

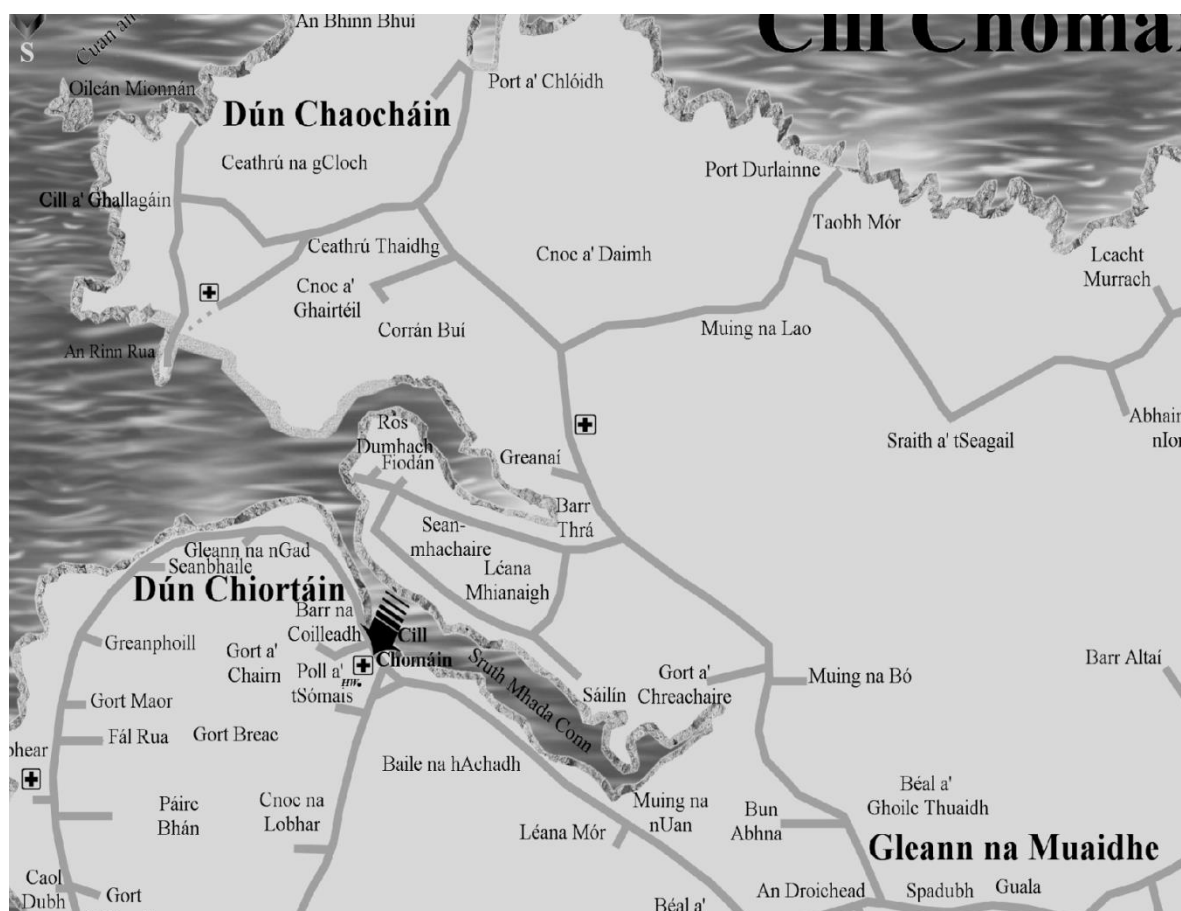
England contrived to end Gaelic, Catholic Life in Ireland **and to demit untrusted Protestants from the Scene**

In having a holiday with a cultural background, in Ireland, learning a modicum of history will complete your experience. Do please watch our video on the Golden Age of Gaelic civilisation and our romantic [*as in idyllic, fairy-tale*] bonds with France. Those were blessed days of heroes, of honour and of holy intent. Such days were not to last. Let us tell you why we, the Gael, disappeared from your sight. And why we now reach out to you, to reform our bonds at the personal level.

Oliver Cromwell came to Ireland in 1649, with his New Model Army and its new weaponry. This was a turning point, the beginning of the end for the Gaelic Civilisation. We did not wake up one morning, speaking English. Though most of us we speak it proficiently, the first official language of Ireland is Irish. The story of acculturation needs to be told and the persistence against all odds of Irish, in our few Gaelic communities, recognised.

