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BATTLES OF 1798 SERIES



by Art Kavanagh

- The Battle of the Three Rocks
- The Capture of Wexford
- The Battle of New Ross
- The Attack on Borris House
- The Battle of Goff's Bridge
- The Battle of Tuberneering
- The Battle of Arklow

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The
Mary Clare Karnick
Irish history & Culture Collection

Saint Mary's University of Minnesota

The Battles of 1798

A series

Art Kavanagh

Irish Family Names

1997

Published by Irish Family Names
Bunclody, Co. Wexford, Ireland. 1997

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I.S.B.N. 0 9524785 8 7

Cover Picture courtesy Comoradh '98 Wexford Committee

Set in Times New Roman 14pt.

Printed by C& R Print, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford.

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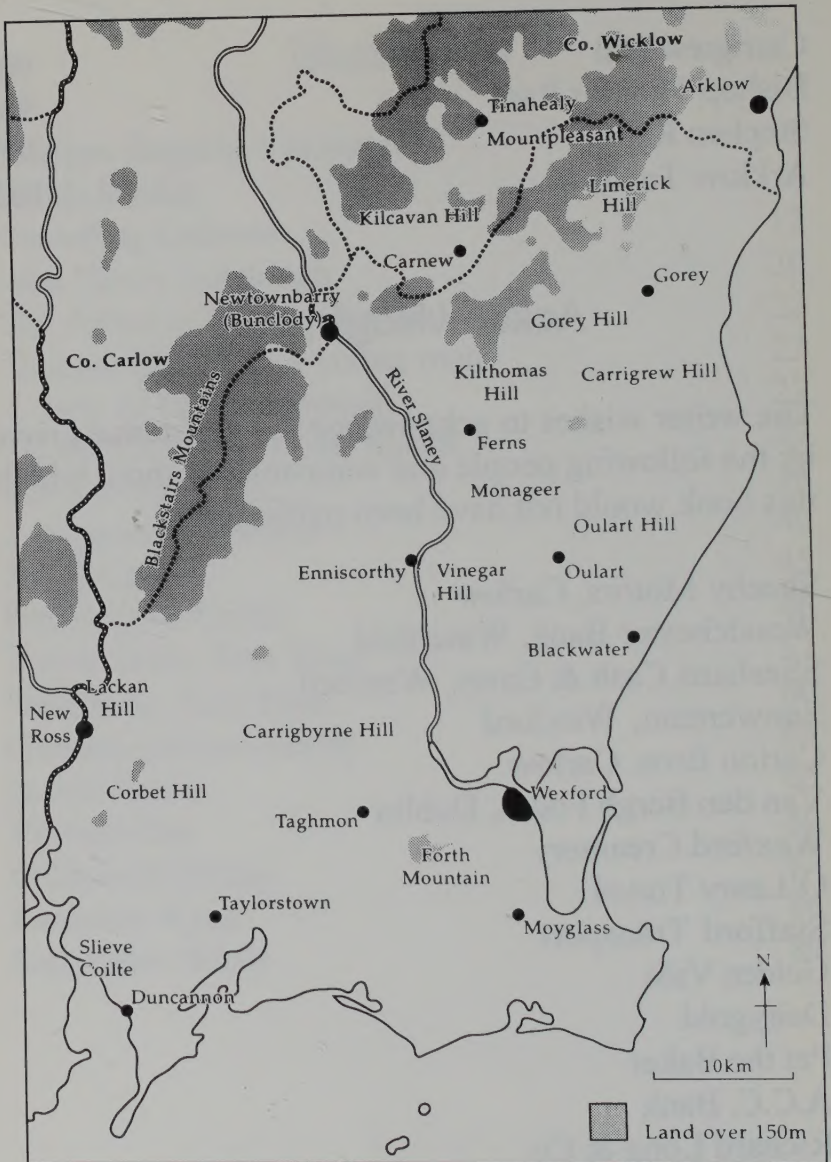
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Acknowledgements

The writer wishes to acknowledge the assistance given by the following people and companies without which this book would not have been published.

Sheehy Motors, Carlow
Woodchester Bank, Waterford
Sheehans Cash & Carry, Wexford
Snowcream, Wexford
Carton Bros. Carlow
Van den Bergh Foods, Dublin
Wexford Creamery
O'Leary Travel
Stafford Transport
Golden Vale
Dairygold
Pat the Baker
A.C.C. Bank
Richard Long & Co.



Foreword

This booklet is just one of a series describing the various battles that took place in Wexford in 1798. The purpose of these booklets is to educate the public in general about the events that happened almost two hundred years ago.

In two years time in 1998 Wexford will see the biggest and most ambitious ever commemoration and plans have been put in place for a number of years to make 1798 the best known date in the Historical Calendar.

It is fitting therefore that in the short time remaining that public awareness should be raised so that the full participation of all in the commemorations will be assured.

The Rebellion of 1798 - An Overview

The Rebellion of 1798 was the culmination of a series of differing aspirations and festering resentments that had all come together much like the estuary of a river which contains the waters of many streams and rivulets within it.

Many of the aspirations and resentments were historical in origin and some were of more recent origin having been born of the ideas emanating from France in the wake of the French Revolution of 1789.

