that John also took possession of all the other estates formerly held by Agnes (*Cal. Carew MSS*, v, p. 364.).

surprisingly, as King Edward noted in July 1310, the question of who should inherit the estates formerly held by de Valence sparked off a war in Munster between John fitzThomas and *sez alliez* on one side, and John de Cogan, Eustace le Poer, the Barrys and *les Rocheyns* on the other.³⁴ Interestingly, the forces assembled by de Cogan against fitzThomas could not, with the exception of the de Burgh associate Eustace le Poer, be considered as long-time opponents of the lord of Offaly. Indeed, fifteen years earlier, when John was in disgrace for imprisoning the earl of Ulster, both the Barrys and Roches featured prominently in the list of individuals who were prepared to guarantee his future good behaviour.³⁵ Hence, it seems reasonable to assume that in this case, provincial loyalties came to the fore, in that the Munster lineages preferred to see the estates passing to their Cork neighbour rather than to a Leinster-based magnate. Regrettably, the king did not identify fitzThomas's allies. Given John's custodianship of the lands of the Desmond Geraldines, it is likely that he was assisted by individuals like Nicholas fitzMaurice of Kerry, as well as the families from Limerick like the Harolds with whom he had previous connections. Like the conflict in Meath, no narrative sources describing the nature or the seriousness of the war have survived. Furthermore, the Athlacca jurors did not state precisely when the remarkable cycle of occupation followed by ejection actually took place. Nevertheless, several incidental details provide some idea about the likely timing of the conflict. First, it is recorded that fitzThomas, along with the earl of Ulster and Roger Mortimer travelled to England at some point before 25 March 1310, presumably to attend the English parliament held at Westminster on 13 March 1310.³⁶ Secondly, on 7 March 1310, the sheriff of Kildare was ordered to send all the provisions which he could find on Agnes's manor of Rathmore to Dublin, as part of the government's preparations for a proposed expedition to Scotland that summer.³⁷ This implies that the administration still had control of Agnes's Kildare properties at this time. However, the Athlacca jurors noted that fitzThomas levied rent from that manor in Easter term. As Easter Sunday fell on 19

³⁴ Craig, *The memoranda roll of the Irish exchequer*, ii, p. 398.

³⁵ BL Add. Ms, 4790, f. 52v no. 5.

³⁶ *Chart. St Marys*, ii, pp294–5, 338–9. They appear to have travelled after the Kilkenny parliament was held.

³⁷ Craig, *The memoranda roll of the Irish exchequer*, ii, p. 264

April in 1310, it is likely therefore that John fitzThomas took the de Valence estates back into his hands upon his return from England, in late March or April of that year.³⁸ If this interpretation is correct, it seems safest to assume that fitzThomas's war with de Cogan broke out immediately after the lord of Offaly took seisin back from the eschaetor, or in other words, during the late spring of 1310.

Superficially, the fact that John fitzThomas conducted two wars nearly simultaneously appears to confirm the dismissive suggestion that he was 'the most lawless of Irish barons'.³⁹ However, it is important to put John's breaches of the king's peace into their contemporary context. In general, it is noticeable that between 1309 and 1312, the lordship of Ireland was rocked by a series of rebellions and murders perpetrated by its magnates. It should be recalled that unlike the de Cauntetons or the de Verdons, fitzThomas did not rise in rebellion against the chief governor.⁴⁰ Similarly, it could be argued that the behaviour of Arnald le Poer, who had John de Boneville, his successful rival for the office of seneschal of Kildare and Carlow assassinated, constituted a more serious threat to public order than did fitzThomas's essentially private feuds.⁴¹ Hence, it is not altogether surprising that neither John's indulgence in private warfare, nor the disregard which he showed to the dignity of the office of the eschaetor roused the administration to take strong measures against him. On the contrary, the available evidence suggests that King Edward's desire to bring an Irish expeditionary force to Scotland in the summer of 1310 had placed fitzThomas in a strong bargaining position. For example, Piers Gaveston's grant of a prest to him makes it clear that Edward was anxious to procure John's services for the forthcoming campaign.⁴² Furthermore, in October 1309 fitzThomas was

³⁸ *Red Bk. Kildare*, no. 136; *Handbook of Dates*, p. 140.

³⁹ Richardson and Sayles, *Irish parliament in the middle ages*, p. 248.

⁴⁰ Otway-Ruthven, *Medieval Ireland*, pp 219–20, 222–3.

⁴¹ Otway-Ruthven, *Medieval Ireland*, p. 220; Williams, 'The "Kilkenny Chronicle"', pp 83–4; PRO E.101/235/20 m. 2. For example, during the Bruce invasion the justiciar Edmund Butler was forced to lead an expedition to de Boneville's old manor at Balilethan to curb the encroachments of the O'Mores (CJR 1308–14, pp 163–4; *Chart St Marys*, ii, pp 348, 353).

⁴² PRO E.101/235/11 m.1; Lydon, 'The enrolled account of Alexander Bicknor', p. 31.

one of the first four magnates to be summoned by the king to be at Newcastle-on-Ayr by the following June, the others being Richard de Burgh, who was to command the expedition, Edmund Butler and Eustace le Poer.⁴³ Indeed, it is likely that John's primary purpose in travelling to England with de Burgh and Mortimer was to play an active role in drawing up the plans for the forthcoming campaign.⁴⁴ Finally, when King Edward wrote to Alexander Bickenor the Irish treasurer in July 1310 to express his concerns about the private wars conducted by fitzThomas, it is quite plain that he was considerably less worried about the impropriety of John's behaviour than he was about its disruptive effect upon the preparations for the Scottish campaign. Thus, the king limited his response to the disorders generated by fitzThomas to issuing instructions to the treasurer, the justiciar and the earl of Ulster, stating that they were to make an effort either to resolve, or at the least, to delay the quarrels.⁴⁵ In the light of the fact that King Edward deemed the war in Scotland to be more important than domestic order in Ireland, it is not surprising that for their part, the Irish government also adopted a less than rigorous approach to punishing fitzThomas for his transgressions. In fact, as the survival of the inquisition taken in May 1310 into the ownership of Athlacca reveals, the Irish administration was attempting to resolve the dispute between de Cogan and fitzThomas long before the king ordered them to do so.⁴⁶ Crucially, on 11 July 1310, they came down decisively on the side of John fitzThomas, effectively ignoring the competing claims of John de Cogan. To be specific, John Wogan, in consideration of the services rendered by fitzThomas to Edward I in Flanders and Scotland and to Edward II in Ireland, and upon the payment of a fine, pardoned the lord of Offaly for entering the lands formerly held by Agnes de Valence without a royal licence.⁴⁷

⁴³ *Parl. Writs*, ii, div. ii, pt. i, p. 392.

⁴⁴ *Chart. St Marys*, ii, pp 294, 338–9.

⁴⁵ Craig, *The memoranda roll of the Irish exchequer*, ii, p. 398.

⁴⁶ *Red Bk. Kildare*, no. 136.

⁴⁷ BL Cotton Ms. Titus B XI pt. II, nos. 22–3 (Common pleas, 3 Ed. II); *Cal. Carew MSS*, v, p. 364. It is very unlikely that King Edward's letter to Alexander Bickenor, which was issued from Westminster on 6 July could have reached Dublin before the decision to pardon fitzThomas was made.

Given its long-term significance, Wogan's decision is worth discussing in some detail. As the ruling was made at a time when an expedition to Scotland was in the offing, it could be argued that fitzThomas's military usefulness weighed more heavily upon the minds of the justiciar and the council than did the merits of his claim. If that was the case, they miscalculated badly, as Edward II cancelled the expedition in August.⁴⁸ In fact, the surviving evidence suggests that the council appears to have been genuinely convinced of the validity of John's claims. For example, the testimony provided by the jurors relating to the manor of Athlacca strongly endorsed fitzThomas's right to inherit the de Valence properties. Thus, after explaining the circumstances by which Agnes de Valence had originally acquired the properties, the jurors were at pains to suggest that John fitzThomas was the legitimate heir. First, they emphasised the fact that John de Cogan's mother Juliana had both enfeoffed fitzThomas with the estates and had quitclaimed her rights to him. Thereafter, they went so far as to say that they did not know to whom the properties should revert, if not to John fitzThomas. Admittedly, it is unlikely that the presence on the jury of individuals like Sir John Harold, former sheriff of Limerick and long-time associate of fitzThomas did the lord of Offaly's cause any harm.⁴⁹ However, it appears as though the Athlacca jurors were not acting in isolation. While justifying his decision, Wogan implied that in the course of his investigation into the rightful ownership of the properties, other inquisitions taken by the eschaetor Nigel le Brun had supported fitzThomas's claims to the de Valence estates. In addition, Wogan noted that fitzThomas had supplied the council with sufficient documentary evidence to prove that Juliana de Cogan had in fact surrendered her rights to the lands held by Agnes de Valence to him.⁵⁰ On reflection, it appears that on this occasion, John fitzThomas found himself in the unusual position of possessing an adequate legal case with which to pursue his claims. And so, after a hiatus of over forty years, a lord of Offaly had succeeded in taking control of his family's Limerick properties. Somewhat ironically, the death of his rival John de Cogan in 1311 appears to

⁴⁸ *Parl. Writs*, ii, div. ii, pt. i, p. 400.

⁴⁹ *Red Bk. Kildare*, no. 136; Chapter 4, pp 103–4.

⁵⁰ *Cal. Carew MSS*, v, p. 364. For the documents likely to have been produced by fitzThomas, see *Red Bk. Kildare*, nos. 30, 33, 73, 116.

have raised further doubts about fitzThomas's right to the de Valence estates.⁵¹ In February 1312, an Irish writ issued by the justiciar John Wogan ordered the transmission of the record and process of a court case held in 1303 to the king. Significantly, the case in question was the assize of *mort d'ancestor* taken by John de Cogan against fitzThomas before John de Ponte and Alexander Bickenor during the period when fitzThomas had prematurely taken possession of Agnes de Valence's estates.⁵² On the surface, the king's sudden interest seems hard to comprehend. Significantly however, after de Cogan's death, John Wogan himself had been awarded custody of his lands in November 1311.⁵³ Given the fact that the assize taken in 1303 had awarded de Valence's properties to de Cogan, it seems reasonable to suggest that the justiciar was attempting to further his own interests at fitzThomas's expense. In this instance, it does not appear that anything came of Wogan's act of self-aggrandisement, and John continued to enjoy possession of the estates for the rest of his life. However, the episode strengthens the impression that in general, the relationship between the chief governor and the lord of Offaly was not particularly cordial.

After fitzThomas finally recovered the family's Limerick properties, he went to some lengths to re-establish them as an integral part of the Geraldine sphere of influence. It is especially noticeable that after 1310, John spent a considerable amount of time in county Limerick. On one level, fitzThomas began to intercede in the courts on behalf of individuals from the county. Thus, in March 1311, one Thomas son of John Russell, who had been charged with sheep-stealing, was released 'by the council and advice' of John fitzThomas and Edmund Butler.⁵⁴ Similarly, on the same day fitzThomas and his son-in-law succeeded in having David Appilgard, who had been charged with raping Mabilla, widow of Gilbert de Whitely, re-admitted to the king's peace upon making a fine of 10 marks.⁵⁵

⁵¹ *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p. 340.

⁵² *Red Bk. Kildare*, nos. 105-7.

⁵³ *CPR 1307-13*, p. 381.

⁵⁴ *CJR 1308-14*, p. 207.

⁵⁵ *CJR 1308-14*, p. 208.

Significantly, one Mathew Appilgard is known to have held land of the Geraldines in Croom in 1331.⁵⁶ In June 1311, John again intervened in court on behalf of two Limerick individuals. In this case, the lord of Offaly secured pardons and remission of any abjurations previously made by Nicholas and Robert de Capella, who had commonly 'taken food and drink from the men of the country against their will'. Incidentally, the court proceedings against Nicholas and Robert are of interest because of the light which they shed upon the important role played by a malefactor's lineage in ensuring their future good behaviour. Thus, the pardoned mens' mainpernors, namely Henry son of Henry de Capella, Henry de Capella of Ardraghyn and Henry son of Robert de Capella, promised that if Nicholas and Robert should reoffend, they would either send them back to prison or blind them themselves.⁵⁷ The mainpernors' shared Christian name of Henry also provides the likely motive for fitzThomas's intervention in the case, as a Henry de Capella had previously acted as his seneschal for the Desmond Geraldine estates in Connell and Kerry.⁵⁸

More importantly perhaps, John fitzThomas also began to act as a generous lord and patron within the region. For example, after Christmas 1312, fitzThomas held 'a great, splendid and peaceable feast' at Adare, during which he knighted Nicholas fitzMaurice of Kerry, Robert de Clahull, and another unnamed individual.⁵⁹ Furthermore, John chose Adare as the location for his most important display of public piety, by founding an Augustinian friary there.⁶⁰ On one level, fitzThomas's devotion of time and resources to the Limerick region can be seen as a logical move designed to deepen his relationship with his newly-acquired tenants. However, John's munificence should also be regarded as a manifestation of the major boost to his disposable income which resulted from his recovery of the de Valence estates. As a series of extents taken in the 1330s appear to have considerably underestimated the value of the

⁵⁶ *Red Bk Kildare*, no. 127.

⁵⁷ *CJR* 1308–14, p. 215.

⁵⁸ *CJR* 1305–07, p. 452.

⁵⁹ *Clyn*, p. 11; *Chart. St Marys*, p. 342.

⁶⁰ *Rot. pat. Hib.*, p. 22b.

Limerick properties, it is difficult to assess the manors' true worth.⁶¹ A more accurate idea of their value can be gained by recalling that before 1290, John de Valle had managed to misappropriate nearly £1500 from Agnes, while fitzThomas himself had made off with at least £700 worth of chattels from the estates in the course of his trespasses in 1294 and 1303.⁶² Hence, it is likely that the acquisition of Agnes's lands finally permitted John to indulge in the kind of conspicuous consumption expected of a great lord.⁶³ Within this context, it is worth noting that John's son and heir Thomas did not marry Joan, daughter of Richard de Burgh until August 1312.⁶⁴ The earl of Ulster, who was the most powerful man in Ireland by a considerable distance, had been highly successful in the business of marrying his daughters to rich and powerful men.⁶⁵ Possibly, from his perspective, the ejection of fitzThomas from Connacht meant that the Geraldines of Offaly were not worthy of consideration as potential marriage partners for his daughters until after John succeeded in recovering the de Valence estates.⁶⁶ If this interpretation is correct, it could be argued that the 1312 marriage was a visible manifestation of the most important consequence of John's new-found affluence; namely the manner in which it enabled him to buy respectability. One final factor may have influenced fitzThomas's decision to found the Augustinian Black Abbey in Adare. By the time that Agnes de Valence died in December 1309, John was no longer a young man. Although his exact age is unknown, he was at least 44, and, more importantly perhaps, had spent 23 eventful years at the head of his lineage. In general, fitzThomas's recorded endowments to the church are few in number, but those which have survived suggest that his views on religious practice were conventional.⁶⁷ Hence, it is quite possible that after 1310, his attention became focused upon the quality of his life in the hereafter, and for a man of

⁶¹ *Red Bk. Kildare*, nos. 127–8, 133, 135.

⁶² See Chapter 3, pp 52–3; Chapter 4, p. 128.

⁶³ Keen, *Chivalry*, pp 153–4.

⁶⁴ *Chart. St Marys*, ii, 342.

⁶⁵ Orpen, *Normans*, iv, pp 149–50.

⁶⁶ It is worth recalling that the marriage alliance mooted as part of the 1298 peace agreement was rapidly shelved (*CJR 1295–1303*, p. 235).

⁶⁷ See Chapter 2, p 41; *Black book of Limerick*, pp 106–7.

his background, the foundation of a religious house was the traditional method employed to attempt to ensure one's salvation.⁶⁸

Although John fitzThomas's acts of patronage in Adare may have been manifestations of a desire to lead a more peaceful life, the disturbed conditions existing within the lordship of Ireland did not give him the opportunity to do so. For example, his recovery of Rathmore in eastern Kildare added to John's defensive responsibilities, as the manor lay close to the Leinster mountains. Thus, as early as December 1310, by order of the justiciar he was keeping men-at-arms at Rathmore in order to keep the peace between Tassagard and Ballymore.⁶⁹ More importantly, in 1313 a familiar problem emerged in the western marches of Kildare, where the Irish of Offaly returned to war. In fact, it seems that for reasons which are unclear, the region had already begun to drift into conflict in 1312, when wards were established in the marches of Kildare to resist the Irish of Offaly.⁷⁰ As far as fitzThomas is concerned, his recorded participation in the escalating conflict began in the summer of 1313, when the justiciar and council responded to an O'Connor Faly incursion into the land of peace by commissioning fitzThomas to lead the region's defence. John undertook to keep troops in the marches for a period of 18 weeks starting from 7 July, in return for a subsidy of 500 marks, of which £100 was to be disbursed to him immediately, while the balance was to be paid out fortnightly.⁷¹ Several fragmentary pieces of evidence reveal that fitzThomas was in the field during the autumn of 1313. For example, it is recorded that in November, the city of Dublin sent 4 tuns of wine to Kildare, for the use of John fitzThomas 'in aid of his war to subdue the Oconughurs in Offolia and their confederates'.⁷² Overall, it seems as if the general pattern of the conflict, which dragged on into 1315, was similar to the warfare during the previous decade.⁷³ For example, it is clear that on the Irish side, the O'Connor Falys,

⁶⁸ Crouch, *The image of aristocracy*, pp 311–21.

⁶⁹ PRO E. 372/171 m. 31d; Lydon, 'The enrolled account of Alexander Bicknor', p. 30.

⁷⁰ Frame, *The Dublin government*, p. 137.

⁷¹ PRO E. 101/236/6; E. 372/171 m. 31d; Frame, *The Dublin government*, p. 137.

⁷² *DKPRI* 39, pp 45, 49.

⁷³ PRO E. 101/237/2.

