

SARSFIELD'S ENCAMPMENT AT MANORHAMILTON IN 1689

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Sarsfield's background

On his father's side, Patrick Sarsfield (1655-1693) was descended from an Old English Catholic family who held estates in Lucan and Kildare. His mother, however, was a daughter of Rory O'Moore, one of the organizers of the 1641 Rebellion. In 1672, while still a young man, Sarsfield was commissioned into an English regiment which was sent to assist the French in that country's war with the Dutch Republic. He returned to England in 1678 just as the Popish Plot was about to unfold. This was a fictitious conspiracy invented by Titus Oates who alleged the existence of a Catholic scheme to assassinate King Charles II, head of the Church of England, and place his Catholic brother James on the throne. In the mass hysteria that followed, Catholics were harassed, fined, imprisoned and debarred from serving in the army. Having been deprived of his career, Sarsfield came back to Ireland in an attempt to regain the Lucan estate from the heirs of his late older brother William. This venture eventually proved futile.

When Charles II died of a stroke in February 1685 he was succeeded on the throne by his brother James II. Catholics were, once again, allowed to join the army. Sarsfield re-enlisted in England, and within three years he had been promoted to the rank of colonel of a cavalry unit.



Patrick Sarsfield, Earl of Lucan (1655-1693)

The Williamite Wars (1688-1691)

King James II at first enjoyed widespread support in England, Scotland and Ireland. However, the birth of a son and heir, James Francis Edward, threatened to create a permanent Catholic dynasty in the kingdom. So, on 30th June 1688 a group of influential English Protestant nobles and religious leaders offered the throne to James' Anglican daughter Mary and her husband William, Prince of Orange (in the Dutch Republic). Having accepted the offer, William

and his army landed in Devon on 5th November in what became known as the Glorious Revolution. Most of the British royal army joined him on his march to London.

James and his remaining followers, which included Sarsfield, sought refuge in France which was then at war with a grand alliance of countries comprising the Habsburg monarchy, Spain and the Dutch Republic. James was therefore hopeful of winning back the British crown with the assistance of Louis XIV.

Rather than risk a direct invasion of England, however, James decided to use his Irish kingdom as a base from which to eventually retake England and Scotland. His lord deputy in Ireland, Richard Talbot, Earl of Tyrconnell, had already created a Catholic dominated political establishment and a loyal army of some 40,000 men. He retained control of much of the country apart from Ulster where Protestant forces had declared allegiance to William.

James II, accompanied by French troops and supplies, landed at Kinsale on 12th March 1689. Sarsfield was prominent among his Irish officers. Jacobite generals soon reduced Protestant resistance across eastern Ulster, leaving only Derry, Enniskillen and a few other smaller towns still in Williamite hands. In mid-April James appeared before the walls of Derry,

hoping to induce the inhabitants to surrender. His attempt was unsuccessful and he was forced to return to Dublin, leaving his army to besiege the city.

Sarsfield's camp at Manorhamilton (8th May-end of June 1689)

In the meantime, Sarsfield, who had been promoted to the rank of brigadier, was given the task of securing Connacht for the Jacobites. On 1st May, with some 2,000 men, he arrived in Sligo. The town had earlier been evacuated by the Williamites who had withdrawn their forces to Enniskillen.

He next turned his attention to Ballyshannon at the mouth of the River Erne, through which supply ships were reaching Enniskillen. The town was well fortified, however, and Sarsfield was forced to retreat in the face of reinforcements which arrived from Enniskillen.

Undeterred, Sarsfield devised a new strategy. On 8th May he set up a field headquarters at Manorhamilton, which was more or less equidistant from both Ballyshannon and Enniskillen. From this new location he could prevent foraging raids by the garrisons of both towns, as well as obstruct any shipping on the Erne which was just thirteen miles away. Even more importantly though, Sarsfield's camp at Manorhamilton would influence to a certain extent the conduct of the siege of Derry. When the Enniskilleners set out in June to relieve the siege they found their way blocked by an Irish garrison at Omagh. They then discovered that a Jacobite army, on its way to Derry, was also approaching from the south-

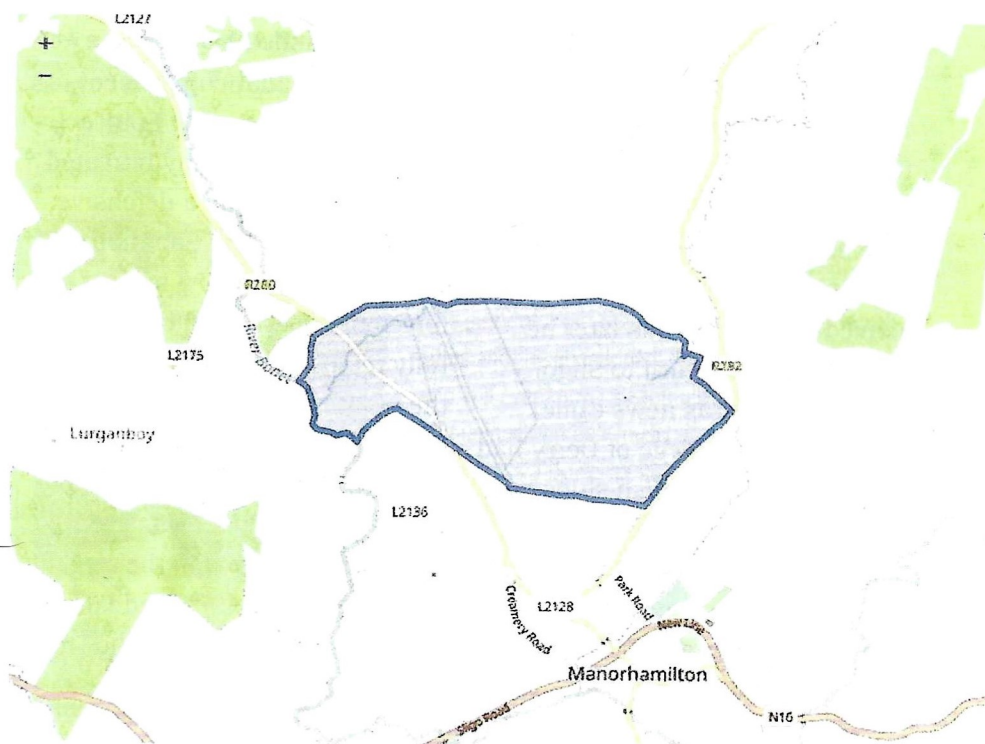
east. There was a danger the Enniskillen men could be sandwiched between both forces, which would have left Enniskillen town at the mercy of Sarsfield's troops. So the Enniskilleners were forced to abandon their objective and return quickly to base.

