Irish Jacobitism and Freemasonry

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Note, 7 September 2020: This is the author's draft of an article published in the journal Eighteenth-Century Ireland, vol 9, 1994, pp 75-82 (accessible via JSTOR). There has been a dramatic increase in scholarly research and publications relating to Freemasonry in the past quarter century and it is hoped to revise the present article in the light of some of this work. See for example publications freely accessible via Academia.edu: Róbert Péter (https://u-szeged.academia.edu/RobertPeter), Ric Berman (https://oxfordbrookes.academia.edu/RICHARDBERMAN) and Marsha Schuchard (https://independent.academia.edu/marshaschuchard). In particular, see Róbert Péter, 'A Historiography of Freemasonry in the British Isles in Light of Recent Scholarship', https://www.academia.edu/29389098, pp xiii-xx.

Jacobitism and Freemasonry are two subjects which have in the past been neglected or disregarded by professional historians.¹ Jacobitism of course fell victim to the victorious 'Whig interpretation of history', although in recent years it has been the subject of a growing body of work in Britain,² and is now being studied more closely in this country as well.³ Freemasonry has been overlooked to an even greater degree, being considered in some quarters as a subject best left to the attentions of masonic enthusiasts, to those with 'feet ... planted firmly in the clouds'.⁴ Yet Freemasonry, and in particular the questions of its origins and its role in the era of Enlightenment and revolution, are now increasingly the subject of scholarly study,⁵ and interest has been stirring in this country also.⁶

While the relationship between radicalism and Freemasonry in the eighteenth century has been the area most studied, the connection between Jacobitism and Freemasonry is now receiving more attention.⁷ In the present paper, we will consider Irish Jacobitism and Freemasonry together in the period from the late seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century, and it will be seen that there were intimate and significant links between the two movements. The sources used in this preliminary survey are largely secondary and sometimes little referred to, and it is hardly necessary to add that further and more detailed research is required in unpublished documents in archives in Ireland, Britain and Europe.

The Jacobite movement had as its principal aim the restoration of the Stuarts to the thrones of England, Scotland and Ireland, in the person first of James II, and subsequently of his son James III, the 'Old Pretender', and his grandson, Prince Charles Edward, the 'Young Pretender'. The Jacobites looked primarily to France for aid in recovering what they saw as their rightful inheritance, and as is well-known, the strong Irish and mostly Catholic component of the movement hoped through a Stuart restoration to reverse the dispossession which had followed the Williamite victories of 1688-91, and which was maintained by the Hanoverian succession in 1714.

Freemasonry was and continues to be a secret or at least semi-secret fraternity with an arcane system of rituals and stated social and philanthropic purposes, but has also periodically attracted suspicions of possessing concealed political or self-serving agendas. An important distinction is made between the original 'operative' Freemasonry, when only working masons were members, and the later 'speculative' Freemasonry which attracted and eventually came to be dominated by those not working in the trade. The portrayal of God as a benign 'Great Architect of the Universe', the use of quasi-magical symbolism, the drawing of moral analogies from good building practices, advancement by degrees, legends concerning the Temple of Solomon, ancient Egypt and the Knights Templar, these and other esoteric elements of Freemasonry continue to fascinate modern devotees as much as they did adherents during

the Age of Reason.

It was formerly believed that Freemasonry had its origins in England, from where it was said to have spread to Scotland, Ireland, Europe, America and further afield. However, in an important contribution to serious masonic historiography, David Stevenson has shown that Freemasonry actually originated in Scotland around 1600, when medieval mythology and mystical Renaissance ideas were blended in stonemasons' lodges to create the modern movement.⁸ It has also been argued persuasively that the accession of James VI of Scotland to the thrones of England and Ireland as James I provided the opportunity whereby Freemasonry could spread to those countries, and furthermore that there was from the beginning an intimate connection between the movement and the Stuart dynasty.⁹

Though there is little documentation on Irish Freemasonry for most of the seventeenth century, one is struck by the concentration in the northern part of Ireland of tombstones and furniture of this period displaying masonic imagery such as the square and compass.¹⁰ One of the earliest surviving masonic tombstones is in Bangor Abbey, Co Down, and is that of William Stennors, a master mason who died in 1627. It has been suggested plausibly that Stennors may have been brought over from Scotland by one of the most prominent Ulster planters, James Hamilton of Ayrshire, later Earl of Clandeboye. Hamilton's varied career included a spell as a schoolteacher and reputed intelligence agent of James VI in Dublin from 1587, and he was also appointed a fellow of the newly-established Trinity College Dublin.¹¹ In the light of what is now known about the Scottish origins of Freemasonry, and the fact that masons have long been numerically strongest in Ulster, it is likely that Scottish settlers such as Hamilton may have acted as the principal conduit for introducing the movement to Ireland during the late Tudor and early Stuart periods.