'manifest felons and enemies of the king' were again the war's prime movers.⁷⁴ Similarly, the Dublin administration again chose not to intervene directly, but instead preferred to delegate responsibility for the prosecution of the war to the region's most prominent magnates, John fitzThomas and John, son of Piers de Bermingham.⁷⁵

However, this particular conflict differed significantly from its predecessors in several regards. In the first instance, the threat posed by the Irish may have been less grave. Admittedly, the sheriff of Kildare's account for the period between May 1313 and September 1315 recorded a loss of rent from 'Alewyn and Tornegeth in the demesnes of Kildare, wasted by divers wars of the Irish'.⁷⁶ However, it is quite possible that the sheriff was referring to the wars which took place in the 1290s and 1300s. Furthermore, the absence of references to the conflict in the *Dublin Annals* seems significant, particularly because they contain descriptions of both the campaigns into the Leinster mountains and of the de Verdon rebellion.⁷⁷ More importantly perhaps, the surviving evidence suggests that John fitzThomas had terminated his personal participation in the conflict by the end of 1313. It is known that John, styled *dominus de Offaly* on one official record, was paid the first £100 which was agreed to by the council. Thereafter however, the issue rolls do not record any further payments being made to him from the Dublin exchequer. It has been suggested that he may have received the residue of his award out of funds levied locally.⁷⁸ Certainly, fitzThomas had received payments in this manner during an earlier period of conflict.⁷⁹ However, the fact that John de Bermingham is known to have continued to receive large sums of money from the Dublin government makes this possibility less likely.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ For example, PRO E. 101/235/21; E. 101/236/6; E. 101/236/7.

⁷⁵ PRO E. 101/235/21; E. 101/236/6.

⁷⁶ *DKPRI* 39, p. 67.

⁷⁷ *Chart. St Marys*, ii, pp 339–42

⁷⁸ Frame, *The Dublin government*, p. 138.

⁷⁹ See Chapter 5, p. 147.

⁸⁰ For example, see E. 101/236/7; E. 101/237/2; E. 101/237/4; E. 372/171 m. 31d; Lydon, 'The enrolled account of Alexander Bicknor', pp 30–1.

Hence, it seems that for some reason, the lord of Offaly had indeed discontinued campaigning and that in consequence, responsibility for running the war had devolved upon John de Bermingham. Insofar as the sources can tell, there is no obvious explanation for John's inactivity. He figured prominently in the letters sent to Ireland by Edward II in March and August 1314 appealing for military assistance in Scotland, which discounts the possibility that he had fallen out of favour with the crown.⁸¹ Perhaps John preferred to devote his time to consolidating his hold on his new estates in Limerick. However, the best explanation may also be the simplest, namely that John fitzThomas had become too old to endure the rigours of continuous campaigning.

It also appears that the political dynamics within the Irish dynasties had changed since the conflict of 1303–08, when fitzThomas and Piers de Bermingham had faced an impressive confederation of hostile forces.⁸² The identities of several of the Irish chieftains who were sent letters appealing for military assistance in Scotland by Edward II in 1314 suggest that the Anglo-Irish of Kildare had succeeded in exploiting the segmentary tensions which were an integral feature of Irish dynastic politics.⁸³ Given his former policy of co-operation with fitzThomas and Piers de Bermingham, it is not surprising to find that Fyn O'Dempsey received a letter from King Edward. Interestingly however, one 'Dermot Occonoghur Doffaly', was also included on the king's lists, which suggests that he had earlier been persuaded to throw in his lot with John de Bermingham.⁸⁴ Incidentally, it is noticeable that while men like Donnchad O'Brien and Feidhlim O'Connor were addressed as *Duci Hibernicorum de Tothimund* and *Connach* respectively, no Leinster dynasts, including Muircheartach Mac Murrough, were referred to in this fashion. This may

⁸¹ *Parl. writs*, ii, div. ii, pt. i, p. 424; *Ibid.*, ii, div. ii, pt. ii – Appendix, p.80. Incidentally, in August 1314 the king also wrote to Thomas fitzJohn for the first time.

⁸² *CJR* 1305–07, p. 215.

⁸³ For example, see Simms, *From kings to warlords*, p. 59.

⁸⁴ *Parl. writs*, ii, div. ii, pt. 1, p. 423; *Clyn*, p. 20. Admittedly, the presence on the list of individuals like Laoiseach O'More, who later became the single greatest threat to the settlers of Laois, underlines the fact that the letters should not be viewed as a guide to the long term adherence of a dynast to the lordship (Ó Cléirigh, 'The impact of the Anglo-Normans in Laois', pp 21–22.).

indicate a reluctance on the part of the administration to accept that the growing detachment of the Leinster dynasties from the colony was irreversible. In any event, like its predecessor in 1310, the plans to mount a major expedition came to nothing.⁸⁵ Instead, the Scots reversed the pattern which had existed since 1296, whereby the lordship of Ireland had been a constant source of money, supplies and men for the English king, and sent their own expedition to Ireland.

On 26 May 1315, the Scottish army led by Edward Bruce earl of Carrick landed at Carrickfergus in county Antrim.⁸⁶ Upon learning of the invasion, the justiciar, John fitzThomas's son-in-law Edmund Butler rapidly moved to gather an army together to repel the Scots. In July, the royal army, in which John fitzThomas served, moved northwards into Louth to meet the invaders.⁸⁷ However, they did not make contact with the Scots, as having reached Ardee, it was decided to allow the earl of Ulster to deal with Bruce on his own, and the army subsequently disbanded.⁸⁸ As far as fitzThomas is concerned, although his movements during the rest of the summer cannot be traced, it is likely that he returned to his estates in Munster, as he was in Limerick city in September, when he sent a letter to King Edward, who had written to him two months previously.⁸⁹ The English government had become aware of the Scottish landing by 21 June, and as a result, on 10 July the king wrote to thirty of the lordship's leading magnates, seeking information about the Scots and ordering them to resist Bruce with all their force. In keeping with his status within the lordship, fitzThomas's name appears third of the list of magnates, after the earl of Ulster and the justiciar Edmund Butler.⁹⁰ John's reply, in which he styled himself the king's *lige bachelor*, dates from 8 September. Interestingly, he made no mention of the truncated campaign against the Scots of the

85 Phillips, 'The mission of John de Hothum to Ireland, 1315-16', pp 65-6.

86 *N. H. I.*, ii, p. 282. For an account of the Bruce invasion in general, see *N. H. I.*, ii, pp 281-294; Lydon, 'The Bruce invasion of Ireland', pp 111-125; Frame, 'The Bruces in Ireland, 1315-18', pp 3-37; Orpen, *Normans*, iv, pp 160-206..

87 Frame, 'The Bruces in Ireland, 1315-18', p. 26.

88 *Ibid.*, pp 26-8.

89 Phillips, *Documents*, pp 249-50, 259.

90 *N. H. I.*, ii, p. 287; Phillips, *Documents*, pp 249-50.

previous July. First, he acknowledged Edward's command to resist Bruce and the other Scottish felons and enemies who had recently landed in Ireland, and promised do to '*tuz ... a mon poer*' to resist them. He then noted that the Irish of Ulster had abetted the invaders when they arrived. Significantly, he stated that both the Irish of Ulster and 'the other Irish' who hated the English language [i.e. the English people], '*ceux qe hante lang engleise*' were willing to help conquer the land of Ireland from the king. However, John continued, with the grace of God they would be confounded. Rather typically, fitzThomas could not resist the temptation to add a self-interested plea to his declaration of loyalty. To be specific, John concluded his letter by reminding the king of his 'great labours' in divers places on behalf of both the late king and of Edward himself. He then added that he had charged his clerk Geoffrey de Penkeston, to raise the issue of the long-delayed grant of 60 librates of land in Ireland promised to him in 1302, as well as 'other matters', with the king.⁹¹ Two other magnates who had been sent letters by Edward II, namely Richard de Clare and Maurice de Rochford, also replied to the king from Limerick at the same time. As the contents of their replies were nearly identical to that of fitzThomas, with the exception of the reference to the 60 librates of land, it is likely that the three magnates consulted with one another before reporting to the king.⁹²

A week before fitzThomas wrote to the king, Richard de Burgh had suffered a catastrophic defeat at the hands of Edward Bruce at Connor in county Antrim.⁹³ The earl's defeat triggered an uprising of the Irish of both Connacht and Meath, which resulted in wide-ranging attacks upon the Anglo-Irish settlements throughout the western province as well as the burning of the royal castles of Roscommon, Rinndown and Athlone. This double blow to Richard de Burgh's authority which was compounded by the capture of his cousin William de Burgh, effectively eliminated the lordship's most powerful magnate from the war.⁹⁴ Despite the seriousness of this setback to the loyalist cause, the surviving evidence does not reveal

⁹¹ Phillips, *Documents*, p. 259.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp 259–60.

⁹³ See Phillips, 'The mission of John de Hothum to Ireland, 1315–16', p. 72, for evidence that the traditional date given for the battle is out by 9 days.

⁹⁴ Orpen, *Normans*, iv, pp 169–72; *N. H. I.*, ii, p. 287.

whether fitzThomas carried out his promise to the king to take action against the Scots during the autumn of 1315. However, he was definitely galvanised into responding to the Scottish threat shortly afterwards. In November 1315, Edward Bruce opened a new and dangerous phase in the invasion when he led his veterans south, to open his winter campaign of 1315–16.⁹⁵ From fitzThomas's perspective, Bruce's defeat of Roger Mortimer at Kells, county Meath in December 1315 proved to be disastrous. Instead of making for Dublin, the Scots, who employed the de Lacys as their guides, chose to advance into the Irish midlands.⁹⁶ Thus, having celebrated Christmas at the de Verdon *caput* of Loughsewdy in western Meath which he subsequently burned, Bruce marched towards the town of Kildare, directly through John de Bermingham's lands in Tethmoy and, more pertinently, across John fitzThomas's manor of Rathangan.⁹⁷ While it could be argued that Bruce's choice of route, which took him through regions controlled, or at least contested by the Irish dynasties of the midlands, was primarily motivated by a desire to make contact with them, the possibility that the de Lacys vindictively led the Scots across their erstwhile enemies' lands should not be discounted.⁹⁸ In any event, the Scots then moved on to Kildare itself, where the castle withstood an assault lasting three days, before moving towards Castledermot.⁹⁹ However, on 26 January 1316, Bruce found his path to Castledermot blocked by a royal army, led by the justiciar Edmund Butler, at Skerries, near Arscoll, in southern county Kildare.

In the aftermath of Roger Mortimer's defeat at Kells and subsequent departure from Ireland, the Irish government, despite being

⁹⁵ Orpen, *Normans*, iv, pp 172–3.

⁹⁶ Frame, 'The Bruces in Ireland', pp 31–3.

⁹⁷ *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p. 347; Orpen, *Normans*, iv, p. 174–5.

⁹⁸ Significantly, Duffy noted that animosity between John de Bermingham and Milo de Verdon on the one hand, and the de Lacys on the other continued in 1317–8, and has suggested that this rivalry contributed to Edward Bruce's fatal decision to move south in October 1318 (Duffy, *Ireland and the Irish sea region, 1014–1318*, pp 205–6).

⁹⁹ Orpen, *Normans*, iv, pp 174–5.

chronically short of money, was forced to take action.¹⁰⁰ Thus, the justiciar and council, with the assistance of John de Hothum, who had been sent to Ireland by Edward II in response to the invasion in September 1315 as a special envoy with wide-ranging powers, issued summonses to all the '*grantz seigneurs Dirland*' to come and help check the Scottish offensive. According to a report sent by de Hothum to the king in mid-February, eight magnates answered the call and joined Butler at Arscoll. He named John fitzThomas first, followed by Maurice fitzThomas of Desmond, John's son Thomas, John le Poer baron of Donoil, Arnald le Poer, Maurice de Rochford, Miles de la Roche and David le Roche.¹⁰¹ Incidentally, from the perspective of the Geraldines of Offaly de Hothum's list is doubly interesting, in that it confirms fitzThomas's relative status amongst his peers and also reveals that his son Thomas fitzJohn was now regarded as an important man in his own right. Some evidence has survived which suggests that John fitzThomas actually travelled to Arscoll from Munster. In an account concerning the tax known as the twentieth penny which was granted by the clergy of the diocese of Ossory in Edward II's ninth regnal year, it was recorded that £5 5s was allowed to one Thomas de Warylowe, clerk, 'appointed to pay wages to John son of Thomas, knight, and his men at arms, lately setting out towards Leinster to subdue the Scotch enemies and felons'.¹⁰² However, the Scots were not subdued at Arscoll. On the contrary, although no detailed account of the course of the battle has survived, it is clear that the Scots were victorious. In his report to the king, de Hothum stated that the combined military strength of the assembled magnates should have ensured Bruce's defeat, and that in fact, the royal army inflicted heavy casualties upon the Scots with the loss of only one man.¹⁰³ This assertion that Scottish casualties were significantly higher than those suffered by the royal army concurs with the description of the battle provided by Clyn and the Dublin annalist.¹⁰⁴ However, de Hothum's

¹⁰⁰ Frame, 'The Bruces in Ireland', pp 25, 33; Phillips, 'The mission of John de Hothum to Ireland, 1315-16', pp 68-9.

¹⁰¹ Phillips, *Documents*, pp 251-3.

¹⁰² *DKPRI* 42 (Pipe Roll a. r. 19 Ed. II), p. 76.

¹⁰³ Phillips, *Documents*, pp 251-3.

¹⁰⁴ *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p. 347; *Clyn*, p. 12.

explanation of the fact that the Scots kept the field was at variance with that offered by the Dublin annalist. After noting that the topography of the battlefield was unfavourable, de Hothum tactfully ascribed the defeat to 'mischance'.¹⁰⁵ In sharp contrast, the Dublin annalist, having expressed the opinion that any one of the magnates should have been able to deal with Bruce, baldly cited dissensions amongst the assembled lords as the reason for the reverse.¹⁰⁶ As the annalist did not provide a specific explanation for the magnates' disunity, various suggestions have been advanced, ranging from the government's financial collapse to an early manifestation of the tensions which undoubtedly developed subsequently between Maurice fitzThomas of Desmond and Arnald le Poer.¹⁰⁷ On balance, it is not possible to provide a definitive explanation for the royal army's failure. Regardless of the reasons for the squabbling however, it is likely that Edmund Butler's position as justiciar was undermined by the unexpected reverse. More pertinently perhaps, the defeat suggests that none of the magnates present, fitzThomas included, possessed enough authority amongst their peers to maintain the unity which would have prevented such an unnecessary outcome.¹⁰⁸

Fortunately for the discomfited magnates, Edward Bruce was unable to exploit his advantage. The available evidence suggests that he was fatally hampered by a chronic lack of provisions. By their nature, winter campaigns were always hazardous enterprises, but in early 1316 the usual shortages were greatly exacerbated by the fact that Ireland, like the rest of Europe, was in the grip of famine.¹⁰⁹ Thus, after the battle, Bruce only advanced as far as Reban, burning and wasting as he went, before turning for his home base in Ulster.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, from John fitzThomas's perspective, Bruce's retreat proved to be as painful as his advance. De Hothum stated that the Scots first withdrew into fortalices (*forceletz*)

¹⁰⁵ Phillips, *Documents*, p. 251.

¹⁰⁶ *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p. 347.

¹⁰⁷ Frame, 'The Bruces in Ireland', p. 33; Orpen, *Normans*, iv, p. 177.

¹⁰⁸ Phillips, 'The mission of John de Hothum to Ireland, 1315-16' p. 75.

¹⁰⁹ Frame, 'The Bruces in Ireland', pp 9, 22, 24,

¹¹⁰ *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p. 347; Sayles, *Affairs of Ireland*, no. 110.

amongst the Irish of Laois, where *gentz darmes a chival ne les poeient grever*.¹¹¹ Thereafter, they devastated the Anglo-Irish settlements of western Kildare as they moved northwards. For example, Bruce's troops burned the church of the New town of Leys and more importantly, set fire to Lea castle, the *caput* of the lordship of Offaly, a feat which the local Irish chieftains had not managed to achieve since John fitzThomas became head of his family nearly thirty years previously. By February 14, the Scots were to be found at John's old stronghold at Geashill, where they are stated to have perished in great numbers from starvation, before making their way back to Ulster via Fore in western Meath.¹¹² The plight of the settlers of western Kildare was made worse by the activities of the O'Mores who took the opportunity to engage in the burning and wasting of *Leys in Lagenia*, until they were heavily defeated by the justiciar, Edmund Butler at Balilethan.¹¹³ However, not all of the Irish midlands dynasties appear to have sided with the Scots. According to a well-known account in Barbour's *The Bruce*, the O'Dempseys treacherously led Edward Bruce and his army into a swamp, causing great losses of horses and men, having promised to guide them safely through the midlands.¹¹⁴ While Barbour mistakenly believed that the episode took place during the manoeuvrings leading up to the battle of Connor, their previous record of co-operation with fitzThomas and the government makes it likely that the O'Dempseys did in fact act in this fashion during the winter campaign of 1315–16.¹¹⁵ Notwithstanding the O'Dempseys' efforts, the scale of the damage inflicted upon John fitzThomas's estates in the marches make it difficult to avoid the conclusion that he was being targeted deliberately by the Scots. Therefore, it

¹¹¹ Phillips, *Documents*, p. 251.

¹¹² *Chart. St Marys*, ii, pp 348–9; *Grace*, pp 68–71.

¹¹³ *Chart St Marys*, ii, pp 348, 353; *Clyn*, p. 12. The date of Butler's defeat of the O'Mores is open to question. The Dublin annalist notices the episode after his description of the battle of Arscoll, which would accord with de Hothum's reference to the Scots withdrawing into Irish-held fastnesses in Laois. However, *Clyn* states that the encounter took place on 6 January 1316. Given the fact that the Scots were then advancing through the midlands, an excursion by the justiciar as far west as Laois would have left Dublin exposed to a sudden attack.

¹¹⁴ Frame, 'The Bruces in Ireland, 1315–18', p. 22 citing W.W. Skeat (ed.), *The Bruce* (Scot. Text. Soc., 1894), book xiv, lines 329–70; Orpen, *Normans*, iv, p. 167.

¹¹⁵ Orpen, *Normans*, iv, p. 167; Chapter 5, pp 176–7.

seems reasonable to suggest that even before Bruce moved south, his Irish advisors had concluded that, unlike disaffected individuals like the de Lacys, there was no possibility that the lord of Offaly could be weaned from his allegiance to his king.

