VIOLENCE, COLONIZATION AND HENRY VIII’S CONQUEST OF FRANCE, 1544 –1546*

In 1579 the English writer Thomas Churchyard explained to his readers the military strategy that Sir Humphrey Gilbert had used in Ireland during the suppression of the First Desmond Rebellion ten years earlier. He wrote that ‘when soeuer he [Gilbert] made any ostyng, or inrode, into the enemies Countrey, he killed manne, woman, and child, and spoiled, wasted, and burned, by the grounde all that he might: leauyng nothyng of the enemies in saffetie, whiche he could possiblie waste, or consume’.1 Gilbert’s actions have been seen as emblematic of the apparently special character of English warfare in sixteenth-century Ireland. The editors of an influential collection of essays examining conflict in early modern Ireland have written of ‘a level of violence in Ireland that was more intense and vicious than elsewhere in the Tudor and Stuart kingdoms’.2 Other historians of early modern Ireland have made even bolder claims. For Vincent Carey, the English ‘campaigns of indiscriminate killing and systematic starvation in Munster and Ulster constituted an early modern European version of total war, which in its impact on the civilian population was probably unprecedented and unmatched until the events of the...

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Thirty Years’ War some decades later’. Recently, David Edwards has reasserted the unique and brutal character of English violence in Ireland. Rather than being a product of the Elizabethan conquest, ‘this type of violence’, Edwards finds, was first used in Ireland during the repression of the Geraldine Rebellion in the 1530s and became especially pronounced in the ‘colonial wars’ that accompanied the establishment of English plantations in Laois and Offaly from the late 1540s.

Edwards’s explanation of the nature of the violence used in Ireland draws on the traditional narrative of the emergence of the early modern British Empire, which is widely believed to have started with the establishment of colonies in Ireland in the second half of the sixteenth century. To take a recent example, the editors of *Age of Atrocity* state that Ireland was ‘the first colony of the fledgling British Empire’, with the Laois–Offaly plantation forming the ‘very first state colony’. Historians have deemed


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these early colonies in Ireland to be significant because they are believed to have provided the bedrock ‘for the long-term development of English colonization’. For Shankar Raman, Ireland was the ‘testing ground for English colonial policy in the New World’, while Patrick Griffin has written that ‘the Elizabethan conquest of Ireland served as a laboratory for the first settlement of America. So axiomatic has this last point become . . . that it lies beyond debate’.

Historians have found that the English developed savage methods of warfare during their conflicts in Ireland, which they also used against the native populations of the Americas, because the English held ethnic views of the Irish that were akin to those they had of the population of the New World. For them, the Irish, like native Americans, were savages, and thus the restraints on violence typically used when fighting other Europeans did not

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apply when campaigning in Ireland. Harold E. Selesky finds that the English conduct of war in sixteenth-century France was markedly different from that in Ireland and the Americas. Historians have asserted that a Protestant English hatred of the Catholic Irish explains the supposedly unique character of violence in Ireland. Nicholas Canny (the leading proponent of this view) has stated that ethnic hatred was the ‘pretext for extermination’ because it ‘absolved [the English] of all normal ethical constraints’. The interplay between violence and colonialism in sixteenth-century Ireland has led some historians to view the English conquest as genocide. From the nineteenth century, historians emphasized the annihilationist nature of English violence in Ireland, which is portrayed as genocide avant la lettre. Furthermore, Raphael Lemkin (who devised the concept of genocide in response to Turkey’s massacre of its Armenian population) considered English actions in sixteenth-century Ireland to constitute genocide. From Lemkin to Jean-Paul Sartre to Hannah Arendt, colonialism has been closely tied to genocide. Indeed, the combination of colonization and

extreme violence has given sixteenth-century Ireland a prominent place in the emerging field of genocide studies, which has reinforced the apparently unique character of the violence there. In his highly influential examination of genocide in human history, Ben Kiernan writes that English policy in sixteenth-century Ireland was based on ‘ethnic and annihilationist thinking’. Postcolonial scholars such as Edward Said and Shankar Raman have also emphasized the exceptional character of the violence used during the sixteenth-century conquest of Ireland, portraying English ideas of Irish racial inferiority as the pretext for extermination.

In comparison to the sheer volume of work on the impact of violence on civilian populations in sixteenth-century Ireland, work on other theatres of Tudor conflict, particularly France, lags far behind. In his book on England’s colonial wars, Bruce Lenman focuses on Ireland without mentioning France at all. There are no detailed discussions of the nature of the violence used against civilians in the principal studies of English armies in the sixteenth century. Recently, Brendan Kane has questioned the extent to which the character of violence in Tudor Ireland was unique, though he focuses on comparisons with violence in England rather than on the interplay between violence and colonialism.


Cliff Davies, Steven Gunn and David Potter have discussed important aspects of the attacks on civilians in their studies of Henry VIII’s wars in France, though none of these works specifically focuses on this topic. The result of the disproportionate coverage of the impact of English warfare on civilians has encouraged the view that the Irish were the victims par excellence of the expansionist Tudor state. Likewise, broader studies of early modern European warfare have tended to confirm the impression that scorched-earth tactics were particular to conflicts in Ireland. For example, in his influential War and Society in Renaissance Europe, J. R. Hale writes that there are ‘few early modern examples’ of a ‘deliberate scorched-earth policy’. Yet Hale is far off the mark, as English, French and Habsburg armies, among others, used scorched-earth tactics widely during the sixteenth century. Certainly, when we examine Henry VIII’s wars in France and Scotland, we find the extensive use of scorched-earth tactics and a high level of violence against civilians. Whereas the implementation of scorched earth in Scotland was modified by a concern to take plunder and prisoners, it was at its most severe in France when conflict was coupled with colonial development in the Boulonnais in the 1540s.

It has gone entirely unnoticed by historians of the early modern British Empire that the principal hallmarks of imperial rule (which are customarily seen to have developed in Ireland in the second half of the sixteenth century) had already appeared in northern France during the 1540s. Indeed, France rarely features in the historiography of the early British Empire.


26 For Scotland, see Steven Gunn, ‘Ford Lecture, Number 4: Trade and Tillage’.
English lands in France receive no treatment in the *Oxford History of the British Empire* beyond cursory remarks from David Armitage that Calais was the ‘last toehold of the Angevin empire’ (in fact, Calais was never part of the Angevin Empire) and from Nicholas Canny that the loss of Calais spelt the end of ‘England’s medieval empire’ on the continent. This dismissive view of England’s policy towards France fails to account for the significant developments in colonial rule that were made on the continent. In particular, an English colony was founded in the Boulonnais in 1546 on the back of the region’s depopulation through the use of scorched-earth tactics. As in Ireland, the English crown employed this highly destructive type of warfare against people it deemed to be its own subjects. This article will begin by investigating the use of military codes of conduct to restrain the behaviour of the English soldiers fighting in the Boulonnais, before moving on to examine direct attacks on the civilian population, particularly traditional non-combatants such as women, children and clergy. It will then examine the effects of the implementation of a scorched-earth policy to depopulate the Boulonnais of its native inhabitants, which was followed by an attempt to create an ethnically English colony.

The article is based on a range of primary sources (English, French and imperial), including the records produced by the English crown that detail the military strategy used in the Boulonnais (among them the blueprints for the establishment of the English colony) and the highly detailed reports that English commanders in France sent to Henry VIII and his leading ministers, giving blow-by-blow accounts of their attacks on the native population. We are fortunate to possess a number of diaries and journals kept by ordinary English soldiers who participated in the campaign, which provide us with graphic accounts of the brutal nature of the conflict in the Boulonnais. As these English sources were generally not intended for public consumption, the authors made no effort to minimize death rates or disguise their slaughter of civilians through the use of innuendo. In addition to the numerous English records, we also possess an abundant range of contemporary sources (diaries, letters, legal inquests, registers of municipal deliberations, etc.).

financial accounts) left by the victims of the English campaign, as well as by those who witnessed at first hand the effects of the war on the local population. Overwhelmingly, these documents corroborate the information provided in the English sources and highlight the wider impact of the violence of 1544–6 on the native population of the Boulonnais. In sum, the range and volume of the surviving contemporary materials detailing Henry VIII’s war in the Boulonnais make this campaign one of the best-documented European conflicts of the age.