The earliest documentary reference to Freemasonry in Ireland is contained in a satirical speech delivered in Trinity College Dublin in 1688 by a student named John Jones, a friend of Swift. Jones referred to the establishment of a 'fraternity of Freemasons in and about Trinity College', consisting of gentlemen, mechanics and porters, and he mentioned as well the discovery of a 'Freemason's mark' on the body of a certain Ridley.¹² Jones's jocular comments indicate that his audience must have been well acquainted with the concept of Freemasonry, and that the organisation was no mere novelty in Dublin. In addition to Ulster and Dublin, another locus of early Freemasonry appears to have been Munster, among English settler families connected with Richard Boyle, the Great Earl of Cork, such as the Parsonses, St Legers and Kings.¹³

The earliest specific linkage of Freemasonry with Jacobitism also dates from the late seventeenth century, and takes the form of a tradition that a masonic lodge was active in 1688 in an Irish military unit. In 1772 the French lodge *Parfaite Égalité* in the Regiment of Walsh succeeded in securing recognition of its claim to date its constitution from 25 March 1688. This regiment was formerly called the Royal Irish, and went into exile in France following the Jacobite defeat in 1691. It was renamed the Regiment of Walsh after 1770, in reference to its commander Antoine Joseph Philippe Walsh. Walsh was a member of a family prominent in its support of Jacobitism, and his ancestor, James Walsh of Ballynacooly, Co Kilkenny, had commanded the ship on which James II escaped to France after the Battle of the Boyne.¹⁴

Irish Freemasonry first made itself publicly manifest in the 1720s through the formation of a Grand Lodge, or national governing body. An English Grand Lodge had been formed in 1717, two years after the Jacobite Rebellion of 1715, and the primary purpose of this development appears to have been to wrest control of Freemasonry from Tory-Jacobite elements by effectively creating a Whig-Hanoverian movement, thereafter at least formally banning political discussion in lodges.¹⁵ So successful was this manoeuvre, that the Scottish and pro-Stuart roots of Freemasonry were ultimately largely to be forgotten, and Jacobite Freemasonry came to be seen as a polluted by-water of the original and pure English stream.

The establishment of an Irish Grand Lodge about 1723 or 1724 may well have been influenced by the English example and had a similar motivation. The first detailed newspaper

account of Irish Freemasonry describes a gathering in Dublin on 23 June 1725 which elected Richard Parsons, second Viscount and first Earl of Rosse, as grand master for the ensuing year. The report portrays an obviously complete organisation, leading to the inference that the Irish Grand Lodge had been formed at some time in the preceding years.¹⁶

The first Earl of Rosse was an interesting character, better remembered for his rakish behaviour and alleged association with the Hellfire Club than for his connection with Freemasonry.¹⁷ Rosse was the great-great-grandson of Sir William Parsons, who held among other offices the surveyor-generalship of Ireland, in which capacity he was involved in the Plantation of Ulster.¹⁸ Though documentary evidence to prove the point is wanting, it is quite possible that the second Earl of Rosse was appointed Irish grand master in 1725 as a result of his family's prior associations with Freemasonry, rather in the way that Sir William Sinclair of Roslin was to be appointed first grand master of Scotland in 1736 because of his family's intimate connections with Freemasonry in that country.¹⁹

The grand wardens during the Earl of Rosse's grand mastership were Sir Thomas Prendergast and Marcus Anthony Morgan, both staunch supporters of the Hanoverian establishment.²⁰ The grand secretary was Thomas Griffith, a leading actor who doubled as tide waiter to the port of Dublin, and the duties of the latter customs office included the arrest of those recruiting for or seeking to enlist in the service of the Pretender.²¹ At first sight, Rosse's association with such men in the new Grand Lodge initiative would indicate that he was pro-Hanoverian. Yet his politics are in fact hard to pin down, and as we shall see, at one point he was to be accused directly of possessing Jacobite leanings.

