

## A HISTORY OF IRELAND IN 100 OBJECTS, A SELECTION

## 5TH &amp; 6TH CLASS LESSON PLAN

**King William's gauntlets c.1690**

On the morning of 14 July 1690, King William III presented these fine doeskin gloves to John Dillon, in whose home in Lismullin, Co. Meath, he had stayed the previous night. The king had won a major victory over his rival King James II at the nearby River Boyne two days previously. Gloves were often given as presents, but there is reason to think that William may have worn these at the battle, in which he personally commanded the cavalry. William is often depicted wearing heavy, fringed gauntlets such as these in several 'battle' paintings by various artists.

The elaborate gold lace border on the right glove is worn away, and the left glove shows signs of heavy use. If Protestants believed in relics, these remnants of the ultimate hero in his finest hour would surely be holy.

The battle may be the most famous in Irish history, but it was shaped by two events beyond Ireland. One was the succession to the English throne of James II. He alienated parliament and the nobility by his conversion to Catholicism and insistence on the absolute rights of the monarchy. The other event was the French king Louis XIV's invasion of the Rhenish Palatinate and the Netherlands. William of Orange emerged as a key

figure in the broad anti-French front that emerged in response. These two issues became one when William, who was James's nephew and son-in-law, arrived in England in November 1688, with 15,000 troops. He and his wife, James's daughter Mary, were crowned king and queen.

James landed in Kinsale in March 1689. His forces failed to establish complete control of the island, with Derry heroically withstanding a siege from April until its relief in August. William followed James to Ireland and hoped for a single decisive battle. The Battle of the Boyne, with 36,000 troops on William's side and 25,000 on James's, was indeed the largest ever fought on Irish soil. It was a pan-European affair, with soldiers from the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, Norway and Poland, as well as from Britain and Ireland. Frenchmen fought on both sides, with some Huguenot Protestants fighting for William and an army of 6,500 men sent by Louis supporting James.

The decisive action was at the village of Oldbridge. William's flanking manoeuvres drew off most of the Jacobite army, leaving a rump, outnumbered three to one, to face the main attack. The fighting nevertheless lasted for 12 hours, and William's hopes of catching the Jacobites in a

pincer movement were dashed. James was able to retreat westwards with the bulk of his army. He escaped to France via Dublin and Cork; most of his Irish army fought on. In that regard, the Boyne was not decisive: the Battle of Aughrim, in July 1691, was far bloodier and more conclusive. Nor was the Boyne the simple sectarian triumph of subsequent legend: William's shock troops, the Dutch Blue Guard, were Catholic, and his allies included the Vatican and Vienna, where Te Deums were sung to celebrate the Boyne victory. Conversely, much of the Protestant hierarchy remained loyal to James. Nevertheless, the personal presence of the two kings gave the Boyne a mythic power that turned it into the ultimate Protestant triumph.