The majority of the population of the country as a whole was Catholic and it was this large group of people of very diverse backgrounds - farmers, labourers, businessmen, clergy, intellectuals and opportunists who felt the resentments - historical, imaginary and real. The historical resentments sprang from the very real woes suffered by the Catholics in the aftermath of the Cromwellian Period and the resulting Penal laws and land Confiscations. The remnants of the 'old order', whether of true Gaelic or Norman origin, could still point to the lands their ancestors owned, which were now in the possession of the descendants of the Cromwellian conquerors. Small numbers of dreamers suffered imaginary

The Rebellion of 1798 - An Overview

resentments - pointed generally in the direction of anything English - and they looked back beyond the Cromwellian period to the time when Ireland was ruled by the Irish Kings. They blamed England for all their ills. These people were ripe to accept the ideals and dreams of the United Irishmen who promised Freedom for all, Equality for all and who proclaimed the Brotherhood of all men.

The business community, the tenant farmers, the clergy and the intellectuals knew the real causes of their resentment . The harsh trade laws which discriminated against the Irish, coupled with the very real Penal laws still in existence, combined to keep the Irish Catholics in their places as second class citizens. Another major cause of grievance was the Tithe System which compelled Catholics to pay substantial sums of money to the Protestant or Established Church.

It was the opposition to the Tithe System which proved to be the catalyst polarising the differing and divergent 'loyalists' on the one hand and the moderates of both Catholic and Protestant persuasions on the other. This polarisation of opinion in the early part of the decade (1790s) hastened the day of confrontation.

By and large the Protestant community - both the landlords and their tenants were committed to the Establishment and to what they perceived as Law and Order. Many of the so called moderate landlords sided with the 'loyalists' when the conflagration occurred. Another serious development which contributed to the already seething temper of the times was the growth of Orangeism in the Leinster counties. In Wexford this was perceived by the Catholics as an ominous portent of bigotry and hatred. Yet another important and threatening development at the time was the imminent invasion of Ireland by the French. It was to counter this threat that the Yeomen were encouraged to form regiments.

The Protestants who joined the United Irishmen were considered by their fellows as being intellectual cranks who had been corrupted by the ideas and ideals of the French Revolution as promulgated by the United Irishmen. These men had aspirations to an Independent Ireland which was anathema to the 'loyalists'. Such men were Wexfordmen Bagenal Harvey and his cousin John Boxwell Cornelius Grogan, John Colclough and Anthony Perry of Inch and Carlowman Sir Edward Crosbie They were United Irishmen and they all lost their lives in the conflict.

The vast majority of the participants in the actual Rebellion were not members of the United Irishmen.

In Wexford in particular, they were ordinary working men, farmers, labourers, shopkeepers, fishermen, tradesmen, etc. who got caught up in the conflagration almost by accident. They were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Many were forced into the fighting. Many more were terrified into joining the rebels because of the work of 'agents provocateurs' who rode around the countryside spreading terror among the people, with the sole object of getting them to join the rebel party. Others had relatives murdered or imprisoned and saw their chance to get revenge. Yet more were influenced by their priests, who at that time had immense influence over their immediate flocks. More still, were influenced by young men of standing in their communities, men of natural leadership ability such as John Kelly from Killan, Thomas Cloney from Moneyhore and Miles Byrne of Monaseed. Yet others lived in mortal fear of becoming victims to the torturers - the North Cork Militiamen and their minions who went through the county pitchcapping and flogging.

The tortures were inflicted to 'encourage' the people to give information about the whereabouts of the large

caches of arms that the Government suspected were hidden.

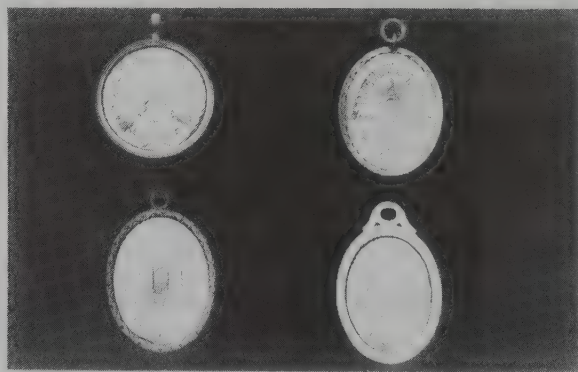


Soldiers flogging a prisoner, 1798. This torture was commonplace in the weeks prior to the Insurrection. (Courtesy the National Library)

For whatever the reason, many tens of thousands of men - young, middle aged and old - joined in the Rebellion. The fighting began like a small fire in a forest but within days became a raging inferno. Like a

forest fire it burned itself out quickly. Many thousands of the men never returned home.

Their opponents in the field were comprised of 'loyalist' companies of Yeomen, regular English Army battalions, (in addition to foreign conscripts such as the Hessians), and conscripted regiments of militia, such as the North Cork Militia, the Donegal Militia, the Antrim Militia and the Dublin Militia. Many of the Yeomen were Protestant tenants of the landlords while many of the Militia men were Catholics.



Militia Medals c. 1798. The Militia Regiments organised on a county basis played a major role in the suppression of the rebellion (Courtesy National Library)

The Rebellion itself smacked of Religious hatred, bigotry and racism.