The years 1726-29 have been termed an 'obscure period' by the official historians of Irish Freemasonry, and they relate this to probable struggles between Jacobites and Hanoverians for control of the movement. In 1726 the Dublin press featured accounts of Jacobite activities, as well as the espousal of the Jacobite cause by the leading English Freemason, the Duke of Wharton. Two days after a serious riot in Dublin on 9 June 1726, the Pretender's birthday, there was an obviously false but nonetheless suggestive report that the Earl of Rosse had appeared wearing white roses, a Jacobite symbol, provoked a fight with an army officer and been killed.²²

Detailed references to Irish Freemasonry did not reappear in the Dublin press until 1731, and it is likely that some sort of revival or renewal was then under way, but not necessarily one in which the Hanoverian element was dominant. At a meeting in the Bull's Head Tavern in Fishamble Street on 6 April 1731, James King, fourth Baron Kingston, who had previously been active in English Freemasonry, was elected grand master of the Irish Freemasons for the ensuing year.²³ The King family had settled in Ireland during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and possessed estates at Boyle, Co Roscommon, and Mitchelstown, Co Cork. Kingston's father John, the third Baron, had renounced Protestantism for Catholicism, supported James II and followed him into exile. Though the third Baron was pardoned in 1694 and returned to Ireland, it is clear that he remained Catholic and that he and his son continued to be suspected of possessing Jacobite allegiances.²⁴

Thus it was reported that in June 1722, the same year as the Atterbury Plot, the third Baron Kingston was in custody of the high sheriff of Cork, on suspicion that his son 'was concerned in enlisting men for the service of the Pretender'.²⁵ Having received requests for assistance from Kingston, Archbishop William King wrote to him in the same month stating that the matter could only be resolved through the courts. King also observed pointedly to Kingston that 'the country has been disturbed by a sort of people called the "Wild Geese", and that some thousands have been listed for the service of the Pretender'. Though not entirely unsympathetic to Kingston's plight, King also took the opportunity to chide him for his continuing Catholic connections:

I ought not to conceal from your lordship, that it is much observed that your family is altogether Papists (sic), and that you live as much after the old Irish manner as the merest Irishman in the kingdom, which brings you into many

inconveniences.26

James, the fourth Baron Kingston, who had been born in France in 1693, succeeded to the title on his father's death in February 1728, and it is clear that he soon decided to minimise the 'inconveniences' mentioned by Archbishop King. The new Lord Kingston took his seat in the House of Lords in May 1728 without any recorded objection to the anti-Catholic oaths, and in April 1729 he was appointed an Irish privy councillor. Though Kingston was now obviously deemed trustworthy on both the religious and political levels by the establishment, there was an indication of some continuing difficulties as late as 1743, when he was ordered into the custody of Black Rod for not attending the services of the House of Lords.²⁷

Kingston, as before noted, was appointed grand master of Irish Freemasons in 1731, and was succeeded in the post in 1732 by Nicholas Netterville, fifth Viscount Netterville of Dowth, Co Meath, a member of a prominent Catholic family and also a nephew of the first Earl of Rosse. Netterville's grandfather, the third Viscount, had fought in James II's army, but Netterville himself took his seat in the Irish House of Lords in 1730 without refusing the oaths, usually a sign of at least outward religious as well as political conformity.²⁸ Netterville's successor as grand master in 1733 and 1734 was Henry Benedict Barnewall, fourth Viscount Barnewall of Kingsland, once more a member of a prominent Catholic family with Jacobite connections, and a cousin of the first Earl of Rosse. Barnewall's father, the third Viscount, again had supported James II, and while father and son presented themselves to the Irish House of Lords in 1692 and 1740 respectively, they were not admitted due to their refusal to take anti-Catholic oaths, indicating that they were not prepared to offer religious as well as political conformity.²⁹

