

Searching for My Irish-Norman Ancestor

Josef Ryzec

Copyright © 2026 by Josef Ryzec. All rights reserved.

English adaptation by Sean O'Sullivan

Edited by Louise Kelleher

Published by the Wild Geese Historical Society of Czechia

www.wildgeese.cz

Contents

Preface.....	4
Note to English version.....	5
Introduction.....	8
A needle in a haystack: The search begins.....	10
Descended from Walter Devereux? A footnote in history.....	13
Getting to know the Devereux line: A family resemblance.....	17
A religious black sheep? Why 16-year-old Walter might have left his native Ireland....	19
From Captain to Colonel: Walter Devereux's military career in Europe.....	22
Life after death.....	35
New roots.....	39

Preface

This account of the research carried out by Czech artist Josef Ryzec to verify a family legend that the Ryzec family is descended directly from an Irish officer who served in the army of the Holy Roman Empire during the Thirty Years War is published as an internal document for the Wild Geese Historical Society of Czechia. Josef's research seems to establish beyond reasonable doubt the truth of his family legend. Not only that, but he has identified the actual progenitor of the Ryzec family as one Walter Devereux, a Norman-Irish knight responsible for the assassination of the Holy Roman Emperor's allegedly traitorous Generalissimo Albrecht von Wallenstein on 25 February 1634. Was Wallenstein indeed a traitor? Was Devereux a mere mercenary assassin? Historians disagree even to this day. The Society will be progressing, in co-operation with interested universities in Austria, Czechia, Germany, Ireland and Sweden, our film documentary (working title: Has the Jury Reached a Verdict?) on the highly contentious accounts of that pivotal event in Cheb in 1634. Hopefully we will reach a verdict!

Wild Geese Historical Society of Czechia

Note to English version

The Thirty Years War (1618-1648), ostensibly beginning as a religious conflict originating in Prague, went on to drag in nearly every European country in one way or another. The main protagonists were Sweden (supported by France), and the Holy Roman Empire, but the brunt was borne by the German provinces and Bohemia.

There were several epic incidents which still are indelibly marked in human memory but one which might be argued proved pivotal was the assassination of the Holy Roman Emperor's commander, Generalissimo Albrecht von Wallenstein, by his own officers. This is where Josef's own story begins, because it was his very ancestor, Norman-Irish knight Walter Devereux, who delivered the fatal blow to the Generalissimo before he could betray the emperor and join forces with the Swedish enemy.

Duke Wallenstein had been a successful, if difficult to control, commander of the Imperial Army for a number of years, gaining several significant military victories, but by December 1633 he was tiring of war and looking to his own advantage. Vienna soon convinced itself of his intended treachery, and the emperor sent out orders to have him taken dead or alive. Wallenstein, on becoming aware of the danger, took a company of some hundred men with him to Eger (now Cheb) on the Czech-German border, to link up with the Swedes massed across the border under Prince Bernard. However, Colonel Walter Butler (who commanded a regiment of (mainly Irish) dragoons), remained loyal to the emperor, and together with Scots colonels Walter Leslie and John Gordon resolved to carry out the royal command. Wallenstein's trusted officers and co-conspirators, Christian Illov, Adam Trezka, Václav Kinský and Henry Neumann were invited to a feast at Eger Castle, which Gordon commanded. Wallenstein himself had decided to retire early; it is alleged that he was in ill health, suffering from syphilis. After much drunken carousing, a clash of toasts

gave the signal to fall upon the enemy and Butler's cousin, Captain Walter Devereux, was sent to disturb the slumber of the traitorous Generalissimo. The bedroom where Wallenstein was killed remains on display in what is now the Cheb museum, where his bloodied nightshirt and a pike hang over his four poster bed.

Butler died the following year and Devereux succeeded him as colonel of the regiment. Young Walter had been rewarded for his service with a confiscated estate and remained in Bohemia (since his elder brother had inherited the family castle at Balmagir in Wexford, there was nothing for young Walter to return to). He was reputedly buried in the Irish Franciscan church in Prague to which he had contributed generously.

The long war which had devastated much of central Europe, killing millions through violence, famine or disease, concluded with peace conferences in the German town of Westphalia in 1648, which united Europe for the very first time in a treaty of peace (a harbinger, it might be said, of the European Union). The religious differences however were to remain for much longer and influenced markedly how historians viewed the period. Walter Devereux was seen by some as a foreign mercenary murderer, others saw him as an officer loyal to his emperor and to his religion. The ending of the war resulted in the Habsburg dynasty continuing to dominate until 1918, which did not endear the foreigners to the Czechs. Wallenstein's ambition, had he succeeded in his alleged treachery, would have been to become King of Bohemia, so he continues to be seen by the Czechs as something of an historical hero.

Opinion, however, remains divided to this day!

The Wild Geese Historical Society of Czechia, as part of its work in identifying and celebrating historical links between Ireland and Czechia, is supporting Josef Ryzec in bringing to a wider audience his painstaking research. We publish his unabridged Czech text in parallel to this English adaptation that endeavours to stay as true as possible to the spirit of the

original. The interpretation of the events leading up to Wallenstein's assassination in 1634 has been a source of contention over the succeeding years. Was the Generalissimo treacherously cut down by mercenary soldiers out only for their own enrichment? Or were his executioners loyal servants of their emperor, desperate to safeguard their religion which would have been under severe threat had Sweden succeeded? The Society hopes to use this publication to encourage history students – particularly in Austria, Bohemia, Ireland, Sweden and the German regions – to come together as a jury to examine fully the facts of the case and to reach a common verdict.

Sean O'Sullivan, Wild Geese Historical Society of Czechia

Introduction

The Ryzec family has been in Bohemia for 400 years. Our family lore has it that we are descended from an Irish soldier who came to fight in the Thirty Years War and later remained in Bohemia. It was an accepted fact, and there was little interest in discovering who that Irish soldier might be.

For me however, as I got older, it became a compelling quest. When I started my research a decade ago, I had no idea where it would lead me. The journey through many different archives – civil, military and religious, Czech, Austrian, Irish and also British – was an adventure in itself, but where it led me exceeded all my expectations.

Part of the legend is that the soldier took the name “Ryzec”, which in Czech denotes the red pine mushroom – suggesting that the soldier himself was red-haired.

Ryzec is a very uncommon name. We are a small family and all know and are related to each other;¹ we are not aware of any Ryzec living anywhere else. Creating a new family in a new place suggests that my ancestor had good reason to protect himself by cutting ties with his past. What had he done, and why had he remained in Bohemia?

What triggered my curiosity about the family legend was when my daughter Žofie, from my first marriage, was born in 1968. At the time an eminent professor of medicine was testing infants for their ethnic origins. I was surprised to hear from him that we had Celtic origins. The socialist regime was not seeking connections with ancient Celtic Ireland, whose mythology had inspired the Czech National Revival; instead Professor Majer’s research sought to establish scientific proof of the Celtic Boii tribe (for which Bohemia is named) and its descendants who are still found in

¹ In 2017 there were only 19 males and 16 females with the name Ryzec (according to the online database www.kdejsme.cz).

the Czech lands. He was telling me I descended from not the Irish but the Bohemian Celts. By the time my daughter Barbora was born in 1971, from my second marriage, Professor Majer was happy to confirm that the Celtic ancestors were on my side of the family. His medical research was supported in the early 1990s by genetic research by Professor Mack which proved that roughly 30% of the Czech population is of Celtic origin, descended from the Bohemia Boii and the Moravian Vlachs.

All of this helped to spark my art project Lughnasadh,² which is named for the summer festival that honours the god Lugh, Celtic patron of arts and crafts. In 1997 I started organising art exhibitions together with a group of artist friends who shared my affinity with the Celtic world, inspired by various themes from the mythology of ancient Celtic Europe. To date, more than 30 Lughnasadh art exhibitions have been held in the Czech Republic and abroad, including in Dublin and Vienna, featuring the work of over 300 professional and amateur artists.

While it was my Irish ancestor who inspired the Lughnasadh art project, I had no need to know any more specifics about him. It was only when a journalist from a tabloid newspaper called me out of the blue in 2013 and asked me if my name was Ryzec, that I became more curious about the origins of our family legend. The journalist was writing an article about people who have the same surnames as mushrooms, so I told him our family legend. Nice story, but who was this Irish soldier? Where was he from in Ireland? How did he end up here? What was his name before he changed it to Ryzec? If it was embarrassing to admit that my family had no answers, the idea of a potential tabloid investigation into our Irish ancestor was even less appealing. So I decided to find out for myself.

² Although I chose to use the Irish spelling “Lughnasadh” in honour of the Irish soldier of our family legend, I was well aware of the openness of the Celtic world which does not discriminate between Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Cambrian, Cornish, Manx, British, Breton, Galician, Gaelic, Helvetic, not to mention Boii after whom Bohemia was named.