The precise location of Sarsfield's camp at Manorhamilton was the deerpark which was situated at the northern outskirts of the town. In 1630 Sir Frederick Hamilton, the Scottish planter, had been granted permission by Charles I to convert part of his 5,000-acre Manorhamilton estate into a park for deer. Such parks were the supreme status symbols for leading settlers at the time. Hamilton designated some 300 acres for this purpose and then set about enclosing the park with a perimeter stone wall some four miles in circumference. However, being a successful horse breeder rather than a gentleman of leisure, he used his deerpark to corral his 400 stallions and

mares which were valued at £5,000. Hamilton died in 1647 and part of his estate, including the deerpark was inherited by Sir William Gore of Co. Donegal who had married Sir Frederick's granddaughter Hannah. Gore was the owner of the deerpark when Sarsfield commandeered it in May 1689.

The extensive walled enclosure (which was designated a townland early in the 18th century) proved more than adequate to accommodate Sarsfield's 35 foot companies and his 4 troops of cavalry and dragoons. It also offered him the space to drill the new volunteers who were being recruited from the surrounding area. The presence of

Sir William Gore's walled deerpark at Manorhamilton where Sarsfield's army of some 3,000 men camped throughout May and June 1689 (Courtesy of Google maps).





Map of the Northwest of Ireland showing the importance of the location of Sarsfield's base at Manorhamilton to the conduct of the Siege of Derry.

such a sizable army must have created quite a stir in Manorhamilton, as word spread quickly to Enniskillen that Sarsfield's forces amounted to as many as 6,000 or 7,000 men.

Aftermath

In the last days of June 1689 Sarsfield was ordered to move his troops northwards to Tullaghan in preparation for another assault on Ballyshannon. However, promised Jacobite reinforcements never arrived and four weeks later he was directed to return to Sligo. Shortly afterwards news came through that the siege of Derry had been lifted after English ships carrying supplies had breached the boom across the River Foyle. The war in Ireland was now beginning to turn in favour of the Williamites. Sligo was retaken by the Enniskil-

leners in mid-August (although Sarsfield captured it once again two months later). The newly appointed commander of the Williamite army, the Duke of Schomberg, seized control of Bangor, Belfast and Carrickfergus. James II resolved to defend Dundalk and Dublin, but as the year drew to a close, the Williamite and

Jacobite armies retired to winter quarters. It was during this interlude in hostilities that Sarsfield married Lady Honora Burke, youngest daughter of the late Earl of Clanricarde.

King William III landed with 30,000 men at Carrickfergus on 14th June 1690 and took personal command of his army. He defeated James at the Battle of the Boyne on 1st July. Sarsfield's role was a minor one in that engagement. James then returned to France while the Jacobite army retreated westwards to set up a defensive line along the River Shannon. They concentrated the bulk of their forces in Limerick which successfully repulsed several assaults in the month of August. Sarsfield also destroyed a Williamite artillery train at Ballyneety near Pallasgreen. William was eventually forced to abandon the siege in September and left Ireland later in the year after appointing the Dutch general Ginkel in charge.

Sarsfield was becoming increasingly influential among the Jacobite leadership and in January 1691 he was created Earl of Lucan by James II. A large French convoy arrived at Limerick five months later with St. Ruth as military commander. In spite of this, Ginkel captured Athlone in June and then won the decisive Battle of Aughrim, where St. Ruth was killed, in July. Galway capitulated soon after and the main Jacobite army retired to Limerick. The city surrendered on this occasion after a fairly short siege. Sarsfield, now the senior Jacobite commander, and Ginkel signed the Treaty of Limerick on 3rd October 1691. The agreement allowed Jacobite soldiers free passage to France. Those who wished to remain were guaranteed retention of property and freedom of religion. However, when the Irish parliament ratified the treaty in 1697, it omitted any reference to freedom of religion and instead enacted repressive penal laws.

Sarsfield left Ireland for France with some 10,000 Irish soldiers in December 1691. He initially became a major-general in the Jacobite army of exiles. These were incorporated into the French army soon afterwards and Sarsfield distinguished himself at the Battle of Steenkerque in Flanders against Anglo-Dutch forces under William III in August 1692. He was subsequently made a *maréchal de camp* (next in rank to a lieutenant-general), but was fatally wounded on 19th August 1693 at the Battle of Landen. He died three days later at Huy in Belgium and was survived by his widow and infant son.