The fourth Baron Kingston served once more as grand master in 1735, and his successors during the years 1736-44 were Marcus Beresford, first Viscount Tyrone, William Stewart, third Viscount Mountjoy, Arthur Mohun St Leger, third Viscount Doneraile, Charles Moore, second Baron Moore of Tullamore, Thomas Southwell, second Lord Southwell, and John Allen, third Viscount Allen.³⁰ None of this group had obvious Jacobite links, and some indeed possessed impeccably pro-Williamite and pro-Hanoverian backgrounds, indicating that the Catholic-Jacobite element in Irish Freemasonry may now have been in decline. Viscount Allen died in May 1745 as a result of an altercation with some drunken dragoons in Dublin a month earlier, but no evidence has been found to show that this incident had any political connotations.³¹ Nevertheless, there was considerable difficulty in finding a replacement for Allen as grand master, as several former holders of the office and other noble Freemasons declined invitations to serve. Whether or not this reluctance had anything to do with the renewed threat of a Jacobite rising is unclear, but it may be significant that the trusty Lord Kingston was the one who agreed eventually to fill the gap and serve again as grand master.³²

It has been pointed out that it is wrong to dismiss Irish Jacobite poetry of the eighteenth century as 'sentimental "Charley-over-the-waterism" or as a mere literary form devoid of import', for it could not exist without a sympathetic audience.³³ However misplaced a trust it may seem to us in retrospect, the mass of Irish Catholics continued to look to a Stuart restoration as a means of ending their religious and political exclusion. It seems remarkable therefore that the country did not rise like Scotland during the last great Stuart rebellion in 1745. It would appear that the chief explanations for this quietude lie in the failure of the Jacobites to land an invasion force in Ireland, and the sensible decision of the Lord Lieutenant, the Earl of Chesterfield, to avoid over-reaction and treat Irish Catholics in as conciliatory a fashion as possible.³⁴

Yet it was a different story with the Irish abroad, for the Wild Geese played a prominent role in the 1745 rebellion, and of the famous 'Seven Men of Moidart' who accompanied Prince Charles Edward to Scotland in 1745, four were Irish.³⁵ Few Irishmen can have been more committed to the Stuart cause than Antoine Vincent (Anthony) Walsh and Pierre André O'Heguerty, two wealthy French-Irish shipowners who were naval contractors and privateers operating out of Nantes and St Malo. Continuing his family's tradition of

support for the Stuarts, Walsh provided a ship for transport and was one of those who landed in Scotland with Bonny Prince Charlie in August 1745, later organising his rescue in September 1746 when the cause had been lost.³⁶ O'Heguerty had considerable influence at the French court, and while organising material support for the Prince's campaign, he was also attempting to persuade the French to land troops in Ireland as well as Scotland.³⁷ McLynn has suggested that O'Heguerty's support for the Stuarts, tireless as it was, may also have been strongly motivated by a desire to achieve Irish independence, and as late as the Seven Years' War in the 1750s he was still pressing for a French invasion of Ireland.³⁸

The connection of the Walsh family with Freemasonry has already been mentioned, and O'Heguerty is credited with membership of a group of Jacobites which founded the first native French masonic lodge in 1725.³⁹ There is no doubt that Freemasonry was viewed by Jacobites as an important means of furthering their ends and that they greatly influenced its development, so much so that some witnesses went so far as to describe Freemasonry as 'a gigantic Jacobite conspiracy'.⁴⁰ Proceedings in the case of a Portuguese lodge of mostly Irish Freemasons which fell foul of the Inquisition in 1738 show how important the masonic network was to emigrés, and indeed some Dominican priests were said to have joined the Portuguese lodge 'so as to have a better introduction and to contact those who might help them in their work'.⁴¹ Masonic lodges provided one of the few environments where Catholics and Protestants could meet on an equal footing during the penal age, and despite Vatican hostility to the movement, the majority of Irish Freemasons were Catholics by the late eighteenth century, if not indeed earlier.⁴²

In the wake of the failure of the 1745 Rebellion, Jacobitism as a political force went into terminal decline in Britain and Ireland, and though many aristocratic Jacobites made their peace with the established order, there appears to have been a tendency among middle- and lower-class supporters to transfer their allegiance to radical politics.⁴³ Thus within a few years of 1745, not entirely implausible allegations were made that the radical Charles Lucas was being supported by Papists and Jacobites.⁴⁴ In the longer term, Irish Jacobitism's cultivation of a 'language and symbolism of revolt' paved the way for the growth of a popular republicanism which still looked to France for salvation, so that when French aid did eventually arrive in 1798, 'it was readily and easily explicable as the realisation of the Jacobite dream'.⁴⁵