In remote areas, as in Cill Chomáin, we have held fast onto our ancient ways. Nobody in Ireland can boast of historic connections with France as we can. Our sons fought in Ireland under Napoleon's flag and - in the exhilarating atmosphere of winning battles alongside French soldiers – set up the Napoléonic Republic of Connacht.

Extract from Map of Cill Chomáin



Eine Heimat unseres Volkes. Ihres Volkes.

1] Parish of Kilcommom {Church of Saint Comán}



Cill Chomáin old Graveyard



Cill Chomáin old Church

St. Comán lived around the end of the 6th century. He was of noble lineage – 7th in descent from **Niall of the Nine Hostages** – who was the ancestor of the great House of Ó Néill. Many bearers of this name are still proud of their family's unbowed protection of **Gaelic values** from the 6th to the 10th century.

Of the original St Comán's church, there remains only a part of one gable, from which but little can be learned of its style or age. The old graveyard, beside the church, lies in the north-western extremity of the townland of **Poll a' tSómais** (or the Hollow of Comfort). It contains other historic relics. There a **Holy Well** near the church of Comán. Tradition says the Saint is buried in the old church, located near an entrance to the old graveyard. Saint Comán's Feastday is the **18th of March**.

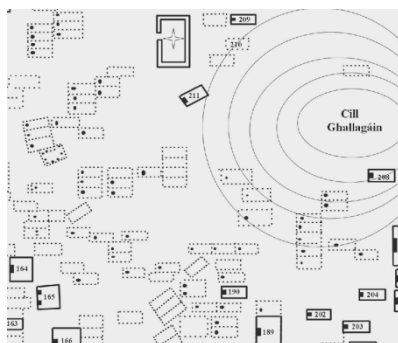
The Latin text **Cellchoman cum pertinentiis suis** {Kilcommon with its appurtenances (eg buildings)} appears in the 1198 list of church lands. Most of these lands were designated as parishes in later years.

The delineation of the Parish of Kilcommon, shown in part in the map above, dates back to Gaelic times. It comprises several 'townlands' – or divisions of land made under Gaelic law.

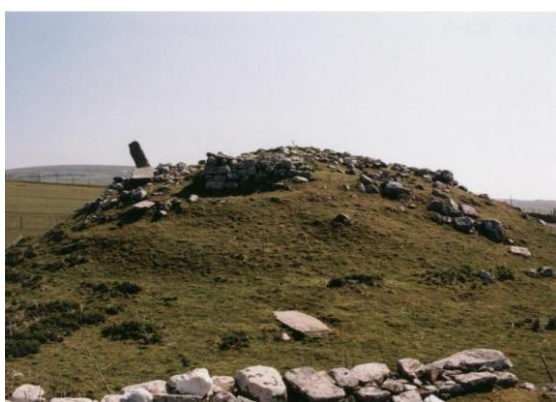
2] An Seanteampall a bhfuil Cill a' Ghallagáin ann –

The old Graveyard, in which lie the ruins of St Gallagán's Church.

Cill a' Ghallagáin (the Church of Gallagán) is the name of a townland so named in honour of its patron, Saint Gallagán. According to tradition, he founded a simple church (or Cill), in the north-eastern corner of the Cill Chomáin (Church of Comán) graveyard, probably around the time of St Comán.



A large mound of stone and clay now marks where he is buried. There is little reference to Saint Gallagán in Gaelic literature but his importance as a saint, and as the patron of a **Holy Well**, has lived on in local folklore down through the ages.



Burial place of St Gallagán (the Small Stranger)



The Maltese Cross

A stone slab with an inscription of a **Maltese cross**, on top of the mound, dates it back to the Early Christian Period. A bullán stone (a cognate word is **the French ‘bol’**) was discovered nearby. Gathered rainwater in these bulláin is said to have healing properties. Bulláin are of Neolithic significance and have been found in France, on Gotland Island and in Lithuania. Gallagán’s Holy Well is situated on the other side of a stream in the nearby townland of **Ceathrú na gCloch** (the Stoney Quarter).