Although fitzThomas may not have been able to prevent Bruce's army from wasting his properties in western Kildare in February 1316, neither he nor Thomas fitzJohn remained idle. For example, a commission issued on 7 February records that, along with Richard de Clare, Maurice de Rochford, Maurice fitzThomas and Arnald and John le Poer, John fitzThomas was described as one of the marshals of the king's army.¹¹⁶ Similarly, Thomas fitzJohn is known to have maintained a ward on the marches of Kildare between February and June 1316, for which he was paid the sum of £100.¹¹⁷ However, John fitzThomas's actions during the immediate aftermath of the battle of Arscoll were of greater long-term importance to his family. In a letter written to the king on February 14 1316 by an unnamed clerk who accompanied John de Hothum on his mission to Ireland, it is stated that two days after the battle, the justiciar and the defeated magnates, with the addition of Richard de Clare who had just arrived from Munster, and the exception of Maurice fitzThomas and Maurice de Rochford, who remained at Castledermot to shadow the Scots, travelled to Dublin in order to meet the king's envoy.¹¹⁸ The most visible outcome of their conference with de Hothum was the well-known pledge taken by the magnates on 4 February 1316 in which they swore loyalty to their king and to one another in the face of the gravity of the threat posed by Bruce, who they acknowledged had been joined by *touz les Ireys Dirlande* and by a great part of the English of that land.¹¹⁹ To copperfasten the agreement, the magnates agreed that their lands and chattels should be forfeited to the crown if they reneged upon their oaths, and they also offered to deliver hostages to the king to be kept wherever the king and his council

¹¹⁶ NAI RC 8/10, pp 529–30; Frame, 'The Bruces in Ireland', p. 34 n. 143.

¹¹⁷ PRO E.101/237/4; PRO E. 352/114 m. 28.

¹¹⁸ Phillips, *Documents*, pp 255–6.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp 253–5; Palgrave, *Parl. Writs*, ii div. ii pt. 2–appendix, p.98; *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p. 348. Maurice de Rochford and the Desmond Geraldine Maurice fitzThomas also associated themselves with the oath of loyalty.

should choose.¹²⁰ In fact, there is no evidence to suggest that any of the magnates who took the pledge of allegiance ever considered defecting to Bruce, and it has been suggested that their promise to provide hostages was a symbolic gesture of mutual solidarity rather than a serious measure to ensure their continued loyalty.¹²¹ Certainly, after the devastation of their Offaly estates, neither John fitzThomas nor his son had any reason to switch their allegiance to Bruce. On the contrary, from John fitzThomas's perspective, the presence of John de Hothum in Ireland offered him a golden opportunity to re-establish the connection to the flow of royal patronage from which he had derived great benefits throughout his career

By the time Edward II sent de Hothum to Ireland as a special envoy, the future bishop of Ely had already occupied important posts in both the English and Irish administrations. For example, he had served as chancellor of the Irish exchequer between May 1309 and January 1310, and was appointed chancellor of the English exchequer in December 1312.¹²² However, it is clear that de Hothum and fitzThomas had become well-acquainted long before this. Thus, de Hothum had actually made an indenture of service with fitzThomas as early as 1291, and had acted as the paymaster of the expedition to Scotland in 1301–2.¹²³ Incidentally, they also shared a common adversary, as both men were forced to endure legal harassment at the hands of Agnes de Valence during the 1300s.¹²⁴ Finally, in 1306, while serving as a baron of the Irish exchequer, de Hothum witnessed a charter by which fitzThomas acquired lands in eastern county

¹²⁰ Phillips, *Documents*, p. 254.

¹²¹ Frame, 'The Bruces in Ireland', p. 33; Phillips, 'The mission of John de Hothum to Ireland, 1315–16' pp 75–6. It is known that Thomas fitzJohn's eldest son, who was named John after his paternal grandfather, was in fact delivered as a hostage to the king, and that the child spent several years as a prisoner in both Ireland and in England, where he died in 1324. (PRO E. 352/114 m. 28d; *Clyn*, p. 16.). However, Phillips has noted that no references to hostages being kept can be dated earlier than the summer of 1317, and has suggested that de Hothum was satisfied with the offer of hostages (Phillips, 'The mission of John de Hothum to Ireland, 1315–16', p. 84 n. 120.).

¹²² Phillips, 'The mission of John de Hothum to Ireland, 1315–16', pp 64–5, 76.

¹²³ PRO E. 101/10/1 mm 1–3; BL Add. Ms. 7966A ff 101, 103v; *Red Bk. Kildare*, nos. 12–13.

¹²⁴ Chapter 4, pp 126–32; *CJR 1295–1303*, p. 322; *CJR 1305–07*, pp 19–20. De Hothum had served as Agnes's bailiff in Ireland during the 1290s.

Kildare.¹²⁵ The connections between de Hothum and the lord of Offaly have been dwelt upon at some length because of a key sentence contained in the envoy's report to Edward II. De Hothum wrote that as soon as he had heard the news of the debacle at Arscoll, he contacted one of his *privez amys des grants seigneurs*, and on the king's behalf, promised that rewards and great benefits would come to those magnates who rallied to the royal cause.¹²⁶ Given their former associations, it seems likely that John fitzThomas, the most important magnate present at Arscoll with the possible exception of Edmund Butler, was the close friend in question. Undoubtedly, as the joint declaration of loyalty issued on 4 February demonstrates, de Hothum's tactic of offering rewards to the defeated magnates proved to be a highly effective method of stiffening their resolve to continue to resist the invaders. In fact, the unnamed clerk who accompanied de Hothum asserted that the envoy's dealings with the great lords had been crucial to the safety of the land of Ireland, and noted that in return for publicly affirming their loyalty, the magnates secured a promise from de Hothum to the effect that he would not depart from the lordship without their permission until something was achieved against the enemy.¹²⁷ On one level, the magnates' anxiousness to retain the envoy in the lordship can be seen as further evidence of their inability to produce an effective leader from amongst their own ranks. However, it would be unwise to understate the extent to which they were also influenced by self-aggrandising motives. The Scottish invasion and the attendant uprisings by the Irish dynasts throughout the island were undoubtedly the most serious threats to the very existence of the lordship since the original conquest. Obviously, as such they had a detrimental effect upon the magnates' own prosperity, as the wasting of fitzThomas's estates in Offaly demonstrates so graphically.¹²⁸ But the crisis also reaffirmed the magnates' indispensability to the crown, and de Hothum's continuing presence in Ireland allowed

¹²⁵ *Red Bk. Kildare*, no. 113; Richardson and Sayles, *The Administration of Ireland*, p. 106.

¹²⁶ Phillips, *Documents*, pp 251–3.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 256–7.

¹²⁸ For another example, see Nicholas de Verdon's letter to Edward II from the autumn of 1315 in which he complained that he had lost his lands, revenues, horses, armour and followers (Phillips, *Documents*, p. 262).

them to exploit that fact. John fitzThomas was particularly successful in this regard, possibly because of his long acquaintance with the king's envoy. Thus, it seems that even as Bruce's troops were devastating the heartland of the lordship of Offaly, John himself was busily engaged in a bargaining process with his former retainer which resulted in him securing his last and greatest concession from his king.

Although Edward wrote to the Irish magnates including fitzThomas on 25 March thanking them for their efforts and exhorting them to continue, it became evident that serious assistance from the king would not be forthcoming while de Hothum remained in Ireland.¹²⁹ Consequently, he returned to England in April or early May accompanied by several Irish magnates, including Arnald and John le Poer.¹³⁰ Significantly, John fitzThomas also made the journey for the last time in his life.¹³¹ After they reached the royal court in May, the king embarked upon the dispensation of a wide range of favours to his Irish lieges. To take some of the more important examples, Arnald le Poer and his heirs were granted the manors of Castlewarden and Oughterard in county Kildare to the value of 100 marks *per annum*, for the service of two knights; Maurice de Rochford and his son were awarded Newcastle McKynegan, which had previously been mooted as a suitable site for John fitzThomas's long-delayed land grant of 1302, and Maurice fitzThomas of Desmond and Richard de Clare were each pardoned 1000 marks of their debts.¹³² Similarly, in another revealing indication of the manner in which Thomas fitzJohn had come to be seen as an important magnate in his own right, on 18 May he was granted 200 marks from the issues of the bishopric of Cloyne in reward for his good service.¹³³ However, of all the magnates, Thomas's father benefited most from the king's generosity. During his stay at court, John fitzThomas spent some of his time acting on behalf of his associates. For example, on 4 May, he secured a pardon of his outlawries for one Roger

¹²⁹ CCR 1313–18, p. 332; Palgrave, *Parl. writs*, ii, div. ii, pt. 1, p. 466.

¹³⁰ Phillips, 'The mission of John de Hothum to Ireland, 1315–16', p. 74.

¹³¹ *Clyn*, p. 12.

¹³² Phillips, 'The mission of John de Hothum to Ireland, 1315–16', p. 74.

¹³³ CCR 1313–18, p. 293.

de Byrthorpe, on the recommendation of John de Hothum.¹³⁴ Similarly, on 16 May, he succeeded in having the level of debt which David fitzGerald, former sheriff of Kerry owed to the crown reduced, because of David's good service with him in Scotland and Ireland.¹³⁵ Undoubtedly however, his primary reason for travelling to England was to further the interests of his own family. At Westminster on 14 May 1316, in the words of Friar Clyn, King Edward II *dedit Johanni filio Thome comitatum Kildarie ... pro garisona*.¹³⁶

The terms of the creation of the earldom can be gleaned from a number of sources. The most important relevant details are contained in the charter of the king's grant to fitzThomas which was issued on 14 May, and which has been preserved in both the *Red Book of Kildare* and in the charter rolls. First, it records that Edward raised John fitzThomas of Ireland to the name and honour of earl of Kildare in consideration of John's services to his late father and to himself in the past, and of his continued service in the future. Second, fitzThomas was granted the castle and town of Kildare with their appurtenances, as well as the knights' fees, advowsons and other appurtenances of the county of Kildare, with the important exception of the office of sheriff, which the king intended to retain in his own hands. Finally, the new earldom was to be held of the king in tail male for the service of two knights.¹³⁷ In other words, fitzThomas was being granted the lands and rights of his old enemy William de Vescy, without the valuable privilege of liberty rights. However, that same day the king also placed a significant restriction upon the value of the grant, when he informed the Irish justiciar that the revenues given to fitzThomas should not exceed £100 *per annum*.¹³⁸ No specific description of a belting ceremony has survived but it is likely to have taken place on 14 May, as John was styled 'earl of Kildare' in an official

¹³⁴ CPR 1313–17, p. 455.

¹³⁵ PRO SC. 8/144/7189; CCR 1313–18, p. 285.

¹³⁶ Clyn, p. 12; Red Bk. Kildare, no. 142.

¹³⁷ Red Bk. Kildare, no. 142; PRO C. 53/102 m. 5 no. 12; Cal. Chart. Rolls 1300–26, p. 307.

¹³⁸ CCR 1313–18, p. 288.

document two days later.¹³⁹ Thus, after thirty years at the head of his lineage, John fitzThomas had received an emphatic royal endorsement of his right to be recognised as one of the lordship of Ireland's greatest men.

The creation of the earldom of Kildare was both the crowning achievement of fitzThomas's career and a defining event in his family's history. As such, it deserves to be considered in some detail. Perhaps its most noticeable feature is the fact that the value of the grant which accompanied it was minuscule, when compared to those attached to contemporary creations in England. For example, the earldom of Norfolk given to Thomas of Brotherton in 1312 was worth approximately £4000, while the earldom of Carlisle which was created for Andrew Harcla in 1322 was valued at 1000 marks *per annum*.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, from John's own perspective, it is worth noting that the grant of 100 librates was not much of an advance on the 60 librates promised to him by Edward I fourteen years earlier, and it could be viewed as little more than a belated implementation of the earlier award. One conclusion which could be drawn is that fundamentally, as far as the king and his ministers were concerned, an Irish earldom was not viewed in the same light as its English equivalent.¹⁴¹ Alternatively, it could be argued that the fact that John was explicitly deprived of the right to exercise the office of sheriff in Kildare suggests that he was still generally viewed with suspicion by both administrations. Indeed, this possibility is strengthened by the fact that a year later, his son was awarded the liberty in similarly unfavourable circumstances.¹⁴² However, the small size of the settlement bestowed upon him is best seen within the context of the desperate financial situation faced by the Irish government. Given the fact that the administration had not even been able to raise enough ready cash to fund the army which assembled at Arscoll, it would be unrealistic to expect extravagant generosity when it came to rewarding fitzThomas a few months later.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ CCR 1313–18, p. 285.

¹⁴⁰ Phillips, 'The mission of John de Hothum to Ireland, 1315–16', p. 75.

¹⁴¹ Phillips, 'The mission of John de Hothum to Ireland, 1315–16', p. 84, n. 118.

¹⁴² *Red Bk Kildare*, nos 143–4.

¹⁴³ Frame, 'The Bruces in Ireland', p. 33.

Instead, it might be more useful to examine the genesis of and rationale behind the creation itself. It should be noted that John was made earl of Kildare during a period of exceptional political instability in England, when the earl of Lancaster's withdrawal from the court had created a power vacuum in the government.¹⁴⁴ Hence, it could be argued that fitzThomas's elevation formed part of the king's personal solution to the crisis in Ireland. On balance however, it is unlikely that the idea originated with King Edward. For example, no mention was made of the possibility when he wrote to fitzThomas in March 1316.¹⁴⁵ More pertinently, the contents of a surviving memorandum drawn up by the English council concerning the grants to all of the Irish magnates suggest that, when the king gave his assent to the creation of the earldom and to the other favours, he was acting on the council's advice.¹⁴⁶ In addition, it is significant that the renewed flow of royal patronage occurred immediately after de Hothum returned to England, and that despite the circumstantial evidence indicating his increasing infirmity, fitzThomas decided to travel to England in person. Therefore, it seems reasonable to suggest that the English government was acting on their envoy's recommendations, which in turn were based upon his negotiations with the magnates in the aftermath of the battle of Arscoll.¹⁴⁷ By inference, it is likely that John instigated his elevation to the status of earl himself. On reflection, from his perspective, the pursuit of a comital title would have been logical. Most obviously, the acquisition of an earldom would, in theory at least, bestow the same status upon him as that enjoyed by his old rival Richard de Burgh. Moreover, in general terms, the depth of fitzThomas's desire to increase his lineage's power and prestige should not be underestimated. While it may be possible to categorise his career as an exemplary case study in the consistent application of honest greed, his fundamental objectives were

¹⁴⁴ See Phillips, *Aymer de Valence*, pp 98–102; McKisack, *The fourteenth century*, pp 47–9; Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster*, pp 160–189 for discussions of the political turmoil in England at this time.

¹⁴⁵ CCR 1313–18, p. 332

¹⁴⁶ Phillips, *Documents*, pp 268–9.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 251–3.

more profound.¹⁴⁸ Throughout his life, John's guiding principle was a genuine belief that the legacy of Maurice fitzGerald II should be reunited in his own hands. Indeed, most of the episodes which saw him employ an unacceptable degree of lawlessness can be explained as attempts to do so. Hence, it seems reasonable to suggest that if the opportunity presented itself, fitzThomas would be eager to surpass his grandfather's achievement on behalf of the family, especially if he was aware that he had not long to live. Furthermore, any aspirations held by fitzThomas to become an earl were almost certainly considerably enhanced by the elevation of his son-in-law Edmund Butler to the earldom of Carrick in September 1315.¹⁴⁹ Although Butler's achievement did not endure, it undoubtedly set a precedent for his fellow Irish magnates, being the first occasion that one of their number had been so honoured since Walter de Burgh's success half a century earlier.¹⁵⁰ At the risk of stating the obvious, after September 1315, all Irish magnates of Butler's rank were more likely to seek an earldom from the crown, in the knowledge that such a goal was attainable. It seems safe to assume that the English government's initial decision to reverse Edward I's consistent policy of not increasing the number of Irish earls, was a hastily-taken emergency measure.¹⁵¹ Similarly, fitzThomas's elevation also occurred during a time of acute crisis. Thereafter however, the subsequent flurry of Irish creations demonstrates that during the period from 1318 until 1330, when Edward III took personal control of his kingdom, the expedient came to be valued as a relatively cheap method of securing loyal support within Ireland, regardless of the long-term consequences for the lordship.¹⁵² On balance, the timing of the creation of the earldoms of Ormond and Desmond, coupled with the circumstances surrounding the creation of the earldom of Louth suggests that in later years at least, Roger Mortimer of Wigmore was the main

¹⁴⁸ Frame, 'Power and society in the lordship of Ireland', p. 17.

¹⁴⁹ *Cal. Chart. Rolls 1300-26*, pp 284-5.

¹⁵⁰ *H. B. C.*, p. 491. Significantly, Walter de Burgh's elevation also occurred in the midst of an English political crisis. See Otway-Ruthven, *Medieval Ireland*, pp 195-8; Frame, 'Ireland and the Barons' wars', pp 158 - 167.

¹⁵¹ See Phillips, *Aymer de Valence*, pp 92-3 for details of the conference held at Lincoln in late August 1315 which preceded Butler's elevation and the dispatch of de Hothum to Ireland.

¹⁵² See Otway-Ruthven, *Medieval Ireland*, p. 246; *N. H. I.*, ii, pp 294, 299-300.

proponent of the policy.¹⁵³ Within this context, it may be significant that the future earl of March also witnessed the charter granting the earldom of Kildare to John fitzThomas.¹⁵⁴

Be that as it may, it is highly unlikely that in May 1316, John fitzThomas was unduly concerned about the long-term impact which the change in policy would have upon the lordship. After receiving a gift of jewels to the value of £28 18s 4d from King Edward, the new earl returned home.¹⁵⁵ There is little of significance to record about John's brief career as earl of Kildare. In June he received seisin of the castle and lands in Kildare.¹⁵⁶ According to Grace, a month later, he travelled to Dublin where he met the earl of Ulster 'and many other lords, who gave their hands to one another, and promised that they would die in defence of king and country'.¹⁵⁷ However, as this further affirmation of loyalty was fitzThomas's last chronicled activity, it is likely that he was already ailing. On Sunday, 12 September 1316, John fitzThomas died, appropriately enough in county Kildare, at Laraghbryan, near the great family manor of Maynooth.¹⁵⁸ He was buried in the Franciscan friary of Kildare.¹⁵⁹ After recording John's burial place, the Dublin annalist noted that it was said that he had been created earl of Kildare shortly before his death. He then went on to comment that John was succeeded by his son and heir, Thomas fitzJohn, who was a *vir prudens*. The implication, although unstated, is clear. His father had not been.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵³ *N. H. I.*, ii, pp 299–300; Duffy, *Ireland and the Irish sea region, 1014–1318*, pp 205–6; McKisack, *The fourteenth century*, pp 96–102.