The politically-oriented Jacobite variety of Freemasonry soon withered away in Ireland in the aftermath of the 1745 defeat, as it did in Britain and on the Continent. However, although Hanoverian Freemasonry seemed triumphant, Jacobitism left a permanent mark in the form of 'Ancient Rite' Freemasonry in Britain, Ireland and America, and 'Scots' Freemasonry on the Continent. A group of mostly Irish Freemasons in England, alleging that the Grand Lodge of that country had departed from certain of the true principles of masonic ritual, formed themselves in 1751 into an independent Ancient Grand Lodge which continued in existence until 1813.⁴⁶ The chief organiser and ideologue of the Ancients was Laurence Dermott, who was almost certainly of the Jacobite-connected MacDermott family of Strokestown, Co Roscommon.⁴⁷ It is also noteworthy that both the Irish and Scottish Grand Lodge.⁴⁸ Finally, awareness of the Jacobite legacy of politicisation and mixing of creeds is vital to understanding the extraordinary proliferation of radical and republican Freemasonry, which marked first the Volunteer and then the United Irish movements in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

Footnotes

¹ I am grateful for advice on sources and relevant publications given by Professor Breandán Ó Buachalla of UCD, Alex Ward of Freemason's Hall, Dublin, Dr Anthony Malcomson of PRONI, and in particular Charles Chenevix Trench, who drew to my attention the important letter of Archbishop William King cited in footnote 26 below.

² See the introduction on Jacobite historiography in Daniel Szechi, *The Jacobites: Britain and Europe 1688-1788* (Manchester and New York 1994), pp. 1-11.

³ Breandán Ó Buachalla, 'Irish Jacobite poetry', *Irish Review*, 12 (1992), 40-9, and 'Irish Jacobitism in official documents', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 8 (1993), 128-38.

⁴ F L Pick and G N Knight, *The pocket history of Freemasonry* (London 1992 ed), p. 7.

⁵ M C Jacob, *The radical Enlightenment: pantheists, Freemasons and republicans* (London 1981); David Stevenson, *The origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's century 1590-1710* (Cambridge 1990 ed), passim.

⁶ Jim Smyth, 'Freemasonry and the United Irishmen', in David Dickson et al eds, *The United Irishmen:* republicanism, radicalism and rebellion (Dublin 1993), pp. 167-75; A T Q Stewart, A Deeper Silence: the hidden origins of the United Irishmen (London 1993).

⁷ J P Jenkins, 'Jacobites and Freemasons in eighteenth-century Wales', *Welsh History Review*, 9 (1978-9), 391-406; Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh, *The Temple and the Lodge* (London 1990 ed); Jane Clark, 'Palladianism and the Divine Right of Kings: Jacobite iconography', *Apollo: the International Magazine of the Arts*, 135, no. 92 (April 1992), 224-9. While Baigent and Leigh's controversial work has to be approached with caution, and particularly the claim that the Knights Templar were the forerunners of Freemasonry, their account of the development of the movement in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries deserves serious consideration. ⁸ Stevenson, *Origins of Freemasonry*, passim.

⁹ Baigent and Leigh, *Temple and Lodge*, pp. 200-1, 210-11.

¹⁰ J H Lepper and Philip Crossle, *History of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Ireland*, 1 (Dublin 1925), pp. 33-6, 37-8.

¹¹ E B Beckett, 'William Stennors, builder of Bangor Abbey', *Transactions of the Lodge of Research, Ireland*, 18 (1982-4), 81-92.

¹² Lepper and Crossle, *History of Grand Lodge*, 1, pp. 36-7.

¹³ Lepper and Crossle, *History of Grand Lodge*, 1, pp. 128-30.

¹⁴ J H Lepper, 'The poor common soldier: a study of Irish ambulatory warrants', *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* (henceforth *AQC*), 38 (1925), 151-2; J E S Tuckett, 'The French-Irish family of Walsh and the lodge in the French-Irish Regiment of Walsh', *AQC*, 38 (1925), 189-96.