I

Historians of early modern Europe have overstated the degree to which military codes of conduct were a development of the later sixteenth century.28 Indeed, there is a wide literature on military ordinances and restraints in war in the later Middle Ages which early modernists have largely ignored.29 Certainly, English armies used codes of conduct from the fourteenth century onwards to regulate soldiers’ behaviour on campaign, including the treatment of non-combatants.30 Restraints were read out to Henry VIII’s armies in France, such as the ‘lawes and ordinances’ prohibiting English soldiers from attacking women, children, merchants and the clergy during the Tournai campaign of 1513.31 While military ordinances only show how the army


commanders expected their troops to act — rather than the reality of the situation in the field — we know from other types of records (including chronicles and reports from the conflict zone) that these regulations were strictly enforced in 1513 and that soldiers who pillaged the local population were hanged.\textsuperscript{32} Likewise, a code of conduct was issued to English soldiers in 1544 which aimed to protect the local population from unlicensed pillaging (and the diaries of English soldiers serving in the campaign show that these ordinances were rigorously enforced).\textsuperscript{33} When the duke of Norfolk’s soldiers marched out of Calais to campaign in the Boulonnais in June 1544, they were told that ‘no one should dare to leave the host to ravage or loot within the French land on pain of death’.\textsuperscript{34} The verbal communication of law codes was a cornerstone of English military practice during the sixteenth century. In his \textit{Treatise of the Art of War}, Thomas Audley (who was appointed lieutenant of the lower town of Boulogne following the establishment of the colony in 1546) stated that military laws should be read out to soldiers before they set off on campaign, ‘And if thei thynek them reasonable they will consent to them and hold up their hands which signifieth agreement. And afterwards if they breake any of thos Lawes of constitucions, then shall thei suffer without any resistance those punishments to be appointed therefor’.\textsuperscript{35} Accordingly, soldiers could not claim ignorance of the punishments for unlicensed pillaging. Indeed, the dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk hanged soldiers by the roadside in 1544 as a warning of the consequences of looting from the population of the Boulonnais.\textsuperscript{36}

Yet the regulations that restrained soldiers from attacking civilians could be suspended in the wake of a siege, with

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\textit{Victoryous, and Moste Cristen Prynce Our Moste Drade Soueraygne Lorde Kyunge Henry the viii} (London, 1513, STC 9333).


\textsuperscript{33} Statutes and Ordynances for the Warr (London, 1544, STC 9334).

\textsuperscript{34} Elis Gruffydd and the 1544 ‘Enterprises’ of Paris and Boulogne, ed. Jonathan Davies (Farnham, 2003), 13.


victorious commanders giving their soldiers licence to attack conquered populations. While sieges were the most codified aspect of warfare in sixteenth-century Europe, the rules governing them offered little protection to civilians, largely because they were derived from biblical precedents which were typically harsh towards conquered populations. The Book of Joshua records how the Israelites slaughtered Jericho’s men, women and children, took their livestock and then burned the city to the ground. Likewise, the Book of Deuteronomy (which provided the blueprint for the laws governing sieges in the sixteenth century) ruled that all the men in a conquered city could be killed and the women, children and goods distributed among the victorious soldiers.37

English commanders threatened to enforce the full rigour of the laws of war. During his French campaign of September 1522, Thomas Howard (then earl of Surrey) promised to kill all the men, women and children of Hesdin if they did not surrender.38 While threats of violence were designed to intimidate urban populations and thus encourage them to capitulate, the full severity of the laws of war could be applied against defiant populations. When Thomas Howard took the Breton town of Morlaix by force in July 1522, he gave his soldiers permission to spend two days sacking it — an action that was endorsed by both Cardinal Wolsey and Thomas Cromwell.39 Similarly, during the Scottish war of 1544, the earl of Hertford told Edinburgh’s rulers that ‘vnless they would yelde vp the towne frankley without condition, and cause man, woman and childe, to issue into the fieldes, submitting them to his will and pleasure, he woulde put them to the sworde, and their towne to the fire’.40

38 Grafton’s Chronicle: To which Is Added His Table of the Bailiffs, Sheriffs, and Mayors, of the City of London. From the Year 1189, to 1558 Inclusive, 2 vols. (London, 1809), ii, 330–1.
39 LP, iii, pt 2, no. 2958; Grafton’s Chronicle, ii, 325.
taken by force, Hertford ordered his soldiers to ‘put the inhabitants to the sword’ and then burn the town.41

The threat of a general slaughter could motivate the besieged to reach an accommodation with their attackers in the hope of avoiding a sack. In early September 1544, it became clear to the captain of Boulogne, Jacques de Coucy, lord of Vervins, that the town (which had been under siege since mid July) could not hold out against a further English assault. Vervins opened negotiations with the duke of Suffolk on 13 September 1544, obtaining his guarantee that the townspeople could leave Boulogne unharmed and with their possessions intact.42 It is significant that Henry VIII was personally commanding the siege of Boulogne, as it permitted Vervins to play on expectations of royal clemency. The ability to grant mercy was a cornerstone of royal power and it could be used for propaganda purposes, especially in chronicles that sought to promote English royal power.43 Raphael Holinshed remarks that Henry approved Vervins’ request for mercy ‘like a noble and mercifull prince’, while Ulpian Fulwell, in his sixteenth-century biography of the king, stated that Henry VIII was a greater ruler than both Agamemnon and Alexander (both of whom had ordered the sack of cities) because he had spared the population of Boulogne.44 Henry granted the two thousand civilians who chose to leave Boulogne safe passage to Abbeville, instructing his soldiers not to molest them. In order to

41 Francis Godwin, Annales of England Containing the Reignes of Henry the Eighth, Edward the Sixt, Queene Mary: Written in Latin by the Right Honorable and Right Reverend Father in God, Francis Lord Bishop of Hereford (London, 1630, STC 11947), 190; Holinshed’s Chronicles, iii, 835.
44 Holinshed’s Chronicles, iii, 840; Ulpian Fulwell, The Flower of Fame: Containing the Bright Renowne, and Moste Fortunate Raigne of King Henry the VIII. Wherein Is Mentioned of Matters, by the Rest of Our Cronographers Ouerpassed (London, 1575, STC 11475), 42.
prevent attacks on the townspeople, Henry stopped his troops from entering Boulogne until its population had departed; indeed, he even provided the refugees with a guard to protect them on the road.\textsuperscript{45} By granting the townspeople clemency, Henry could also demonstrate that he was acting in accordance with contemporary views regarding the implementation of the laws of war. While the sack of cities was never the norm in the Middle Ages, military theorists (such as Alberico Gentili) placed an increased emphasis on the granting of mercy to conquered populations during the sixteenth century, though there could be a substantial difference between the often idealized forms of conflict set down in military manuals and the reality of war.\textsuperscript{46}

In 1544, the granting of mercy to the population of Boulogne (and the restraining of English soldiers) depended on the king’s presence. As soon as the Boulogne refugees had walked several miles along the road — and thus beyond Henry’s gaze — they were attacked by soldiers, who stole their goods and left them exposed to harsh weather in a region that had been entirely destroyed and depopulated.\textsuperscript{47} It is probable that their attackers were the very soldiers that Henry VIII had sent to protect them, or else mercenaries or English adventurers operating beyond the control of army authorities. While Henry granted the townspeople permission to leave Boulogne with their possessions intact as an act of mercy, this gesture also made


\textsuperscript{46} Meron, \textit{Henry’s Wars}, 103–4.

them prime targets for pillage — particularly as the group included the wealthiest urban families.48

Furthermore, one contemporary French account of the attack states that some of the townswomen were raped.49 Certainly, there is good reason to treat this account as more than an effort to demonize the English, particularly because rape was (and continues to be) a common threat for women during periods of warfare, and there are numerous reports of soldiers (English, French and imperial) raping women in this region during the mid sixteenth century.50 It is significant that the rapes took place in the immediate aftermath of a siege, when the customary restraints on soldiers’ violence were often lifted. Under normal circumstances, rape was a capital crime; indeed, the codes of conduct issued to the English army in 1544 made the rape of women punishable by death.51 Nonetheless, soldiers believed that the laws of war gave them the right to rape women after a victorious siege.52 As Thomas Meron has observed, ‘licence to rape was considered a major incentive for the soldier involved in siege warfare’.53 What we find here is perhaps the darker aspect to E. P. Thompson’s moral economy.54 As the English soldiers saw it, Henry VIII had infringed their customary rights by preventing them from pillaging Boulogne in the aftermath of the siege. Soldiers considered the right to rape to be enshrined in the laws regulating warfare, which made it difficult to restrain their

48 Baron d’Ordre, Siège de Boulogne, 25; Brésin, Chroniques de Flandre, 185. Morin, ‘Chroniques du siège de Boulogne’, 63, 143, 245, 248, 252, 256.
53 Meron, Henry’s Wars, 111–12.
actions. As Michel de Montaigne observed, it was difficult to stop victorious troops from attacking the populations of conquered towns, even when mercy had been granted. Efforts to prevent soldiers from molesting civilian populations often provoked discontent among armies. Certainly, English soldiers complained about the restraints placed on them during the 1544 campaign in France. Soldiers sought to profit from their labour by sacking a town; indeed, army commanders encouraged their soldiers to fight with promises of pay through plunder. Moreover, in his 1539 work *On the Law of War*, the influential Spanish writer Francisco de Vitoria stated that the sack of a town was beneficial to soldiers’ morale.