¹⁵⁴ *Red Bk. Kildare*, no. 142.

¹⁵⁵ PRO E. 403/178 m. 2; Phillips, 'The mission of John de Hothum to Ireland, 1315–16', p. 84, n. 112.

¹⁵⁶ NAI RC 8/10, pp 143–4; Phillips, 'The mission of John de Hothum to Ireland, 1315–16', p. 84, n. 113.

¹⁵⁷ *Grace*, pp 72–3.

¹⁵⁸ *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p. 297.

¹⁵⁹ *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p. 352.

¹⁶⁰ *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p. 352; *DKPRI* 42, p. 24.

Conclusion

Part one:

The achievement of John fitzThomas

John fitzThomas's career at the head of his lineage spanned a period of just over twenty-nine years, from August 1287 to September 1316. When he first emerged from the obscurity of his early life as a minor landholder in Connacht, the status of the Geraldines of Offaly as one of the lordship of Ireland's greatest families was in imminent danger of eclipse. On one level, a major proportion of the landed wealth carved out by John's grandfather, Maurice fitzGerald II second lord of Offaly, had been alienated to Agnes de Valence, the widow of the third lord, Maurice fitzGerald III. More seriously, in 1287 the family itself faced extinction. Neither Gerald fitzMaurice III, the fourth lord of Offaly, nor his great-uncle the Connacht-based Maurice fitzMaurice had succeeded in producing male heirs. Consequently, the marriages made by the female members of the family meant that the entire Geraldine inheritance was due to fall into the hands of the de Cogan and the de Clares.

However, upon the death of John fitzThomas, the situation had been completely transformed. In the first instance, and most fundamentally, he fulfilled his dynastic obligations and ensured his lineage's continuing survival by producing a male heir. Similarly, the marriage alliances made by two of his children demonstrate that under his stewardship, the Geraldines of Offaly continued to be regarded as one of the lordship's leading lineages. Thus in 1312 Thomas fitzJohn, his son and heir married Joan, daughter of Richard de Burgh earl of Ulster, the most prominent magnate in Ireland. In addition, fitzThomas also became ancestor to the earls of Ormond through his daughter Joan, who married Edmund Butler in 1302. Secondly, John had presided over a successful consolidation of the family's landed wealth. Thus, in Kildare he not only retained his lineage's estates in his own hands, but increased them, thereby establishing himself beyond doubt as the dominant magnate within the region. Moreover, following the death of Agnes de Valence in 1309, John

managed to reassert his family's control over a sizeable portion of central county Limerick, after a hiatus of more than forty years. Finally, and most strikingly, in May 1316, fitzThomas succeeded in securing formal royal recognition, both of his own position as one of the lordship's major figures, and of his family's status as one of Ireland's greatest aristocratic lineages, when King Edward II created him earl of Kildare. Indeed, both the earldom and the territorial supremacy carved out by him proved to be enduring achievements which subsequently formed the solid platform from which his more famous fifteenth century descendants realised their ambitions. By any standards, John's life can be regarded as a remarkable success.

While it is possible to summarise the measure of John fitzThomas's accomplishment fairly succinctly, the detailed examination of his life has demonstrated that the reasons for his success were rather more complex. In fact, it has shown that during his turbulent career, as he went from initial obscurity through sudden prominence and near-calamity to his ultimate triumph, John's actions and objectives were shaped by a wide range of disparate influences. Consequently, this appears to be an appropriate point at which to review the 'highlights' of fitzThomas's life while emphasising the factors which were critical to the manner in which he achieved his ambitions. One observer has cited John's career as an exemplary case study in the consistent application of honest greed.¹ This rather uncharitable interpretation contains a large measure of truth, as fitzThomas was undoubtedly a highly ambitious man. Indeed, throughout his life, John's actions were guided by his desire to reunite his grandfather's inheritance under his own control, an objective which he pursued with single-minded determination and a great deal of success. Crucially however, his ability to fulfil this ambition was facilitated by the actions of several influential individuals during the early stages of his career. Most importantly, he was the beneficiary of a sense of Geraldine self-awareness, on the part of two more senior members of the lineage, which manifested itself in a reluctance to allow the family inheritance pass into the hands of outsiders. For John, who was the son of Thomas, fourth son of Maurice fitzGerald II, was merely the scion of a junior branch of the family, and as such had no legal claims to the Geraldine properties himself. However, in 1287 fitzThomas became fifth lord of Offaly as a direct result of the actions of

¹ Frame, *Power and society in the lordship of Ireland*, p. 17.

the dying fourth lord, Gerald fitzMaurice III. Gerald decided to disinherit Juliana de Cogan, his aunt and heir general in favour of fitzThomas, apparently to keep his estates within Geraldine hands. Similarly, a year later Amabilia, the daughter and coheiress of Maurice fitzMaurice, who was herself a childless widow, decided to prevent her extensive inheritance in Connacht and county Limerick from passing into the hands of the de Clare family, and began the process of assigning her rights and claims over to John fitzThomas.

The decisions of Gerald and Amabilia to enfeoff John fitzThomas with their properties had the effect of suddenly propelling him into the first rank of Irish magnates. Thereafter, the assistance of other individuals enabled him to consolidate his new-found prominence. In particular, the role of the archbishop of Dublin John de Sandford, in his capacity as chief governor of Ireland and as a trusted advisor to King Edward I should be stressed. De Sandford's stint as *custos* of Ireland was brief, but during his term of office he went to some trouble to assist the new lord of Offaly, by facilitating Amabilia's transfer of her property in Connacht to him and by mounting a major campaign in the marches of Kildare which temporarily pacified his rebellious Irish tenants. In fact, during his early career, fitzThomas might best be regarded as a member of the archbishop's household. This viewpoint is strengthened by the fact that John maintained his ties with some of de Sandford's other associates after the archbishop's death. In particular, in 1294, when William de Oddingeseles, who also had close connections to the archbishop became chief governor of Ireland, at a time when fitzThomas's power-struggle with Richard de Burgh reached its climax, he showed a distinct bias in favour of the lord of Offaly. However, as far as de Sandford himself is concerned, it could be argued that his greatest service to his protégé occurred in 1291, after his period in office had ended. In that year, he took fitzThomas to England to meet King Edward I, and during John's first recorded visit to court, he succeeded in establishing a good personal relationship with his king. The advantages of possessing such a relationship became evident immediately, as the king granted him the power to negotiate peace terms with the Irish, and more importantly, appointed him to be the keeper of the royal castles of Roscommon and Rinndown in Connacht. Thereafter, although John's behaviour in 1294-5 strained the relationship for a time, it seems that at

heart, King Edward looked upon fitzThomas as someone 'of whose valour and constancy he has heretofore made trial'.²

Although John began his career under broadly favourable circumstances, he also had to surmount a series of formidable obstacles, some of which he inherited, and others which were of his own making. In the first instance, the initial transfer of power and lands from Gerald fitzMaurice III had been botched. Unfortunately for fitzThomas, Gerald died before he managed to acquire seisin of all the properties and rights pertaining to the lordship of Offaly. Consequently, Juliana de Cogan the heir general retained some claims to the Geraldine inheritance after John became lord of Offaly, particularly to the lands held for life by Agnes de Valence, the well-connected widow of Maurice fitzGerald III. Thereafter, for most of his career, fitzThomas's relationship with the de Cogan family was tense. Initially, he had to face a legal challenge from Juliana herself, and after her death her son and heir John de Cogan III also caused him some difficulties. John's second major problem was closely related to, and to a great extent the cause of, his disputes with the de Cogans. To be specific, Agnes de Valence survived until 1309, which meant that fitzThomas was deprived of the substantial income accruing from his family's Limerick estates and from one third of their Kildare properties for most of his life, to his evident frustration.

FitzThomas's third major difficulty, which manifested itself almost at the outset of his career, concerned his lands in Offaly itself, where he was obliged to deal with a security threat of serious proportions. It should be remembered that the bulk of the estates which he acquired on becoming lord of Offaly were located in the western marches of Kildare, where Anglo-Irish settlement was sparse and the indigenous population groups had retained their pre-invasion leadership largely intact. Although John became lord of Offaly during a temporary period of calm, the peace did not endure, as de Sandford's campaigns on his behalf in 1288-9 demonstrate. In fact, throughout his career John was obliged to devote a considerable portion of his energies to campaigning in the marches in order to maintain a semblance of control over his nominal tenants.

² CCR 1296-1302, p. 187.

Fourthly, fitzThomas's ability to achieve his objectives was hampered by the fact that as a general rule, his relationships with the men who held the office of chief governor tended to be rather poor. There were of course exceptions to this generalisation, as the examples of John de Sandford and William de Oddingeseles make clear. Similarly, when Edmund Butler served as *custos* during the 1300s, he undoubtedly tried to be of assistance to his father-in-law. However, John fitzThomas clashed bitterly with William de Vescy, who combined the office of justiciar with the lordship of the liberty of Kildare. The instability engendered by this particular quarrel graphically demonstrates the inherent dangers to a magnate of making an enemy of a chief governor. Lastly, and most importantly, fitzThomas's longest relationship with a chief governor was with John Wogan, who served almost continuously from 1295 to 1312. While Wogan never displayed overt hostility towards the lord of Offaly, there is little evidence that relations between the two men were particularly cordial either. On balance, it appears that although Wogan appreciated fitzThomas's military abilities, he did not trust the lord of Offaly, and it is noticeable that he rarely asked John for advice.

Finally, the most serious obstacle in the path of fitzThomas's ambitions to emulate his grandfather's achievements was the arrival in Ireland of Richard de Burgh, earl of Ulster and lord of Connacht in 1286. It should be recalled that in the 1260s, the de Burghs and Geraldines had fought a bitter, but indecisive civil war in an attempt to establish which lineage would dominate Connacht and western Ulster. Consequently, de Burgh's return to Ireland, combined with John fitzThomas's subsequent acquisition of the estates which passed to Amabilia daughter of Maurice fitzMaurice in Connacht, meant that the problem again became a live issue. Thus, from the outset of his career, fitzThomas was faced with a serious dilemma. Given the inherent tensions that existed between the two families, it was always likely that any attempt on John's part to put his grandfather's claims to overlordship of western Ulster into effect would result in a violent confrontation with de Burgh, the most powerful magnate on the island.

However, it has to be said that violent confrontations held few fears for John fitzThomas. If the various means by which he attempted to resolve the problems facing him are examined together, a basic, if rather unpalatable facet of John's character emerges into sharp focus.

Repeatedly, whenever a particular difficulty arose, fitzThomas's preferred solution was to resort to violence or intimidation in an attempt to cow his opponent into submission. Obviously, in the course of his campaigns against the Irish dynasties of the midlands, fitzThomas's employment of force was considered to be legitimate in the eyes of the Dublin administration. However, some evidence suggests that as far as the Irish themselves were concerned, his prosecution of the war went beyond the bounds of what was deemed to be acceptable behaviour. Admittedly, it is not possible to link fitzThomas conclusively to the atrocity perpetrated by Piers de Bermingham against the O'Connor Falys in 1305. However, the usually reliable author of the Irish 'Remonstrance' to Pope John XXII specifically accused John of taking advantage of Piers's crime to murder his own foster-son. Moreover it is surely significant that the author of the Remonstrance also singled fitzThomas out as an example of the perfidious 'middle nation' whose conduct had rendered it impossible for the Irish to retain their allegiance to the English crown.

In any case, there is no doubt but that fitzThomas's behaviour towards his Anglo-Irish and English adversaries was frequently unlawful. For example, in 1297 he made an agreement with John de Cogan concerning the Geraldine estates in Limerick which were in the possession of Agnes de Valence. This agreement, which called for a division of the properties between the two men, demonstrates that their dispute was amenable to an amicable resolution. However, fitzThomas chose not to pursue this option. Instead, by 1303 he was ignoring the agreement, and when the Limerick properties finally became vacant in 1310 following the death of Agnes de Valence, John fitzThomas resorted to private warfare to secure his possession of them. Similarly, John's dealings with Agnes de Valence herself are instructive. It is clear that he was frustrated by the fact that an absentee with no real ties to the lordship was enjoying possession of a great proportion of his family's estates. Consequently, despite the fact that she was Edward I's first cousin, he consistently treated her badly. For example, there are strong grounds for suggesting that he conspired with her bailiff John de Valle to defraud her on a massive scale. More strikingly, his repeated intrusions upon her properties, which resulted in the seizure of her chattels 'in manner of open robbery', demonstrate an attitude towards both Agnes herself and the rule of law that can only be described as

contemptuous.³ Significantly, it should be noted that John's treatment of other absentees who crossed his path, such as Gerard de Orum, was similar to his behaviour towards Agnes.

On balance, given the fact that Agnes de Valence's longevity was depriving fitzThomas of a much-needed source of revenue, his harsh treatment of her is understandable, if not excusable. However, his conduct towards William de Vescy was a different matter altogether. It appears as though the two men initially fell out over the lord of the liberty of Kildare's vigorous reassertion of his rights within the region. Their quarrel was exacerbated in early 1293 when de Vescy, acting in his capacity as chief governor, intervened in a region which fitzThomas considered to be within his own sphere of influence, namely the king's cantreds of Connacht and installed Aodh son of Eoghan O'Connor as king of Connacht. While de Vescy's action may have been designed to provoke fitzThomas, the lord of Offaly's response was disproportionate. John deliberately undermined the justiciar's authority in Connacht by forcibly deposing and imprisoning Aodh son of Eoghan and replacing him with his own nominee, Cathal Ruadh O'Connor. Thereafter, tensions escalated, and it seems as though fitzThomas and de Vescy were on the brink of open war in the summer of 1293, before a timely intervention by King Edward prevented de Vescy from leading a royal army against the lord of Offaly.

However, the feud between the two magnates entered its most remarkable phase a year later, on April 1 1294. There is little doubt but that on that day, John fitzThomas perjured himself before the Irish council and an important group of magnates, including the earl of Gloucester. Specifically, John alleged that de Vescy had attempted to induce him to join a conspiracy against the king, and that he had called Edward a coward to boot. When set against the background of the bitter complaints which fitzThomas had levelled against the chief governor at the parliament held at Westminster in Michaelmas 1293, the notion that de Vescy would try to suborn the lord of Offaly, of all people, seems completely implausible. John's act of perjury is all the more difficult to comprehend when it is considered that by April 1294, de Vescy's future as justiciar was in serious doubt. In fact, he had been suspended from his office, pending the findings

³ *Cal. Chanc. warr.*, 1244-1326, p. 212.

of a commission investigating the allegations made against him by a wide range of individuals at Westminster in 1293. However, it seems that by April 1294, fitzThomas had realised that the commission's investigations would also expose his own illegal behaviour in Connacht, and so decided to forestall any unwelcome enquiries into his conduct in the western province by cold-bloodedly destroying de Vescy's reputation. On one level, John's feud with William de Vescy provides a good demonstration of the extraordinary lengths to which he was prepared to go in order to defeat an opponent. More remarkably, despite the fact that fitzThomas subsequently ignored a royal command, and failed to turn up at Westminster to face the outraged lord of Kildare in single combat, his iniquitous behaviour actually succeeded. De Vescy was replaced as chief governor by John's ally William de Oddingeseles. Moreover, the lord of Kildare never returned to Ireland, and in 1297 he surrendered the liberty to King Edward, leaving fitzThomas in the unrivalled position of being the region's dominant magnate.

FitzThomas's triumph over William de Vescy is particularly important because this success appears to have influenced his extraordinary behaviour immediately afterwards. For in the autumn of 1294, fitzThomas embarked upon the course of action which led to such unrest throughout the entire island that it later became known as 'the time of the disturbance'. The sheer scale of John's lawlessness during the winter of 1294-5 was remarkable. Apart from capturing and imprisoning the earl of Ulster, fitzThomas launched an invasion of Connacht, looted Agnes de Valence's properties and led his followers on a violent rampage through Kildare which culminated in his occupation of Kildare castle and the contemporaneous destruction of the liberty's records by An Calbhach O'Connor Faly. It is clear that John's primary 'war-aim' was to establish his supremacy over de Burgh in Connacht and Western Ulster, thereby ending the rivalry which had been engendered between the two lineages by the grant of the earldom of Ulster to Walter de Burgh in 1263. However, by any standards, the methods which he chose to achieve his objective were wildly reckless and adventurous. In particular, fitzThomas conducted his operations on such a scale and against such an important individual that he was bound to attract royal retribution. Almost certainly, his elimination of de Vescy from the lordship had made him over-confident and his conduct may best be explained by echoing Stanihurst's apt expression, which was

that John simply 'waxed loftie of mind'.⁴ Nevertheless, fitzThomas's behaviour during 'the disturbance' is merely an extreme example of his general attitude towards the resolution of disputes. Throughout his career, John persisted in believing that the kind of bold, decisive action which had served his predecessors well would also produce a favourable outcome for himself.

Overall, even a cursory glance at the lengths to which fitzThomas went to attain his objectives confirms the view generally expressed by modern historians that he was an extremely ruthless individual.⁵ However, it is important to note that with the significant exception of his quarrel with William de Vescy, his ruthlessness did not always achieve the desired results, and on several occasions was actually counter-productive. For example, although John made a great effort to retain a degree of control over the Irish dynasties of western Kildare, the fact remains that the long-term prospects for the Anglo-Irish settlements west of the Barrow had become bleak long before Edward Bruce set foot on the island. Within this context, the failed attempt by Piers de Bermingham to secure peace by eliminating the leadership of the O'Connor Falys can be seen to have worsened the plight of the settlers in the western marches. Overall however, it would be an overstatement to describe fitzThomas's campaigns in the marches as a complete failure. Apart from protecting the more densely settled districts east of the Barrow, by retaining control of his family's *caput* at Lea castle until the Bruce invasion, he was able to maintain a stabilising military presence in the region. However, the same cannot be said of his foolhardy attack upon the earl of Ulster. Most obviously, the events of 'the disturbance' led to precisely the opposite result to that which fitzThomas intended, namely the complete expulsion of the Geraldines of Offaly from Connacht. Indeed, while losing his family's stake in Connacht undoubtedly constituted a humiliating reverse for the lord of Offaly, John can be considered to have been fortunate that his punishment was so light, and that a complete forfeiture of his properties was not demanded of him. Moreover, in the longer term, his activities during 'the disturbance' appear to have earned him the permanent distrust of the Irish

⁴ Stanihurst, p. 201

⁵ For example, see *N. H. I.*, ii, p. 188; Orpen, *Normans*, iv, pp 115-9.

administration. It is worth noting that with the minor exception of a stint as custodian of the peace in county Kerry, fitzThomas was not appointed to any official position within the lordship of Ireland thereafter. In this regard at least, John's experiences contrasted sharply with those of his grandfather half a century earlier.