A wall was built around the old graveyard in 1892. The earliest graves, marked by simple undecorated stones, are located around the mound in the north-eastern corner. During the Second World War, called **The Emergency** in Ireland, bodies of some dozen sailors, who had drowned when their U-boats were sunk, were found along the coast and given proper burial. In the early 1960s, the bodies of these men were exhumed and taken home.

Christian Burial Practice

An interesting feature of burial here is the lay-out of graves. Here, bodies face from west to east, while in the Poll a’ tSómais and other cemeteries, the bodies face from north west to south east. Traditionally, Christians positioned coffins in the grave, with the head lying to the west and feet to the east. The body was placed face up. When it was not practical to use this position, a north-south positioning was favoured. The body would be laid on its side, head to the north and facing east.

Facing bodies eastwards is related to the Gospel of St Matthew, which says “for as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man...” Facing the departed

to the East is a respectful way of acknowledging that the Christian story is a ‘work-in-progress’.

3] Catholic Chapel, Léana Mór, Kilcommom Parish – Séipéal Caitliceach, an Léana Mór, Paróiste Chill Chomáin

Moving to events in the last millennium, the inscription on the stone (the placement of which was supported by the EU) at **Muing na nUan** (‘a Sedgy place for Lambs’), in **Léana Mór** (the Great Wet Meadow) reads:

“The parish of Kilcommon takes its name from Saint Comán, after whom the ancient church at Cill Chomáin (in the Townland of Poll a’ tSómais) is named. Before it was divided, in the nineteenth century, Kilcommon was one of the largest parishes in Ireland and consisted of most of what is today the Barony of Erris. There are many historic references to the extent of the parish.”

Baronies were land divisions (for Barons) formed during the Tudor conquest of Ireland in the 1530s. They replaced earlier Norman demarcations. These, in their turn, had often respected the original Gaelic **tríocha céad**, or ‘thirty hundreds’ (units of land used in the 11th and 12th centuries, which related to the number of troops which could be raised). The Tudor king, Henry VIII, broke with Rome over the Laws of Espousal, and made Anglicanism the official religion. Tudor confiscations in this country still left 90% of the land in Gaelic hands.

East of the stream at An Léana Mór are the ruins of a thatched Chapel, 44’x16’, with a stone altar at the southern gable, erected c1770. In spite of English policies aimed at eliminating ‘popery’ (Catholicism), Holy Mass was celebrated here until c1825, when the old Christ the King Church, at **Baile na hAchadh** (Aughoose) was built.



Muing na nUan – Information carved on stone

Old church at Muing na nUan, An Léana Mór

At dawn, every Easter Sunday morning, Holy Mass was celebrated at the historic site of Muing na nUan. It is located on naturally sheltered low ground and is called **Pollán an Aifrinn** (the Mass Hollow). The thatched chapel site was marked on a map in 1830. The old chapel was later replaced by the new Christ the King Church, also at Baile na hAchadh.

Local people recall the use of the Chapel when the **Penal Laws** were enforced. So what were the

Penal Laws?

Edmund Burke was an independent-minded Irishman, of Norman lineage, whose family had adapted to life, as Protestants, under English rule. He was a member of the English parliament in the middle 1700s. He described the Penal Laws as “a machine of wise and elaborate contrivance, as well fitted for the oppression, impoverishment and degradation of a people and the debasement in them of human nature itself, as ever proceeded from the perverted ingenuity of man”. Penal Laws were passed in Ireland from 1691 to 1760. Some of these laws included the following:

A Catholic was forbidden to exercise his religion (but compelled to attend Protestant worship or be fined) and forbidden to receive an education, to enter a profession, to hold public office, to engage in a trade or commerce, to own a horse of greater value than five pounds, to own land, to vote, to carry a sword, to buy or obtain land or anything else from a Protestant, to rent any land worth more than 30 shillings a year, to send his child to a Catholic teacher.

Remnants of the Penal Laws survived into the present day. A very secretive body called the ‘Church of Ireland Body’ acted in the last century to prevent lands owned by Anglicans from passing into Catholic hands. Civil rights (as regards housing, employment, education and voting) were only recently allowed to Catholics in the Six Counties.

The English leadership, in the 16th and 17th centuries, strove for the wholesale replacement of the Gaelic population with loyal, English-speaking, Protestant subjects. Many ‘Plantations’ (population replacements) were carried out, with much loss of life. The Munster Plantation began in 1586. The ethnic cleansing (or Plantation) of Ulster was methodically planned and settlers were sent over from Scotland, from 1606 on. They were mainly anglicised Celts – Lowland Scots and some Border English.