A needle in a haystack: The search begins

I started in 2013 by contacting historians of the Thirty Years War period. They told me that trying to track down an unknown Irish soldier of an unknown army would be like looking for a needle in a haystack, since the Irish were in all the armies of Europe at that time – the armies of the Holy Roman Empire as well as Protestant armies.

But this soldier of ours had to be somewhere to be found. Bohemia was Catholic under Emperors Ferdinand II and III, so we can infer that if our soldier was given leave to remain here, he could only have served in the armies of the Holy Roman Empire, and therefore must have been a Catholic himself.

I tried the military archives. It transpired that the Czech archives from the Thirty Years War were long ago moved to the Austrian War Archives in Vienna. And those archives can't be browsed; documents are available only on request for academic research under very strict conditions. Since I didn't even know the soldier's name or military unit, the archives were in effect inaccessible to me.

However, one Czech military historian drew my attention to a crucial detail that, as a non-historian, had escaped my attention (and that of the civil historians I had spoken to): After the Thirty Years War a foreign soldier would only have been allowed to stay in Bohemia with the permission of the Imperial Office. This was completely out of the question for a common soldier; only a person with free will – that is, a member of the nobility – could request a permanent residence permit (*incolate*). Furthermore, he would have had to own the property where he proposed to take up residence. Similarly, only a nobleman would have had the right to choose under which name he would be registered in Bohemia.

My research now had a direction: I was looking for a member of an Irish noble family. The reason an Irish nobleman would have come to Europe at that time is clear. He came to fight in the war – with the armies of the Holy Roman Empire, as we have deduced. As a nobleman, he would have served as an officer. He would not have owned property in Bohemia; however land may have later been granted to him by the Holy Roman Emperor for military merit.³

From here, it was easy to look up the names of Irish officers to whom Ferdinand II granted land and leave to remain in Bohemia.⁴ There were three in total:⁵ Colonel Walter Butler (who was granted residence in 1634), Colonel Robert Geraldin (FitzGerald, 1638) and Colonel Walter Devereux⁶ (1635). These three Irish officers were rewarded by Emperor Ferdinand II for carrying out his order to assassinate three former commanders of his army who he had dismissed for treason: Duke Albrecht von Wallenstein,⁷ Adam Trčka and Vilém Kinski in the border town of Eger (now Cheb) on 25 February 1634. The lands of the alleged traitors were duly confiscated by the emperor, and granted in turn to the three Irish officers, with Butler receiving the Doksy, Deštná and Nový Bernštejn estates, Geraldin allocated Mšeno, Romanov and Lobeč, and Devereux granted Krchleby, Dobrovítov and Chlum.⁸

Which of these three gentlemen could be the ancestor I was looking for?

³ As Bohemia was at the time under the control of the Holy Roman Empire, only the emperor had the authority to honour a foreign officer serving in his army and grant him permanent residence.

⁴ Pařez, J. & Kuchařová, H., (2001). *Hyberni v Praze*. Oswald.

⁵ Bílek, T. J. (1883). *Dějiny konfiskací v Čechách po r. 1618*. Muzeum království českého.

⁶ Here we will prefer the spelling “Devereux” (see: Redmond, G. O’C. (1891). *An Account of the Anglo-Norman Family of Devereux, of Balmagir, County Wexford*. Office of “The Irish Builder”). During the Thirty Years War in Bohemia, due to phonetic transcription, there was a shift to the spelling “Deveroux” and other variations. The name is recorded as “Deveroux” in most contemporary Czech sources, including the documents of the Irish college of the Irish Franciscans at the Church of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, which are now stored in the National Archives in Prague.

⁷ “Valdštejn” in Czech.

⁸ Part of the lands that were confiscated from Jan Rudolf Trčka after his death in late 1634.

Walter Butler? Unlikely. He was born in 1600, died in 1634, and had no proven children.

Robert Geraldin? Also unlikely. While his date of birth is unknown, we know that he had a daughter who married in 1654.⁹ Assuming that his daughter then was born sometime around 1635, we can estimate that Robert Geraldin was a little younger than Butler. He died in 1642.

Walter Devereux? A plausible candidate: While his date of birth is stated as unknown in the available Czech and foreign literature and in academic texts, it is recorded in several sources that he died in 1639¹⁰, since his last will and testament is dated December 28, 1639.¹¹ In his will he bequeaths his entire estate to his son Walter.

⁹ His daughter, Baroness Maria Klára Josefa Geraldin of Kildare, married Odolen Věžník in 1654.

¹⁰ Some sources indicate that Walter Devereux died in 1640.

¹¹ See for example Pařez, J. & Kuchařová, H., (2001). *Hyberni v Praze*. Oswald.

Descended from Walter Devereux? A footnote in history

Could my ancestor be Walter Devereux? At this point, it was not such a simple question to answer. Walter Devereux's will is the only reliable source indicating that he had a son, also named Walter Devereux (all other texts that mention this son cite the will itself as the source).

To continue the search for my ancestor, I would need to find out more about this son: When and where he was born? How old was he when his father wrote his will? If he was born in Ireland, how and when did he come to Bohemia? Where was he when his father was serving in the Imperial Army? Who was his mother? When and where were his parents married? Where was his mother while her husband was at war? Was she still alive at the time the will was written? If so, why is she not mentioned in it?

With renewed vigour, I began to explore these new avenues of research. Soon however I came up against inconsistencies. For example, Walter Devereux's son is named as Martin, not Walter, in T. J. Bílek's book (1883), but also in the records of the village of Zbýšov.¹²

I needed to find out this son's date and place of birth, as well as more about his mother, her date and place of birth, and the date and place of her marriage to Walter Devereux. But Czech sources once again proved fruitless:¹³ they make no mention of any spouse or any other offspring, aside from the son and heir referred to in his will.¹⁴

At this point I sought the advice of the then Irish ambassador to the Czech Republic, Alison Kelly, who suggested I consult the genealogy team in

¹² Zbýšov was part of the lands granted to Walter Devereux by Emperor Ferdinand II.

¹³ We find references to Walter Devereux only as an officer from an unspecified branch of a renowned Irish noble family.

¹⁴ I consulted various archives in Bohemia and abroad, as well as genealogies of noble families, especially in books on Irish and British (or Anglo-Norman) emigration to Central Europe.

Trinity College Dublin. Their reply was brief: after the Act of Union in 1800,¹⁵ all records on the genealogy of noble families in Ireland were transferred to the British Royal Archives in London. And to access these archives, as I learned from a historian friend of mine, I would need the permission of Queen Elizabeth II.

And so I wrote to Queen Elizabeth II requesting permission to consult the records of the Irish Anglo-Norman Devereux family in the British Royal Archives. Eight months later I received a reply from an official informing me that, by the authority of the Queen, I had permission to consult the archives, but only the records of the British Devereux family, since the records of the Irish Devereux family apparently never were transferred to the British Royal Archives but remained in Ireland.

And so I wrote to the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, requesting permission to access the National Archives of Ireland, and before long received a positive reply. I then sent a request to the director of the National Archives in Dublin to consult the records of the Irish Devereux family. The reply also came soon, but in it the director regretfully informed me that, although the records of the Irish Devereux family had indeed remained in the National Archives after 1800, but during the Civil War in 1922 half of the buildings of the then National Archives were destroyed by a large explosion. Among the documents that were destroyed were the records pertaining to the Irish Devereux family.¹⁶

After this disappointing discovery, Ambassador Alison Kelly told me about a book published in Dublin in 1891, *An Account of the Anglo-Norman family of Devereux, of Balmagir, County Wexford*, that was available in reprint.

¹⁵ The Act of Union (1801) dissolved the Irish Parliament and created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

¹⁶ I assumed that copies of the missing archival documents would be in existence elsewhere. Subsequently I discovered that the English Devereux family (now the Dukes of Hereford) maintains an extensive archive of the entire Devereux family, with links to the Irish branch of the family dating back to Queen Elizabeth I.

In it I discovered that over more than 1,000 years of existence of the Devereux family,¹⁷ several persons have borne the name of Walter Devereux. And then I noticed this footnote at the very end of the book:¹⁸

“Sir Walter Devereux, who slew Wallenstein in Bohemia, was born in the Castle of Balmagir.”

However, the book offered no further information on this Walter, his date of birth, his parentage or his position in the Devereux family. The rest of the book gives a detailed genealogy of the family over the centuries, but this Walter is relegated to a literal footnote in the family history.

Without Walter’s year of birth, my search would go no further. So I made a guess. Of our three Irish officers in Cheb in February 1634, the oldest was evidently Colonel Walter Butler, their commander, who was born in 1600. I estimated that his deputy, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Geraldin, was about five years younger. Captain Walter Devereux, who was Butler’s aide-de-camp, would have been the most junior of the three, in age as well as rank; I estimated that he was born around 1615.