Given the strength of King Edward's reaction to the similar behaviour of the earls of Gloucester and Hereford in the Welsh marches a few years earlier, the leniency which he displayed towards fitzThomas requires some explanation.⁶ It is possible that the favourable impression which John made on his first visit to England played some part in the king's thinking. However, there is little doubt but that the main reason for fitzThomas's survival was that Edward's burgeoning problems in Scotland and France left him with a pressing need for military assistance. In fact, John's military service overseas provides the key to understanding his rehabilitation in the aftermath of the disturbance. For example, his participation in the Scottish campaign of 1296 secured pardons for himself and many of his associates for most of their violent deeds during 'the disturbance', with the significant exception of the capture and imprisonment of the earl of Ulster. However, it is clear that John's service in Flanders during the early months of 1298 was the decisive factor in his recovery of the king's confidence. Although he arrived too late to participate in the campaign proper, it is important to remember that he made the journey at a time when Edward I faced the greatest challenge to his authority to occur during his reign, with civil war being threatened in England. Undoubtedly, by this act of conspicuous loyalty, fitzThomas earned himself the gratitude of his king. Edward's high opinion of the lord of Offaly becomes clearer when John's participation in the Scottish campaign of 1301-2 is considered. Although the campaign itself was a failure, the king made a particular effort to reward fitzThomas for his endeavours, promising him an outright grant of land as well as the provision of a valuable ecclesiastical benefice to his second son Thomas fitzJohn.

⁶ For details of the feud between Gloucester and Hereford, see Prestwich, *Edward I*, pp 348-51; Kaeuper, *War, Justice, and Public Order*, pp 262-3.

In fact, it can be argued that John's martial prowess was his most important asset, both in terms of ensuring his survival as a man of consequence and in facilitating his ultimate elevation to comital rank. Thus, as far as the former consideration is concerned, fitzThomas's military qualities played a crucial part in shielding him from the consequences of another of his ill-advised ventures, namely his repeated persecutions of the king's first cousin Agnes de Valence. The Irish administration displayed a noticeable lack of vigour in its efforts to assist Agnes in either assessing the damages inflicted upon her by fitzThomas, or in levying the debts which he owed to her. Admittedly John's ability to intimidate or suborn the local royal officials who were responsible for implementing the government's orders played a vital part in his frustration of Agnes's pursuit of justice. However, it is worth noting that the timing of Agnes's attempts to recoup her losses from fitzThomas was extremely poor, in that simultaneously, John was proving himself to be a bulwark against the depredations of the Irish dynasties of the midlands. Consequently, despite her close ties to the king, the administration in Dublin pragmatically decided that the best course of action to adopt was to leave fitzThomas alone.

Similarly, the fact that John was created earl of Kildare at a time when the threat posed to the lordship's survival by Edward Bruce meant that military considerations were of paramount importance is not a coincidence. Indeed, fitzThomas's reaction to the arrival of the Scots in Ireland provides a striking example of another facet of his character, namely his tendency to view situations which constituted crises for the king as golden opportunities to be exploited. The hard bargains which he drove with the royal negotiating teams in the late 1290s and early 1300s before agreeing to perform service overseas demonstrate that this particular aspect of his character had manifested itself earlier in his career. However, John took this attitude to extreme lengths during the Bruce invasion. For example, the letter which he sent to Edward II in September 1315 may have reaffirmed his loyalty to his monarch, but it also reminded the king of his obligation to fulfil his father's long-deferred promise to bestow land upon fitzThomas. John's reaction in the wake of the battle of Ardscoil in January 1316 was even more opportunistic. Despite being partially responsible for the failure of the royal army to defeat the Scots, it is clear that fitzThomas saw the disaster as a chance to further his own interests. Thus, even as the Scots were ravaging his estates in Offaly, John was seeking concessions from the king's envoy John de Hothum. Subsequently, he travelled to England

in order to pursue his claims in person. The scale of the crisis in Ireland, where the justiciar was discredited, the administration bankrupt, and the power of the earl of Ulster broken should not be underestimated. Consequently, it is not altogether surprising that Edward II, acting on de Hothum's advice, should have looked upon the demands of a senior magnate of proven loyalty and military worth with favour. In the final analysis, it is clear that in May 1316, fitzThomas skilfully exploited his reputation for military usefulness at a time when the lordship faced a security threat of unparalleled proportions, in order to extract the title of earl from King Edward.

In conclusion, it is possible to discern a number of factors which were critical to fitzThomas's success. In the first instance, the significance of John's own forceful personality cannot be gainsaid. The very turbulence of his career testifies to the fact that he consistently displayed the qualities of naked ambition, a ready willingness to take risks and a steadfast faith in the efficacy of his martial ability. To an extent, circumstances in Offaly obliged fitzThomas to behave in this fashion. The permanently unsettled conditions in the marches meant that he had to be capable of defending the region's Anglo-Irish settlements and strongholds from the depredations of the local Irish dynasties. However, a study of his career confirms that in addition to being a warrior, fitzThomas also had to run his business affairs. In practice, this meant that John required a degree of competence in the overseeing of the management of his estates and in the acquisition of property, as well as possessing an understanding of both the law and of court procedures. Admittedly, in John fitzThomas's case, it has to be said that his martial qualities were rather more in evidence than his managerial abilities.

Interestingly however, the personal attributes such as ambition and audacity which can most readily be associated with fitzThomas had been lauded by Gerald of Wales, and had helped his predecessors to propel their lineage to the forefront of affairs in the lordship of Ireland during the first century following the invasion.⁷ Indeed, one of the more important revelations arising from a close analysis of

⁷ Giraldus, *Expugnatio*, pp 80–1, 168–71. For a discussion of Gerald's opinions on both the Irish and his own family, see R. Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales: 1145–1223*, pp 18, 20–25, 158–177.

fitzThomas's career is the extent to which it was predicated by his desire to emulate the achievements and realise the unfulfilled ambitions of his grandfather Maurice fitzGerald II. This is not to say that John's primary motivation was his lineage's aggrandisement. Given his obscure origins, the gathering of as much of his grandfather's inheritance as possible into his own hands was fitzThomas's most obvious route to the attainment of wealth and power. Nevertheless, it is equally clear that the importance of familial solidarity should not be understated, and that in fact, it was essential to John's success. In particular, it should be recalled that the decisions made in his favour by Gerald fitzMaurice III and Amabilia formed the basis of his initial rise to prominence.

During the early years of fitzThomas's public life, another key reason for his ultimate success also manifested itself. By associating himself with John de Sandford, archbishop of Dublin and justiciar of Ireland, fitzThomas showed a clear appreciation of the need to win patronage from powerful individuals. Indeed, it could be argued that John's subsequent ability to sustain a relationship with Edward I was essential to his survival in the aftermath of 'the disturbance'. In the main, this relationship was based upon fitzThomas's conspicuous loyalty to and military service, both at home and overseas, on behalf of the king – traits for which parallels can be found in the experiences of the second and third lords of Offaly. Indeed, it is possible to echo the comment made about his Desmond Geraldine namesake who was killed at Callan in 1261 and state that 'for fitzThomas ... the pursuit of political influence at court was as vital as the brandishing of a sword locally'.⁸ Of course, this point should be qualified by noting that as far as John fitzThomas of Offaly was concerned, any hope of gaining the former was based upon his talent for the latter. It has also been observed that King Edward displayed a considerable degree of skill in his management of magnates like John fitzThomas.⁹ While this is a valid point it tends to obscure the inverse proposition. Given the turbulent, insecure environment in which he operated, John fitzThomas's

⁸ R. Frame, 'King Henry III and Ireland: The Shaping of a Peripheral Lordship', p. 185. However, it might be more accurate to substitute the phrase 'political favour' for 'political influence'.

⁹ Frame, *Colonial Ireland*, p. 66.

maintenance of a good relationship with the king while pursuing his own legally-dubious objectives was no mean accomplishment.

Overall then, the most enduring impression left by a study of fitzThomas's life is that first and foremost, the first earl of Kildare was a gifted opportunist. Broadly speaking, after his fortuitous rise to prominence, he can be seen to have operated along the lines laid down by, and towards the objectives of, his Geraldine predecessors. Although this approach led him into serious difficulties in the 1290s, fitzThomas showed enough political skill and military ability to successfully emulate his forebears' tactic of gaining royal redemption through service to the crown. Thereafter, it was his skilful exploitation of the problems facing Edward II after the advent of Edward Bruce in Ireland in 1315 which enabled him to surpass the achievements of the previous lords of Offaly, by securing a comital title for himself and for his lineage. Ultimately, the best measure of John's achievement can be seen in the inheritance which he bequeathed to his successors.

Part two:

The wider significance of the career of John fitzThomas

By definition, the primary purpose of a biography is to unravel, insofar as possible, the skein of beliefs, ambitions, influences and events that shaped and defined its subject's life. In addition however, any attempt to fulfil this obligation will, of necessity, have the beneficial side-effect of helping to illuminate the society in which he dwelt. Thus, the study of John fitzThomas's life provides several valuable insights into the kind of society that existed in Ireland during the reigns of Edward I and Edward II. Not surprisingly, John's turbulent career is a particularly rich source of material which is relevant to an examination of the attitudes possessed by, and general conduct of, the lordship's magnates during the decades preceding the Bruce invasion. Moreover, it also sheds much light upon several other issues of broader interest which have concerned historians of the lordship during this period. These include the mounting difficulties encountered by the Dublin administration as it grappled to enforce its authority and maintain order, the first tentative signs of the emergence of a wider political community within the lordship whose interests did not coincide with those of the magnates, and the question of the complex relationships which existed between the two nations in Ireland.

It is clear that for most of his recorded career, John fitzThomas was one of the most important men in Ireland. However, it would be advisable to exercise a degree of caution before attempting to draw generalised conclusions about the behaviour of the principal magnates of the lordship from his experiences. For John was a rather atypical representative of the small group of aristocrats who dominated the lordship during his lifetime. In particular, fitzThomas's upbringing and political concerns were somewhat unusual when compared with those of his peers, in that he appears to have been raised in Ireland, and that subsequently, he devoted all of his martial and political energies to the task of improving his position there. Within this context, it might also be significant that fitzThomas's property acquisitions appear to have been conducted

exclusively within the lordship. The same attachment to the island cannot be demonstrated for most of the other aristocrats who exercised authority there.

In the first place, the partitions of Leinster and Meath in the 1240s meant that a large portion of the lordship of Ireland remained in the hands of magnates who usually resided in England, and whose main political and economic interests lay to the east of the Irish Sea. Not surprisingly, some of their number, such as William and Aymer de Valence and Edmund Mortimer rarely, if ever set foot in Ireland. Admittedly others, like Gilbert de Clare earl of Gloucester and Roger Bigod earl of Norfolk did make a greater effort to give personal attention to their Irish estates.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the fact remains that for individuals like the earls of Gloucester and Norfolk, their Irish properties were literally of peripheral interest to them, both economically and politically. Hence, at the risk of stating the obvious, the degree to which they shared the same outlook and political concerns as a permanently resident magnate such as fitzThomas is questionable. Moreover, it is likely that John's social and cultural horizons were somewhat more narrow than those of individuals like Geoffrey de Geneville, the French lord of Trim, who spent much of his time in Ireland. Indeed, the contrast in background between de Geneville, a former crusader, trusted confidante of King Edward I and brother of the author of the biography of St Louis, and fitzThomas, a scion of a minor branch of a marcher lineage based on the western edge of Christendom could hardly have been greater.¹¹ Furthermore, unlike fitzThomas, several of the more important magnates who usually resided in Ireland, including Richard de Burgh earl of Ulster and Richard de Clare, fitzThomas's first cousin once removed, received an English upbringing.¹² Lastly, it should be noted that at least one important individual who appears to have been raised in

¹⁰ See for example, M. Altschul, *A baronial family in medieval England: the Clares, 1217-1314.*, pp 153-4, 285; R. Frame, 'The justiciar and the murder of the MacMurroughs in 1282', pp 224-5.

¹¹ See *N. H. I.*, ii, p. 189; E. Hallam, *Capetian France, 987-1328*, pp 205-07; J. R. S. Phillips, 'The Anglo-Norman nobility', p. 95.

¹² Orpen, *Normans*, iv, pp 139-140; Altschul, *A baronial family in medieval England: the Clares, 1217-1314.*, pp 195-7

Ireland, namely Edmund Butler, did take the opportunity to acquire property in England.¹³

Nevertheless, it would be an overstatement to suggest that fitzThomas was in any way unique. In fact, his exclusive attachment to the lordship was shared by several other important figures including William de Burgh, Thomas fitzMaurice of Desmond, Arnald and Eustace le Poer, and Piers de Bermingham. Overall however, the most important point to be made about the lordship's principal figures during John's lifetime is that they displayed wide disparities in background, political orientation and character, which in turn greatly limit the effectiveness of any assumptions made on the basis that they possessed shared interests or common purposes.¹⁴

However, John fitzThomas's career did exemplify one striking feature of magnatial behaviour in Ireland, in that he readily resorted to private warfare in order to attain his ends. John's stormy relationships with Richard de Burgh and John de Cogan III graphically demonstrate that, like his predecessors the second and third lords of Offaly, he was willing to take drastic action to further his ambitions. In fact, fitzThomas has been singled out as 'the most lawless of the Irish barons'.¹⁵ Arguably however, such a judgement is too harsh, as the nature of John's behaviour was not particularly unusual when compared to that of his contemporaries. Indeed, the most exceptional aspect of his attack upon the earl of Ulster was that its sheer scale and the prominence of its victim brought royal retribution down on his head. A brief survey of the entries in the Irish annals during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries reveals that conflict between Anglo-Irish lineages was relatively commonplace.¹⁶ Moreover, the rebellions of the de Cauntetons and the de Verdons in the early years of Edward II's reign confirm that at least some of fitzThomas's peers were willing to wage war upon the king's representative

¹³ W. Page (ed.), *A history of the county of Buckinghamshire*, iv, p. 388; Frame, *English lordship in Ireland, 1318-61*, pp 48-9.

¹⁴ For a similar opinion upon the heterogeneous nature of the English aristocracy, see M. Prestwich, *English politics in the thirteenth century*, pp 44-6.

¹⁵ Richardson and Sayles, *Irish parliament in the middle ages*, p. 248.

¹⁶ See for example, *AI*, s.a. 1281, 1309, 1311, 1317.

when their interests were threatened.¹⁷ Similarly, the murder in 1310 of John de Boneville, the seneschal of Carlow and Kildare at the behest of his predecessor Arnald le Poer is doubly significant. In the first instance, the deed itself provides further evidence of the fact that violence was endemic throughout the lordship of Ireland, even within the officially designated 'land of peace'. However, the affair's aftermath is even more interesting. The administration exonerated Arnald for the murder, at the request of a group of important magnates, including both fitzThomas and the earl of Ulster.¹⁸ At the least, Arnald's experience suggests that the lordship's aristocrats regarded the settlement of disputes by violent means to be a legitimate enterprise.¹⁹ Moreover, this interpretation is supported by the Irish administration's response to the conflict in 1309 between fitzThomas and John de Bermingham on the one hand, and the de Lacys on the other, when it limited itself to arbitrating between the warring parties, with the judicious assistance of Richard de Burgh, in order to seek a resolution of the dispute. Finally, it is worth noting that the practice of conducting private warfare was by no means limited to those magnates whose formative years had been spent in Ireland. For example, a particularly glaring outbreak of violent competition between magnates occurred in 1311, when the English-raised Richard de Clare engaged in a serious conflict with William de Burgh, which was based upon their rival claims to exert overlordship over the O'Briens of Thomond.²⁰

This phenomenon may warrant further discussion, especially as the predilection of the Anglo-Irish magnates to operate in defiance of the law appears to contrast with the situation that pertained in

¹⁷ Otway-Ruthven, *Medieval Ireland*, pp 219–20, 222–3; B. Smith, 'A county community in Early Fourteenth-Century Ireland: The case of Louth', pp 572–80.

¹⁸ For details of the incident, see Otway-Ruthven, *Medieval Ireland*, p. 220; Williams, 'The "Kilkenny Chronicle"', pp 83–4; PRO E.101/235/20 m. 2.

¹⁹ It has been suggested that a similar attitude operated in northern Britain during a somewhat later period. See Goodman, 'Introduction', p. 10. For a discussion on the continuing attachment to the concept of private warfare on the part of the French aristocracy in the fourteenth century, see Kaeuper, *War, Justice, and Public Order*, pp 225–31.

²⁰ *AI*, s.a. 1311.

England, at least during the reign of Edward I.²¹ Perhaps the most obvious explanation for the predisposition of the lordship's magnates to engage in violence is that it simply reflects the *mores* of a frontier society. In general, the recent upsurge of interest in the production of comparative studies of such societies has emphasised their differences. Not altogether surprisingly however, it has also confirmed that one common feature shared by medieval frontier societies was their militarisation, together with the possession of certain 'social values flowing from that militarisation'.²² There is no doubt but that Ireland was a land of many frontiers, was highly militarised, and that the difficulties experienced by fitzThomas with the Irish of Offaly were shared, to a greater or lesser extent, by the other magnates operating in the lordship.²³ Hence, it seems safe to assume not only that martial prowess was a quality which they held in high esteem, but also that their collective appreciation of its virtues was an important contributory factor in their tendency to engage in violence amongst themselves. On balance however, it would be unwise to employ the 'frontier society' paradigm as the sole, or even as the principal reason for the Anglo-Irish aristocracy's rather robust attitude towards the rule of law. It is important to note that Edward I did not tolerate such practices in the fragmented society that existed in Wales. Most obviously perhaps, the harsh treatment meted out by the king to the earls of Gloucester and Hereford in 1291-2, when they attempted to settle their differences in the Welsh Marches by resorting to private warfare comes to mind.²⁴ Hence, it might be more profitable to seek an explanation for the Irish experience as exemplified by fitzThomas, by raising the broader issue of the degree of royal authority within the lordship, in comparison with the situation that existed in England.