According to the plans of the United Irishmen, rebel groups were to take over the main towns in all the

counties where the Society was strong. Dublin was to be taken over by the many rebel groups active in the city itself. Of course the Society was riddled with informers and most of the general plans were known to Government who had the main leaders including Lord Edward Fitzgerald arrested. Nonetheless, plans went ahead and it was agreed that the Insurrection would take place on the 24th May. The signal to the other counties was to be the stopping of the mail coaches.

The Dublin rebels, however, failed miserably and the coaches went their way. True, the coach to the north was intercepted and burnt near Santry but the counties to the north of the city did not rise. At Naas the Mail coach heading south was stopped and the passengers murdered. This had the effect of signalling to Kildare, Meath, Carlow, Laois, Wicklow and Wexford that the rebellion was to go ahead. The Government was aware of what was going on and proclaimed martial law throughout Ireland. Because of the failure to prevent the other three mail coaches from leaving the capital none of the organised counties in Munster, Connaught or Ulster went into Rebellion.

The Kildare and Meath rebels were initially victorious but by the time Fr. Murphy of Wexford was standing as conqueror on Vinegar Hill most of the Kildare,

Meath, Laois and Carlow rebels were either dispersed or killed or had surrendered. The Wicklow men had suffered defeat in all their encounters - Stratford on Slaney, Dunlavin, Roundwood, Newtown-Mount-Kennedy and the Devil's Glen. The remnants of some of those rebel groups went south to join the Wexfordmen when they heard of their successes. The Northern Ireland rebels decided to raise their banners on the 9th. June, possibly after having heard the heartening news from Wexford. But they too proved ineffective, and the northern rebels were decisively beaten with enormous loss of life at Antrim and Ballynahinch.

After a few major victories the Wexford Rebel forces were defeated in key battles at Newtownbarry (Bunclody), New Ross, Arklow and Vinegar Hill. The most decisive battle was that of Vinegar Hill and after that the Rebel forces tried to break out of the county with a view to getting other counties to Rise, but all in vain. Within a few weeks of their defeat at Vinegar Hill the Rebel forces were dissipated, with large numbers 'melting away' during the nights. Small pockets of rebels held out in the Wicklow mountains and in Killoughram forest near New Ross for quite some time afterwards.

An idea of the very disturbed state of the county in the days prior to the Rebellion may be had from this

account written by Rev.S. de Bhal, the noted Bunclody historian and scholar: ‘ the clergy in the north of the county tried to preserve peace, and encouraged the people to surrender their arms to Lord Mountnorris and other magistrates. Even when the Insurrection had broken out, the priests continued their efforts. On the 24th May 1798, thirty five prisoners were murdered at Dunlavin, and on the next day twenty four more were killed in the ball alley at Carnew. The news of the killings terrified the people and many families began to leave their homes and spend the nights in the fields. On Saturday, 26th May, the cavalry from Bun Cloidi rode through the parishes of Kilrush and Ferns, burning the houses of the people. Canon Doyle describes some of their activities: “They approached Ballycarney and on their way, found three first cousins of the Canon’s mother, John, Patrick and Mogue Redmond, near their father’s house. They were ordered to accompany the yeomen to the crossroads at Ballycarney, about a mile away. On arrival there, Patrick was shot through the heart; John ran across the bridge but was followed and killed with a sword; Mogue was fired at and fell, but though he was thought to be dead, he was not seriously wounded, and later, he and another brother, James, joined the insurgents. Mogue had his thigh broken at the battle of Hacketstown, but recovered, married and had a large family.”

Fr. De Bhal continues: ‘ Many families in the townland of Kiltilly slept in the fields and hedges on that Saturday night.’ He then goes on to quote Luke Cullen the noted historian of the period who heard many stories from survivors. “On the Sunday morning 27th May, in the morning light the men fled towards the elevated ground of Slieve Bui, from the fury of the mounted yeomen, who had been riding madly through the country all the preceding night. In fact they had been doing the same every other place from the time the people had surrendered their arms for protections. These were followed to Kiltomas Hill and Nicholas Jackman was shot. Darby Doyle was severely wounded and for a considerable time they had to change him from hedge to hedge. James Doyle was shot at the same place. Patrick Doyle was taken prisoner coming from Dublin and was sent a prisoner to Carnew. He was taken to the Castle yard and shot. Nicholas Kinsella of Knocknalour and James Doyle his cousin were also shot.

Thomas Pakenham the noted historian had this to say: ‘A wave of hysteria was sweeping southwards to the peasantry of central Wexford, fed by tales of atrocity, some of which were only too well authenticated.’

These ‘tales’ were commonplace before and during the rebellion. The Freeman’s Journal of May 26th. stated that ‘At Dunshaughlin they (rebels) broke into

the house of the Rev. Mr. Nelson, a Protestant Clergyman, who kept a school there and having murdered him and his brother-in-law Mr. Pendteron, in the most cruel manner, their infernal dispositions prompted them to the very climax of barbarity. Another person whom they knew to be a loyal subject they stripped and put him into a cauldron of boiling pitch!’

On the 29th. the same paper reported that ‘ In Co. Wicklow, an old lady aged 97 was murdered: What was her crime? She was a Protestant. Several Protestant children, who had been at nurse have also been murdered, for had they lived they would have been men!!’