Military theorists of the sixteenth century such as Vitoria reluctantly recognized that the rape of women was part of the sack of a city (as had Saint Augustine). Indeed, the rape of women and the looting of enemy goods were two sides of the same coin for soldiers. As Otto Ulbricht has observed in his study of the Thirty Years’ War, ‘Rape by soldiers . . . meant the experience of violence in its most radical form, namely, reducing a human being to a mere object, a part of the booty’. As the attack on Boulogne’s refugees took place on the road, the rapes would undoubtedly have been carried out in front of the women’s husbands or fathers. By having acts of sexual violence take place concurrently with the looting of goods, English soldiers reinforced the men’s powerlessness to protect their property. Because the rape of women was seen as an attack on male

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57 Elis Gruffydd, 26–7.
honour, soldiers could further assert their domination over the conquered population. As the refugees included Boulogne’s elite, there may have been an element of class humiliation to this act because, in contemporary thought, the loss of honour through rape was greater for higher-class women. 

Contemporary descriptions of the Boulogne refugees provided by people who saw them strongly suggest that the English soldiers stripped the townspeople of their clothing during this attack. The theft of clothes from conquered populations was a common aspect of warfare in early modern Europe. One the one hand, there was a basic financial incentive because clothes were valuable and could be sold on. But stripping was also intended to humiliate the victims, especially when they were from social elites (for whom clothing was an important marker of their elevated status). As William Smyth has shown, the humiliation was intensified when those stripped of their clothing were refugees on their way to seek shelter. There were also strong associations between the stripping of women and the opportunity to commit sexual violence, particularly in the wake of a siege.

Moreover, the stripping of conquered populations during periods of adverse weather was an effective way to kill them without resorting to direct slaughter. While the deliberate

62 Bradbury, *Medieval Siege*, 322; Dianne Hall and Elizabeth Malcolm, “‘The Rebels Turkish Tyranny’: Understanding Sexual Violence in Ireland during the 1640s”, *Gender and History*, xxii (2010), 63; Wolfthal, *Images of Rape*, 64.

63 Elis Gruffydd, 30–1; Bre´sin, *Chroniques de Flandre*, 185.


killing of civilians through stripping and exposure is taken to be a distinctive feature of English warfare in Ireland, both English and French forces used this tactic during the wars in the Boulonnais in the 1540s. \(^{67}\) When the English garrison at New Haven surrendered to the French in 1549, one soldier observed that ‘if any man or woman came out wearing any good clothes the French stripped them cruelly, and so many left with very little on them at all to protect them from the hoar frost on their way to Calais’. \(^{68}\) By adopting such tactics, commanders could claim that they were being merciful to civilians by sparing their lives, though the denial of adequate shelter and clothing in periods of harsh weather often had the same result as direct slaughter. There are numerous contemporary accounts attesting to the severe weather in the Boulonnais at the time of the townspeople’s expulsion — and the fatal effect it had on them. One English soldier who witnessed the refugees leaving Boulogne commented on the ‘Winde and Raine wt suche Storme as has not been seen . . . and foule wether’ that continued to afflict the region while the townspeople were on the road. \(^{69}\) The Welsh soldier Elis Gruffydd, who was participating in the siege of Montreuil in September 1544, saw the Boulogne refugees pass him on the road to Abbeville. He states that the men, women and children ‘fainted while walking because it was so wet that there had not been one dry hour for ten days’, noting how the refugees sought refuge in ‘the ruins of a church and village which we had burnt a short time before. Many both old and young died there of cold’. \(^{70}\) Antoine Morin, one of the Boulogne refugees, records how they were unable to find any shelter from the incessant rainfall because of the total destruction of the buildings in the region. \(^{71}\) The Saint-Omer monk Louis Brésin confirms the observations of Gruffydd and Morin, stating that the refugees passed through a land that had been entirely burnt and depopulated, while many refugees drowned in rivers swollen by the heavy rains. \(^{72}\)


\(^{68}\) ‘Boulogne and Calais from 1545 to 1550’, ed. M. Bryn Davies, *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, Fouad I University*, xii (1950), 67.

\(^{69}\) Leslie, ‘Siege and Capture of Boulogne’, 192–3. For the adverse weather, see also: Morin, ‘Chroniques du siège de Boulogne’, 245, 251; Brésin, *Chroniques de Flandre*, 189, 193.

\(^{70}\) Elis Gruffydd, 67.

\(^{71}\) Morin, ‘Chroniques du siège de Boulogne’, 260.

\(^{72}\) Brésin, *Chroniques de Flandre*, 185.
While the attacks on the Boulogne refugees took place in contravention of Henry VIII's instructions, there are numerous accounts of English commanders ordering the deliberate killing of civilians during the conquest of the Boulonnais. These killings were partly a consequence of the strategies the local population developed in response to Henry VIII's invasion. As Julius Ruff has observed, peasants had three principal choices when faced with a military invasion. First, they could attempt to flee the violence by seeking shelter in a castle or fortified town. Failing that, they could escape into woods, caves or other remote areas in the hope of remaining hidden until the soldiers had passed through the region. Second, villagers could stay in their homes and try to protect their families and their possessions. Third, peasants could offer resistance to the invading army. The native population of the Boulonnais used all three strategies in response to the English invasion of 1544.

Peasants who were able to seek refuge in a walled town or castle often had the best chance of survival. At the beginning of the English campaign in 1544, the inhabitants of the villages surrounding Boulogne sought refuge in the town and its surrounding forts, while others fled to neighbouring towns such as Amiens, Abbeville, Beauvais and Senlis. Yet this option was not available to many rural dwellers for two principal reasons. First, peasants had to live in close proximity to a fortified town if they hoped to reach it before the invading army did. Second, it was typically only the wealthier peasants (who had enough food and money to support themselves during their period of exile) who were permitted entry into towns. Because the burden of feeding poor rural refugees often fell on urban populations, displaced people were often forcibly prevented from entering towns. Furthermore, when food supplies ran low even those people fortunate enough to be admitted behind the security of urban walls could find that they had to re-enter the conflict zone in order to find sustenance. For example, peasants who had fled into Boulogne in advance of the siege were

74 *Journal du siège de Boulogne par les anglais prédéé d’une lettre de Henry VIII à la reine sur les operations du siège*, ed. Camille Le Roy (Boulogne, 1863), 22.
slaughtered by English troops when they tried to forage for food in the surrounding area.\textsuperscript{75}

Villagers who were unable or unwilling to stray far from their homes had to seek an alternative place of refuge. Peasants often sought shelter in churches, as these were normally the strongest places in their villages. Religious buildings were regularly destroyed during periods of conflict because they could be fortified, and the English burned numerous churches and abbeys in 1544.\textsuperscript{76} Indeed, the situation in the Boulonnais was so dire that some villagers sought refuge in burned churches.\textsuperscript{77}

While religious buildings offered a place of refuge, the people who sought shelter within their walls were subject to the same laws of war that governed the conduct of sieges.\textsuperscript{78} The men of the Boulonnais village of Audinghen fortified their church against an English force and managed to hold out for six hours despite the use of artillery against them, during which time they killed several soldiers and one officer. While the English commander persuaded the villagers to surrender by offering them mercy, as soon as the peasants opened the church doors the soldiers started to slaughter them. When the village women tried to stop the massacre of their menfolk, they too were killed.\textsuperscript{79} Likewise, after soldiers under the command of Adrien de Croÿ, count of Roeulx (who fought with the English army in 1544), used cannon against the church of Petinghem, the villagers sheltering inside attempted to surrender. Yet the count refused to accept their capitulation (as the artillery had been fired, he was not obliged

\textsuperscript{75} W. A. J. Archbold (ed.), ‘A Diary of the Expedition of 1544’, English Historical Review, xvi (1901), 504; Elis Gruffydd, 55. Peasants also died while guarding the walls of Boulogne, along with women, children and members of the clergy: Morin, ‘Chroniques du si`ege de Boulogne’, 142.


