

Jamestown - Virginia

-The First English / Irish settlement in America

Francis Magnel was one of the first settlers at Jamestown. Founded in 1607, there is startling new evidence that the Irish were there and left their mark. They arrived aboard 3 ships - the Discovery, the Godspeed or the Susan Constant – that landed on May 13th 1607. Magnel was there – a historically verified founding member of the first permanent English settlement in North America .

Magnel's Irish roots have not been documented but his relatively rare surname suggests that they lay in Co. Cork, where the Magnels were a family of Norse origin established since the 13th Century. The townland of Magnelstown, near Kanturk, is now known as Castlemagner. Francis Magnel's name can be found among the colony's first identified settlers who arrived during the years 1607-1608. At least one other obviously Irish surname appears there. Dionis Oconor (O'Conor) who was a tradesman who arrived in Jamestown in October 1608 .

The colony had among its earliest leaders veterans of England's protracted campaign to smash the power of the rebellious Gaelic chieftains, Hugh O'Neill, and Red Hugh O'Donnell, in a campaign that lasted nine years. Edward Maria Wingfield, the first president of Jamestown's governing Council, also served in Ireland under Elizabeth I, as had his subordinates George Percy, Richard Crofts and Edward Morris. At Jamestown, both Oconor and Magnel would have worked under these men. Not surprisingly, these men were not very accepting of the Native Americans as this reflected their experience with the native Irish. Both Irish and Indians favored of hit and run tactics of guerrilla warfare for the massed battle formations practiced by English soldiers.

George Kendall, an English officer and a Catholic, was executed at Jamestown on suspicion of espionage, as reported by Magnel. At a time when the English outlawed the Catholic Religion with a series of bills called the Penal Laws, the nature of some Jamestown finds raises new questions. . Amongst the artifacts found, a long stemmed lead crucifix with an image of a praying woman – probably Mary – beneath the body of Christ, faceted jet beads characteristic of 17th Century Catholic rosaries, and a copper alloy medal showing Mary's crowned head surrounded by seven stars, as found in later images of the Miraculus Medal. Some of these religious icons, which were then shunned by the reformed Anglican Church, may have belonged to Francis Magnel, Dionis O'Conor or other, as yet, unidentified Irish exile.

One of the most revealing discoveries at Jamestown was a collection of copper coins found scattered throughout the 17th Century Fort. The crowned harps on the pennies

and halfpenny, still visible four centuries later, clearly identify them as Irish. And their dates – 1601 and 1602 – mark the end of the Nine Years War and the devastating defeat of Gaelic Irish hopes for freedom at the Battle of Kinsale, in 1601. Many Irish were forced to flee their country and find new homes abroad. Many were forced to change their name and abandon their religion to conceal their Irish identity.

The use of copper in Ireland was revealing, since all English coins were minted in silver. In a letter to King Philip III of Spain in 1606, Matthew Tully, secretary to the Red Hugh O'Donnell, wrote that the English “were brought to such straits that they were forced to coin money in copper instead of silver.” The substitution of copper for silver was discontinued in 1603, which explains why the dates of only the two prior years appear on the coins found at Jamestown .