Pakenham continues - ‘in Wexford it was the turn of the Catholics to be terrified. Hunter Gowan, it was said, had marched into the town of Gorey with the amputated finger of one of his victims stuck on the point of his sword. The trophy was then used to stir the punch at an Orange orgy in the local inn.

There were reports of wanton murders by gangs of Orangemen and of tortures cheerfully inflicted by Archibald Jacob, (died 1838 following a fall from a horse) the Enniscorthy magistrate, who now went out on his rounds with an executioner in train, complete with hanging rope and cat-o’-nine-tails. In

Enniscorthy he had hanged a man and then dragged his body backwards and forwards through the market place. At Ballaghkeen he had flogged a man to death and threatened the same treatment to anyone who was caught absent from his house.’¹



A cartoon depiction of the 'Travelling Gallows', another torture used in 1798

Scenes of terror like these had been repeated in other areas of the county and when Fr. John Murphy the curate of Boolavogue assembled his little band at the Harrow on the evening of the 26th of May it was done from a primal urge of self preservation. He never dreamt of or envisaged the horror that would engulf the county of Wexford over the following two months.

¹ *Year of Liberty* - Thomas Pakenham pg. 167

We have seen in the booklets dealing with the Harrow and Oulart that Fr. Murphy was sensationally successful in those battles and in the booklet dealing with the battle of Enniscorthy we saw how the Wexford rebels won the day and established themselves on Vinegar Hill.

The Battle of The Three Rocks

Vinegar Hill became the main camp of the rebel army after the capture of Enniscorthy on May 28th.

According to Miles Byrne, Vinegar Hill became the Mecca for the men from the southern baronies when the news of the victories at Oulart and Enniscorthy spread throughout the county. They flocked there in large numbers carrying every conceivable type of weapon.

The whole place was in turmoil with large numbers arriving there by the hour. The leaders were constantly being pressed to attack the different towns - large numbers wanted them to attack Gorey while equally large numbers clamoured to go to New Ross. Others still, favoured an attack on Wexford and some felt that Newtownbarry to the north west would be a suitable target. The leadership was bewildered and uncertain about what course to take.

The Battle of the Three Rocks

The arrival of John Colclough and Edward FitzGerald seemed to focus their minds on the necessity to attack Wexford where Bagenal Harvey, an acknowledged leader of the United Irishmen was being held prisoner. Both Colclough and FitzGerald had been held in custody there on suspicion of being involved with the United Irishmen, as indeed they were. When the loyalists who had fled from the carnage of Enniscorthy reached Wexford it was thought prudent to send Colclough and FitzGerald as emissaries to entreat the rebels to put down their arms and disperse.

The leaders of the rebel forces consulted together and resolved to send Colclough back to Wexford demanding the immediate surrender of the town. Edward FitzGerald was persuaded to stay in the rebel camp but declined to accept any position as a leader, claiming his complete ignorance of military matters as his main excuse. Nonetheless he stayed with the rebel forces to the bitter end.

The rebel leadership then decided that the best course of action was to march immediately to Wexford and take the town. At Ferrycarrig they decided to move south to the elevated ground of Forth Mountain and this they accomplished that evening of the 29th May.

At this point it might be worthwhile to give some background information on some of the persons who became embroiled in the war from this time on.

Edward FitzGerald whose seat was at New Park, a few miles south of Oulart, was the son of a wealthy malster. A Catholic, he was given a fine education culminating in his attendance at Trinity College, where he studied law and was later called to the Irish Bar.² While there he made the acquaintance of other notable Wexfordmen, such as Bagenal Harvey and Dr. John Colclough. He would also have been acquainted with Wolfe Tone and the other founder members of the United Irishmen. He was a very interesting individual, if one looks at his politics and actions before and during the Rebellion.

Edward was a young man in his late twenties when the rebellion broke out. His father and mother had died when he was young. It was said that he was descended lineally from the great FitzGerald family of Kildare. Apparently he was a much loved young man and most popular in his neighbourhood. In addition when he came home to carry on the family business he became very wealthy.

² *Fr. John Murphy* of Boolavogue - Nicky Furlong

A very prominent United Irishman, he held the rank of Colonel. He was Adjutant General for Co. Wexford and his friend and distant relative Garret Byrne held the same position for Co. Wicklow.³ Edward was a cousin of the Hay brothers who were also heavily involved in the Rising.

He was quite active in attempting to spread the United Irishmen in Wexford and according to Kevin Whelan both he and Anthony Perry approached Fr. Miles O'Connor the parish priest of Ballindaggin with a view to allowing a branch of the Society to be founded in the parish.⁴ Paradoxically, FitzGerald and Anthony Perry of Inch, were described as 'ineffective' Colonels by another scholar.⁵ Both FitzGerald and Garret Byrnewere described as 'colourless and ineffective'.⁶ Bagenal Harvey was also a somewhat reluctant rebel.

Both FitzGerald and Harvey were actively encouraging their tenants to surrender their weapons on the very day the rebellion broke out in Co. Wexford and after the rebellion had broken out in counties Kildare, Carlow and Wicklow. However R.R.Madden, the noted historian stated that the

³ *Wicklow History & Society* - ed. Ken Hannigan & Wm. Nolan

⁴ *Wexford History & Society* - ed. Kevin Whelan pg. 304

⁵ *Ibid.* pg. 190

⁶ L.M. Cullen in *Wicklow History & Society*

The Battle of the Three Rocks

weapons that were surrendered were bogus pikes just made up to keep the magistrates convinced that the people were loyal. FitzGerald and Harvey were arrested following the interrogation and torture of Anthony Perry and his confession signed on the fateful Saturday of May 26 implicating them in the planned rebellion.