\textsuperscript{77} Brésin, Chroniques de Flandre, 180, 295.

\textsuperscript{78} Davies, ‘Boulogne and Calais’, 11.

\textsuperscript{79} Contemporary reports of the numbers of villagers killed at Audinghen are largely consistent. One source states that eighty-eight men were killed in addition to an unknown number of women, while another puts the total number of men, women and children killed at 110: ‘Documents inédits ou rarissimes’, ed. Rosny, 404–5; Brésin, Chroniques de Flandre, 179.
to do so by the laws of war)\textsuperscript{80} and he massacred eighty men in the
church, as well as an unknown number of women and children.\textsuperscript{81}
By seeking refuge inside churches and defending them against the
English soldiers, these peasants had relinquished the protection
given to them in military codes of conduct. While the direct
slaughter of women and children has typically been portrayed
as a distinctive feature of English warfare in Ireland, these
examples demonstrate that it was already happening in Henry
VIII’s wars in France.\textsuperscript{82}

In addition to women and children, members of the clergy (also
traditionally protected by the law of war) were killed during
attacks on churches. Historians of early modern Europe have
traditionally treated attacks on the clergy as examples of
religiously motivated violence.\textsuperscript{83} Yet there is little to suggest
that religion was a motivating factor in the violence of 1544,
despite the attempts of some nineteenth-century French
historians to portray the population of the Boulonnais as ‘good
French and good Catholics’ who were defending their land
against a tyrannical Henry VIII, who had invaded France intent
on destroying Catholicism.\textsuperscript{84} Rather, members of the clergy were
attacked when they encouraged or facilitated resistance to the
English — actions that removed their customary protection
from violence. English commanders warned the French clergy
to isolate themselves from any resistance to Henry VIII’s wars
in France. During the 1523 invasion of France, Sir William
Sandes spared the lives of the clergy he found in fortified
churches, though he reminded them that they were not men of
war and threatened to hang them from the steeples of their
churches in future.\textsuperscript{85} This was more than an empty threat: in
1522 Sandes burned the priests and villagers of Whitsandbay in
the bell-tower of the church they defended against the English.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{80} Bradbury, \textit{Medieval Siege}, 308; David Potter, \textit{Renaissance France at War: Armies,
Culture and Society}, c.1480–1560 (Woodbridge, 2008), 205.
\textsuperscript{81} Brésin, \textit{Chroniques de Flandre}, 180.
\textsuperscript{82} Carey, ‘“What Pen Can Paint or Tears Atone?”’, 210–11; Edwards, ‘Escalation
of Violence in Sixteenth-Century Ireland’, 71.
\textsuperscript{83} See, for example, Walter, ‘Performative Violence?’, 139.
\textsuperscript{84} Auguste d’Hauttefeuille and Louis Bénard, \textit{Histoire de Boulogne-sur-Mer}, 2 vols.
(Boulogne-sur-Mer, 1860), i, 226 (also 220, 225, 238). See also Bertrand, \textit{Précis de
\textsuperscript{85} Grafton’s \textit{Chronicle}, ii, 326.
\textsuperscript{86} Grafton’s \textit{Chronicle}, ii, 326.
In 1544, a monk from the abbey of Cysoing (close to Saint-Omer) recorded how ‘in many places the poor people were burned in their bell-towers’. While killing of civilians in bell-towers is a common feature of atrocity stories, there are good reasons to read this as more than a literary trope. First, it is entirely logical for civilians to be killed in their churches because these buildings were places of refuge during times of conflict. Second, bell-towers had a judicial and symbolic importance. As highly visible structures, they provided the location where justice was done. During the suppression of the 1549 revolt in England, priests who led the rebels were hanged from church towers. Similarly, clergy (like other non-combatants) were killed in 1544 because the English crown characterized them as rebels who had resisted their legitimate ruler — Henry VIII.

The majority of the instances of peasant resistance occurred in the early days of the English occupation, which probably reflected a belief that the English were only there to pillage rather than to occupy the land. As well as defending churches, French peasants also made some direct attacks on English soldiers. Although a genuine feeling of loyalty towards the Valois monarchy may have motivated some of the attacks, the viciousness of these actions may also point to a wider hatred of the soldiers who repeatedly devastated the region in the mid-sixteenth century, particularly as these attacks were designed to humiliate the soldiers. For example, soon after English soldiers had entered the region, French peasants killed a scout and mutilated his corpse. Similarly, English soldiers caught pillaging an orchard in 1544 were killed and hanged from trees with their mouths stuffed full of cherries. These actions were intended both to humiliate the soldiers and to warn others of the consequences of pillaging. Yet retributive attacks on English soldiers were rare. Peasant violence tended to be defensive and it largely resulted from French villagers trying to protect their communities from attack. Peasant leaders emerged, such as Pierre du Roy, who moved the population of the village of

89 Elis Gruffydd, 18.
91 Elis Gruffydd, 20–21.
Alquines to a well-hidden cave system, which the community used as a place of refuge during times of conflict.92

Flight to remote locations such as woods was the most common civilian response to the English invasion of 1544.93 After Sir Ralph Ellerker and Sir Hugh Paulet had raided Desvres in 1545, they reported that the population had ‘fled into the pyle and woods, and so saved themselves’.94 It was not in the interests of soldiers to slaughter fleeing villagers when pillaging was the motivation behind their attacks. Indeed, it was easier to loot goods from deserted villages because there was no resistance to deal with.95 However, as the 1544 war was aimed at depopulating the region, English commanders had their soldiers hunt down French peasants who had fled into the woods.96 This was a tactic the English had used in Scotland. During his scorched-earth campaign in the Scottish Borders in 1523 Thomas Howard (who also commanded an English army in France in 1544) enlisted men from Northumberland (who knew the terrain) to hunt down Scottish villagers who had fled into the hills in advance of the English raid.97 Similarly, during the 1544 campaign in the Boulonnais one English soldier recorded how he had ‘clensed the Woode’ of ‘pyllers and robbers’.98 From Henry V’s invasion of Normandy to Robespierre’s campaign against the Vendée rebels in 1793, governments labelled people they wanted to take punitive action against as brigands or criminals because it justified the use of violence against them.99 As the sixteenth-century military theorist Alberico Gentili made clear in his De

92 Elis Gruffydd, 13–15; Potter, Henry VIII and Francis I, 269–70.
93 Nicholas Wright, Knights and Peasants: The Hundred Years War in the French Countryside (Woodbridge, 1998), 66.
94 The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), SP 1/202, fo. 84r (LP, xx, pt 1, no. 962).
96 Brésin, Chroniques de Flandre, 293.
97 British Library, London (hereafter BL), Cotton MS Caligula B/VI, fo. 372r (LP, iii, no. 3321).
98 Leslie, ‘Siege and Capture of Boulogne’, 189 (see also 197). During the Elizethan conquest of Ireland, the English also hunted down civilians who had fled to the woods: Carey, ‘“What Pen Can Paint or Tears Atone?”’, 208; John McGurk, The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: The 1590s Crisis (Manchester, 1997), 226.
iure belli libri tres, brigands ‘do not enjoy the privileges of a law [of war] to which they are foes’. In 1544, the English employed a legal vocabulary that legitimized their violence against the population of the Boulonnais. The Welsh soldier Elis Gruffydd writes of the ‘people of Picardy living like thieves and bandits in the woods and caves and valleys of the country round Boulogne’. Likewise, during the Elizabethan conquest of Ireland, the English called those people who had fled to the woods ‘rebells and theeves’. As we saw with the slaughter of women, children and the clergy, the English could justify their killing of civilians in 1544 by claiming that the laws of war did not protect these people because of their actions.

