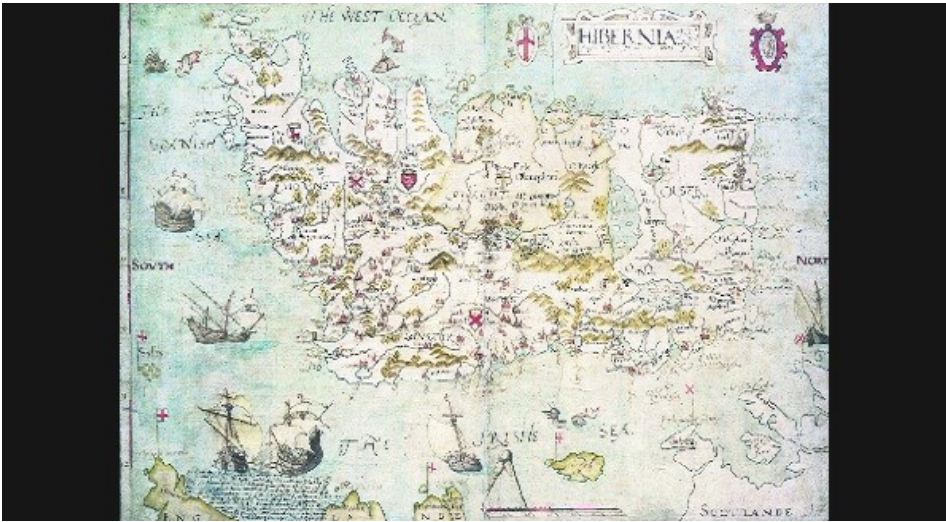


Dozens of colourful detailed maps of Ireland when it was being colonised 500 years ago have been made available to examine up close from the comfort of home.



The 60-plus cartographical records include some of the maps used in the early days of the plantation of Ireland during the reigns of English monarchs, Elizabeth I and James I.

They range from detailed plans of towns and forts, to strategic detailing of the Gaelic chiefs and families dominating particular counties and baronies of 16th-century and early 17th-century Ireland.

As well as being an important aid to historians of the period, many of the images are artworks in themselves. They offer a reminder of the vital nature of accurate maps and charts in the centuries before the idea of having satellite imagery.

Previously only open for inspection by visiting the UK National Archives in Kew outside London, or by paying for a digital copy from its website, they have been added to the material on a subscription-based genealogy and history website.

The National Archives describe maps as one of the English colonists' tools, along with the written survey and the gun.

“The English were trying to increase the loyalty of Ireland to the English crown by transferring land ownership from the native Irish to English settlers. The maps were usually made in response to a particular threat, to show a siege or battle, or to help inform defence strategy against a background of ongoing clashes with Irish chieftains.”



Findmypast.ie has added the collection of maps from the State Papers at Kew to its service, available at a monthly or annual fee. The costs depend on whether a subscriber seeks access only to Irish files or to also have access to UK and other international files.

For less than €10 a month, access is given to hundreds of collections with millions of files ranging from births, deaths and marriage records to military files documenting British conduct of operations during the Easter Rising and War of Independence.

“The maps are beautifully decorated and were used to inform the settlers of the locations of rivers, bogs, fortifications, harbours and other such features,” said Findmypast researcher Alex Cox.

Some illustrations have drawings of wildlife and even sea monsters, as seen on a 1567 map of ‘Hibernia’, one of many showing the evolving detailed knowledge of the country’s coast, physical features and political landscape.

The famous Hibernia map was drawn by John Goghe and shows many place-names. Earldoms like Thomond, Desmond, Clancarty, Ormonde and Kildare are also identified, to name just a few in the southern part of the country.

A 1905 description of the map in the English Historical Review journal noted that it represents “a decided improvement, both as regards general outline and detail, on anything which had up to that time been attempted.”

But rather than being an expert cartographer himself, the author believed that the unknown Goghe - or possibly Gough - compiled it based on an Italian printed map.

More than 40 of the 68 maps uploaded to Findmypast relate to Ulster, including a 1533 drawing of the town and walls of Carrickfergus, Co Down. Dozens of colourful maps from 1609 detail baronies around the province during the plantation of Ulster at the beginning of the 17th century.

“Map making during this period could be an incredibly dangerous undertaking as cartographers were often exploring hostile foreign territory,” said Mr Cox.

“The native population was well aware that these English surveyors were working as part of a military expedition to lay bare the geography of the country and open the countryside to political conquest,” he said.

Some maps in the collection were produced by famous English cartographers, such as Robert Lythe, Francis Jobson and John Norden. In these early days of the map-making profession, today’s rules such as orienting maps with north at the top had not become standard.

The files date from as early as 1533 - a very simple plan of Banagher in what is today Co Offaly - to a 1691 map of Kinsale and its forts.

They can be downloaded or viewed direct from the website, offering a chance to zoom in to much of the fine detail of locations, illustrations and map keys or legends.

Most of the original maps were drawn on parchment, some brightly coloured and decorated, and were originally bound in vellum covers embossed with coats of arms.

The State papers which give context to many of these maps are held in Kew. But more contextual information is also provided in a research guide on its website, including details of other publications that explain their meaning and importance.

The Ireland, Maps and Surveys 1668-1610 collection is available at findmypast.ie

Last days of Gaelic Ireland by cartographer

A sailing ship on Lough Neagh is shown firing its guns in this 1602 or 1603 map of south Ulster.

