The 16th century was a very important time in the history of Ireland. It strongly influenced the languages which we speak today. In 1601 a major battle was fought at Kinsale near Cork. The Battle of Kinsale was part of a bigger war between England and Spain. Spanish soldiers joined up with two Gaelic lords, or earls from Ulster. Their names were Aodh Ó Néill (Hugh O’ Neill) from Tyrone and Aodh Ó Dónaill (Hugh O’ Donnell) of Donegal. Their aim was to fight against an English army.

The two earls and the Spanish were beaten by the English in battle and finally surrendered in 1603. The two earls left Ireland for Spain in 1607 – a time known as the ‘Flight of the Earls’. They wanted to get help from Spain to force the English to leave Ireland. The English saw the chieftains or the heads of the Ulster families as a very serious threat. This is because the main leaders at the Battle of Kinsale came from Ulster.
After the Flight of the Earls, the government in England decided to take land from the Ulster chieftains and give it to ‘colonists’ or ‘planters’ who came from Scotland and England. This is known as the **Plantation of Ulster**. Colonists are people who come to settle in a region which is ruled by a different country. In this case, England was ruling over Ireland.

King James I, the King of England at the time of the Plantation, wanted Protestants to settle in Ulster because Ireland was a Catholic country at the time. As a result, most of the settlers who arrived from Scotland were Presbyterian and most of the English settlers were from the Church of England.

King James I also wanted the settlers to speak English so he could be more powerful in Ireland.

This was more difficult, as many settlers spoke Scottish Gaelic and Scots along with English. This meant that the Scottish Presbyterian planters brought three languages to Ulster with them to add to the Irish already spoken there. So there were actually four languages spoken in Ulster at the time of the Plantation.

Many Scottish Gaelic speakers arrived in Ulster in the 17th century. This meant that Ulster had the most Gaelic speakers (that is, people who spoke Scottish Gaelic or Irish). This continued right up until the 18th century. Of course, at this time many people thought of Gaelic as one language, whether it came from Ireland or Scotland, as Irish and Scottish Gaelic were very similar.

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1622 map of the Plantation of Ulster

**SUMMARY**

- At the Battle of Kinsale in 1601, two earls from Ulster (O’Neill and O’Donnell) helped the Spanish fight the English.
- The English won the battle and eventually the two Ulster earls left Ireland in the Flight of the Earls in 1607.
- King James I wanted to make Ulster an English-speaking, Protestant part of Ireland, so land was taken from the natives and given to Scottish and English planters who came to settle in Ulster. This was called the Plantation of Ulster.
- Planters arriving from Scotland would have brought the languages of Scottish Gaelic, Scots, and English to Ulster with them.
- Most people with Irish or Scottish roots have ancestors who spoke Irish or Scottish Gaelic.