In 2014 I tested my hypothesis in the FamilySearch online database,¹⁹ where I found an entry for: **Walter Devereux, born 1615 in Balmagir, Wexford, Ireland, father Philip Devereux and mother Jane Walsh.**²⁰

Since there was no further information attached to the entry, we can surmise that there is no record of his marriage or the birth of any children

¹⁷ The Irish branch of the Devereux family is descended from one of the first 13 Dukes of Normandy (Duchy of Évreux), who came to Britain with his cousin, William the Conqueror, and then to Ireland with the army of King Henry II.

¹⁸Footnote 81 in Redmond, G. O’C. (1891). *An Account of the Anglo-Norman Family of Devereux, of Balmagir, County Wexford*. Office of “The Irish Builder”.

¹⁹ The FamilySearch database (<https://www.familysearch.org>) is run by the Church of the Latter Days Saints. Since it is managed by genealogists to serve the needs of the Church, it can be taken to be a reliable reference. Given that it has an entry for Walter Devereux, whose family’s records were lost with the Irish National archives, we can imagine that it draws information from private sources as well as state archives.

²⁰ The entry contained no further information, which means that Walter Devereux, born 1615 in Ireland, could not have had a wife or children in Ireland, as they would have been recorded in the Irish archives. Similarly, no date of death is recorded in the Irish archives; we know that he left Ireland for Europe, where he served in the military and never returned to Ireland, so he could not have died in Ireland.

in Ireland. Similarly, if there is no year of death in the entry, we can infer that his death is not documented in Irish records.

I cross-referenced this online record for Walter Devereux with *An Account of the Anglo-Norman family of Devereux, of Balmagir, county Wexford*. The closest predecessor named Walter Devereux there is Sir Walter Devereux who died in 1619 (and so could not have served in Colonel Butler's regiment). And since the book lists no other Walter Devereux after the Walter Devereux born in 1615, **this is *de facto* confirmation that our Irish officer is the Walter Devereux born in 1615**. (It is gratifying to note that I correctly guessed his year of birth.)

It is at this point credible to state that the Irish officer who settled in Bohemia after the Thirty Years War is the Irish officer of our family legend: namely Colonel Walter Devereux, who on 25 February 1634 assassinated Generalissimo Wallenstein in Cheb.

The next step was to find out more about the son and heir that Walter named in his will.

If we know that Walter the officer was born in 1615, he would have been 16 or 17 years old in 1632 when, after arriving from Ireland, he began his military service in Colonel Walter Butler's Irish dragoon regiment as his aide-de-camp. Could he have had a wife and son at that time? Not in Ireland, as we know from the entry on FamilySearch. And it seems unlikely that he would find a wife, and father a son with her, immediately after arriving in Europe. Yet in his will dated 1639 he bequeaths all his property to his son Walter. Even if a son was born in 1633, he would have been six years old in 1639; could he legally and materially take over all the lands and property of Colonel Walter Devereux, as such a young child?

Getting to know the Devereux line: A family resemblance

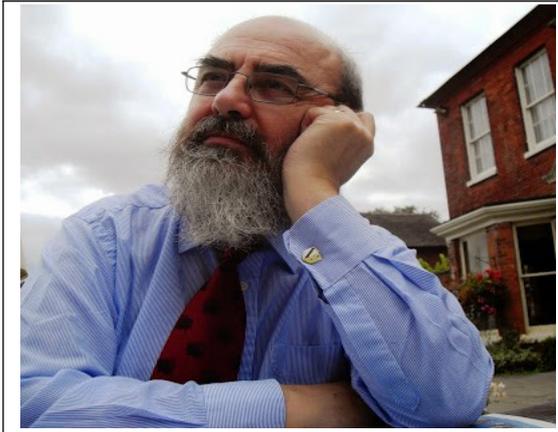
Once I knew the names of Walter Devereux's parents I could trace his entire family²¹ back to the origins of the Irish Devereux family in the 12th century. The information I found in the FamilySearch database is consistent with the genealogy in *An Account of the Anglo-Norman family of Devereux, of Balmagir, county Wexford*.

Keen to find connections to the Irish Devereux family, I was surprised to stumble across the face of Patrick Comerford while researching online (see photos overleaf).

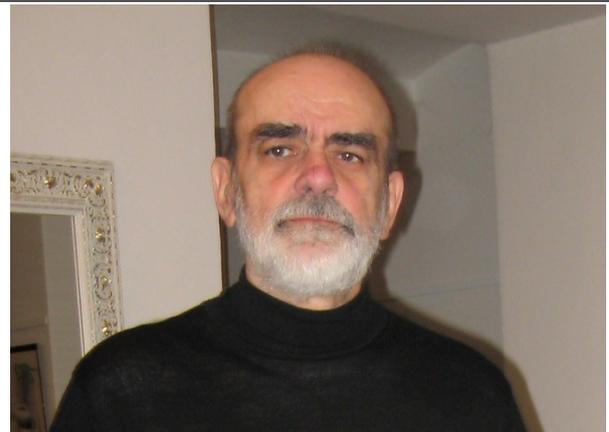
This likeness, which I happened upon by chance, led me to discover another of the coincidences I would encounter in my research. There were once two sisters in the Kingdom of Ireland, Joan (1587-1660) and Ellen (1596-1654), the daughters of Walter Walsh (1541-1619) and Ellinor Butler (1553-1622). Joan married Phillip Devereux (1583-1635) who was Roman Catholic, and Ellen married the Reverend Thomas Comerford (1596-1635) who was Church of Ireland (Anglican). The current Church of Ireland Reverend, Dr. Patrick Comerford (pictured above left) is related to the descendants of Thomas and Ellen, while I (pictured above right) am a descendant of Joan who was the mother of Walter Devereux (*1615).

²¹ For the sake of interest, I list here the names of Walter Devereux's immediate family.

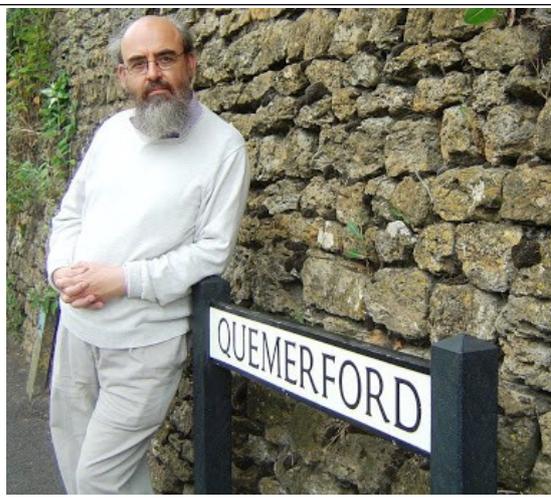
Father: Philip Devereux (1583-1635), Mother: Joan Walsh (1587-1660), Marriage: 1605, Sons: Nicholas (1606), Robert (1608), John (1609), Alexander (1611), Walter (1615), James (1616), Edward (1617), George (1619), Richard (1621), daughters: Mary (1623), Margaret (1625), Catherine (1627).



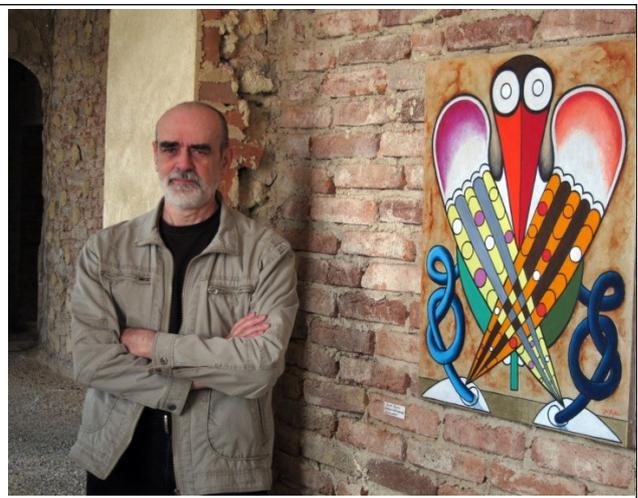
Patrick Comerford



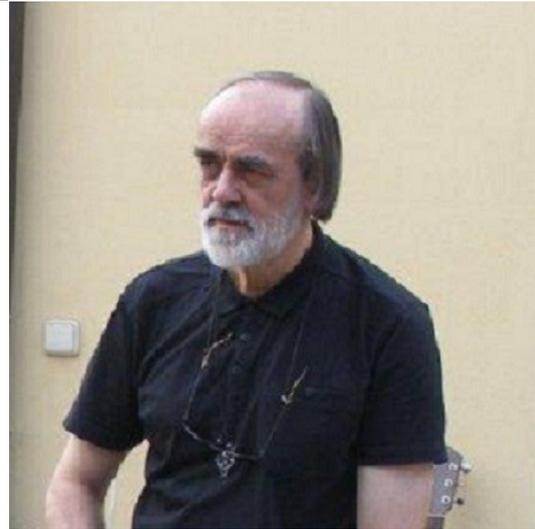
Josef Ryzec



Patrick Comerford



Josef Ryzec



A religious black sheep? Why 16-year-old Walter might have left his native Ireland

Another curious detail led me down a new avenue. On page 17 of *An Account of the Anglo-Norman family of Devereux, of Balmagir, County Wexford*, in the list of the children born to Philip Devereux and his wife Joan, I noticed that their fifth son Walter is listed as “**Walter of Waterford**”. However, Balmagir Castle, the seat of the Irish Devereux family since the 13th century, where all of these children were born, is located in County Wexford.