²¹ See Kaeuper, *War, Justice, and Public Order*, pp 260-67.

²² See for example, Goodman, 'Introduction', p. 1; Bartlett and MacKay, 'Preface', p. v; R. Davies, 'Frontier Arrangements in Fragmented Societies: Ireland and Wales', pp 81-3.

²³ See for example, R. Frame, 'Military Service in the Lordship of Ireland 1290-1360: Institutions and Society on the Anglo-Gaelic Frontier', p. 101; R. Davies, 'Frontier Arrangements in Fragmented Societies: Ireland and Wales', pp 83-4.

²⁴ Prestwich, *Edward I*, pp 348-51; Kaeuper, *War, Justice, and Public Order*, pp 262-3.

One Irish historian has rather cynically observed that 'England was perhaps more peaceful than most of its neighbours, or at least English historians, following a tradition established by Bede, have agreed to make it appear so'.²⁵ In general, England's relative peacefulness has been ascribed to the unusually high degree of authority wielded by its monarchy. Consequently, the theory goes, its higher nobility 'unlike its French counterparts, did not so much aspire to a regional particularism but rather sought to exercise political influence directly over the king and his chief officers and ministers'.²⁶ However, although it shared the same ruler and was theoretically governed using the same legal and administrative systems, the situation in the lordship of Ireland differed markedly. In the first instance, an Anglo-Irish magnate without significant landed interests in England, such as John fitzThomas, was of peripheral political and economic importance to his king. As a result, the option of directly influencing royal policy was not normally available to him. A second, and more significant difference between the kingdom and the lordship was that the lord of Ireland was a permanent absentee. This fact may be obvious, but it was of crucial importance to the development of society within the lordship.²⁷ It could of course be argued that the justiciar performed the same functions in Ireland as did his royal master in England. However, John fitzThomas's treatment of William de Vescy and his frequent failure to comply with directives issued by John Wogan make it abundantly clear that regardless of their theoretical powers, justiciars were simply not regarded in the same light as kings by the Anglo-Irish magnates. Within this context, the fact that prolonged royal absences from England could have negative consequences for the upkeep of public order should be stressed. Thus, it has been observed that while Edward I was on crusade at the opening of his reign, 'the professional element in the regency ... had neither the personal authority nor the social weight needed to prevent disorder and (what might amount to the same thing) to hold the nobility in check'.²⁸ As a result, the same historian has bluntly commented, 'the nobility were able

²⁵ *N. H. I.*, ii, p.1.

²⁶ A. Tuck, *Crown and Nobility 1272-1461*, p. 9.

²⁷ See also, Frame, *English lordship in Ireland, 1318-61*, pp 4-5.

²⁸ J. R. Maddicott, 'Edward I and the lessons of baronial reform: Local Government, 1258-80', p. 8.

to defy the government with something like impunity', and took the opportunity to indulge in feuding amongst themselves.²⁹ The importance of the personal presence of the ruler is further underlined by the example of the English monarchy's other overseas possession, namely Gascony, where ducal authority had to be restored by means of a prolonged sojourn on Edward I's part during the 1280s.³⁰

In a similar vein, there is little doubt but that even when the king of England was *in situ*, the English aristocracy needed to be firmly controlled in order to prevent them from developing 'a regional particularism'. For example, it has been argued that the lenient policies of Henry III towards his magnates 'provided ideal conditions for the development of their local power', with predictably damaging consequences for the administration of justice.³¹ Similarly, while Edward I possessed the necessary degree of authority and political skills to keep the English magnates relatively quiescent during his reign, his son's subsequent failure in this regard clearly had disastrous consequences for the tranquillity of his realm.³² Overall, at the risk of stating the obvious, the English experience during the period between 1234 and 1320 underlines the point that a strong, politically capable, and resident ruler was usually necessary in order to maintain royal authority. However, as John fitzThomas's career demonstrates, in Ireland during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the requisite firm control based upon a close interest in and knowledge of the lordship on the part of the ruler was conspicuously lacking. Hence, the Anglo-Irish magnates' tendency to resort to violence amongst themselves is quite understandable, especially when their general militarisation and 'conquest ideology' is taken into account. Indeed, in general terms, when the predilection of the lordship's great men to wage

29 Maddicott, 'Edward I and the lessons of baronial reform: Local Government, 1258–80', pp 3–4, 9.

30 For details of Edward I's efforts in Gascony see J-P. Trabut-Cussac, *L'administration anglaise en Gascogne sous Henry III et Edouard I de 1254 à 1307*, pp 41–109; M. Wade Labarge, *Gascony, England's first colony 1204–1453*, pp 41–62.

31 D. A. Carpenter, 'King Magnates, and Society: the Personal Rule of King Henry III, 1234–1258', pp 62–69.

32 M. Prestwich, *English politics in the thirteenth century*, pp 25–8; *Idem*, 'Royal Patronage under Edward I', pp 46, 50–1; *Idem*, *War, Politics, and Finance*, p. 272; Kaeuper, *War, Justice, and Public Order*, pp 60–1.

private warfare is considered along with the high degree of 'nucleated magnate supremacies' such as those enjoyed by the earl of Ulster in Connacht or by fitzThomas in Kildare, further weight is lent to the observation that in certain important respects, Ireland 'is sometimes reminiscent less of England than of France'.³³

In fact, fitzThomas's career provides a useful glimpse of the process whereby an Anglo-Irish magnate went about establishing a territorial supremacy. It is evident that from the outset of his career, he assiduously devoted himself to building up a power base in Kildare. In the first place, he benefited greatly from the military assistance given to him by his mentor John de Sandford, the archbishop of Dublin, in 1288-9. Indeed, in general terms, de Sandford's efforts on behalf of his protégé underline the potential benefits which having a powerful patron could bring to a rising young aristocrat. However, in order to become dominant in Kildare, it was necessary for fitzThomas to exercise patronage himself. One approach which he adopted was to take local individuals with administrative experience, such as John de Punchardon, former seneschal of Kildare, into his employment. To an extent, fitzThomas's recruitment of men like de Punchardon can be viewed as prudent estate management. However, the witness lists attached to John's charters and recognisances confirm that shortly after his accession to the lordship of Offaly, other Kildare-based figures such as Sir William Cadel and Walter L'Enfaunt junior had become his associates. Most obviously perhaps, in 1289 John fitzThomas made a military indenture with Piers de Bermingham, his neighbour and fellow magnate, which formed the basis for a lasting partnership between the two men. Significantly, long before he recovered his family's Limerick estates, John was taking an interest in the region. For example, several members of a family which had administrative experience in the county, namely the Harolds, served with fitzThomas overseas. Furthermore, as the murder of Sir Richard Harold graphically reveals, they also became embroiled in his conflict with the de Burghs. More importantly perhaps, fitzThomas's treatment of Agnes de Valence during the 1300s demonstrates that he could

³³ R. Frame, *Colonial Ireland*, pp 98-101; *Idem*, 'Military Service in the Lordship of Ireland 1290-1360: Institutions and Society on the Anglo-Gaelic Frontier', p. 113. See also Kaeuper, *War, Justice, and Public Order*, pp 267-8

bring considerable influence to bear upon the royal officials of both counties Limerick and Kildare.

Interestingly, John's behaviour in Kildare and Limerick satisfies a recent definition of the practice of the historians' construct known as 'bastard feudalism', which places 'the invasion and subversion of law courts and offices of administration' by private individuals at the heart of the phenomenon.³⁴ The outcome of fitzThomas's protracted legal difficulties with Agnes de Valence makes it abundantly clear that in Ireland, such invasions and subversions were not unusual. In general, while the government was capable of issuing directives specifying a particular course of action throughout the island, it could not guarantee their implementation in the face of determined opposition from a magnate with good local connections. Thus, despite the tenacity shown by de Valence in her pursuit of justice, the relevant royal officials, like Cambinus Donati sheriff of Limerick and Albert de Kenleye sheriff of Kildare appear to have weighed up their options and to have decided that they had more to fear by incurring the wrath of the lord of Offaly than by disobeying their instructions from Dublin. Within this context, it also might be worth recalling that while trying to frustrate Agnes's efforts, John fitzThomas received varying degrees of support from some of his fellow magnates, including Edmund Butler and Richard de Burgh.³⁵ Similarly, several of John fitzThomas's activities highlight both the inadequate administration of criminal justice within the lordship and the way in which the behaviour of the magnates undoubtedly exacerbated the challenges to the maintenance of law and order facing the Irish administration. The most obvious example of the government's failure to come to terms with this problem comes from the aftermath of 'the disturbance'. In 1297, John Wogan launched a general eyre in the newly-established county of Kildare which uncovered the scale of the criminal activities conducted by fitzThomas and

³⁴ P. Coss, 'Debate: Bastard Feudalism Revised: Reply', pp 192–3. For a lengthier treatment of Coss's re-evaluation of McFarlane's model of 'bastard feudalism', see *Idem*, 'Bastard Feudalism Revised', pp 27–64.

³⁵ Arguably, the assistance received by John from the other magnates could be used in support of the view that 'bastard feudalism' developed 'as a response to the resurrection of public authority within feudal society and within the feudal state' (Coss, 'Bastard Feudalism Revised', p. 54). However, it has to be said that in general, the behaviour of the Anglo-Irish magnates does not suggest that they ever greatly feared public authority.

his followers two years previously. However, the punishments imposed by the eyre were remarkably light, and it is worth noting that despite the undeniable fact that a wide range of felonies had been perpetrated during 'the disturbance', no-one was actually executed for having participated in it.³⁶ In general, when the widespread and largely unpunished acts of lawlessness perpetrated by magnates such as fitzThomas during this period are considered together, the fragility of concepts like law and justice within the lordship becomes painfully exposed. Indeed, one of the most important insights to be gained from a study of John fitzThomas's career is the way in which his illegal actions starkly reveal both the limitations of the authority of the central administration in Dublin and the consequential chasm between official rhetoric and local realities.³⁷

However, it would be misleading to imply that the Dublin administration was indifferent to the magnates' lawless behaviour. Within this context, its treatment of fitzThomas after 'the disturbance' seems to be significant. For example, it is worth recalling that subsequently, he was not entrusted with any significant public office, and that when Edward I ordered the Irish government to suggest a suitable location for the proposed grant of 60 librates of land to fitzThomas, its preferred option was to allocate him property in the marches rather than in the land of peace. More broadly, on two occasions during fitzThomas's career, the government attempted to ameliorate the disorders perpetrated by the magnates through legislation. Thus, when a parliament was summoned to Dublin in 1297, it was explicitly stated that it was being held 'in order to establish peace more firmly'.³⁸ The legislation enacted by that parliament bears a close resemblance to the Statute of Westminster of 1275, and was clearly designed to curb the worst excesses of the great men.³⁹ Similarly, the parliament held at Kilkenny in 1310 also passed legislation aimed at controlling the

³⁶ See Hand, *English law in Ireland, 1290-1324*, pp 104-5, 108-11, 165, 168, 249-50; MacNiocaill, 'The interaction of laws', pp 109-113.

³⁷ See also Frame, 'King Henry III and Ireland: The Shaping of a Peripheral Lordship', p. 200 for similar comments about the efficacy of the Dublin administration during the 1260s.

³⁸ *Stat. Ire. John-Henry V*, pp 194-5.

³⁹ For the statutes of the 1297 parliament, see *Stat. Ire. John-Henry V*, pp 194-213; See also Maddicott, 'Edward I and the lessons of baronial reform', p. 14.

behaviour of the magnates and their dependant lineages. In addition, the administration attempted to underpin that parliament's directives by invoking the spiritual authority of the lordship's bishops, with the explicit approval of several of the more important magnates, including fitzThomas himself.⁴⁰ However, the effectiveness of this particular expedient may best be summed up by repeating the observations of the Dublin annalist :

Parliamentum tentum est Kylkenie ... in quo multe provisiones tamquam statuta providebantur, multum utiles terre Hibernie, si fuissent observate.⁴¹

Indeed, the fact that fitzThomas went to war against John de Cogan III shortly afterwards neatly illustrates the rather limited impact which either the legislation or the threat of excommunication had upon his actions.

More seriously perhaps, several details from fitzThomas's career make it clear that the administration was itself partially responsible for the magnates' unruly behaviour. For example, the crown's eagerness to draw troops from Ireland meant that in the course of the eyre of Kildare, individuals like William Cadel, who had been found to have committed homicide, went unpunished because of their service in Scotland with the lord of Offaly. Furthermore, despite the sentiments expressed at the Kilkenny parliament, the reaction of both Edward II and the Irish administration to John fitzThomas's conflicts with the de Lacys and John de Cogan in 1309 and 1310 strongly suggests that they did not regard the punishment of those who engaged in private warfare as being of paramount importance. Instead, King Edward's keen desire to have fitzThomas serve in the abortive expedition to Scotland in 1310 led the administration to seek a resolution of John's quarrels through arbitration, rather than by enforcing the law. Hence, it seems reasonable to conclude that for the duration of John Wogan's long justiciarship, the administration's efforts to do its duty by maintaining order and providing justice within the lordship were repeatedly subverted by its obligation to contribute to the ultimately unsuccessful attempts by Edward I and Edward II to subdue Scotland.⁴²

40 For the statutes of the 1310 parliament, see *Stat. Ire. John-Henry V*, pp 258-77.

41 *Chart. St Marys*, ii, p. 294.

42 See also Kaeuper, *War, Justice, and Public Order*, pp 125-130, where the similar problems afflicting the kingdom of England are discussed.

Nevertheless, it is significant that in 1310, fitzThomas felt it to be desirable to at least pay lip-service to the concept of adhering to and abiding by the 'commonwealth' statutes enacted in parliament. The attitude expressed by the Dublin annalist in his comments upon the Kilkenny parliament clearly indicates that concern about law and order in general and magnatial behaviour in particular extended beyond administrative circles.⁴³ In turn, this raises the broader issue of the extent to which 'county communities', which did not perceive their interests to be identical to those of the magnates, had developed in the lordship of Ireland in general, and in Kildare in particular.⁴⁴ Admittedly, on the face of it, there is little evidence to suggest that fitzThomas's freedom to manoeuvre was ever unduly hampered by the need to consider the collective wishes of the community of Kildare. Similarly, although the parliaments of 1297 and 1310 were more representative of opinion within the lordship than was usual, it is not possible to gauge the extent to which the 'commonwealth measures' enacted in them had their origins in governmental initiative or in pressure from below.⁴⁵ Moreover, it should be noted that the Irish petitions presented before the King in the English parliament during fitzThomas's lifetime do not reveal widespread discontent about his conduct. Indeed, somewhat ironically, the magnate who attracted most criticism concerning his behaviour in Ireland in that forum was none other than fitzThomas's old adversary, William de Vescy. Nevertheless, it is clear that a tradition of acting collectively did exist in Kildare. Most obviously, experiences such as performing jury service at the liberty court bound the 'worthy men' of Kildare together. Moreover, in the military sphere, the Kildare community was long-accustomed to acting in concert with the other settlers in Leinster when a royal service was proclaimed, in a tradition whose origins lay in the original subinfeudation of the province.⁴⁶ Most importantly perhaps, it should be recalled that several of John fitzThomas's

⁴³ In fact, quite a number of instances of disaffection with the behaviour of the magnates has survived. See for example, *N. H. I.*, ii, pp 718–9.

⁴⁴ For a localised study of the question see Smith, 'A county community in Early Fourteenth-Century Ireland: The case of Louth', pp 561–88. See also Prestwich, *English politics in the thirteenth century*, pp 47–63.

⁴⁵ For a discussion of the parliaments, see *N. H. I.*, ii, pp 271–2, 278.

⁴⁶ Otway-Ruthven, 'The medieval county of Kildare', p. 193; *Stat. Ire. John–Henry V*, pp 270–73.

campaigns against the Irish of Offaly were financed by the county community. For example, it has been noted that in order to secure financial backing for John's proposed campaign in Offaly with Fyn O'Dempsey in 1306, 'at least a measure of local consent' was required.⁴⁷

However, given the fact that in that particular instance fitzThomas's stated objective was to pacify the marches, it seems reasonable to assume that his proposed actions would have met with the county community's approval. Obviously, it is unlikely that this was forthcoming when he devoted his energies to rampaging through Kildare in order to discomfit the earl of Ulster. Within this context, it might be appropriate to draw some comparisons with other parts of the lordship during a slightly later period. Two of John's younger contemporaries, namely Maurice fitzThomas first earl of Desmond and John de Bermingham earl of Louth, encountered serious difficulties in their dealings with organised groups of their social inferiors. In Maurice fitzThomas's case, he had to endure the hostility of the citizens of several important towns in Munster in the 1320s and 1330s, while John de Bermingham had to face the enmity of the county community of Louth in the 1320s.⁴⁸ At the least, the experiences of the earls of Desmond and Louth clearly demonstrate that serious dichotomies of interests, between the magnates on the one hand, and organised local communities on the other could manifest themselves in the early fourteenth century. Indeed, for de Bermingham, as is well known, this dichotomy had fatal consequences for himself, his timpanist and 160 of his followers.⁴⁹ At this point it might be worth recalling that at one stage, John fitzThomas also faced the disapproval of his neighbours. Specifically, in 1295, in the wake of his falling into disgrace for his assault upon the earl of Ulster, the bulk of his Kildare neighbours were conspicuous by their absence from the list of individuals who were willing to act as his mainpernors.

Nevertheless, there is a world of difference between the Kildare community's relative lack of sympathy for fitzThomas's plight, and

⁴⁷ Frame, 'Military Service in the Lordship of Ireland 1290-1360', p. 113.

⁴⁸ See *N. H. I.*, ii, pp 271-2; Smith, 'A county community in Early Fourteenth-Century Ireland: The case of Louth', pp 581-83.