Peasants who fled to woods during times of conflict were frequently called ‘wild’. For Nicholas Canny, the English characterization of the Irish as ‘wild’ was essential for the use of extra-legal methods to slaughter them. Yet, there was nothing specifically Irish about this term. The English used the same vocabulary to describe the population of the Boulonnais. When English officials surveyed the Boulonnais in the summer of 1546 to prepare its resettlement with English colonists, they wrote that the remaining population ‘doe live wildly, nether observyng holyday nor fastyng daye. In our opynyon, no civell nor polytyc order can take ther due effects where god is nether remembred ne honoured’, which is strikingly similar to English accounts of the Gaelic Irish in the sixteenth century. Furthermore, the term ‘wild’ was used widely across Europe; indeed, the French

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101 Elis Gruffydd, 29.
104 TNA, SP 1/223, fo. 89r (LP, xxi, pt. 1, no. 1444). Furthermore, it was not just the Irish that the Tudor crown deemed to be ‘wild’ or ‘barbarous’. It used similar language to describe the population of northern England: Steven G. Ellis, ‘Civilizing the Natives: State Formation and the Tudor Monarchy, c.1400–1603’, in Steven G. Ellis and Lud’a Klusáková (eds.), Imagining Frontiers, Contesting Identities (Pisa, 2007), 86–7.
considered the English to be ‘wild’ (‘Anglois sauvaiges’), while Oudart du Biez, admiral of France, wrote that the combined effects of French, English and Irish soldiers in 1544 had forced the population of Groffliers to live in the woods ‘like wild beasts’. As his remarks show, there was a recognition that such people were not naturally ‘wild’ and that war had reduced them to this state.

Historians of early modern Ireland overemphasize the role that ethnic hatred played in outbreaks of mass violence. For Brendan Bradshaw, the savagery of the Elizabethan conquest of Ireland was the product of a Protestant English sense of cultural superiority over the Catholic Irish. Yet it is clear that English soldiers fighting in France in the 1540s had neither a predisposition to extreme violence nor a visceral hatred of the native population. While the English soldiers who served in Ireland had little, if any, connection to the place, many of those who fought in the Boulonnais were drawn from the Calais garrison and had links with the local French population. For example, English soldiers searching the woods outside Samer found a group of refugees, including a woman who had nursed one of the soldiers’ children before she had been expelled from Calais with all the other French residents in 1543. It is also clear that the pitiful state of the French population in the Boulonnais elicited feelings of great sympathy and compassion from many English soldiers. One soldier was so affected by the scenes of starvation he witnessed in the Boulonnais that he tried to hand over his money to French peasants to buy food (though there was no food to buy). Indeed, Elis Gruffydd writes that the terrible state

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105 Potter, War and Government in the French Provinces, 213; Archives Municipales (hereafter AM), Amiens, BB 25, fo. 250. Similarly, French peasants forced to live in the woods and fields during the Hundred Years War were also described as ‘wild’: Clifford J. Rogers, ‘By Fire and Sword: Bellum Hostile and “Civilians” in the Hundred Years’ War’, in Mark Grimsley and Clifford J. Rogers (eds.), Civilians in the Path of War (London, 2002), 60; Wright, Knights and Peasants, 66.


107 Elis Gruffydd, 30.

108 Elis Gruffydd, 28.
to which the starving population had been reduced ‘would have made the hardest heart melt into tears from pity’.109

Despite such expression of empathy, attacks on the population of the Boulonnais continued unabated. The character of the warfare in 1544 produced a fear among the French that the English were indiscriminately killing civilians. A monk from Saint-Omer wrote that numerous refugees had fled to the town in 1544 because of a rumour that the English had ordered the killing of all men, women and children in the Boulonnais.110 Moreover, the monk stated that when the English Crown recruited soldiers in the Low Countries they had these men take an oath to kill women and children.111 While it is easy to dismiss such reports as exaggerated rumours, the nature of the warfare prosecuted in the Boulonnais meant that soldiers were indeed ordered to kill traditional non-combatants (including women and children). From the perspective of the English commanders in France there were compelling reasons to do this, particularly when the women and children had supported the enemy’s war effort. For example, in 1544 the English ruled that anyone caught bringing victuals into the French-held town of Ardres (which Henry’s army was blockading) would be killed. When English soldiers caught a group of women trying to supply Ardres, they warned them ‘not to come there again under threat of having their hair and ears cut off and being sewn in sacks and thrown into the lakes near Guisnes’.112 Soon after the English issued this warning, five men and twelve women caught trying to supply Ardres were executed and their corpses displayed at Guisnes castle.113 The high number of women executed in 1544 probably reflects a belief that they were less likely to be killed than men (likewise, when Henry Howard, earl of Surrey, and Sir Thomas Cheney burned Saint-Riquier in 1544, the men had fled the town, leaving only the women behind).114 Yet English soldiers patrolled the region around Ardres specifically looking for women and children. In these cases,
women’s and children’s customary immunity from violence was removed because they had supported the enemy’s war effort.

Overall, reports detailing the killing of traditional non-combatants in 1544 are highly credible for a number of reasons. First, the killings are corroborated by a range of English, French and imperial sources, most of which were not intended for public consumption. Second, these accounts avoid many of the clichés of atrocity stories in early modern Europe, such as the impaling of babies on pikes and the slicing open of pregnant women’s wombs. In fact, when English soldiers caught a group of women supplying Ardres, they executed all of them except for the one woman who was pregnant.115 Third, English commanders ordered the killing of civilians when they deemed that their actions — whether supplying the enemy with food, fortifying churches or encouraging peasant resistance — had put them beyond the protection they could expect from the laws of war.116

II

Although widespread, the direct killing of civilians only affected a minority of the Boulonnais’ population. In contrast, the implementation of a scorched-earth strategy caused extensive death and deprivation across the region. The English began to destroy the Boulonnais soon after Henry VIII declared war on France in 1543. Within days of the outbreak of hostilities, Sir John Wallop entered the Boulonnais and began to destroy all the villages in his path as he made his way to support Charles V’s siege of Landrecies.117 The main onslaught against the Boulonnais began when an English army of approximately 35,000 soldiers poured into the region in the summer of 1544. The real threat to the native population was not from unlicensed pillaging by these soldiers; rather, the English commanders’ orders to destroy the region caused the greatest hardship. While Thomas Howard, duke of Norfolk, hanged soldiers for unlicensed pillaging, he began systematically to burn crops and destroy villages from the moment he crossed out of the Calais Pale.

into the Boulonnais. 118 For Howard, there was no tension between these two policies. As pillaging was against military law codes, soldiers who looted from the population of the Boulonnais had challenged his authority and should be punished accordingly. In contrast, the destruction of the land was legitimate because it was carried out on his instructions. Some historians have downplayed the effects of scorched-earth tactics. Commenting on the English use of scorched earth in the sixteenth century, Wayne Lee states that it ‘was not intended to kill the local population. In essence, the tactic of devastation in most sixteenth-century contexts was logistical and emotional, not demographic’. 119 In fact, this type of warfare was highly destructive and it created a demographic catastrophe in the Boulonnais during the mid 1540s.

There are a number of reasons why scorched earth caused greater mortality and misery than direct killing. First, these raids aimed to achieve the total destruction of a region. For example, Ralph Robson estimates that Thomas Dacre destroyed 75,000 acres of land in the Scottish Borders in 1523. 120 Cardinal Wolsey had instructed Dacre to destroy this region entirely, so ‘that ther is left neither house, forteress, village, tree, cattail, corn, or other succor for man’, with the result that the population would die from starvation. 121 While the destruction of crops is normally portrayed as a unique feature of the Tudor crown’s ‘ethnic cleansing’ in Ireland, Henry VIII’s commanders repeatedly used these methods against his subjects in France. 122 Midway through Thomas Howard’s 1522 campaign in France, Sir William Sandes wrote to Henry VIII to inform him that they were burning everything in their path and that they had swept the Boulonnais clean of corn, cattle and houses. 123 The devastation the English caused in 1522 was so extensive that the French were unable to

120 Ralph Robson, The Rise and Fall of the English Highland Clans: Tudor Responses to a Mediaeval Problem (Edinburgh, 1989), 180, 186. For these burnings, see TNA, SP 49/2, fo. 30v (LP, iii, no. 3344).
121 TNA SP1/28, fo. 184v (LP, iii, no. 3281).
123 BL, Cotton MS Caligula D/VIII, fos. 269v–270v (LP, iii, pt 2 no. 2530).
send a relief army to the region because it could not have survived. In 1544, Antoine Morin, one of the Boulogne refugees, wrote that the English had so completely destroyed the Boulonnais they were unable to find any sustenance in the land, so that many died. In short, the use of scorched earth was not indiscriminate; rather, it was highly organized and designed to destroy as much land as possible.

