

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT: 'Was Cromwell's reputation deserved?'

[RECEPTIONIST]

Hello, you're through to the office of History Bombs Investigates? Oh my god, we've been hearing so much about this guy!

Yes... yes... okay, I'll pass that right on. No, thank you sir.

Hey boss, that's another one. Everyone's talking about this guy, Oliver Cromwell.

[EDITOR]

Thank you René. Okay people, look lively. The phones are lighting up. I got these people in England, they're telling me this guy is the best thing since sliced bread, they've got a statue of him outside the Houses of Parliament in London. He's got more streets named after him than anyone except Queen Victoria, alright!

And over in Ireland you can't say his name without it being some kind of a curse. They call him a snake, they call him a murderer, they say he massacred Irish women and children. Archie, what gives?

[ARCHIVIST]

Well, he wasn't always that popular in England, boss. After he died his body was dug up and his head put on a spike, and it wasn't until the 19th century that the Victorians decided to turn him into a national hero.

[EDITOR]

Okay, okay, I get it, people's reputations change over the years, as history proceeds. But I've got an Irish school book here that says that he killed women and children by locking them in a church and burning it to the ground at Drogheda in 1649!

[ARCHIVIST]

We've got to be careful here. Some pretty sensational stories have been passed down over the years, like the one about Cromwell's soldiers beating to death Sir Arthur Ashton with his own wooden leg. They've almost become part of Irish Catholic folklore. But we need to focus on the facts and the hard evidence.

[EDITOR]

Okay, so what actually happened? What does the evidence tell us?

[ARCHIVIST]

At Wexford and Drogheda it is true there were civilian deaths - Irish priests record that 4,000 townspeople, mostly Catholics, were killed. They called it 'unparalleled savagery beyond any slaughterhouse'.

[EDITOR]

Woah, hang on! This was Irish priests that wrote this? They were Catholics. They're exaggerating everything to drum up support for the Irish.

[ARCHIVIST]

Not always, but it is worth looking at other accounts, like perhaps Cromwell's army. Even Officer Hugh Peters puts the number of civilian deaths between 700 and 800, and he was one of Cromwell's own men.

[EDITOR]

That's a little more reliable. But it's still only one point of view, I need more. Get me more!

[ARCHIVIST]

There was a Protestant cleric, Dean Bernard who said that Cromwell's soldiers went from town to town shooting at the Catholic residents, whether they were armed or not.

[EDITOR]

A Protestant huh? Just like Cromwell. Well, he had no obvious reason to lie... I think we need an exact number of how many people were killed, in the hot blood of battle and the cold blood afterwards. Winifred, how do those numbers stack up?

[WHIZZ]

The death rate for most battles in England was between five and ten percent, but at Drogheda and the Battle of Wexford it was more like 80 per cent. That's huge!

[EDITOR]

That sounds fishy to me. We need to get some exact numbers on the civilian casualties at these battles. We need some hard, physical evidence. Get me Mindiana Bones!

[ARCHAEOLOGIST]

Hi boss. I've just been digging out at Wexford and Drogheda and all I found was this: It's just soil. If that many people did die in these battles, you would expect mass graves. But there's no evidence at all. I did get some great soil though!

[EDITOR]

Okay okay, great work.

[RECEPTIONIST]

Hello, History Bombs? Oh, is that right? How interesting. Of course, I'll pass that on. Thank you, sir.

Boss, an English guy just called. Apparently the siege at Drogheda actually had mainly English people on both sides - some were loyal to Cromwell and some were loyal to the future king, Charles II. The Irish weren't the only ones fighting by any means!

[EDITOR]

What a scoop! But it's still just the military side of things. What about the ordinary Irish people living there at the time of the war? Surely a massacre of that scale would have torn the town apart.

[WHIZZ]

Boss, I've been doing the numbers and something just doesn't add up. According to recent research by some local historians, the same people are on the Merchant Register the year after the siege as the year before. If there was a massacre, how come so many men survived?

[EDITOR]

So the numbers were exaggerated. But Archie, what do we think of Cromwell's own behaviour? Is he a war criminal? Or do we believe Cromwell when he said that the sack of Drogheda would 'prevent the effusion of blood for the future'?

[ARCHIVIST]

Actually, an argument could be made that he was pretty standard for military commanders of the time. We must be careful not to judge people in the 17th century by the standards of today. It was pretty standard practice to show no mercy to a town that refused to surrender.

Besides, these are town records from Drogheda and they show that in the days after the battle, people went about their daily business pretty much as they always had. Things seemed pretty normal. That doesn't sound like a complete wipe-out to me.

[WHIZZ]

Drogheda and Wexford were the only two places of unusual accounts of violence. In fact at the Siege of Clonmel, where he lost 2,000 of his own men, Cromwell still spared the townspeople.

[EDITOR]

Hmm, what a complicated guy. He's an aggressive invader of another country, he seems to show tremendous mercy some times, but not others. Everybody who writes anything about him seems to have some sort of agenda - a strong opinion, some prejudice even. Even 400 years later, now, the evidence doesn't seem to be comprehensive. I've got to get my best investigators on this case.

So, what do you think?

[ARCHAEOLOGIST]

Hey guys! I also picked up Cromwell's head, do you want to see it?

[EVERYONE]

NO!