⁴⁹ Smith, 'A county community in Early Fourteenth-Century Ireland: The case of Louth', p. 582; Lydon, 'The Braganstown Massacre, 1329', pp 5-17.

the assassination of John de Bermingham at the hands of its counterpart in Louth. Significantly, upon his elevation to the earldom of Louth, de Bermingham was a complete outsider in the county, and consequently, he lacked a local network of associates.⁵⁰ By way of contrast, although fitzThomas may have been brought up in Connacht, by 1295 he could count upon both his family's long-standing ties to Kildare, and his own efforts to draw men like Piers de Bermingham and Walter L'Enfaunt into his following to provide him with at least a degree of support in the region.⁵¹ Overall, it is clear that by the end of the thirteenth century, 'county communities' existed throughout the lordship. On balance however, the evidence of John fitzThomas's career suggests that in the event of a magnate like fitzThomas managing to establish a sufficiently strong network of connections within a particular region, the local community would not act as a major impediment to his extra-legal activities.

On another level, John fitzThomas's relationships with his fellow Geraldines is particularly useful in illuminating the significance of aristocratic lineages within Anglo-Irish society during this period.⁵² As far as the Geraldines themselves are concerned, when the number of extant copies of the writings of Gerald of Wales which date from the thirteenth century is taken into consideration, it seems reasonable to make two broad assumptions.⁵³ First, that fitzThomas and his kinsmen were at least as familiar with the pioneering role played by their forbears during the initial stages of the conquest as was the ninth earl of Kildare, who is known to have possessed two translations of Gerald's works.⁵⁴ Secondly, both the Geraldines of Offaly and their Desmond kinsmen were aware of their

⁵⁰ Smith, 'A county community in Early Fourteenth-Century Ireland: The case of Louth', pp 581-2; Frame, *English lordship in Ireland, 1318-61*, pp 31-3.

⁵¹ Within this context, it is surely significant that in 1312, the county community of Louth followed the de Verdons, who had been the region's dominant magnates, into rebellion against the Crown (see Smith, 'A county community in Early Fourteenth-Century Ireland: The case of Louth', pp 572-77).

⁵² For a general discussion of the issue, see Frame, *English lordship in Ireland, 1318-61*, pp 27-39. See also *N. H. I.*, ii, pp 277-9.

⁵³ For a list of surviving thirteenth century copies of Gerald's works, see R. Flower, 'Manuscripts of Irish interest in the British Museum', pp 313-17.

⁵⁴ MacNiocaill, *Crown surveys of lands 1540-41*, p. 356. One copy was in English, and the other in Irish.

common ancestry.⁵⁵ More importantly, John fitzThomas's career provides much evidence to demonstrate that this awareness translated itself into a real sense of familial solidarity. In the first instance, it was noted earlier that John's initial rise to prominence was a direct consequence of the desire of Gerald fitzMaurice III and Amabilia to keep the ownership of their estates and rights within the family. Significantly, by helping John, both Gerald and Amabilia showed a bias in favour of male succession. Indeed, within this context it should be recalled that fitzThomas himself revealed the same preference two decades later, when making provisions for his third son John.

In addition to the evidence provided by fitzThomas's early career, his conflict with Richard de Burgh also sheds light upon the high value placed by the Geraldines and their relatives upon their common ancestry. The agreements drawn up between fitzThomas and John de Cogan in 1297 concerning the de Valence properties provides a good example. Despite the fact that de Cogan was John's rival and that he was linked to the earl of Ulster, the Cork magnate agreed to come to his embattled cousin's assistance if he was attacked by de Burgh. Admittedly, fitzThomas and de Cogan were closely related, being first cousins once removed. However, the actions taken in 1295 by Thomas fitzMaurice of Desmond, a much more distant relative, are especially interesting, as they reveal the extent to which an individual could be influenced by a sense of familial solidarity. First, upon becoming *custos* of Ireland following the death of William de Oddingeseles, fitzMaurice did not punish John fitzThomas for launching 'the disturbance', but instead permitted him to retain the custody of the royal castles of Roscommon and Rinndown. More importantly, in the autumn of 1295, King Edward sent fitzThomas home from England with strict instructions to find 21 mainpernors to guarantee his future good behaviour, or else to face imprisonment. Fortunately for John fitzThomas, his distant Desmond cousin persuaded his own tenants in Munster to act on behalf of the beleaguered lord of Offaly.

Overall, the course of fitzThomas's career leaves little doubt but that the Geraldines' keen awareness of their collective identity

⁵⁵ Moreover, the fact that both Geraldine branches were addicted to using the Christian names 'Gerald', 'Maurice' and 'Thomas' appears to confirm this hypothesis.

could and did have tangible effects. Moreover, the occasional references to 'the Geraldines' in contemporary sources like the *Dublin Annals* suggests that they were viewed as a distinct group by their peers.⁵⁶ Indeed, it could be argued that Friar Clyn's use of the term *Capitaneus Geraldinorum* when describing the transfer of lordship from Gerald fitzMaurice III to John fitzThomas in 1287 suggests that a 'clan structure' was in operation amongst them.⁵⁷ Admittedly, their sense of self-awareness, bolstered as it was by the works of Gerald of Wales, appears to have been particularly strong.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, their experience is representative of a wider phenomenon which can be identified within Anglo-Irish society as a whole during this period. It has been stated that 'English Ireland in the fourteenth century was a region of greatly extended lineages', an observation which also holds true for the late thirteenth century.⁵⁹ In general, it appears that the militarised character of the lordship greatly enhanced the desirability of 'protecting the interests of the agnatic lineage against the operations of English feudal law, which had never smiled upon collateral heirs'.⁶⁰ Thus, in the late thirteenth century, members of the de Rochford and de Laone families can be seen attempting to exclude female heiresses from inheriting their property.⁶¹ Significantly in 1310, the Kilkenny parliament formally recognised the existence of lineages as identifiable socio-political units, and went so far as to make the heads of the lineages responsible for the good behaviour of their relatives.⁶² Admittedly, the strongest ties of agnatic kinship manifested themselves amongst the less powerful settler families living in frontier zones. However, John fitzThomas's experiences with his

⁵⁶ See for example *Chart. St Marys*, ii. p. 325.

⁵⁷ *Clyn*, p. 10. However, it should be noted that Clyn was writing in the mid-fourteenth century, when such terminology had become more commonplace.

⁵⁸ For example, their continued use of patronymics in preference to the adoption of fixed surnames suggests a self-conscious decision to maintain a distinct identity for themselves (Frame, *English lordship in Ireland, 1318-61*, p. 31).

⁵⁹ Frame, *English lordship in Ireland, 1318-61*, p. 27.

⁶⁰ Frame, *English lordship in Ireland, 1318-61*, p. 24.

⁶¹ Frame, *English lordship in Ireland, 1318-61*, p. 22.

⁶² *Stat. Ire. John-Henry V*, pp 266-7.

family strikingly confirm that the same outlook also extended into the highest levels of settler society.⁶³

More broadly, the detailed study of John fitzThomas's career has yielded several valuable insights into one of the most important issues confronting an historian of the period, namely the relationship between the two nations in Ireland.⁶⁴ In the first instance, it sheds much light upon the complex and fluid situation in the marches of Kildare, where the natives and newcomers dwelt together in uneasy coexistence. For example, it reveals that there was undoubtedly a considerable degree of social interaction between the colonists and the Irish at all levels of society. However, it demonstrates equally clearly that deep racial animosity was also rife. Within this context, the examination of fitzThomas's career has been especially useful in highlighting the ambiguous relationships that existed between two sets of aristocrats who were obliged to share the same physical space, but whose primary objectives were fundamentally incompatible. Thus, it shows how individuals such as fitzThomas and Piers de Bermingham on the one hand, and An Calbhach O'Connor Faly and Diarmait O'Dempsey on the other, were operating in a murky, perilous environment, where war alternated easily with peace, temporary alliances were formed and dissolved, and where the joint celebration of a religious feast-day could act as the trigger for mass murder.⁶⁵ Moreover, the very intimacy of John's dealings with his nominal tenants raises the thorny question of the extent to which the higher echelons of Anglo-Irish society had become 'degenerate' or, more politely, acculturated.⁶⁶ Undoubtedly, fitzThomas's career demonstrates that he was able to operate comfortably within an Irish *milieu*. Moreover, some evidence from the Irish 'Remonstrance' raises the intriguing possibility that the lord of Offaly may

⁶³ Frame, *English lordship in Ireland, 1318-61*, pp 28-9.

⁶⁴ For a recent overview of the problem, see *N. H. I.*, ii, pp 240-277.

⁶⁵ For a recent study of a region where conditions differed sharply from those in Kildare, see C. Parker, 'The Internal Frontier: The Irish in County Waterford in the Later Middle Ages', pp 139-154.

⁶⁶ Irish historians have come to sharply divergent conclusions concerning the issue. For example, compare J. F. Lydon, 'The middle nation', pp 1-26, with R. Frame, "'Les Engleys Nées en Irlande': The English Political Identity in Medieval Ireland', pp 83-103.

have had an Irish godfather.⁶⁷ In fact, it is possible to speculate that John's tendency to disregard English law was a legacy of his probable upbringing in the turbulent and lightly settled province of Connacht, which left him more sympathetic to the *mores* of Irish society than were most of his fellow magnates. However, on closer examination of the evidence, such an interpretation seems to be overly-simplistic.

In the first place, fitzThomas's family background should be recalled. After all, the Geraldines of Offaly's rise to prominence within the lordship was based upon the adoption of a fundamentally hostile approach to the interests of Irish rulers. More broadly, a brief survey of the dealings of John's peers with the Irish dispels the notion that his behaviour was exceptional. Generally speaking, all of the Anglo-Irish magnates responded to the continued survival of the native aristocracy by adopting some Irish practices. Within this context, it may be worth observing that c. 1290, Geoffrey de Geneville, the French lord of Trim, gave a judgement which amounted to a plunderer's charter to his tenants.⁶⁸ More specifically, one of the most serious charges levelled against fitzThomas by modern historians is that he formed an alliance with the O'Connor Faly's in the mid-1290s in order to pursue his feuds with William de Vescy and Richard de Burgh.⁶⁹ Admittedly, it seems as though a brief community of interest existed between fitzThomas and his old adversary An Calbhach O'Connor Faly during 'the disturbance'. However, it should also be acknowledged that by supporting the equally rebellious chieftain Cairbre O'Melaghlin in 1290, de Burgh himself had acted in a similar fashion. Furthermore, John's development of social and religious ties with Irish dynasts such as John, son of An Calbhach O'Connor Faly was not particularly unusual. Most notoriously, Piers de Bermingham had engaged in the same practice. So too had the English magnate Thomas de Clare, a 'man of unjust judgements, of deadly treachery, of mind unrighteous', with equally fatal consequences for the Irish aristocrat involved, namely Brían Ruadh O'Brien.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ *Scotichronicon*, vi, p. 395.

⁶⁸ *Cal. Gormanston Reg.*, pp 10, 182.

⁶⁹ *N. H. I.*, ii, p. 186.

⁷⁰ *N. H. I.*, ii, pp 253, 323.

In fact, the surviving evidence would suggest that John fitzThomas displayed rather fewer signs of acculturation than did several of his fellow magnates. Thus, although it is not known whether John ever patronised the Irish learned classes, it is certain that the earl of Ulster did so.⁷¹ Similarly, unlike Richard de Burgh, fitzThomas does not appear to have contemplated forming marriage alliances with his Irish counterparts.⁷² Similarly, it may be significant that when John died, his passing was not noticed in the Irish annals. In sharp contrast, in 1298 Thomas fitzMaurice of Desmond, whose dealings with the MacCarthy dynasty were usually quite amicable, received a glowing eulogy in the *Annals of Inisfallen*, where it was reported of him that 'there was not in Mumu a baron more modest, more hospitable, or of greater prowess than he'.⁷³ The fact of the matter is that in order to perform effectively, fitzThomas, like his fellow magnates, was obliged to operate in, and understand the dynamics of, native Irish society. Almost certainly, their ability to deal with, and indeed behave like Irish chieftains played a greater part in the conduct of their day-to-day activities than the surviving sources would suggest. To that extent, they had indeed become acculturated. Crucially however, the bitter tones of works such as the *Annals of Inisfallen* and the Irish 'Remonstrance' starkly reveal the limits to the process of assimilation. Within this context, it might be worth noting that the Anglo-Irish magnates appear to have been behind Edward I's refusal to grant English law to the Irish in the late 1270s.⁷⁴ On balance, it seems clear that during this period, the Irish essentially viewed the *Gaill* as a group which was both distinct from, and hostile to, themselves. As far as the magnates' relationship with England is concerned, it has been suggested that by the early fourteenth century, 'there does seem to have been a growing detachment from England and from their fellow nobility across the water'.⁷⁵ However, to judge from the evidence of fitzThomas's career, there is little to

⁷¹ *N. H. I.*, ii, p. 354.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 353.

⁷³ *AI*, s. a. 1298. Of course this particular *lacuna* may simply be the by-product of the lack of a contemporary Irish annal from the midlands.

⁷⁴ A. J. Otway-Ruthven, 'The request of the Irish for English law, 1277-80', pp 263-5.

⁷⁵ Phillips, 'The Anglo-Norman nobility', p. 104.

suggest that either the king or the English nobility regarded the Anglo-Irish aristocrats to be a distinctive group. On the contrary, it is evident that they were as at home dwelling in the cultural world of their English equivalents as they were in Irish society.

Again, John fitzThomas's career may be used to underline this point. Like any Christian aristocrat, he patronised religious houses for the sake of the souls of his family.⁷⁶ Moreover, it is known that he celebrated his recovery of the family's Limerick estates by hosting a great knighting ceremony at Adare, which confirms that despite their peripherality, the Anglo-Irish were as attached to chivalric ideals as were their peers in England or in the mainland of Europe.⁷⁷ Similarly, his agreement with John de Cogan concerning the giving and wearing of robes would not have been out of place in England, and clearly shows that their significance was appreciated within the lordship.⁷⁸ Furthermore, like his English counterparts, John knew the importance of acting like a good lord to his tenants and associates, which frequently led him to intervene in court on their behalf.⁷⁹ Finally, the rather scanty surviving evidence indicates that fitzThomas's ambitions for his children were quite conventional. Thus, he attempted to secure the best possible marriages for them, tried to secure the future of his youngest son John by settling landed property upon him, and initially at least, planned an ecclesiastical career for his second son Thomas. In other words, despite his obscure Connacht origins, fitzThomas was behaving like a typical member of the aristocracy of western Christendom. Perhaps the safest conclusion to be drawn from the evidence available about fitzThomas's cultural affinities is the simple observation that in order to conduct his affairs successfully, an Anglo-Irish magnate had to be able to operate in two distinct environments simultaneously. That said however, John's experiences also demonstrate that as far as the long-term aggrandisement of his family's interests were concerned, his connections with the king were of greatest importance to him.

⁷⁶ See also Crouch, *The image of aristocracy in Britain, 1000–1300*, pp 311–21.

⁷⁷ See also Keen, *Chivalry*, pp 153–4.

⁷⁸ For a recent discussion of the practice, see Lachaud, 'Liveries of Robes in England, c. 1200 c. 1330', pp 279–298.

⁷⁹ See also Prestwich, *English politics in the thirteenth century*, pp 36–8.

In fact, John's career provides a particularly good example of the crucial significance of the relationship between the Anglo-Irish magnates and the king of England during this period. It was noted earlier, that in practical terms, royal authority in the lordship of Ireland was relatively weak. To take a further example which concerns the magnates, it has been observed that one manifestation of this phenomenon was 'the impressive thirteenth-century records of debt to the crown for unperformed military service and unpaid rents for crown lands on the parts of such men as John fitzThomas of Shanid (early Edward I), Theobald Butler (1276), Walter de Burgh earl of Ulster (1280) and Gilbert fitzThomas de Clare (1304)'.⁸⁰ More immediately, John fitzThomas's reluctance to obey the precepts of the Irish administration provides graphic confirmation of the limitations of royal authority. Nevertheless, the obvious difficulties experienced by justiciars like William de Vescy and John Wogan in controlling men like fitzThomas or Sir James Keating should not be permitted to obscure a more fundamental truth. For all of their 'particularist' tendencies, the Anglo-Irish magnates were still operating within a society in which both their hierarchical landholding system and the administration of law required the existence of a recognised head. That function was fulfilled by the king of England in his capacity as lord of Ireland.⁸¹ As far as fitzThomas was concerned, he certainly realised that ultimately, the power and authority which he wielded as lord of Offaly had been conferred upon him by his king. Hence, even his most blatant displays of lawlessness were limited in scope. Thus, he set the earl of Ulster free after 'the disturbance' ended. More importantly, three years later he agreed to surrender his Connacht estates to the earl to make amends for his wrongdoing. Similarly, after seizing Agnes de Valence's properties in 1303, despite some initial procrastination John did hand them back to her. In short, despite the appearances to the contrary, fitzThomas was not a common robber, but an individual who needed the respectability which could only be conferred by the king.

In a sense, the magnates' reliance upon the crown as a legitimising force was not affected by the personality or regal quality of the

⁸⁰ Phillips, 'The Anglo-Norman nobility', p. 104.

⁸¹ Frame, *Colonial Ireland*, pp 66-8, 93-4; Prestwich, *English politics in the thirteenth century*, pp 15-17; Kaeuper, *War, Justice, and Public Order*, pp 125-130.

individual who happened to be sitting on the throne. However, fitzThomas's career demonstrates that during this period, the personal relationship between an Anglo-Irish aristocrat and his king was of the utmost importance for the former. In general, the observation that 'patronage was an essential lubricant of political society' was as true for Ireland as it was for England.⁸² Thus, the world in which John usually lived may have been physically remote from that of the king, but he and his associates were just as appreciative of the fruits and trappings that accrued from royal favour as were the English magnates. Consequently, fitzThomas showed himself to be keenly aware of the benefits which royal patronage could bring. It has been noted that Edward I was not a particularly generous monarch, and that he did not rely upon largesse to any great extent to get his way.⁸³ It is true that John initially made a favourable and fruitful impression upon the king during his first visit to England in 1291-2. Thereafter however, in order to advance his interests in Ireland, he was obliged to demonstrate his usefulness to King Edward. Not surprisingly, given the king's political ambitions, for most of fitzThomas's career, the most profitable way to do so was through the performance of military service overseas, a task which he managed with some distinction. Within this context, it should be noted that fitzThomas's attempts to further his interests by fostering his relationship with the king were typical of the behaviour of his Anglo-Irish peers, who also flocked to the king's wars in Scotland. Consequently, it is possible to use John's specific experiences in order to gain an insight into the general operation of royal patronage within the lordship.