The English used scorched-earth tactics for the specific purpose of depopulating areas by creating starvation conditions. In 1521, Thomas Howard stated that his burnings in Ireland ensured that the people of the targeted areas ‘shalbe enforced eyther to forsake the cuntrey, or dye for honger this wyntyer comyng’. Henry VIII’s commanders timed their scorched-earth tactics to take place at harvest time, so that they could achieve the maximum amount of damage. In 1523, Howard delayed his raid in Scotland from June until September ‘when their corn will be wonne, and they can be utterly ruined’. Likewise, the 1544 campaign was deliberately timed to cause as much damage to the harvest as possible. Indeed, Elis Gruffydd writes that as a consequence of these actions the Boulonnais was made ‘barren’.

Corn was the principal target of scorched-earth raids. As this crop underpinned European diets in the sixteenth century, its destruction caused the most damage to the civilian population. Steven Kaplan has written of the ‘tyranny of cereal-dependence’,

124 BL, Cotton MS Caligula D/VI, fos. 353v–354r (LP, iii, pt 2no. 2707); BL, Cotton MS Caligula D/VIII, fo. 266r (LP, iii, pt 2 no. 2517).
125 Morin, ‘Chroniques du siège de Boulogne’, 260.
127 BL, Additional MS 24965, fos. 19b, 27–28r (LP, iii, pt 2, no. 3110, 3134); BL, Cotton MS Caligula D/VIII, fo. 266r (LP, iii, pt 2, no. 2517); Elis Gruffydd, 37.
128 BL, Additional MS 24965, fo. 19b (LP, iii, pt 2, no. 3110). Howard employed similar tactics when he campaigned in France the year before: BL, Cotton MS Caligula D/VIII, fos. 269r (LP, iii, pt 2, no. 2530), 271r (LP, iii, pt 2, no. 2541), 273r (LP, iii, pt 2, no. 2540); TNA, SP 1/26, fo. 96r (LP, iii, pt 2, no. 2592).
129 Elis Gruffydd, 12. In early July 1544, Francis I ordered the crops in the regions around the Boulonnais to be harvested early in an effort to save them from destruction: Inventaire sommaire des archives communales antérieures à 1790 publiée sous la direction du ministre de instruction publique: Oise. Ville de Beauvais, ed. Renaud Rose (Beauvais, 1887), 16; AM Amiens, BB 25, fos. 56v–57r.
130 Elis Gruffydd, 35.
131 BL, Additional MS 24965, fo. 55r (LP, iii, pt 2, no. 3222); BL, Cotton MS Caligula B/II, fo. 43 (LP, iii, pt 2, no. 3273), 207 (LP, iii, pt 2, no. 3336).
especially for the poorer classes, for whom grain provided the bulk of their calories. Indeed, the disproportionate effect that the destruction of corn had on the poor was paramount in the minds of English commanders when ordering scorched-earth attacks. As well as burning crops in the fields, English soldiers created an immediate inflation in the price of bread by destroying stores of grain. A 30 per cent reduction in crop yields doubled the price of bread; a 50 per cent reduction increased it fourfold. Yet surveys from northeastern France in the mid sixteenth century show that the type of warfare used by the English in the Boulonnais typically led to the destruction of 80 per cent of crops. The destruction of vineyards during the 1544 war also meant that there was no wine that year — with the loss of another essential source of calories. In addition, the price of beer rose considerably, which was bad for the poor as they obtained a significant amount of their daily calorie intake this way. If the principal purpose of scorched-earth attacks was to create an immediate food shortage, Henry VIII’s commanders in France achieved a resounding success in the Boulonnais.

Numerous contemporary reports attest to the starvation conditions the English created over the winter of 1544–5. One soldier writes of how he saw ‘young and old people, who cried piteously in God’s name for the help of a piece of bread to keep alive some of [the] little ones who were dying for want of food’.


133 State Papers . . . Henry VIII, iv, 26–7; BL, Cotton MS Caligula B/VI, fos. 293, 341 (LP, iii, pt 2, no. 3341); TNA, SP 49/2, fo. 30 (LP, iii, pt 2, no 3344).

134 Brésin, Chroniques de Flandre, 190.


136 Gunn, War, State and Society, 280.

137 Parker, Global Crisis, 21.


139 Elis Gruffydd, 37.
before going on describe how numerous bodies lay unburied across the countryside and were eaten by dogs. The effects of the food shortages were compounded by other factors. First, the surplus grain produced in the areas surrounding the immediate conflict zone went to supplying the French army rather than feeding starving civilians. Second, the displacement of refugees into neighbouring towns extended the effects of the burnings beyond the Boulonnais. For example, the pressure placed on Amiens by overwhelming numbers of refugees led to the collapse of the city’s poor relief system. In addition to causing an immediate food shortage, scorched-earth tactics were designed to produce long-lasting misery. The destruction of seed corn ensured that the region could not support any significant population. Overall, according to David Potter, by 1545 large parts of this region were ‘uninhabitable or impossible for normal life’.

As well as burning crops, English commanders sought to destroy the population’s sources of food production. For example, the fishing industry, upon which the coastal villages relied, was decimated in 1544 because the English deliberately destroyed fishing boats. Moreover, Henry VIII’s armies targeted buildings that were essential to the production of food (mills, breweries and farms), as well as the resources necessary to work the land (horses, cattle and ploughs). Although Sir Ralph Ellerker and Sir Hugh Paulet were unable to kill the population of Desvres directly during their raid in 1545, they destroyed the bakeries, breweries, houses and mills, thus denying the returning population access to food and shelter. Steven Kaplan has shown how the destruction of buildings such as mills created ‘a secondary form of subsistence crisis — a flour crisis’, so that people starved even when grain was available.

140 Gruffydd, 28, 37.
141 Inventaire sommaire... Beauvais, ed. Rose, 16; AM Amiens BB 25, fos. 56r–57r.
142 AM Amiens BB 25, fo. 137r.
144 LP, xx, pt 2, no. 993; Cal. State Papers, Spain, 1545–1546, no. 180.
145 Brésin, Chroniques de Flandre, 293; Potter, Henry VIII and Francis I, 270; Baron d’Orde, ‘Siège de Boulogne’, 41, 121.
146 TNA, SP 1/202, fo. 84r (LP, xx, pt 1, no. 962).
147 Kaplan, Bread, Politics and Political Economy, i, p. xviii.
English commanders aimed completely to destroy both the grain stores and the means to produce food in the Boulonnais. On 28 September 1544, English soldiers under the command of Thomas Howard attacked Étaples where ‘they, . . . made great ravages in the supply of food and burnt three big ships full of wheat and other food as well as more than a dozen small food ships in the haven’. They also burnt the town which contained the breweries of the French king which were filled with food in the pipes, hogsheads, barrels and vats, and burnt all the houses which had been built to keep the grains of corn to be baked and brewed, and killed a number of people.148

The systematic destruction of crops and livestock, combined with the destruction of the means of producing food, created a man-made famine in the Boulonnais in the 1540s. In contrast, the short journey across the Channel meant that the English soldiers and settlers could be supplied with grain and other foodstuffs shipped over from England.149

The effects of starvation were compounded by the impact of disease. In particular, a reduced calorie diet combined with exposure to cold and damp caused by the deliberate destruction of homes meant that diseases were often fatal owing to the weakened condition of the body.150 Elis Gruffydd remarked that as he passed through the village of Neufchâtel he saw ‘as many as a hundred people, old and young, with not one healthy man among them, but all shivering with ague [a malarial fever], and death in their faces from the scarcity and lack of bread to strengthen them’.151 The armies also brought plague in their wake, which spread across the Boulonnais in 1544 and persisted throughout the rest of the decade.152 The virulence of the plague outbreak at Boulogne was so great that the town

151 Elis Gruffydd, 28.
became known as a tomb, with English soldiers and civilian settlers fearing to go there. In addition to plague, the armies brought other epidemic diseases with them, including the English Sweats (possibly Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome). Disease spread quickly among starving refugee populations in the Boulonnais, who were either packed into overcrowded towns or forced to live in makeshift refugee camps in the woods. Unhygienic living conditions and malnutrition also encouraged the spread of dysentery, which was often fatal. Overall, it is likely that disease killed more people than direct attacks and starvation during the conflict of 1544–6.