According to many sources FitzGerald was held as a hostage at Vinegar Hill and was the object of deep mistrust on the part of the rebels. According to Nicky Furlong in his excellent book 'Fr. John Murphy of Boolavogue' FitzGerald was welcomed to Vinegar Hill with wide acclaim and with much enthusiasm. It was probably when he delivered the stark message from the Wexford authorities demanding immediate dispersal that the mood of the rebels changed. His subsequent behaviour at Wexford, which will be dealt with below, added to this mistrust, at least temporarily.

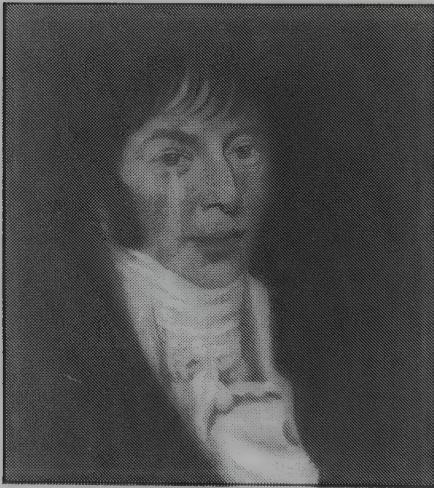
However he soon regained the trust and confidence of his comrades and became a leader of note in the weeks that followed. He surrendered to the Government forces having led the Wexfordmen into Co. Meath in July, where they were scattered. He was sent into exile in Hamburg along with his friend Garret Byrne of Ballymanus. It is thought that he never returned to Ireland. His property was burned by

a troop of General Needham's army, including his house, out offices, and stores of corn amounting it was said to almost £5,000 in value.⁷ After the rebellion his property was bought by a Mr. Hay of New Ross - undoubtedly a relative. Sometime later in the 1800s a cousin of his, also called Edward FitzGerald became the owner of Newpark. In 1807 his servant came back from Hamburg and said that his master had died there. One might speculate that in fact the 'cousin' may well have been Edward himself!

Dr. John Henry Colclough (pronounced Coakley) was descended from a very well known and highly respected Wexford family, the Colcloughs of Tintern and Duffry Hall. His great great grandfather was Patrick Colclough of Duffry Hall, who managed to reclaim the forfeited Colclough lands which had been confiscated by the Cromwellians in 1650. Patrick became an M.P. for Enniscorthy in 1688 . Patrick's son Dudley married Mary Barnewall a granddaughter of the 1st Viscount Kingsland. Dudley's fourth son, John moved to Ballyteigue castle and estate. John's wife was Mary Sutton, a Catholic member of a dispossessed but famous family. John's grandson became a Doctor after having studied in Trinity College where his life long friend Bagenal Harvey also attended.

⁷ *The United Irishmen* - R.R. Madden

Although a member of the United Irishmen and named in the Perry confession he was a reluctant rebel. After having been freed from jail (on £1000 bail) he went to Vinegar Hill with Edward FitzGerald and was ordered to return to Wexford with the rebel refusal to surrender and disperse. He was deeply disturbed by the prospect of the looming war and when he had delivered his message in Wexford he asked to be re-incarcerated in the jail.



*Dr. John Henry
Colclough of
Ballyteigue,
hanged on
Wexford Bridge
June 28th.*

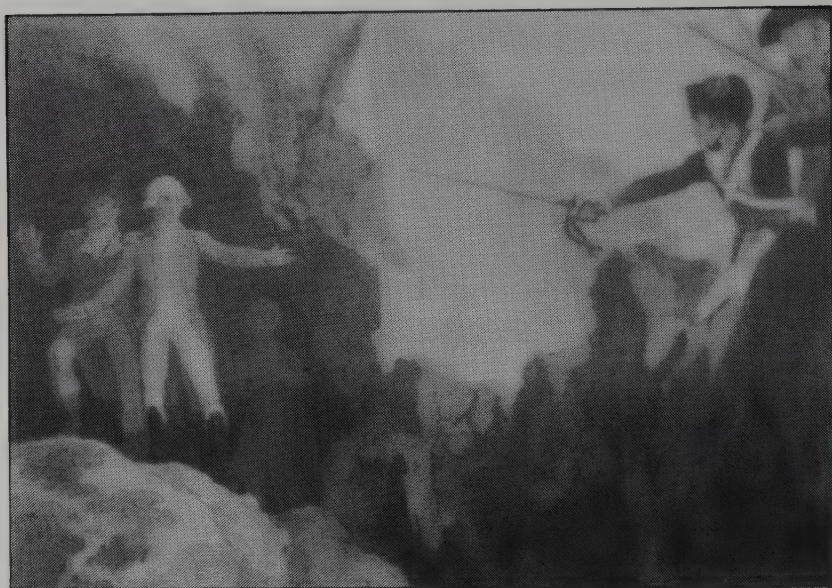
John Henry subsequently went to New Ross with Bagenal Harvey and the 'southern' army of the rebels. After the defeats of Ross and Goff's Bridge (his behaviour at both of those engagements was puzzling as we shall see later on in this volume) he retired to Ballyteigue and with Bagenal Harvey made arrangements to leave Ireland.. The friends with their

wives found refuge on the Great Saltee island off the coast of Wexford. Their presence there was alerted to the authorities by a Richard Waddy. A party of soldiers went across to the island and found them hiding in a cave. The men were arrested and brought back to Wexford town. There they were court martialled, sentenced and hanged on the 28th June.

