

## A Derry Connection to 'The Eighty Years' War/The Dutch Revolt' in the Low Countries 1566-1648

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I often ask myself why I am interested in numismatics, coins in particular but also other numismatic artefacts; however, once in a while I am reminded of why.

I have always enjoyed history, especially finding out about some of the lesser known figures and their connections which touch on numismatics. Sometimes their involvement is in the issuing of coins or being the subject of medals. Other times the connection is only fleeting or minor but enough to stimulate further enquiry.

Recently, I have developed an interest in jetons struck in the Spanish Netherlands in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. This was a period of great turmoil throughout Europe, both political and religious. It was a period of complex political alliances, religious conflicts and global expansion of trade, all of which drew in the major powers of Western Europe.

This series of jetons documents in numismatic form the course of the '80 Years' War' - a conflict between Spain and the Dutch of the United Provinces. The conflict combined the struggle for political independence and religious freedom. The friction between England and Spain was also at its height during the early years of this conflict. It was from her base in the Netherlands that Spain intended to launch her invasion of England. This was partly motivated by England's support for the Dutch under the terms of the 'Treaty of Nonsuch' and led directly to the most famous event of Elizabethan history - the destruction of the Spanish Armada in 1588. The reasons for this conflict were longstanding and complex, drawing in the Holy Roman Empire, the Papacy, France and England, and it was fought on many fronts including Ireland.

The jetons were primarily manufactured for use as reckoning counters to calculate accounts, but overtime, especially in the Netherlands, they were used to record events and for political propaganda. This particular series traces the 80 Years' War recording battles, assassinations, executions, sieges, and alliances which happened during the period.

A recent acquisition recorded a battle which took place in 1597 close to a town called Turnhout near Breda in the province of Brabant. The obverse depicts a fleeing Spanish army being pursued by cavalry and infantry with the town in the background. On the reverse are three escutcheons bearing the arms of England, France and the United Provinces tied together with a ribbon, representing the 'Triple Alliance' of the United Provinces, France and England.



DUG 3412

The battle involved a Spanish army led by Count Varax and an the Allied army led by Prince Maurice of Orange. The English troops, supplied by Elizabeth, were under the command of Sir Francis de Vere with eight companies of infantry led by Sir Henry Docwra. It was when I read this name that my curiosity was aroused. I recognised the name Docwra - was he the same man who had taken a leading role in the earliest phase of the Plantation of Ulster?

After a little research this was confirmed, thus the search began to find out more about the history on my doorstep.



The Battle of Turnhout 1597

Henry Docwra was born in Crookham, Berkshire, in 1564 into a minor landed family. He joined the army at an early age and served for a while in the Netherlands. He was then posted to Ireland in 1586 and served with Richard Bingham in his abortive campaign to pacify the Burkes of Mayo. Around 1590 he left Ireland and entered the service of Robert Devereux the Earl of Essex who was campaigning in the Spanish Netherlands as part of the Triple Alliance. He was at the siege of Rouen in 1591. In 1596 he went with the allied fleet, again led by the Earl of Essex, and in the company of Sir Francis de Vere and Sir Walter Raleigh on the attack and capture of Cadiz where he was knighted by Essex for his 'acts of valour'.

Returning to the Netherlands, now under the command of Sir Francis de Vere, he had a leading role in the battle of Turnhout on 24<sup>th</sup> January 1597, which is the subject of our jeton.

In 1599 he was sent back to Ireland, 'to his unspeakable contentment' to serve again with Essex as his advisor on Irish military affairs during the failed attempt to pacify Ireland, which was in the grip of the Tyrone Rebellion/Nine Years' War. He was involved in the attempt to subdue the O'Byrne clan of Wicklow but was not involved in the disastrous negotiations with Hugh O'Neill. He avoided implication in Essex's fall from grace and his eventual execution in 1601, and he had remained in Ireland during the crisis.

In 1600 Docwra was put in command of 4200 troops and led an expedition which set out from Carrickfergus with the objective to establish a bridgehead in the north west of Ulster on the Foyle Estuary through which to then gain access to the almost impenetrable heartland of the O'Neill. He landed at Culmore and went on to Derry where he built a fort and defensive earthwork in the Dutch style on a hill close to the ruined monastery of St. Colmcille and laid out the first streets of a new

city. He then built further fortification along the Foyle. He fought several skirmishes with the local clans but after a difficult start and almost losing his troops through starvation he managed to foster division among the clans and eventually gained support from several of the leading chieftains, although he understood how tenuous this could be.



Docwra's Fort and town at Derry 1604

He joined with Mountjoy in his brutal campaign to subdue O'Neill which led eventually to the Treaty of Mellifont and finally to the Flight of the Earls in 1603.

Docwra is regarded by many as 'the founder of modern Derry'. He continued to try to develop the town and was granted a Charter in 1604 with the rights to hold markets and fairs and to hold courts. However, he became disillusioned and was disappointed that he did not reap rich reward for his efforts. He sold his privileges and public offices and returned to England. The town was later destroyed during O'Doherty's rebellion in 1608.

After a short period out of public life Docwra returned to Ireland and served in the government. He was raised to the Peerage as 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Docwra of Culmore and published a narrative on his experiences as a soldier in Ireland which is regarded as a valuable insight to the way of life experienced by the ordinary soldier in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Although highly regarded by many of his contemporaries, others regarded him as being too lenient with the Irish leaders in Ulster. He was never really part of the inner circle and lacked friends and influence at court. Commended for his care and diligence and resisting the temptation to use his offices to enrich himself, he was described as 'an honest man who died poor'.

His successful actions in Ulster paved the way for James I's Plantation of Ulster, but that is another story.

Henry Docwra died in Dublin in 1631 and was buried in the Christ Church Cathedral.



The Allies infantrymen attacking the Spaniards in the Battle of Turnhout 1597 (left) and modern reconstruction of the contemporary English infantry armours (right).

It is amazing how a simple jeton can lead to such interesting but less known characters from history I like to think that one of the advancing infantrymen on this jeton may well be Sir Henry.

#### [Further Reading](#)

Bardon, Jonathan, *The Plantation of Ulster*, Gill & Macmillan, 2011.

McGurk, John, *Sir Henry Docwra 1564-1631-Derry's Second Founder*, Four Courts Press, 2007.

Morgan, Hiram, *Tyrone's Rebellion*, Boydell Press, 1993.