The Scots, though acculturated, still employ a later Gaelic method of surname formation, using **Mac** {son (of)} for the male name and for both male and female names in the anglicised version. **It happens that both settler and native Celts in Ulster share a heritage which, in time, should bring them together in their common interest.** The leading Protestant Clergyman, **Dr Ian Paisley**, who died in 2014 (RIP), saw this as the basis for lasting peace.

By 1641, in any event, the percentage of the land still in Gaelic hands, was **59%**. As a result of the Cromwellian Plantations, the percentage had dropped to **22%** by 1685. The Penal System aside, an Act was passed, in 1652, to banish Catholic gentry to lands already laid waste, west of the Shannon. Any (men or women, young or old), who did not go, ‘might be killed by whoever met them’. With such laws and the impact of the Treaty of Limerick (relating to a war between rival English pretenders), the percentage dropped again to **14%** and, by the 1770s, to only **5%**. “Remember Limerick and Saxon treachery!” went into folk memory.



Treaty Stone, City of Limerick

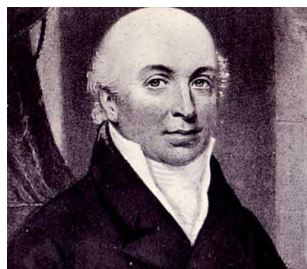
From the beginning of the English Reformation, laws which punished those in England who did not conform to the new régime, were passed. In Ireland, **Catholics, Dissenters (mainly Presbyterians) and Quakers** were targeted. Quakers are a Protestant grouping which earned an unassailable reputation on the island for good works, notably during the Great Famine and for general economic development. In England, full emancipation of Catholics, Jews and non-conforming Protestants was not accomplished until the mid-19th century.

Ulster-Scots Presbyterian settlers however, like their counterparts in Scotland, came to be seen as a threat by the English and, as a result, suffered centuries of **persecution**. Any such threat was quite imaginary.

Many Scots, however, had rejected the Church of England, on the perhaps peculiar grounds that it had not moved far enough away from Catholicism. They espoused Presbyterianism, forming the Established Church of Scotland. Divisions within Protestantism thus mirrored the earlier split in Christianity as a whole. Scottish **Presbyterianism derived from European Calvinism**. Its adoption may indicate subtle, **early expressions of a persisting Scottish belief** in independence. The Ulster Scots language is a heavily accented form of English.

The Test Act of 1704 brought more discrimination against both **Presbyterians and Catholics**. Primarily designed to suppress Catholicism, it also banned Presbyterians from holding public office if they did not take communion in the Church of Ireland. With mistreatment by their landlords and worsening economic conditions, these measures led to a total of over 250,000 Ulster-Scots leaving for a new life in the New World. There was, too, a difference in social class between Anglicans and Presbyterians. Whilst these latter largely belonged to the poorer classes, those of wealth and power tended to belong to the Church of Ireland. Yet there were **always upstanding, conscientious Anglicans**, of highest character and repute, who did not approve of religious persecution.

In 1718, the **Protestant Archbishop of Dublin** wrote that "the misery of the people here is very great, the beggars innumerable and increasing every day....One half of the people in Ireland eat neither bread nor flesh for one half of the year, nor wear Shoes or Stockings; your Hogs in England and Essex Calves lie and live better than they." How much worse must conditions have been when, in 1729, famine (not the Great Famine) struck, following three years of bad harvests.



Thomas Leland

Honourable Protestant historians recorded the weight of repression on the ordinary people. In 1774, **Thomas Leland, a Protestant Clergyman and Historian** wrote: “The favourable object of the Irish Governors, and the English Parliament, was **the utter extermination of all the Catholic inhabitants of Ireland**. Their estates were already marked out and allotted to their conquerors; so that they and their posterity were consigned to inevitable ruin.”

We may next see some details of the story surrounding Baile na hAchadh (Aughoose) and how the people will build, and build again, structures which represent hopes and their values - importantly that **all people of goodwill should be given a fair shake**.