Another man of note to join the rebellion at this stage was Thomas Cloney. Cloney himself managed to survive the rebellion and was later implicated in the abortive Emmet Rising in 1803.

John Joyce of Graiguenamanagh, who now lives in the house once occupied by Cloneywrote a fine work about this man entitled 'General Thomas Cloney'. Another compelling work about the Cloneys can be found in *Wexford History and Society* (Ed. Kevin Whelan).

The Battle of the Three Rocks



The arrest of Harvey & Colclough on the Saltee Islands, on information supplied by Richard Waddy

The Cloneys were a Wexford/Carlow family and prior to 1798 one branch of the family was settled at Moneyhore, a townland near Templescoby, a village about three miles south west of Enniscorthy. The Cloneys held about 300 acres from their immediate landlord Colonel Robert Phayre. It was there that Thomas Cloney grew up. Cloneys were also middlemen. His father Denis, held lands from the Kavanaghs of Borris (who owned lands in Co. Wexford at that time) and he also rented lands in Carlow.

Thomas's mother was a Kavanagh of St. Mullins and her family too were prosperous middlemen. Young Cloney was a fine specimen of manhood and in his 23rd. year when the rebellion broke out. He was on very friendly terms with his social equals - Kellys from Killan, Furlongs of Templescoby, FitzGerald of Newpark, Devereuxs of the Leap and the Sweetmans of Newbawn. The Cloney family was also held in high esteem by their Gentry neighbours - the Carews of Castleboro and the Colcloughs of Duffry Hall.⁸ Walter Kavanagh of Borris also held the Cloneys in high regard and it was Walter Kavanagh who was mainly instrumental in securing Cloney's release from prison in the aftermath of the rebellion.



*Thomas Cloney as
a young man - an
unfinished portrait
by Martin
Forrestal (1984 -
Courtesy John
Joyce)*

⁸ *General Thomas Cloney* - John Joyce pg.3

Thomas Cloney joined the rebel forces on Vinegar hill, leading in a group of men from his own area. According to Whelan's study of the organisation of the United Irishmen, Cloney was the Colonel of the Bantry battalion⁹. Years after the rebellion Cloney wrote his autobiography, in which he tried to conceal his involvement with the United Irishmen, claiming that he was coerced into joining the rebellion. This account is now largely discounted.

He fought in four major engagements - the Three Rocks (which will be detailed below), New Ross, Borris and Goff's Bridge. Miraculously he escaped injury during the campaign only to accidentally wound himself with a pistol shot in the thigh while hiding in the Moneyhore district in the weeks immediately after the Rebellion.

His family and friends worked tirelessly to try to ensure he would be shown clemency if he surrendered. His health deteriorated and he was forced to surrender to General Grose in Enniscorthy, a man reputed to be most humane. Cloney had enemies also, among the yeomen, who desired to see him killed.

⁹ *Wexford History & Society* - ed. Kevin Whelan pg.282

In the months and years following, he was subjected to imprisonment and exile, but was allowed to come home to Ireland in 1803. He promptly became involved in the Emmet Insurrection plot and was hounded by the authorities who had him arrested and imprisoned. His physical and mental health broke down and he was released on compassionate grounds. The lease on his Moneyhore farm ran out and Phayre refused to renew it. Cloney with his sisters, removed to Graiguenamanagh, from where he managed his Carlow properties. He was actively involved in politics and was a leading townsman of the time. His last 'hurrah' was when he entertained the young Irishmen on their way to Tipperary in 1848. Thomas Cloney died in 1850 and was buried in St. Mullins cemetery.¹⁰

When John Henry Colclough arrived back in Wexford he met with the garrison officers and told them the response he had got at Vinegar Hill. It further appears that he offered to go out to his homeland territory of Forth and Bargo in an effort to persuade the United Irishmen there not to take up arms. Colonel Maxwell agreed to this and Colclough set out on his journey which would ultimately take him to Ballyteigue, his home. It is not known what advice he gave to the rebel leaders in his home barony.

¹⁰ General Thomas Cloney - John Joyce

Maxwell now pinned his hopes on the arrival of reinforcements from Duncannon. Earlier in the day a well known and respected loyalist, George Sutton, had volunteered to try to get to Duncannon and inform the commander there of the situation in Enniscorthy and the impending danger facing Wexford.