But why? It occurred to me that, in a religiously tense time, there could have been religious reasons to record Walter as “of Waterford”. Walter’s mother’s sister, Ellen, after all, married an Anglican reverend; could this have caused a religious rift in the Devereux family at the time of Walter’s birth?

For further explanation, let us look to our Walter’s grandfather, Sir James Devereux (1544-1605), whose cousin was Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex, and Viceroy of Ireland for Queen Elizabeth I of England, his reputed lover.

At this time, while in England the Protestant Tudor regime was persecuting Catholics, Elizabeth I sought to spiritually conquer Ireland, where **religious freedom** prevailed.

In 1599 this English cousin, the Earl of Essex, brought some unwelcome guests: he led a large English army to quash the Gaelic O’Neill and O’Donnell clans in the long-standing rebellious province of Ulster in the north of Ireland. He expected Sir James to support the invasion and to convince other Irish Anglo-Norman families to take the side of Elizabeth I.

Sir James refused. Even though he was offered an earlship in return for his cooperation, he insisted that he would remain neutral in the conflict.

Sir James Devereux refused to turn against his Irish Gaelic friends, the traditional religious freedom of the old Gaelic world, and indeed the Irish Franciscans, who after almost 400 years in Ireland had become an integral part of Irish religious thought, and enjoyed a lot of sympathy in Waterford and Wexford.

The Tudor conquest was a failure, in part because many other Anglo-Norman families in Ireland refused their support, and the Earl of Essex returned to England. **Elizabeth I reacted by expelling all of the Irish Franciscans from Ireland.** Another consequence was that the Earl of Essex and the queen fell out, which led to his attempt to overthrow her reign and to his own execution in 1601.

Walter's grandfather, Sir James Devereux, died before he was born. But we can imagine that young Walter grew up steeped in the legend of how his grandfather had stood up to his fanatical cousin who wanted to destroy good old Ireland, how the Earl of Essex was later executed for another reason, how the wicked Queen of England drove all our Irish Franciscans out of all Ireland. He may well have inherited his grandfather's love of art and Irish traditions and been more of a romantic than his siblings. We can imagine that he preferred the Irish Franciscans to the family's Anglican faith, and so the Devereux sent the stubborn boy to live with relatives in Waterford, where his religious views would have been more welcome.

Waterford was not only a stronghold of the Irish Franciscans, but also the hometown of Luke Wadding (1588-1657), who went on to become a leading figure in Rome and in 1655 almost became the first Irish pope. (As founder of St. Isidore's Irish college in Rome, it was Wadding who established the tradition of celebrating St. Patrick's Day which later became the Irish national holiday.) Wadding was a nephew of the

Archbishop of Armagh, Peter Lombard, Primate of the Roman Catholic Church of All Ireland, from whose family came several mayors of the city of Waterford. We can assume that in Waterford young Walter Devereux would have been under the protection of the staunchly Catholic Lombard family.

At this impressionable age, Walter would have heard the good news from Europe: the Irish Franciscans, wandering Europe since their expulsion from Ireland in 1599, had found a permanent home in Bohemia, where in 1629 Luke Wadding had succeeded in persuading Emperor Ferdinand II to grant them permission to establish a monastery and Irish college in Prague.

Given this context, it is quite easy to understand why, at the first opportunity, 16-year-old Walter decided to leave Ireland to support the cause of the Irish Franciscans in Europe. That opportunity was the Irish regiment of the Imperial Army that had been set up by his cousin,²² Colonel Walter Butler.²³ He joined the regiment and was taken under his cousin's wing. In any case, his prospects were poor in Ireland as his elder brother had inherited the castle and lands at Balmaguir.

²² Walter Devereux's maternal grandmother was born Butler (b. 1542) - from which branch of the Butlers, of which there were quite a few in Ireland at the time, I have not yet been able to ascertain. However, the Butlers were quite an important Anglo-Norman family in Ireland at that time, with their main seat in Kilkenny, which is close to both Wexford and Waterford, and we can imagine that all the Anglo-Norman families residing in these areas would have been close in terms of kinship and contact.

²³ Colonel Walter Butler was descended from a branch of the Butlers of Roscrea, of Ballinakill Castle, which, together with his family's possessions, had been confiscated by the English in 1616, so he subsequently set out for Europe and entered the military service of the Austrian emperor Ferdinand II. He set up an Irish regiment on the authority of the newly established supreme commander of the imperial army, Generalissimo Wallenstein. The Irishmen who likewise decided to leave Ireland for military service in Europe flocked to his banner.

From Captain to Colonel: Walter Devereux's military career in Europe

Walter Devereux joined Colonel Butler's regiment as his aide-de-camp sometime before the famous Battle of Lützen²⁴ in 1632. Military historians present conflicting assessments of this battle that pitted Catholic imperialists against Swedish and Saxon Protestant forces, and resulted in the death of the Swedish King Gustav II Adolph.

I will point only to the personal testimonies of the combatants (specifically, the Irish regiment), which can be compared with the later statements of Generalissimo Wallenstein, who condemned the shameful behaviour of some of his soldiers, whom he then had executed in February 1633 on the Old Town Square in Prague, on an exact replica of the gallows used to hang the Czech lords in 1621. It was an ardent demonstration of power by the would-be King of Bohemia.

This theatrically staged punishment of their fellow soldiers would have been fresh in the minds of Butler's regiment one year later when they received the emperor's command to assassinate the treacherous Wallenstein.

After the assassination of Duke Wallenstein in Cheb in February 1634, Butler's Irish regiment, along with all of the imperial troops, came under the command of the emperor's son Ferdinand, king of Bohemia and Hungary. In actual fact, the imperial troops were commanded on his behalf by General Matthias Gallas, who organised military campaigns in the autumn of 1634 in the area of Württemberg. There the Imperial Army delivered a crushing defeat on the Swedish troops. This victory altered the course of the Thirty Years War: the imperial troops succeeded in almost

²⁴ At this stage Lieutenant Colonel Walter Leslie and Lieutenant Colonel Robert Geraldin were already serving in the regiment, i.e. all four protagonists in Wallenstein's assassination.

completely ejecting Swedish forces from southern Germany, leading to the Peace of Prague the following year.²⁵

The victory of the imperial troops at Nördlingen was followed at the end of 1634 by another significant victory at the nearby Protestant town of Schorndorf. There was no direct engagement of troops in this battle, instead the Imperial Army besieged the town and laid down a massive barrage of artillery fire. The entire town was destroyed, including Schorndorf Castle.

It was then that Colonel Walter Butler died on Christmas 1634 – not in combat (as is sometimes erroneously stated), but due to a typhus infection. He lingered on in the field infirmary for some 14 days. Perhaps that is why this sad event is shrouded in silence by historians. Equally little known however is General Gallas's reaction to Butler's death: Stating that it was completely out of the question for a war hero to be buried in Protestant territory and so far from home, he ordered that the deceased Colonel Walter Butler be transported to Prague for a state funeral.

The 19-year-old Lieutenant Colonel Walter Devereux was then selected by General Gallas to take over the command of the Irish Dragoon Regiment.

The young man rose to the task in hand with aplomb. Since Colonel Butler had died of typhus, the body had to be sealed in an airtight coffin for safe transport. Walter had the lead pipes torn out of the sacked town and melted down to make a leaden coffin. The coffin had first to be transported to the nearby Catholic town of Wiesensteig²⁶ for a requiem

²⁵Concluded in 1635, this was the emperor's peace agreement with Saxony and most of the German states.

²⁶As was the custom at the time Colonel Walter Butler sometimes travelled from battlefield to battlefield accompanied by his wife, Countess Anna Maria of Donín (whom he married in 1632, during the battle of Lützen). During the preparations for the battle at Schorndorf, the Countess stayed with her entourage in the Catholic town of Wiesensteig, approximately 35 km from Schorndorf. When Colonel Butler died in the field infirmary at Schorndorf, a messenger first went to Wiesensteig to deliver the sad news to his wife. A requiem mass for the deceased was held in the local Catholic church attended by General Gallas and other high-ranking officers of the imperial army (perhaps even the supreme commander of the

mass, which took an extra week to organise. The coffin then had to be transported from Wiesensteig to Prague along a route that is approximately 400 km as the crow flies. But travelling along rough stony roads through war territory with a column of horse-drawn wagons (and a cavalry unit providing protection), the route could conceivably have been much longer due to detours. All in all the journey would have taken at least two weeks. On arrival in Prague young Walter, with the help of the Franciscans, would have had to organise a state funeral. That might have added another week before Butler was finally interred.