¹⁵ Baigent and Leigh, *Temple and Lodge*, pp. 239-41; J R Clarke, 'The establishment of the premier Grand Lodge: why in London and why in 1717?', *AQC*, 81 (1968), 1-7.

¹⁶ Lepper and Crossle, *History of Grand Lodge*, 1, pp. 52-8.

¹⁷ J T Gilbert, A history of the city of Dublin, 3 (Dublin 1978 ed), pp. 251-2.

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¹⁹ Pick and Knight, *Pocket history*, pp. 190-1; Stevenson, *Origins of Freemasonry*, pp. 52-76.

²⁰ Lepper and Crossle, *History of Grand Lodge*, 1, pp. 62, 133-4.

²¹ Ibid, pp. 62-4, 70, 134-5.

²² Ibid, pp. 70-5.

- ²³ Ibid, pp. 75-6, 82-3.
- ²⁴ Complete Peerage, 7, p. 298.

²⁵ Lepper and Crossle, *History of Grand Lodge*, 1, p. 147.

- ²⁶ Archbishop William King to John King, third Baron Kingston, 9 June 1722, TCD MS 750/7, p. 128.
- ²⁷ Complete Peerage, 7, p. 298.

²⁸ Complete Peerage, 9, p. 474; Lepper and Crossle, History of Grand Lodge, 1, pp. 148-9.

²⁹ Complete Peerage, 1, pp. 428-9; Lepper and Crossle, *History of Grand Lodge*, 1, pp. 150-1.

³⁰ Lepper and Crossle, *History of Grand Lodge*, 1, pp. 156-8, 165-6, 169-71, 174-7, 465-6.

³¹ Faulkner's *Dublin Journal*, 28 May 1745; *Complete Peerage*, 1, p. 110; Lepper and Crossle, *History of Grand Lodge*, 1, pp. 176-7.

³² Lepper and Crossle, *History of Grand Lodge*, 1, p. 177.

³³ Ó Buachalla, 'Irish Jacobite poetry', 43-4.

³⁴ F J McLynn, "Good behaviour": Irish Catholics and the Jacobite Rising of 1745', *Éire-Ireland*, 16, no. 2 (1981), 43-58.

³⁵ Charles Petrie, 'Irishmen in the Forty-Five', Irish Sword, 2 (1954-6), 277.

³⁶ Tuckett, 'French-Irish family of Walsh', 191-2; F J McLynn, 'An Irish Jacobite in the Forty-Five: Pierre André O'Heguerty', *Irish Sword*, 14 (1980-1), 192.

³⁷ McLynn, 'An Irish Jacobite', 192-3.

³⁸ McLynn, 'An Irish Jacobite', 194; Marcus Beresford, 'Francis Thurot and the French attack at Carrickfergus, 1759-60', *Irish Sword*, 10 (1971-2), 255-6, 270-1.

³⁹ J E S Tuckett, 'The early history of Freemasonry in France', AQC, 31 (1918), 7, 11-13.

⁴⁰ Frank (F J) McLynn, *The Jacobites* (London 1985), p. 140.

- ⁴¹ S Vatcher, 'A lodge of Irishmen in 1738: an early record of Inquisition proceedings', AQC, 84 (1971), 77, 101.
- ⁴² Lepper and Crossle, *History of Grand Lodge*, 1, p. 423.
- ⁴³ Szechi, *Jacobites*, p. 131.

⁴⁴ Sean Murphy, 'Charles Lucas, Catholicism and nationalism', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 8 (1993), 90-2.
⁴⁵ Ó Buachalla, *Irish Jacobite poetry*, 48.
⁴⁶ Henry Sadler, *Masonic facts and fictions, comprising a new theory of the origin of the 'Ancient' Grand Lodge* (London 1887), passim; Pick and Knight, Pocket history, pp. 88-94, 105-7, 230-1.

- ⁴⁷ Lepper and Crossle, *History of Grand Lodge*, pp. 236-42.
- ⁴⁸ Lepper and Crossle, *History of Grand Lodge*, p. 416; Pick and Knight, *Pocket history*, p. 92.