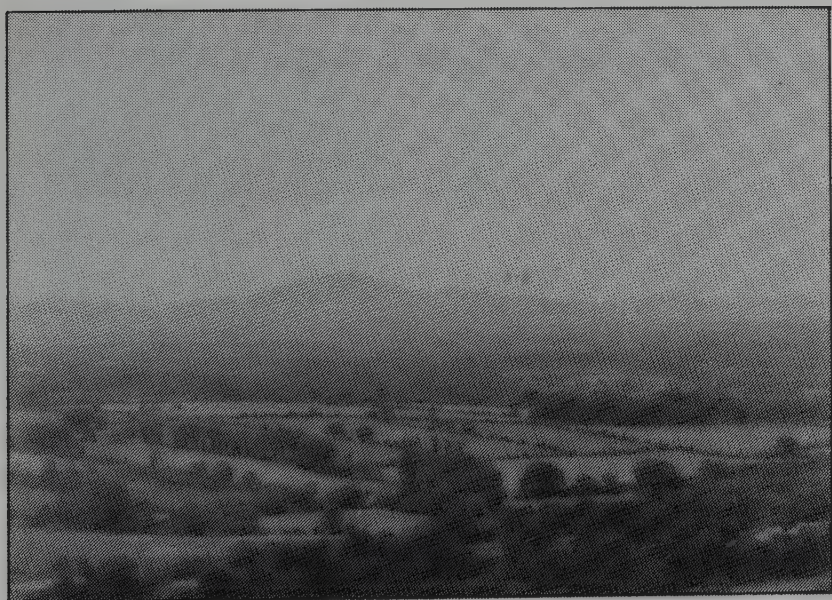
The rebel forces reached the Forth Mountain and took up positions near the Three Rocks. The entire force now numbered about 10,000 including stragglers.¹¹ This position was chosen because of its proximity to Wexford, its eminence and the fact that it was a rallying point for the Forth & Bargy rebels who had not yet joined the Rebellion. The people of Wexford town and the garrison could clearly see the camp fires on the hills and knew an attack was imminent.

George Sutton succeeded in reaching Duncannon unmolested and convinced the authorities there of the urgency of the situation facing the defenders of Wexford town. General Fawcett immediately got preparations in train to assemble a force of 200 militia men and in the afternoon he set out for Wexford. It was impossible to reach Wexford that evening and he decided to bivouac at Taghmon, a village about ten miles west of Wexford and situated behind Forth

¹¹ *The People's Rising* - Daniel Gahan pg.66

The Battle of the Three Rocks

mountain. He was unable to see the rebel fires on the hills and was blissfully unaware of their presence. In addition he was awaiting the arrival of a smaller force of about one hundred men of the Meath militia and some members of the Royal Artillery who were bringing up howitzers.



A view of Forth Mountain

Quite inexplicably this force which arrived in the Taghmon area about two in the morning (30th. May) saw no sign of Fawcett's column and assumed they had travelled on to Wexford. The officers in charge

of the second force decided to press on and get to Wexford.

The road they took to Wexford brought them on to the northern slope of Forth mountain. The rebel forces were mainly concentrated on the eastern slope of the hill facing Wexford town, but small groups of them were scattered across the mountain mainly as lookouts. The route being followed by the Militia took them to within yards of some of the rebel groups. One of these groups reported to Thomas Cloney and he in turn communicated with Edward Roche who was stationed further up the hill. It was decided that the Bantry men under the command of Cloney would engage the column. Cloney in hasty conclave with his friends and fellow officers, John Kelly of Killan, Robert Carty of Birchgrove and Michael Furlong of Templescoby settled on a course of action.

They positioned their forces on the slope of the hill immediately above the road being taken by the militia and waited.

The unsuspecting soldiers moved into the road immediately below the waiting rebels. A white flag was raised from the slope below the road, as a signal. The rebels congregated above began firing on the soldiers who despite their panic began to return fire.

The Battle of the Three Rocks

The musketry duel was definitely being won by the rebels and the militia began to retreat down the road.

The massed pikemen above, who had been waiting for such an event now began to rush down on the soldiers and in the narrow confines of the road the militia were no match for the desperate rebels. The whole engagement was over in fifteen minutes and the whole militia force was either killed, wounded, captured or dispersed.¹²



The Battle of the Three Rocks (from a photograph by J. Hayes of a painting by Fr. E. Foran 1898)

¹² *Memoirs of Miles Byrne* pg.55

The Battle of the Three Rocks

The artillery officer and several gunners and the whole complement of guns were captured. Two officers and a small number of privates escaped and made their way back to Taghmon where they met up with General Fawcett and gave him the bad news. He saw that his position was untenable and made a decision to retreat to Duncannon.¹³

In Wexford town the garrison under Maxwell were still under the apprehension that they would receive reinforcements. George Sutton had arrived back in Wexford in the small hours of the morning with the good news that help was on the way. The defending force consisted of the Donegal Militia under the command of Colonel Maxwell, five detachments of Yeomanry from Enniscorthy, Taghmon, Wexford, Healthfield and Shelmalier, and the remnants of the North Cork Militia. In addition there was a force of 200 Scarawalsh cavalry under the command of Captain Cornock.

Another spectre now raised its head in the form of a mass of rebels or rebel sympathisers from areas north of the town who had gathered just at dawn on the Ferrybank side of the town at the toll house on the northern end of the bridge. The toll house was set on fire and the garrison at that end of the bridge was

¹³ *The People's Rising* - Daniel Gahan pg.73

The Battle of the Three Rocks

powerless to prevent the spread of the flames which threatened to engulf the wooden structure. Shipping which had been assembled for the purpose of transporting loyalists to a safer destination in the event of the town being taken, was forced to move further out into the estuary. Many hundreds of loyalists now thronged to the quayside and some jumped into the water and swam to the anchored ships. A party of soldiers managed to rush onto the bridge and tear up the burning planks, thus preventing the fire from consuming the whole structure and indeed the whole town. The end result of this action was to confine any would be escapees in the town.