What is interesting about all this is that no Czech historical sources mention the elegant solution arrived at by Colonel Walter Devereux, but ironically it is recorded in the annals of the city of Schorndorf, which had been devastated by the imperial forces.

Oddly, nowhere in the Czech sources can accurate data be found about Colonel Butler's state funeral in Prague.²⁷ Historians in the 18th and 19th centuries recorded the event inaccurately. For example Jan František Beckovský claims that Butler died in 1636 in Malá Strana and was buried by the Franciscans in the Church of Our Lady of the Snows;²⁸ František Ekert, a historian who served as parish priest in the Church of Our Lady of the Snows from 1892, makes the same erroneous claim.

I tried to follow this up in February 2021 with the Franciscan monastery in Prague. However, in response to my enquiry the archivist Petr Beneš replied that they have no records at all that Colonel Walter Butler was ever buried in their church. It remains the case that Butler's name does

imperial army, the emperor's son Ferdinand, who served at Nördlingen and Schorndorf). Only then did the long journey to Prague begin, accompanied by a military escort and the carriages of Colonel Butler's widow and her entourage.

²⁷ We would expect Colonel Walter Butler's state funeral in Prague to have been an extraordinary occasion for its time, attended by the elite of the Bohemian and Austrian nobility. General Gallas, Acting Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial Army, wished to honour the deceased as a military hero, which was the main reason for transporting the coffin all the way from southern Germany to Prague. Logically it should be mentioned in some Czech historical sources.

²⁸ Beckovský, J. F. (1879). *Poselkyně starých příběhův českých*. Dědictví svatého Prokopa v Praze.

not appear on the list of those buried in the Church of Our Lady of the Snows.²⁹

In his will, Colonel Butler bequeathed 30,000 florins to the construction of the Irish Franciscan Church of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Although construction of the church was not begun until 1652, the priests and monks of the Irish Franciscan monastery and college would have had a chapel and graveyard for their own use – could Butler have been buried there? He had wanted to be buried with the Irish Franciscans in Prague, and as a war hero it is likely that his wishes were carried out to the letter.

Walter Devereux was officially promoted to colonel and commander of the Irish regiment by Emperor Ferdinand II in Vienna later in 1635. The emperor was personally invested in whom he entrusted with command of his regiment. Walter was recommended for promotion by the emperor's son Ferdinand, as well as General Gallas, both of whom witnessed the victorious battles at Nördlingen and Schorndorf, and were thus well placed to evaluate the performance of the military units in combat and the military capabilities of their commanders. Young Walter, although he was still only 19 years old, seems to have impressed them.

It was likely these successful victories of the Imperial Army in the battles of Nördlingen and Schorndorf, together with his sterling service in Cheb, that led Emperor Ferdinand II to grant him his request for permanent residence and the allocation of some land in Bohemia where he could take up residence.

The adventures of the Irish regiment under Colonel Walter Devereux from 1635 to 1639 are described in some detail by its chaplain, Father Thomas Carve (1590-1672) in his book *Itinerarium* published in 1639 in Mainz. At the time of the Battle of Lützen, Thomas Carve had been the chaplain of the regiment under Colonel Butler at his personal request. Father Carve

²⁹Count Kolovrat kept from 1634 a record of those buried in the Church of Our Lady of the Snows. Colonel Walter Butler's burial, which we would expect to have taken place in 1635, is not listed here.

had been a close friend of the Butler family since young Walter's childhood in Ireland, and kept a protective hand over Devereux, especially in times of bitter religious strife. It is he who was later the chief witness to Devereux's will in 1639. When Colonel Devereux took over the command of the regiment, he of course wanted Thomas Carve to remain as chaplain. Given Father Carve's seniority (he was 45 years old at the time), in addition to his role as chaplain and spiritual adviser he may have become, like Butler, a father figure to Devereux, as evidenced by his collegial treatment of him in *Itinerarium*.

I will give a brief overview of the places where Colonel Walter Devereux led his Irish dragoon regiment of some 1,000 men and 1,000 horses³⁰ as its new commander from 1635, as recorded in *Itinerarium*:

1635: Bavaria, Swabia, Augsburg, Ulm, Dillingen, Baden-Württemberg, Breisach

France, Lorraine, Saverne, Angoulême, Montbéliard, Blamont, Belfort

1636: France, Lorraine, Metz, Saverne, Southern Germany, Thuringia, Saxony, Pomerania

1637: Baden-Württemberg, Black Forest, Heilbronn, Memmingen, Hessen, Fulda...

1638: Mecklenburg, Wolgast, Westphalia, Saxony, near Braunschweig, then closer to the borders of Bohemia

1639: in May Bohemia, at the end of summer near Prague, in September somewhere in Prague, where his regiment camped.

³⁰ The dragoon regiment in the Imperial Army, used from 1631 as one of the new combat units until the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648 (when it was abolished and the remnants were distributed to other units), was organised by the number of men and horses similarly to cavalry regiments, i.e. by centuries (100 men and 100 horses). The only difference was that while horsemen fought on horseback, dragoons were mainly transported on horseback, but fought as foot soldiers on the ground. The cavalry and dragoon regiments ideally had 10 centuries (1,000 men and 1,000 horses) but in practice they would have had eight to nine centuries (the number varied according to circumstances). The regiment had to be supplied with weapons, ammunition, various technical and other services, provisions, fodder for horses, and so on; these were transported on the wagon train, which at that time could have comprised some 150 wagons, meaning more men and horses. When we consider that the Imperial Army had the most dragoon regiments in 1635 and 1636 – 19 in number – and mostly full ranks, the Irish dragoon regiment would have had at least nine centuries. So Colonel Walter Devereux would have led around Western Europe a regiment of 900 soldiers and 900 horses, plus at least another 100 additional horses and 100 additional men (regimental and centurion staff, essential military personnel and essential laymen for services. And a train of at least some 150 command wagons and service wagons. All this was the responsibility of Walter Devereux as the new commander of the Irish dragoon regiment.

The day-to-day life of the travelling regiment was home for the soldiers, as it was for Father Carve. He would have spent most of his time with the inner circle of the regiment and, as spiritual advisor, with the commander himself. We can imagine that young Walter would have consulted the chaplain on non-combat matters also, such as plans for after the war and making a civilian life in an unknown and possibly hostile environment.

Since Emperor Ferdinand II in 1635 granted Walter leave to remain in Bohemia, transferring the estates of Krchleby, Dobrovítov and Chlum to him, it was clear that he would have to familiarise himself with life in Bohemia and the Czech language. This had been difficult to do so far during the wartime trips through German and French territories, when the Imperial Army was doing well, and he had his hands full with his regiment. But he would have had questions about how to learn to organise the life of his estate in his own way, when he had no practical experience in either Bohemia or Ireland, which he had left as a young man. His discussions with the chaplain must have been interesting, given the latter's insights into human nature and the human psyche that can be gleaned from his book.

Young Walter would have observed how his cousin Walter Butler dealt with the estates of Nový Bernštejn, Doksy and Deštná, which were some of the confiscated Wallenstein estates. Butler could not attend to his estate personally while serving as a military commander, but after his marriage to Countess Anna Maria of Donín in 1632 he was able to arrange for someone from her family to manage the estate. However, Walter had no-one to whom he could entrust the administration of his own estates while in active duty. Had Walter been married at this stage, Father Carve would certainly have mentioned his wife in his detailed accounts of the period. We have no information in official records of how these estates were managed and they may, due to neglect while their proprietor was otherwise engaged, have fallen into some disrepair.

One of the renowned historians of this period, Professor Ludvík Schmid, had much to say about Colonel Walter Devereux. In an article on Wallenstein's murderer,³¹ he claimed Devereux "was a soldier in body and soul, a paid mercenary [...] like other mercenaries he suffered from a chronic lack of money [...] the Irish proved themselves as mercenary soldiers and were therefore gratefully accepted in all European armies [...] they were attracted by a life of adventure [...] as soon as they came into fortune, they were just as easily dispossessed of it in taverns, throwing away silver coins on drinking, women and gambling. [...] The main perpetrator of the struggle at Cheb castle was **Walter Deveroux [sic], apparently a hardened and brutal type** [...] who, apart from his successes in some battles, became infamous for a common murder [...] who was constantly travelling the world [meaning the five years when Colonel Walter Devereux was commanding his Irish dragoon regiment to fight in the Imperial Army's battles] and **only came to Bohemia for money** [meaning his estates of Krchleby, Dobrovítov and Chlum]."