In the first instance, it should be acknowledged that fitzThomas's degree of success in securing royal largesse, in the form of wardships and outright grants of land is quite impressive, when it is considered that they were extracted from 'a government besieged by the costs of its own policies'.⁸⁴ Moreover, the type of favours which were bestowed upon him by the king, such as the levying of a royal service to pay for fortifying the marches, or the provision of ecclesiastical benefices for his

⁸² M. Prestwich, 'Royal Patronage under Edward I', p. 41.

⁸³ Prestwich, 'Royal Patronage under Edward I', p. 46.

⁸⁴ S. L. Waugh, 'The fiscal uses of royal wardships in the reign of Edward I', pp 59-60.

son confirms that in Ireland, the impetus for exercising royal patronage usually came from below.⁸⁵ Finally, the haggling in which fitzThomas engaged before setting out on campaigns makes it abundantly clear that he fully expected his acts of loyalty to be suitably rewarded. In other words, John fitzThomas believed that the relationship between himself and his king should be mutually advantageous. On balance however, it would be unfair to the lord of Offaly to suggest that his allegiance to his king was in any way conditional. Most obviously, when his loyalty was put to the test by the arrival of Edward Bruce in the lordship, John may have behaved opportunistically, but there is no evidence to suggest that he ever considered defecting to the Scots. In fact, John's reaction to the Bruce invasion exemplifies the attitudes held by the Anglo-Irish aristocracy about their relationship to the king of England. After the debacle at Ardscoil, it is true that most of the more important Anglo-Irish magnates sought, and received concessions from the beleaguered Edward II. Nevertheless, it is clear that their basic allegiance was to the English crown. Thus, when confronted with the greatest crisis to strike the lordship since the initial invasion, the great majority of them remained loyal to their king.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Prestwich, 'Royal Patronage under Edward I', p. 49.

⁸⁶ Phillips, 'The mission of John de Hothum to Ireland, 1315-16', pp 75-6; *N. H. I.*, ii, p. 289.

Appendix 1

An analysis of the regional backgrounds of John fitzThomas's 24 mainpernors, whose names were delivered to Thomas fitzMaurice, custos of the land of Ireland, in Dublin 3 October 1295.(Bl Add. Ms. 4790 f.52v no. 5)

Name	Background
Walter L'Enfaunt	Kildare. – <i>Red Bk Kildare</i> , nos. 11, 30, 108, 125, 131, 192.
Peter le Botyler	Tipperary. – <i>CDI</i> 1285–92 no. 309; Or Connacht – <i>Ibid.</i> no. 965.
Henry de Vernoyl	Inconclusive.
John de Barry	Cork. – <i>CDI</i> 1293–1301 no. 801.
William de Barry	Cork. – <i>CDI</i> 1293–1301 no. 801.
David son of Alexander de Roche	Cork. – <i>CDI</i> 1293–1301 no. 129.
Robert de Davu[]ton	Inconclusive
Walter Purcell	Leighlin ?– <i>CDI</i> 1293–1301 no. 90.
Hugh Purcell	Tipperary. – <i>CDI</i> 1293–1301 nos. 612, 637, 658.
Robert Purcell	Limerick, a tenant of Thomas fitzMaurice. – <i>CDI</i> 1293–1301 no. 551.
William Cadel	Kildare. – <i>Red Bk Kildare</i> , nos. 10, 30, 39, 85.
Milo de Rochford	Kildare. – <i>CDI</i> 1293–1301 nos. 106, 481.

Name	Background
Adam de St Albins	Tipperary. – <i>CDI 1293–1301</i> nos. 40, 550.
Henry de Capella	Kerry. – <i>CDI 1293–1301</i> no. 551.
Gilbert de Wallens	Cork. – <i>CDI 1302–07</i> no. 344.
Robert Haket knights	Newcastle, Co. Limerick, a tenant of Thomas fitzMaurice. – <i>CDI 1293–1301</i> no. 551.
George de Roche	Desmond. – <i>CDI 1293–1301</i> no. 727.
Maurice de Rochford	Cork. – <i>CDI 1293–1301</i> nos 613, 727.
Maurice de Caunteton	Carlow. – <i>CDI 1293–1301</i> no. 41 Cork. – <i>CDI 1293–1301</i> no. 139, 637.
Philip de Barry	Cork ? – <i>CDI 1293–1301</i> no. 387.
Hugh de Lees	Limerick. – <i>CDI 1293–1301</i> no. 281.
Edmund le Gras	Waterford. – <i>CDI 1302–07</i> no. 100.
John son of John le Poer	Waterford. – Free tenant of Thomas fitzMaurice. – <i>CDI 1293–1301</i> no. 551.
Philip Christofre.	Waterford. –Free tenant of Thomas fitzMaurice. – <i>CDI 1293–1301</i> no 551.

Appendix 2:

The descent of the principal branches of the Geraldines, 1169–1330

Barons of Naas

Geraldines of Offaly

Geraldines of Desmond

Maurice fitzGerald I
† 1176

William I
baron of Naas
† c. 1199

William II
baron of Naas
† 1227

David
baron of Naas
† 1260

Three daughters,
namely
Maud, Lescaline
and Rose

Gerald = Eva
fitzMaurice I de Bermingham
1st lord of Offaly, † 1204

Maurice
fitzGerald II
2nd lord of Offaly
† 1257

Thomas
fitzMaurice
† 1271

John fitzThomas
5th lord of Offaly
1st earl of Kildare
† 1316

Thomas fitzJohn
2nd earl of Kildare
† 1328

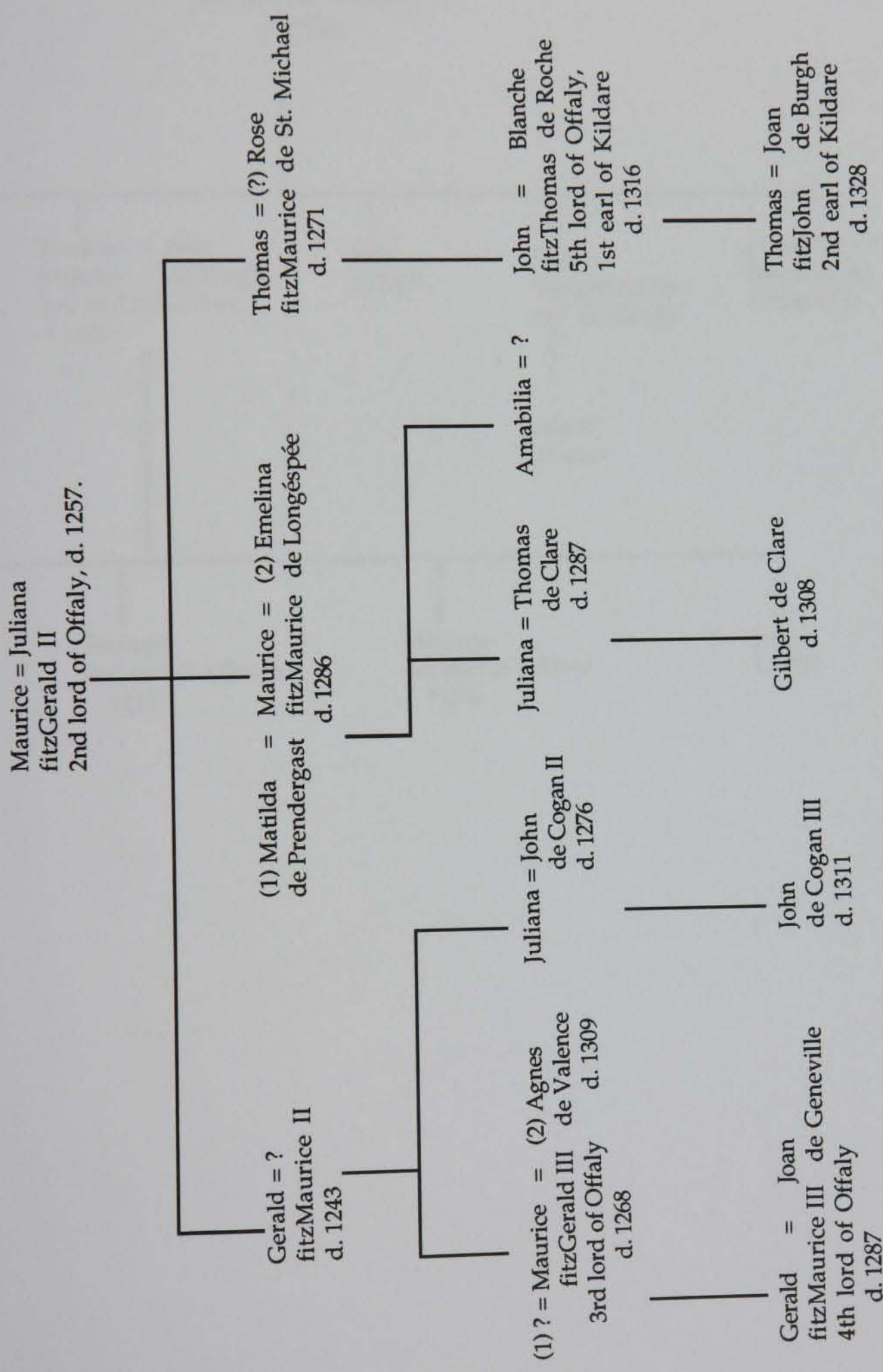
Thomas
of Shanid
† c. 1214

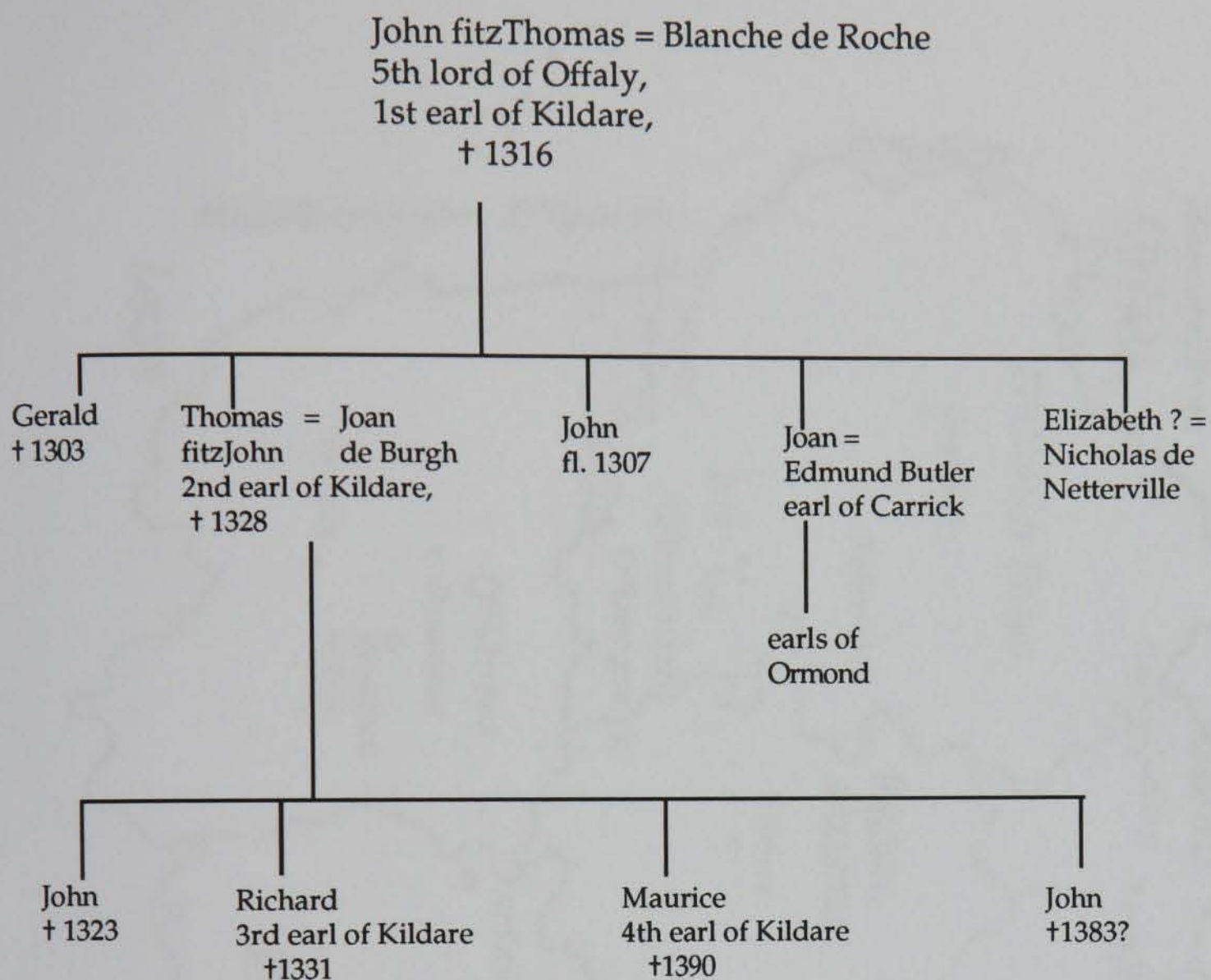
John fitzThomas
of Desmond
† 1261

Maurice fitzJohn
of Desmond
† 1261

Thomas fitzMaurice
of Desmond
† 1298

Maurice fitzThomas
1st earl of Desmond
† 1356





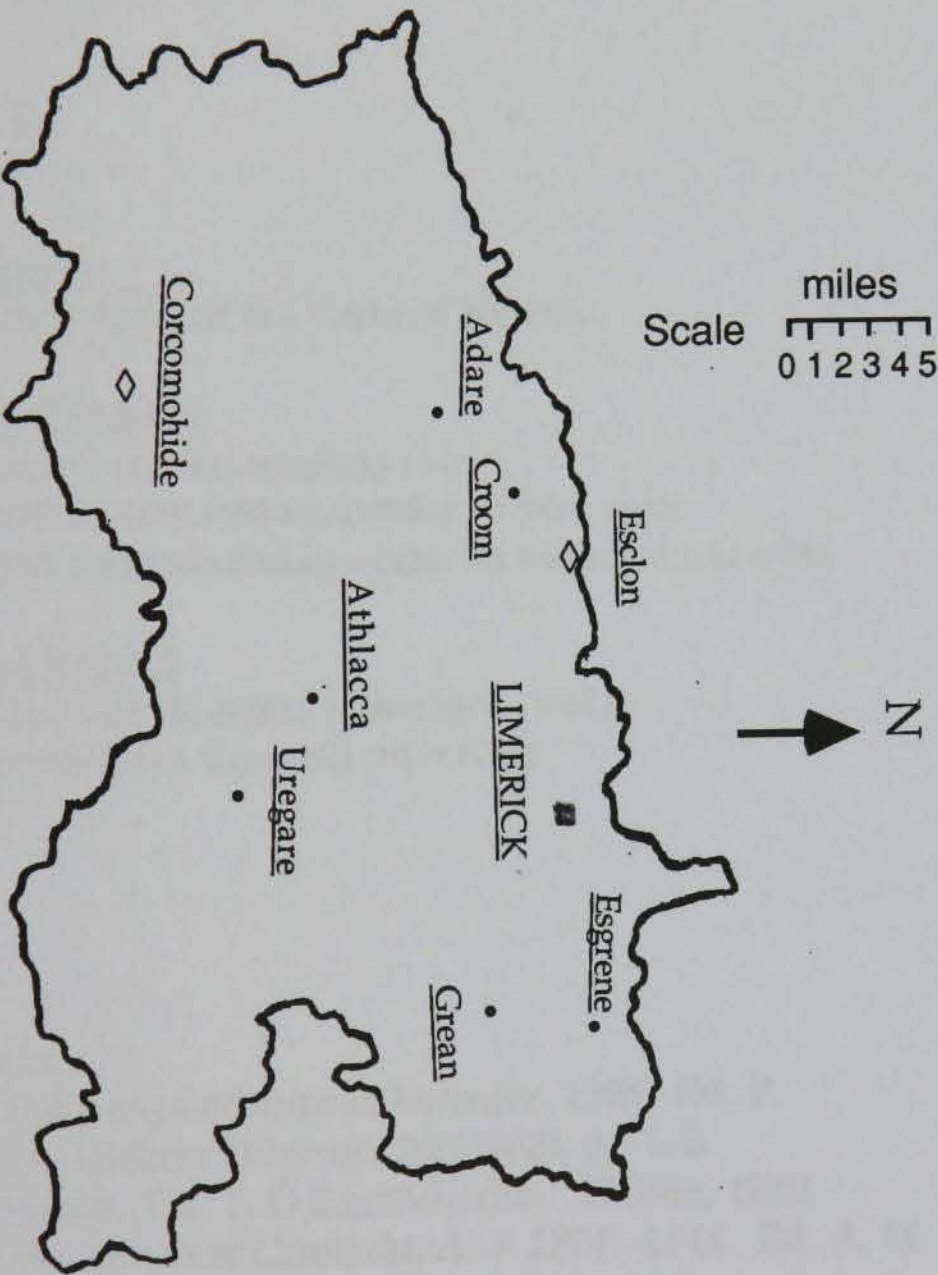


Key:

- Geraldine manors or strongholds
- ◇ Other centres of importance

Leys: Cantred or Demesne
Irth: Irish-dominated district
O'Mores: Irish dynasty

Appendix 6: John fitzThomas's estates in County Limerick



- ◆ Acquired from Amabilia after 1288
- Acquired from Agnes de Valence after 1310

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E 101,	Exchequer, King's remembrancer, accounts various.
E 358,	Memoranda rolls.
E 372	Pipe rolls
E 403,	Exchequer of receipt, issue rolls.
SC 1,	Ancient Correspondence
SC 8,	Ancient petitions.

British Library:

Additional MS 4790

Additional MS 7965

Trinity College Library

MS 9825 The Red Book of the Earls of Kildare

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RC7	Record commission calendar of plea rolls
RC8	Record commission calendar of memoranda rolls

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