4] Baile na hAchadh (the Village of the Field) {English mispronunciation of Irish is the basis for the (now fairly meaningless) placenames, commonly used in Ireland}

Achadh – meaning field or farmland - is more a Scots Gaelic term in the modern day. The old church of Christ the King was built by the sea around 1825, as we have noted, measuring 80’ long by 30’ wide. The building remained unroofed until the 1840s, as the people were exceedingly poor and suffering, on and off, from famine. The island’s poorest were said, in folklore, not to have been been thought worth counting in any census of population. These people subsisted on a diet of potatoes and sour milk and, without freedom or dignity, could aspire to nothing better.

When a Fr Smith visited Baile na hAchadh in 1889 he wrote to his Bishop (in Latin), saying the chapel was ‘**Sine luce, sine cruce, sine aqua benedicta**’ i.e. without light, without a cross, without holy water. However, it was not until many years later that the interior was decorated and a tabernacle and sanctuary light installed.

Building commenced in 1961 on the present church of Christ the King, at a cost of £25,000. It was opened in 1964.

Irish people are so said to have numbered **9m** before the full force of Famine struck in 1845. Potato blight was the cause. As the people died from hunger and disease, Protestant (English) Landlords seized upon this as a way to clear their lands of people for more profitable, less labour-intensive enterprises, such as pasture.



Old and new churches at Baile na hAchadh (Aughoose)

There was enough agricultural produce in Ireland to feed twice the population but the poor were only allowed potatoes. Ireland was again turned into a death-camp, for the Irish to die in. Once having caught the Blight, potatoes become mushy, produce very little nutrition and give off a vile stench. There is a story from Galway, not untypical, of a family of seven, who had eaten grass for too long, who lay down on the earthen floor of their **bothán** (a modest cabin), bade each other goodnight, never to rise again. The trauma to the Irish population was so great that, for different reasons, it fell steadily for over one-hundred years - to just over **4m in 1960**. The population of Mayo is still falling.



Landlord's House, Lissadel House, Co Sligo

Tenant's House, post Eviction

Famine Tenants

The Protestants of Ulster too suffered in the Great Famine. Workhouses in the north of Antrim and Down and in Belfast were overrun by people fleeing from the potato crop failure. In one week, in February 1847, the Lurgan workhouse – situated in one of the most dynamic linen production areas – recorded 95 deaths. Mortality rates there, during 1847, were amongst the worst in Ireland. Of the 919 men, women and children, who perished in the Armagh workhouse in 1847, **some 55% were Protestant** (both Presbyterian and Anglican).

5] An Corrán Buí - Seanteach a' Phobail (Corraunboy old Church) - An Séipéal nua i nGreanaí (new Church in Greanaí)

‘**Corrán Buí**’ means the ‘Yellow-coloured Crescent’, a reference to the golden sandy beach nearby.

The old chapel is marked on a map from 1812. Once thatched, it was later roofed with corrugated iron. The altar was wooden and there was no seating: the builders were poor.

Although in a very remote area, it was situated in a hollow so as not to arouse interest from the English authorities. The hollow is called **Poll an Aifrinn** (the Mass Hollow). In 1911, a gale blew away the roof, badly damaging the walls. Shortly afterwards a new church was built in **Greanaí**. This name refers to the gravelly nature of the terrain, close to the inlet.



An Corrán Bui - old Church



New Church at Greanaí

In most places, from the Cromwellian invasion and through the Penal Days (1650-1750), attending Mass was a dangerous undertaking. However, people secretly attended the Holy Sacrifice, at a designated rock (mostly called **Carraig an Aifrinn** – the Mass Rock), located out of sight. A look-out was often posted to give the Mass-goers a warning. [There is a Mass Rock on the farm of this author's Uncle, in West Cork.] When the danger was extreme, Mass was celebrated not only in a hidden place but at night. **Priest Hunters** were used to track down **both Catholic priests and Presbyterian preachers**.

In 1829, the English historian, **John Lingard**, describes Cromwell's taking of Drogheda in 1649, after he had offered clemency for surrender by the Irish garrison: "The pledge (of clemency for surrender) which had been given was now violated; and, as soon as resistance ceased, a general massacre was ordered.... During five days the streets of Drogheda **ran with blood**; revenge and fanaticism stimulated the passions of the soldiers: ... they turned their swords against the inhabitants, and one thousand unresisting victims were **immolated together** [set alight] within the walls of the great church..."