Numerous contemporary sources attest to the key role that a combination of famine and plague played in depopulating the Boulonnais in the mid 1540s. Writing in 1545, Louis Brésin (from Saint-Omer, which bordered the Boulonnais) estimated that 50,000 people had died in less than six months as the result of famine, plague and poverty caused by the English invasion. The municipal deliberations of the town of Senlis (which lay just on the edge of the conflict zone) also describe the devastating effects that famine and plague caused to the region in the mid 1540s. Numerous other first-hand accounts confirm these impressions of the extreme depopulation of the Boulonnais, with some writers likening the region to a desert — devoid of people, buildings and...
Certainly, as John Lynn has demonstrated, early modern governments deliberately used scorched-earth tactics to create ‘an artificial desert’. The impression of total devastation in the Boulonnais contained in these narrative sources is borne out by the official inquiries (enquêtes), which provide specific details about the level of the destruction. For example, 270 out of the 300 houses in the village of Verton were destroyed during the war and the inhabitants ‘had been taken or killed by the enemy, others were dead from disease or from poverty [that is, starvation] and the rest forced to beg in neighbouring towns’. Verton’s experience of the English conquest was typical of villages across the region. While the deliberate depopulation of a region through war, disease and famine is traditionally seen as being specific to Ireland in the sixteenth century (most notably with the establishment of the Munster colony), the same combination of factors caused the extreme depopulation of the Boulonnais in the 1540s and prepared the ground for its resettlement by English colonists.

As the war continued, the English introduced scorched-earth tactics into areas bordering the Boulonnais. Indeed, there is compelling evidence to suggest that the English attempted to expand their conquest by depopulating parts of Picardy. Certainly, control of this region was an avowed aim of the English crown from the outset of the invasion. When Henry VIII arrived in France in mid July 1544, he abandoned the customary assertion of his wider claims to the kingdom of

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158 Morin, ‘Chroniques du siège de Boulogne’, 260; Deseille, ‘Introduction à l’histoire du pays Boulonnais’, 46. For contemporary impressions of the extreme depopulation of the Boulonnais, see also TNA, SP 1/219, fo. 118\(^7\) (\(LP\), xxi, pt 1, no. 950).


160 Brésin, Chroniques de Flandre, 293.

161 Potter, Henry VIII and Francis I, 270; Brésin, Chroniques de Flandre, 286, 280, 293.


163 TNA, SP 1/189, fo. 165\(^v\) (\(LP\); xix, pt 1, no. 849).
France. Instead of summoning ‘all within the realme of Fraunce to come in & knowledge theyr dutyes of allegiance to his Majesty’, Henry restricted his summons to the people living ‘within [Pica]rdye [and the] countie of Bulloyn’ — the two regions where he concentrated his military actions in 1544–6. The claims to Picardy and the Boulonnais formed part of Henry’s efforts to justify his conquest of these regions. As Henry saw it, all those who failed to take an oath of loyalty to him (the vast majority of the population) forfeited their lives and property. Certainly, English soldiers considered themselves to be fighting to extend Henry’s rule over both Picardy and the Boulonnais. Once English commanders had destroyed the Boulonnais, they turned their attentions to Picardy. For example, Le Tréport (while technically in Normandy) lay on the river Bresle at the extremity of Picardy. By taking control of the town, the English would have effectively secured the western borders of Picardy. Accordingly, Sir John Dudley attacked and burned Le Tréport on 19 September 1545, with the English soldiers ‘killing all [the] men and women they could catch’. As well as slaughtering the population of Le Tréport, English forces began systematically to destroy the Picard countryside in 1545. For example, Henry Howard, earl of Surrey, and Sir Thomas Cheney ‘burned St. Richards [Saint-Riquier] and divers towns and villages on the Somme to the gates of Abbeville’. Moreover, the French believed that the English were attempting to expand the borders of their conquest into Picardy through violence and depopulation. Indeed, English sources confirm that Henry VIII’s commanders made direct attacks on French villages as a means to extend the scope of their conquest and harm the French crown. During the peace talks of June 1546, the privy council instructed the earl of Hertford to ‘destroy the three villages, that Wee shuld have hadde by this treaty, in which they bragg they have kept all this while during the warre, with asmuche

164 TNA, SP 1/190, fo. 78r (LP, xix, pt 1, no. 933).
165 Elis Gruffydd, 32, 37.
166 LP, xx, pt 2, no. 493; Cal. State Papers, Spain, 1545–1546, no. 143.
167 LP, xx, pt 2, no. 494. See also: Holinshed’s Chronicles, iii, 843; ‘Récit du siège’, ed. Haigneré, 292–3; LP, xxi, pt 1, no. 558, 559; Cal. State Papers, Spain, 1545–1546, no. 239.
besides, as he conveniently maye, which shuld be to the comodite of thennemye'.

Yet the destruction of these villages was not necessary, as the treaty of Camp (7 June 1546) brought an end to the war in the Boulonnais and paved the way for the development of an English colony. While this treaty is largely forgotten today, it represents an important moment in the development of the English crown’s colonial policy. In particular, by the terms of the treaty Henry was to rule the Boulonnais as king of England, rather than as king of France. This marked a complete reversal of Henry’s earlier policy towards France, which was based on dynastic right. In June 1546, the English crown attempted to develop an ethnically English colony. Restrictive measures were introduced against the remaining French population, while the former residents of the Boulonnais were prevented from returning to their homes. The region was then surveyed, mapped and divided into plots. Indeed, English surveyors redrew the socio-political topography of the region and imposed an English parish system on it. The colony was devised to follow a Roman model (years before the application of this system in Ireland) and the members of the Boulogne garrison were given plots of land to farm, while further land was rented out to civilian settlers from the southern counties of England.

There was a deliberate move away from medieval conceptions of landholding (where different nationalities and jurisdictions coexisted in one region) to one that was based on a more recognisably modern form of sovereignty operating within fixed national boundaries. Before the establishment of English rule, the


\[170\] TNA, SP 1/220, fos. 41r–44v (LP, xxi, pt 1, no. 1014); Thomas Rymer, Foedera, conventiones, literae, et cujuscumque generis acta publica, inter reges Angliae et alios quosvis imperatores, reges, pontifices principes, vel, communitates habita aut tractate, ab ineunte saeculo duodecimo, viz. ab anno 1101, ad nostra usque tempora, habita aut tractata: ex autographis, infra secretiores archivorum regiorum thesauriarum, per multa saecula reconditis, fideliter exscripta. In lucem missa de mandato regio

\[171\] LP, xxi, pt 1, no. 1003; Cal. State Papers, Spain, 1545–1546, nos. 271, 271, 276, 277, 279.

\[172\] TNA, SP 1/223, fos. 21r–22r (LP, xxi, pt 1, no. 1414), 37r–45r (LP, xxi, pt 1, no. 1427); LP, xxi, pt 1, no. 1428.

\[173\] TNA, SP 1/223, fos. 24r–25v (LP, xxi, pt 1, 1415), 88r–92v (LP, xxi, pt 1, no. 1444); LP, xxi, pt 1, no. 1428.
Boulonnais was a patchwork of jurisdictions, with individual villages being ruled by either the king of France or the Holy Roman Emperor. As well as blocking the French population from returning, Henry VIII also restricted the legal claims his imperial allies had to these lands. Despite the fact that many imperial nobles had fought alongside the English to gain control of the Boulonnais, the Tudor crown disregarded their legal claims to these lands, which were divided up and parcelled out to settlers. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that the annexation of imperial lands and their distribution to subjects of the English crown was present from the beginning of the campaign. Whereas Thomas Howard’s scorched-earth campaign of 1522 deliberately avoided attacking imperial villages in the Boulonnais, these same villages were targeted for depopulation in 1544. For example, English and Irish soldiers destroyed 200 houses (out of 300) at the imperial village of Berck in 1544, so that its population fell from 1,800 to 250.