Schmid's credibility as a historian is brought into question however by his claim that the first account we have of the officer Walter Devereux is from 1613.³² Schmid seems to have misread a "7" as a "1" in the manuscript he cites as his source, which is in fact dated 20 June 1673.³³ Unfortunately Schmid's error has been reproduced widely by historians recounting the life of Colonel Walter Devereux.³⁴

By 1637 however the political and military situation had begun to slowly change for the Holy Roman Empire. Emperor Ferdinand II died and was succeeded by his son who became Emperor Ferdinand III. Colonel Count Walter Leslie immediately joined him as chief military adviser and commander of his personal guard and was promoted to field marshal.

³¹ Schmid, L. (1980). "Vrah frýdlantského vévody" in *Zpravodaj společnosti genealogické a heraldické*, 1980, no. 1.

³² Schmid (1980) considers the first mention of Walter Devereux to be an attestation dated 20 June 1613, in which Devereux certifies that he received 50 Rhenish guilders from Edmond O'Kennedy by order of Robert Gordon.

³³ This manuscript is stored in the National Archives in Prague along with 220 other manuscripts from the college of the Irish Franciscans.

³⁴ See: Košťálová, R. & Košťál, V. (2018). *Britská šlechta v českých zemích*. Barrister & Principal.

Devereux was personally acquainted with the new emperor and his chief military adviser from many battles for the Imperial Army; Leslie had served alongside him in Butler's regiment and was a co-protagonist of Wallenstein's assassination. Yet many historians downplay Devereux's relations with the elite, with Ludvík Schmid even claiming that "court officials and dignitaries shunned him as a hitman."

From the outset of my research on Walter Devereux I could detect a certain bias against him in accounts by Czech historians, for whom Albrecht von Wallenstein can do no wrong, and his killer is depicted as an evil mercenary. The Thirty Years War was a contentious period and can still inflame passions and personal sympathies (Catholic imperial forces vs. Protestant Swedish and Danish forces, or indeed Wallenstein vs. Devereux).

I am a painter and sought out with great interest pictures of the assassination of Duke Wallenstein. There are a lot of them, and all of them depict Walter Devereux as an at least 50-year-old killer, a stereotypical mercenary who will do anything for a few pieces of silver. "Court officials and dignitaries" would have seen these pictures and likely shared in the distaste for the 'killer'. If they had met him in real life, they probably would not have recognised him. The only people who knew him were his army colleagues, but they didn't write about him – with the exception of Father Thomas Carve, who served in his Irish dragoon regiment for more than five years.

After the death of the hardline Catholic Emperor Ferdinand II in 1637, the war nonetheless continued unabated in Europe. Although Ferdinand III was more inclined to compromise in cases of heated religious disputes, the Peace of Prague agreements remained unsettled. Sweden had recovered from its total defeat in the Battle of Nördlingen in 1634, and the new Swedish army under the command of General Johan Banér took to the field. In 1638, he took control of Pomerania, and pushed the Imperial Army in Saxony further and further south. In the same year France, which

had previously entered the Thirty Years War on the side of the Protestants, began to recover its lost fortresses on the Rhine (Breisach) on the borders with Baden-Württemberg. The imperial troops seemed to be on the wane; until then they had successfully moved through the Protestant German principalities as far as the French border, but by winter 1637-38 they were struggling to supply their divisions. All regions of the enemy countries had been plundered, ransacked, and there was nowhere to take food for the soldiers and fodder for the horses. The operational capability and morale of the Imperial Army were petering away. **We can imagine that at this point Father Carve and Walter Devereux begin to seriously consider quitting the army.**

During this period the Swedish commander Johan Banér began invading Bohemia. In May 1639 he made it to Prague,³⁵ but his planned siege and military takeover was repelled by General Gallas,³⁶ who had recently arrived in the city and managed to muster enough men to repel the attack.³⁷ Banér moved his forces to Brandýs nad Labem castle, where he made his headquarters and began to pack up all the looted property, furniture, valuables, anything of value.³⁸ From there he sent military expeditions to systematically pillage the towns and villages of western and eastern Bohemia.³⁹

When I read about Banér and the Swedes in Bohemia in 1639,⁴⁰ it struck me that a feeling of utter despair must have reigned among the Imperial

³⁵ From Pirna via Děčín, Ústí nad Labem, Litoměřice and Mělník.

³⁶ From May 1639, General Gallas had his headquarters in Prague, in his palace in the Old Town, on what is now Husova Street. From there he commanded only the garrison of Prague and a number of regiments that he brought with him from Hradec Králové.

³⁷ To accommodate his regiments in Prague, General Gallas had an encampment built on Bílá Hora (White Mountain), where he had 50 cannons. This dissuaded Banér from attacking the city in May 1639, but he subsequently made two more unsuccessful attempts: from the left side of the River Vltava (from Letná) and from the right (first from Pankrác against Vyšehrad and then from what is now Vinohrady against the New Town walls, which extended from Karlov to the river at Karlín).

³⁸ There were said to be many hundreds of wagons of loot. The wagons filled with valuables went to his Pomerania castle, which Banér owned until his death in 1641 in Halberstadt.

³⁹ In June and July 1639 the Swedish forces under Banér ransacked Litoměřice, the towns of Louny, Beroun, Mělník and their surrounds, Mladá Boleslav, Jičín, Nymburk, Kolín and surrounds, Čáslav, Pardubice, Hradec Králové, Nové Město nad Metují and Náchod. Between August and November 1639 they moved onto the towns of Pilsen, Rokycany, Klatovy, Žatec, Most and their surrounds, as well as Čáslav, Německý Brod and Jihlava.

Army commanders as they watched the Swedish general and his troops do what they liked in Bohemia for more than half a year with no retaliation. I won't go into details of how the Swedish army held to ransom estates, churches, towns and villages throughout Bohemia, nor its predilection for confiscating horses.⁴¹ I will only add that refusal to hand over the loot was immediately punished, by destruction of property or life. Banér's troops seemed to particularly enjoy looting and wrecking Catholic churches and properties where there was always a lot of gold, as seen with the destruction of Zbraslav castle. All of this must have been reported to the Holy Roman Empire's envoys in Bohemia and to General Gallas, but it took the Imperial Army in Bohemia more than six months to muster the forces for an effective counter-attack. Emperor Ferdinand III blamed Gallas for this, and decided to send him into early retirement in November 1639. In September the emperor appointed his brother Leopold Wilhelm as the new commander-in-chief. This is probably why Banér decided to attack Prague again that October. He drove out the imperial regiments from their encampment on Bílá Hora, and forced them to retreat behind the city fortification to Hradčany. In the face of artillery fire from Prague Castle he eventually decided to end his siege, allegedly because the water and fodder for his horses ran out. In his withdrawal he made sure to continue looting and carrying away whatever valuables he could. Given General Gallas' long military service, and the renewed Swedish campaign, we can imagine that he was not too distressed about having to retire. It would seem that by the end of 1639 what was left of the Imperial Army in Bohemia had retreated inside the walls of the castle, while Banér from his base in Brandýs nad Labem went on a looting rampage with little opposition.

Colonel Walter Devereux returned with his regiment to Bohemia in May 1639, and then on to Prague in September. He would have been well

⁴⁰ I read many books on the Thirty Years War as part of my research; I am not a historian and will not list them all here. I will mention a nice bachelors thesis supervised by Prof. Vít Vlnas: Jan Saturka, J. (2010). *The Swedes in Bohemia during the Thirty Years War: The March of Baner to Bohemia in 1639*. Univerzita Karlova.

⁴¹ Saturka's thesis describes this in detail.

aware of the inability of commander-in-chief Gallas, and his successor, to fend off the Swedish attacks; the town of Čáslav, near Devereux's estates of Krchleby, Dobrovítov and Chlum, was burnt to the ground in July 1639. **We can imagine that Walter would have had very deep conversations about his future with his spiritual mentor, Father Carve, as to how he might retire from the military and devote himself fully to his estates.**

The conversation might have gone something like this:

"I think you can see for yourself where things are going without our being able to influence it. This war is beginning to consume us all, and as yet there is no foreseeable end to it. You have done more than your fair share and your soldiers will respect your decision. Besides your second in command, your old Irish friend and reliable colleague MacDaniel, is popular with them and deserves his own chance at glory.⁴² Given his service the Emperor will surely approve of him commanding the regiment. You know that his father too was grateful for what you both did for him.

"But there is the rather difficult matter of your reputation among the Bohemian nobility. While they have sworn loyalty to the Emperor, Wallenstein is still in their hearts, and they will never forget who took his life. You remember what happened when the Emperor tried, through General Gallas, to pay military tribute to the deceased Colonel Butler in Prague... no-one in Bohemia wanted to do it, the Prague Franciscan convent refused for allegedly religious reasons, and today no-one knows where the leaden coffin is with Butler's remains.