Edward Hyde, 1st Earl of Clarendon

Again, in the 1704 'History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England', **Edward Hyde, 1st Earl of Clarendon**, says the English army at Drogheda "...entered without resistance and put

every man, governor and [Irish] soldier to the sword: and....they executed all manner of cruelty and put...all the citizens who were Irish, man, woman and child, to the sword...” Popular accounts say that Cromwell himself dispatched huddled civilians with his sword in one hand and a Bible in the other.

The use of the word ‘chapel’ rather than ‘church’ in Irish and in Dublinese (this latter at least in fairly recent years) reflects restrictions the Colonial Power put on Catholicism. As we have seen, religion in Ireland was tool used by radicalised colonials, not for sanctity. Even nowadays, many do not understand religion at all: slogans have replaced the art of thought, apparently at all levels.

The big picture can anyway be summarised. The Normans invaded in 1172 AD. As in France, they learned to co-exist with Celts. English replaced French as the Court language, in London, in 1731. Gaelic Civilisation (or the Gaelic Order) began to go under in the mid-17th century and even old Franco-Norman families were increasingly challenged by the new English culture, which reflects a mixture of Saxon and French influences.

Under the severest pressures of occupation, including disease, hunger, slavery and deep and repeated cuts in population, the slow acculturation of Gaelic Ireland was unstoppable. Our history is much the saddest of any people whose story has been written down. **Please understand our treasured memories - of when we walked the land of Europe, hailed by High and Low.** Of when your people, and ours, worked together for learning and prosperity across the Continent. And now we are so few, even in our own country.

6] Gleann na Muaidhe (na Maighe) – The Valley of the Plain

Dedicated to St. Paul, the foundation stone of **the church at Gleann na Muaidhe** was laid in August of 1935. The building was opened and blessed in June 1936. Prior to this, Holy Mass was celebrated nearby in the Seanscoil (Old School).



Gleann na Muaidhe is a village in Kilcommon Parish. The name also covers some nine surrounding townlands. This remote area consists of large expanses of blanket bog (ie peatland), which forms where there is both a high rainfall and a low level of evapotranspiration, so allowing turf (peat) to develop not only in wet hollows but over large expanses of undulating ground.

7] Ceathrú Thaidhg {the Quarter of the Taidhg family (poets in ancient times to the Kings of Connacht)}



Teach a' Phobail - The 'Community's House' (meaning Church)

The people in Ceathrú Thaidhg and the surrounding areas are waiting to welcome you into their homes. This is the first time for **four hundred years** that **Gaelic and German** people will have come together again to celebrate their old ties and to work on new ones.

Our church in Ceathrú Thaidhg may look just like a one in the Schäubische Alb. However, this building is actually on the edge of a vast bogland. The photograph was taken in winter.

We are minded that 'Alb' is a Celtic word: Ailp means 'mountain' in Irish. The Church of the Immaculate Conception was officially opened in 1974. Prior to this Mass was celebrated locally in the Seanscoil (Old School) and later in Garvin's Hall.

We have a superb cultural connection to the Schwäbische Alb. As you will know, on the plateau of this mountain lies the Heidengraben (or Grassland Graves). These comprise the ruins of an Iron Age Celtic oppidum (as the Romans called a fortified settlement). The site lies in the municipalities of Grabenstetten, Hülben and Erkenbrechtsweiler in the districts of Reutlingen and Esslingen, in the land of Baden-Württemberg. The oppidum is the largest remaining in mainland Europe.

Be assured that, with the excitement of renewing an ancient liaison with us, such as you will, our differing but connected languages will be an encouragement. There are so many Celtic placenames in Germany which indicate our past closeness. We have about 3,000 years of shared history. Let's have some more.

<https://books.google.ie/books?id=yGuuCwAAQBAJ&pg=PA204&dq=England+did+not+conform+to+anglicanism,+were+passed.++Catholics,+Jews,+Dissenters&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiBkpe0ijvUAhWhLcAKHcXxDxcQ6AEIKDAB#v=onepage&q=England+did+not+conform+to+anglicanism%2C+were+passed.+Catholics%2C+Jews%2C+Dissenters&f=false>
http://www.irishhistorylinks.net/Historical_Documents/MemoirNativeSaxon.htm
<http://www-personal.ksu.edu/~lyman/english320/sg-Swift-18thC.htm>
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