Furthermore, whereas at the beginning of his reign Henry VIII had claimed the right to territory in France through dynastic inheritance, during the Boulogne campaign English officials emphasized his legal claim to this territory through the right of the conquest. By holding the Boulonnais through conquest (rather than as the king of France), Henry VIII was able to do as he wanted with these lands, including depopulating them of their native inhabitants and repeopling the region with English settlers. Indeed, English officials consistently asserted Henry’s right to hold these lands through the right of conquest. For example, on 18 October 1544 the earl of Hertford told Francis I’s representatives that Henry would ‘kepe stil Boulloyn and Boullonnoys as iust conquest in [a] warre laufully begonne’. While Henry’s dynastic claims never entirely disappeared from political

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174 This dispute over lands continued right up to Henry’s death: LP, xxi, pt 2, nos. 238, 239, 255, 392, 547, 609, 735; Cal. State Papers, Spain, 1545–1546, nos. 331, 332, 343, 365, 372, 383.
175 Breé, Chroniques de Flandre, 293; Potter, Henry VIII and Francis I, 270. Other imperial villages received the same treatment: Potter, War and Government, 212–13.
176 LP, xxi, pt 1, no. 1461; TNA, SP 1/224, fo. 358 (LP, xxi, pt 2, no. 19); TNA, SP 1/223, fo. 488v (LP, xxi, pt 1, no. 1429); LP, xix, pt 2, no. 368; TNA, SP 1/193, fos. 205v–208v (LP, xix, pt 2, no 456); TNA, SP 1/199, fos. 188v–189v (LP, xx, pt 1, 499); TNA, SP 1/212, fo. 65v (LP, xx, pt 2, no. 1003); Cal. State Papers, Spain, 1544, no. 266; Cal. State Papers, Spain, 1545–1546, no. 307.
177 TNA, SP 1/193, fo. 206v (LP, xix, pt 2, no 456).
discourse, they always remained in the background of the peace negotiations, with the English only threatening to assert them in order to encourage the French to agree to Henry’s demands for the annexation of the Boulonnais. Moreover, economic exploitation of the land was central to Henry’s assertion of his right to the Boulonnais through conquest. As early as June 1544, Lord Russell advised Henry VIII to conquer the Boulonnais rather than march on Paris (which Henry and Charles V agreed in 1543 was to be the principal objective of their invasion of France) by emphasizing the fertility of the region. By minimizing the native population’s legal claims to the land (whether French or imperial), the Boulonnais’ natural resources could be confiscated by the English crown. For example, the English blocked the efforts of the lady of Fiennes to reclaim her village (where six lucrative quarries were located) as an imperial territory. Instead, her lands were apportioned to English settlers and Welsh soldiers. Indeed, the proclamations that crown officials read out in England to encourage settlers to relocate to the Boulogne colony emphasized the fertility of the land — a strategy that the English crown also used when it attempted to establish colonies in Ireland later in the sixteenth century.

III

The character of English violence in sixteenth-century Ireland was not unique, and Laois and Offaly were not the first colonies of a nascent British Empire. As this article has shown, the English crown pursued a policy of mass violence in France that was designed to inflict the maximum amount of damage on the civilian population of the Boulonnais. Irish historians often assert that the English crown’s policy of conquest and colonization caused Ireland to suffer the most substantial population decline in early modern Europe. Recently, David

178 SP, Henry VIII, x, 728, 732, 755, 777.
179 TNA, SP 1/189, fo. 116v (LP, xix, pt 1, no. 816).
180 TNA, SP 1/207, fo. 121v (LP, xx, pt 2, no. 337); SP, Henry VIII, x, 703–4; TNA, SP 1/204, fo. 118v (LP, xxi, pt 1, no. 1228); Grummitt, Calais Garrison, 7.
181 TNA, SP 1/223, fo. 88v (LP, xxi, pt. 1, no. 1444).
182 For example, historians estimate that Ireland’s population declined by between 20 per cent and 25 per cent as a result of war in the 1640s and 1650s: Pádraig Lenihan, ‘War and Population, 1649–1652’, Irish Economic and Social History, xxiv (1997), 8; Parker, Global Crisis, 360; Smyth, ‘Towards a Cultural Geography’, 90.
Edwards has estimated that six decades of warfare in Tudor Ireland caused a population decline of between 7.5 and 10 per cent, making it ‘one of the most destructive conflicts anywhere in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Europe’. Yet English actions in the Boulonnais in the 1540s led to a population decline of approximately 90 per cent — probably more. The English armies operating in the Boulonnais in the mid 1540s were not acting beyond European norms; indeed, the burnings of crops, destruction of buildings and attacks on civilians were common features of warfare in sixteenth-century Europe. Nonetheless, while other parts of Western Europe also suffered extreme depopulation as a result of prolonged warfare, the English campaign in the Boulonnais was different in that it paved the way for the establishment of a colony. As well as clearing the population from the land, the English also obliterated their legal claims to this territory by systematically destroying archives across the region, especially those containing land and property deeds.

France is ignored in the historiography of the early British Empire, but the Tudor monarchy first implemented its ideas about government and colonial settlement in its French territories. Indeed, it should be no surprise that these developments first took place in France because it (rather than Ireland) was the principal focus of the English crown’s expansionist policy during the first half of the sixteenth century. While Thomas Howard put forward proposals for the conquest and settlement of Ireland in 1522, the Tudor monarch first put this policy into practice in France in the 1540s. Indeed, English colonies had been founded in France during the Hundred Years War, most notably at Calais by Edward III and at Harfleur by Henry V, which provided models for the English to draw on in the mid 1540s. Yet while there was some English settlement in parts of northern France during the early fifteenth century, the Lancastrian conflicts were not colonial wars. There was no effort to favour English settlers over the ‘loyal’ native inhabitants of regions such as Normandy and Picardy, and there was no effort to impose English laws or customs on these people. In this respect, the establishment of the Boulogne colony was a major

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184 Hauttefeuille and Bénard, Histoire de Boulogne-sur-Mer, i, 247.
shift in English attitudes to its overseas territories. Indeed, it represented a return to the colonial policy employed in Wales during the reign of Edward I, which set a clear precedent for colonial ventures in the sixteenth century.\(^{185}\)

Rather than Ireland acting as the laboratory for the development of new methods of violence, the widespread use of scorched earth was introduced there during the mid sixteenth century by men who had experience of the French wars. While David Edwards notes that it was under Lord Leonard Grey that the escalation of violence in Ireland began, there was nothing novel in this violence.\(^ {186}\) Grey was simply implementing in Ireland the methods he had used against the French during the 1520s (as did Sir William Skeffington, who followed Grey as Lord Deputy of Ireland).\(^ {187}\) While historians have noted the links between the people involved in the colonization of Ireland and of America in the late sixteenth century, they have failed to see the close links that existed between those who drove the policies of conquest and colonization in France and in Ireland decades earlier. For example, the earl of Hertford was the commander of English armies in France during the mid 1540s and it was under his domination of the Privy Council that plans for the colonization of France were devised and implemented. With the death of Henry VIII in January 1547 and the ascension of his young son Edward VI to the throne, Hertford took effective control of the kingdom. Ruling as the Protector Somerset, he revived plans for the development of colonies in Ireland, which followed the same pattern as the colony established in the Boulonnais.\(^ {188}\)

Many of the hallmarks of colonial genocide, which some historians believe the English first developed during the Elizabethan conquest of Ireland, were already present in Henry VIII’s actions in the Boulonnais in 1540s, including: the use of scorched-earth tactics; the characterization of the indigenous population as ‘wild’; the centrality of land use; and the slaughter of civilians and murderous response to outbreaks of


native resistance. In short, the English crown systematically and deliberately depopulated the Boulonnais through war and starvation in order to create an ethnically English colony based around a Roman model. Indeed, the English strategy of using soldier-farmers to colonize a region was an early example of what would become a common feature of European state expansion, from the establishment of British rule in North America to Adolf Hitler’s colonial projects in Eastern Europe.\(^{189}\) There was nothing problematic for the English crown about implementing this form of colonial policy in France in the 1540s because the forced removal of a group of people to clear the way for the establishment of a colony was endorsed by biblical precedent and permitted by the right of conquest. The slaughter of peasants could be justified because they had resisted Henry’s rule, while the use of scorched-earth tactics was widely sanctioned in contemporary laws of war.\(^{190}\) Perhaps Boulogne’s longest legacy was that the depopulation of a territory could be legitimized by the right of conquest. From Ireland in the late sixteenth century to Tasmania in the late nineteenth, the English (and later British) regularly invoked this justification for imperial expansion as they depopulated lands and established colonies across the globe.\(^{191}\)

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\(^{190}\) Vitoria, *Political Writings*, 317.