"I think that it would be better for you to appear to vanish from the scene and create a new identity. Suppose you were to 'die' and we could arrange that your estates be bequeathed to yourself, as your son! You can suddenly appear on the scene as your 24-year-old son, who is an ordinary civilian. Your image only exists in your enemies' heads from the many gruesome pictures of you impaling Wallenstein, from all those cartoonists – who

⁴² Devereux's deputy was Lieutenant Colonel Dionysus MacDonald, who had served in the regiment under Colonel Walter Butler at the time of the assassination of Wallenstein.

have never seen you... who else could he be for them but a rough murderer?

"I am sure that even the Emperor and Leslie, who likes you, will understand... The Emperor will have an easier time with the Bohemian nobility if you are dead. Alive, you are a constant reminder of the punishments inflicted on the Czechs by the Habsburg Empire and foreigners. And, as you know the reigning Emperor is rather inclined to compromises, unlike his father, and would welcome more effective cooperation.

"I have an idea: if we write your will now, you can bequeath everything to your 'son', and I will arrange for trustworthy witnesses to attest to it. Then you can conveniently vanish into your new identity."

And so it was.

The 'son' of Colonel Walter Devereux came to be, a 24-year-old civilian who had inherited his father's estate in Čáslav country and took over it from 1640. It helped that the plague had broken out in Prague in the autumn of 1639, giving another reason why Carve might have suggested it was a good time to 'die'. None of the witnesses to the will had to know Colonel Devereux's son, or even whether he had one; they were merely witnesses to the Colonel's signature and Father Carve would have ensured that everything proceeded smoothly. Shortly thereafter Colonel Devereux conveniently died, leaving his estate to his son, Walter Devereux. There is, of course, no death certificate attesting to this and no report of funeral arrangements made for the gallant war hero. The only 'verifiable' date of death for Colonel Walter Devereux is given in Carve's *Itinerarium* (published in 1639) which states that Colonel Devereux died sometime in November. All other reports about his supposed death are based on the

misinterpreted date of the writing of the will on December 28, 1639,⁴³ and from this deduce the approximate date of death.⁴⁴

Historians make no reference to any death certificate in existence for Colonel Walter Devereux. My own investigations suggest that he was still alive into the 1670s, more than thirty years after his supposed demise.

In the chaos of wartime, we can imagine that the most convincing news of the death of Colonel Walter Devereux would certainly have come from his 'son', who could refer to the sudden death of his 'father' (probably as a result of an infection that he transported from Prague) on a farm on his estates, where he was also buried. As long as Banér's ransacking continued, the Catholic parishes in those areas would not have been functioning.

This 'son' had full legal proof of both his existence and his inheritance, thanks to the will so cleverly arranged by Father Carve.

The results of my search now substantiated our family legend that the Ryzec family is descended from an Irish soldier who settled in Bohemia. The Irish soldier I was looking for was Baron Colonel Walter Devereux himself, and not his son, who is a fiction of his, created with the help of Father Carve, and whose identity he assumed after his supposed death.

⁴³ Schmid, L. (1980). "Vrah frýdlantského vévody" in *Zpravodaj společnosti genealogické a heraldické*, 1980, no. 1.

⁴⁴ Almost all historians read the date of Colonel Walter Devereux's will incorrectly: 28 Xbris 1639 is 28 October 1639, not December 28, 1639. For example: Pařez, J. & Kuchařová, H. (2001). *Hyberni v Praze*. Oswald.

In the Czech National Archives, located in Dejvice, Prague, I studied all 220 documents from the former college of the Irish Franciscans. Here, the will is stored in two original copies archived under numbers 31 and 32 (the original will was also stored there previously, and with it an unknown number of additional copies). The will is signed by eight witnesses, the most important of which for our purposes is Father Thomas Carve, whose signature proves that the will must have been written in October. From the end of October Thomas Carve was in the German city of Mainz for two months, where he was arranging to have his book *Itinerarium* printed, the first volume of which was published in December 1639. This is further evidence that the will could not have been dated December 28, 1639.

The English numbering of the months at that time began with March as the first month, and October as the tenth month. English and Irish soldiers, fighting in armies on the continent, went by this system at the time. For the sake of accuracy, they did not use the names of the months of the local languages of different countries in Europe, but their numbers. And so the reading of the date 28 Xbris for a mostly English-speaking soldier is undoubtedly correct as 28 October. This numbering remained the established tradition even after the continental numbering, starting with January as the first month, began to apply.

Life after death

We can imagine that this 'son' of the Colonel had a difficult time when he took over the estates of Krchleby, Dobrovítov and Chlum. He was a civilian, but clearly a foreigner who at that time did not speak Czech, only Irish, English and German. And of course his name would have identified him as the son of Wallenstein's killer. Nothing in his young life so far would have prepared him to manage the estates on which relied for his income. While he undoubtedly remained in occasional contact with the monks and his comrades in Prague he would have been very much on his own, and inevitably dependent on Czech agents to administer the estates and secure his income.

Modern-day historians tend not to delve into the circumstances surrounding the transfer of Colonel Devereux's estate to his son. Czech history books portray the colonel as a drunk and a gambler who bequeathed his debt-ridden estate to his son. Unable to pay the debts, the son was forced to sell the estate at an auction in 1650. This account, particularly as relayed by Ludvík Schmid,⁴⁵ seems to be accepted without question.

However, the reality of Walter Devereux's son entering the lands of his estate was different.

Colonel Devereux's estates were located in Čáslav country, an area devastated by Banér's Swedish troops in July and again in October 1639. The town of Čáslav was burned to the ground twice, and the surrounding countryside would have taken a long time to recover. By the time his 'son'

⁴⁵ Schmid, L. (1980). "Vrah frýdlantského vévody" in *Zpravodaj společnosti genealogické a heraldické*, 1980, no. 1.

took over the management of his estates, he would have found them in a rather sorry state.⁴⁶

By the time of his 'death' in 1639, Colonel Devereux had few personal acquaintances. Many colleagues from his regiment had died (Walter Butler and Herman Edmund de Bourke). Dionysius MacDonald, who had taken over the regiment from him, would have been fully occupied with his military duties. Of his comrades in the Wallenstein assassination, Colonel John Gordon had moved to the Netherlands, and Field Marshal Walter Leslie moved to Vienna in 1637, leaving only Colonel Robert Geraldin.⁴⁷ A distant cousin on his mother's side, Geraldin would have known well that Walter Devereux had no son, but seems to have allowed the charade to continue.

Given that they had few other comrades, and were both foreigners in a land where they did not speak the language, we can imagine that Walter Devereux and Robert Geraldin kept in contact. Walter the 'son' would have gotten to know Robert's young daughter, Marie Klára Josefa, through his visits to Lobeč from 1640 onwards. When Robert Geraldin died in the

⁴⁶ T. J. Bílek estimates the value of the properties granted to Walter Devereux by Emperor Ferdinand II for his part in Wallenstein's assassination (Bílek, T. J. (1883). *Dějiny konfiskací v Čechách po r. 1618*. Muzeum království českého). Realistically, however, we can imagine that Colonel Devereux would have neglected his estates in the years that followed, as he was busy touring Europe on military campaigns with his regiment, and thus the value of the estates would have depreciated. How could he effectively manage these properties during an absence of five years? The value of the estate from 1639 is unknown.

⁴⁷ Colonel Robert Geraldin (Fitzgerald) was a distant relative of Walter Devereux as well as Walter Butler. Robert Geraldin was promised by Walter Butler a reward of 25,847 guilders with later payment, for taking part in the assassination of Wallenstein (in addition to the immediately paid reward of 2,000 tolar). But when Butler died later that year that agreement died with him. In 1635, Geraldin asked Butler's widow to pay him the money promised by her husband. But she flatly refused. Geraldin then petitioned Emperor Ferdinand II to pass judgment on their dispute. The emperor ruled that in lieu of payment, Geraldin would receive the lands of Mšeno, Lobeč and Romanov (part of the Doksy estate that had been granted to Butler by the emperor). But the transfer was delayed because of the war, as Geraldin was still serving in the army. After Ferdinand II's death it fell to Ferdinand III to confirm his father's original decree, and also to grant Geraldin residence in Bohemia. Geraldin had meanwhile decided to marry, which further assured the emperor that he intended to remain as a loyal subject and strengthened his case. The emperor in 1638 granted Robert Geraldin the estates of Mšeno, Lobeč and Romanov, as well as permanent residence in Bohemia. About this time, Geraldin took up residence in Lobeč, keeping the title Geraldin of Kildare, his family's seat in Ireland.

Little is known of his wife with whom he had a daughter, christened Marie Klára Josefa, so it is likely that she was not a noblewoman as such. The year of the daughter's birth is also unknown, but it can be estimated that it could have been in 1638, making her 16 years old in 1654 (the date of her marriage, which is known).

year 1642, the little girl seems to have been left an orphan. Since she had no other Irish relatives willing to take responsibility for her,⁴⁸ Walter continued to visit the child in Lobeč.