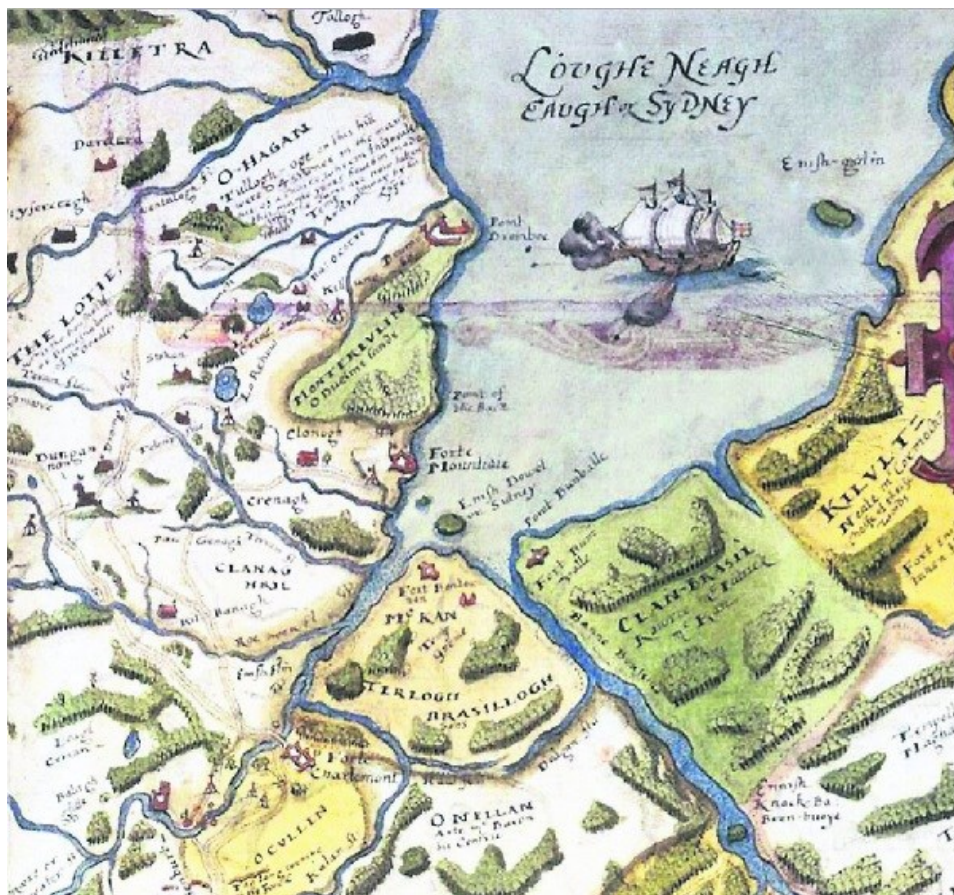
It is clearly visible in the detail image here, a portion of the 43cm x 55cm original map that was drawn at a scale of about one inch to four miles.

The names of clans or chieftains in control of each area are clearly marked in an area stretching from east Fermanagh to the Irish Sea, with Dundalk visible in the bottom right corner of the full map.

Names like O’Hagan, Clanbrasil, and McMaghon can be read in different-shaded areas of the map, which also shows mountains and woods. Forts, houses and churches are also to be seen in this map, drawn by well-known cartographer of the period Richard Bartlett.

He was beheaded by natives in Tyrconnell, Donegal who were resisting plantation and saw the area’s mapping as a threat to their security.

“Before his death, Bartlett documented the defeat and collapse of the last Irish stronghold, Gaelic Ulster, and with it, chronicled the death of Gaelic Ireland,” said Findmypast researcher, Alex Cox.



Bantry Bay map one of earliest of the country

This map of Bantry Bay is roughly dated to 1558 and is one of the earliest of any part of Ireland.

It is certainly one of the oldest held in the UK's National Archives.

Among the most notable features is the depiction of wolves. The map was drawn around a century after they were wiped out in England, but they would continue to live wild in Ireland for another 200 years.

Other life represented include deer and a dog, as well as armed men (at the left of the image).

Ships and galleys can be seen around the coast in Bantry and Dunmanus bays.

Dunboy Castle, near Castletownberehaven towards the top (in this case, west) of the map, figures largely. Other buildings include an abbey at Bantry, forts, houses and huts.

Bere Island — which would serve as an important British military and naval location in the centuries that followed — is highlighted in orange. So too are many smaller islands around Cork's south-west coast.

Like many maps in the collection, it also bears notes by Sir William Cecil, who went on to become Lord Burghley, an influential minister of Queen Elizabeth I.



Kinsale forts protected the town on both sides of harbour

One map dated 1691, titled “Plan de la ville et Forts de Kinsale”, shows the entry to the harbour near the south Cork town.

Just part of the town is visible and the map appears to show details of how the two forts guarding the mouth of the River Bandon had succumbed during the previous year’s short-lived siege by Williamite forces.

What is today known as Charles Fort, the much larger of these two forts, is marked in French as “Nouveau Fort”. This signifies its completion less than a decade before.

Despite its significant strength, the use of higher ground by the attacking Duke of Marlborough quickened its forced surrender by Jacobites who had held the nearby town and port.

The older and smaller James Fort, labelled “Vieux Fort” by the French cartographer, was built much earlier in the same century following the famous siege of Kinsale in 1601.

During the September 1690 siege, it did not last near as long as Charles Fort.

It had already fallen to Marlborough’s Williamite attackers by the time the newer fort was surrendered, largely owing to damage from an explosion inside.

One map dated 1691, titled “Plan de la ville et Forts de Kinsale”, shows the entry to the harbour near the south Cork town.