In the decade after Colonel Devereux's 'death', it is difficult to estimate how his estates in Krchleby, Dobrovítov and Chlum were managed since there are conflicting reports of who was the proprietor. According to the Colonel's will, the estates were owned by his 'son' Walter. Martin Deveroux [sic] of Chlum is listed as the proprietor in the municipal records in Zbýšov, as well as by T. J. Bílek.⁴⁹

It is unclear why Walter sold the estates in 1650 (setting aside Schmid's accusation of bankruptcy). However, the contract of sale is preserved in three copies in the National Archives in Prague, under no. 51, 52 and 53 in the archive of the Irish college. The contract is dated 20 VII 1650. It is signed by Walter Devereux, as the seller, and by the following witnesses:

František Vilém of Talmberk – (governor of the Kouřim region, two relatives were governors of the Vltava region)

Ferdinand Rabenhaupt of Suchá – (governor of the Čáslav region and purchaser of the property)

Odolen Věžník of Věžník – (official of the provincial boards, one relative was a former governor of the Čáslav region)

Alexandr Vratislav of Mitrovice – (governor of Nové Město and the Vltava Region)

Albert Levín of Ottenfeld – (witness)

Adam Hraběšínský of Hraběšín – (witness)

Kryštof Ludvík Hummnis – (notary public)

Upon studying the signatures of the witnesses, it is clear that three of them had a close relationship with the Čáslav Region: Rabenhaupt was the governor, Talmberk was a former governor, and a relative of Věžník was

⁴⁸ Richard Butler was also a relative, but had other concerns than tending to the orphan: he was locked in a dispute with Colonel Walter Butler's widow's family concerning the division of the estate.

⁴⁹ Bílek, T. J. (1883). *Dějiny konfiskací v Čechách po r. 1618*. Muzeum království českého.

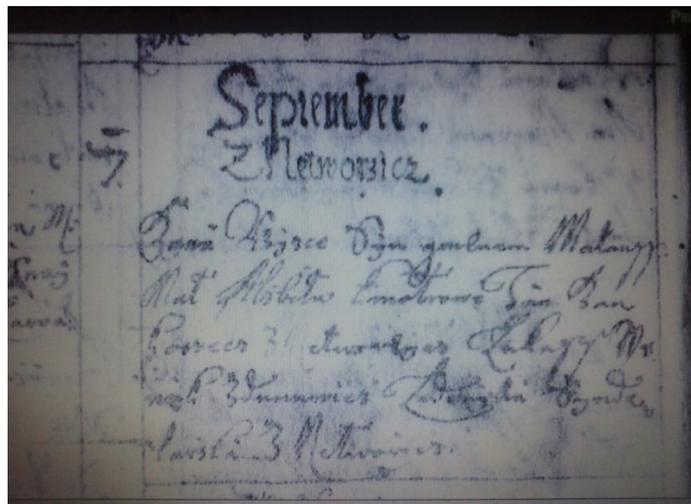
another former governor. We can imagine that Walter Devereux knew them personally. It may even have been he who introduced Odolen Věžník to Robert Geraldin's daughter. It is a fact that Odolen Věžník married Baroness Maria Klára Josefa Geraldin of Kildare in 1654. The couple lived together at first in Lobeč castle, but may have moved subsequently to Věžník palace (at 12 Hybernská Street in Prague, across the road from the Irish college), which the Věžník family started building around the time of the couple's marriage.

As Walter would now need a new place of residence, we can also imagine that he sought advice from two witnesses to the sale of his estates: Alexander Vratislav and František Vilém, both influential figures in the Vltava region. Perhaps they referred him to Václav Jan, Count of Vacínov, a large landowner in that region, which led him to Netvořice in the barony of Lešany, where there were many abandoned lands from which he could choose.

New roots

A new landowner in the Vltava region mysteriously appears in the 1653 census: Matěj Ryzec,⁵⁰ aged 38,⁵¹ who is recorded as having taken over an abandoned estate. **Walter Devereux was putting down new roots in Bohemia with a new Czech name: Ryzec** in Czech denotes the red pine mushroom; our family legend has it that Walter was red-haired.⁵²

We can imagine that he quietly took refuge in his new home. He may have travelled to Prague to visit his Irish friends who were still alive,⁵³ or to Lobeč (or Prague) to visit Josefa Geraldin, or even to Vienna to see Walter Leslie (who lived until 1667). Over time he may have begun to feel lonely in a foreign land. In any case, when he was 55 years old, he fathered a son: Matěj Ryzec, who was in Netvořice on 7 September 1670.



⁵⁰ In the 1653 census for the Vltava region, the name is spelt “Ryzek”; we can imagine that he did not yet master pronunciation of the Czech “c”, and the censors transcribed the name as he pronounced it.

⁵¹ This would have been Walter Devereux’s age at the time.

⁵² “Matěj” may have been in tribute to his late commander General Mattias Gallas.

⁵³ For example, William Gall (who died in 1655), Father Hugo O’Molloy (who died in 1657) and others. We can imagine he would have attended the laying of the foundation stone for the new Church of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary at the Irish College in Prague in 1653, which was attended by Emperor Ferdinand III.

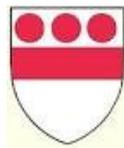
This is the only information that can be verified. All records from the town of Netvořice were destroyed in a fire in 1825. The record of Matěj Ryzec's birth was preserved in a chronicle kept from 1669 by the Catholic priest Blažej Nynek Holický, whose church survived the blaze.

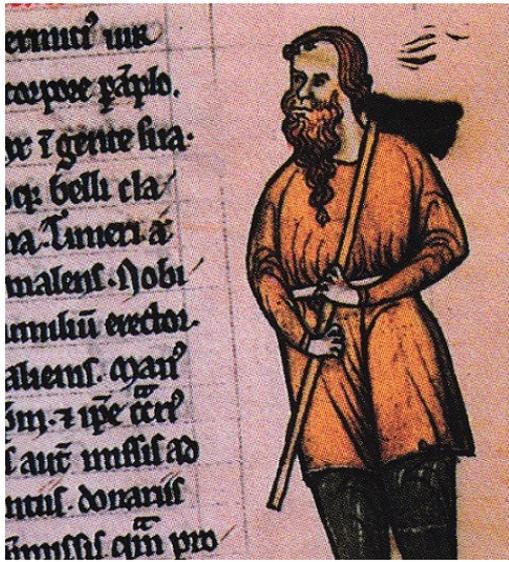
When discussing all this information, which I had slowly assembled over many years, with my Irish friend Sean O'Sullivan he suggested that it would greatly support my story if I were to take a DNA test. He arranged for this to be done with a specialist company in the field. When I got the results I had them checked against the extensive Y-DNA archive of the entire Devereux diaspora, which is managed by one of the family members in Ireland, Chris Devereaux. The result was quite unequivocal: **a 100% match with the Y-DNA of the Devereux family 24 generations back.**

But the Devereux family was Norman-Irish, originating from Viking stock in Normandy. From whence came the Celtic genes identified by Professor Majer in my newborn daughters? When I further researched Walter's maternal line, I discovered that his mother's great-great-grandmother (born 1587) was Anastas Ní Mhurchadha (born 1465), who was a descendant of the last King of Leinster, Diarmait Mac Mhurchadha... a true Irish Celt!

Do you see any resemblance?

Josef Ryzec, 23 November 2023





Diarmait Mac Mhurchadha (c. 1170)



Josef Ryzec on the Hill of Tara, Ireland (1999)

About Josef Ryzec

*Josef's own life story is just as interesting as his illustrious ancestor. While he has spent years in the artistic sphere in general, film production, drama, writing, it is as a painter he is best known. He admired Picasso and was so deeply touched by Picasso's protest at the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1939 with his paintings *Cat Catches a Bird* and *Cat Eats a Bird* that he reciprocated with a tribute to his Spanish idol of six paintings which he painted in February 2003 directly in the Small Hall of the National Gallery's Trade Fair Palace in Prague in enlarged format modification (330 x 400 cm and 330 x 400cm), which remained on exhibition for 10 years together with a further five paintings in the Czech Grottesque series, three of which were subsequently purchased by the Gallery for its collections. He remains a prolific artist and has many other paintings to his credit. In homage to his deep love of Ireland he created the Lughnasadh festival of arts (Lugh being the Celtic god of artistic disciplines after whom the month of August is called in Irish) in 1996 to celebrate the Celtic links between Czechia and Ireland. Together with a committee of fellow enthusiasts he has staged exhibitions in Dublin, Vienna and many Czech towns and cities involving over 300 artists, professional and amateur in the intervening years. Among his other many achievements he won an international competition to design a series of six postage stamps for the United Nations for the 8th World Congress of Criminologists (crime prevention) in 1990. He is a vigorous 83 years of age and lives with his wife, Ivana, just outside Prague.*