Colonel Maxwell and the waiting garrison became anxious as time passed and it was decided to go out from the town towards Forth mountain and meet with General Fawcett who was expected by the minute. There was also the possibility of catching the rebel forces in a pincer movement. Overall command of the joint Wexford force was given to Colonel Jonas Watson, a retired army officer domiciled in Wexford. They sallied out by the John's Street entrance and headed towards Forth mountain.

The rebels had moved the captured guns to the east side of the mountain facing the town and the men with gunnery experience, John Hay and William Barker of Enniscorthy took command of the

The Battle of the Three Rocks

ordnance. The guns covered the road that the defenders of Wexford were travelling.

Maxwell sent the Taghmon cavalry to cover his left flank and Watson with some men rode ahead to reconnoitre. A few shots from the howitzers caused the advancing group to falter. A small party of rebel gunmen fired on the advance party when they rode into range and Watson was killed. Captain Cox of the Taghmon Cavalry saw the danger and pulled his men back. Watson's companions galloped back to the main party and Maxwell seeing the danger ordered his men to retreat. The retreat soon turned into a rout. The Scarawalsh yeomen under Cornock and the North Corks panicked and decided to make a run for Duncannon. Archibald Jacob, the Enniscorthy magistrate also made a run for it and managed to get Duncannon and Ross and from there to England.¹⁴

They were soon followed by Maxwell. To gain time he first sent the Richards brothers, Thomas and Loftus, merchants of Wexford town and known liberals to treat with the rebels. Their mission was to have the town property protected and the lives of its citizens spared. Maxwell thus gained valuable time in which to prepare for his flight.

¹⁴ *Fr. John Murphy of Boolavogue - Nicky Furlong* pg.78

The Capture of Wexford

The Government forces abandoned the town and the many hundreds of loyalists to their fate. They fled south through Mayglass on to Duncannon and safety. The only defenders left in the town were the Wexford yeomen and their commander, Dr. Ebenezer Jacob

Dr. Jacob was a very distinguished and highly respected Wexfordian, a descendant of the original Lieutenant William Jacob who had been granted Sigginstown by the Cromwellians. He was Mayor of Wexford in 1778 and in 1787 and again in 1799.¹⁵

The Richards brothers brought with them a note from Bagenal Harvey, who declined to go to the camp himself. The note effectively begged for quarter for the garrison and for property to be spared.

¹⁵ *History of the Town & County of Wexford* Vol.6 Hore pg.583

The Capture of Wexford

Some of the rebel leaders suspected treachery though they were assured by the Richards brothers that General Fawcett had retreated back to Duncannon from Taghmon. Edward FitzGerald was instructed to accompany the brothers to Taghmon to find out the position and if they met with Fawcett they were to inform him that negotiations for the surrender of Wexford were in train.¹⁶

En route to Taghmon they met some rebel forces who had gone there to requisition provisions and they confirmed that Fawcett and his regiment had indeed retreated to Duncannon.

It was now proposed to send Edward FitzGerald and Thomas Richards to the town with the conditions of surrender - namely, that lives and property would be spared if the garrison surrendered their arms and ammunition. Loftus Richards remained in the camp as a hostage. The emissaries were expected back within the hour.

After three hours had passed there was still no sign of the messengers and it was assumed that FitzGerald had been either killed or imprisoned. Some rebels determined to kill Loftus Richards who protested his

¹⁶ *Fr. John Murphy of Boolavogue* - Nicky Furlong pg.80

innocence. John Hay, who knew him well, interceded, and saved his life.

So what had happened to FitzGerald and Richards? As soon as they reached Wexford it became clear that most of the defenders had left. They met with Dr. Ebenezer Jacob. He was desperately concerned about the mob of rebels and or sympathisers who were gathered at Ferrybank and were repairing the bridge. He felt they would destroy the town and kill the inhabitants. Messengers told them that the rebel army had begun to move from Forth mountain and some were already at Windmill hill.

The most urgent task according to Dr. Jacob was to try to prevent the mob, who were now streaming across the bridge, from burning the houses and killing the innocent. He prevailed on Edward FitzGerald to go to the bridge and to try to speak to the people, many of whom would know him. FitzGerald agreed and went to the bridge. Although he did his best to calm the people they largely ignored him and streamed into the town.¹⁷ The Wexford yeomen hurriedly threw off their uniforms and donned civilian clothes and dumped their arms in the river or put them in hiding places.

¹⁷ *The People's Rising* - Daniel Gahan pg.80

Inexplicably, FitzGerald now decided to cross the bridge and make his way homeward. He left Wexford and was missing from the scene for some twenty four hours - a remarkable thing for a man who was one of the most senior figures in the United Irishmen. Some writers have speculated that he went home to settle his affairs, while Daniel Gahan felt he may have at this time seriously considered resigning altogether from the Society.¹⁸ In the event he returned to Wexford the following day.

Wexford was in total turmoil when the rebel leaders from Forth mountain led in the victorious rebel army. The streets were filled with good humoured men while the residents hastened to decorate their premises appropriately. Green boughs and green flags were hastily hung out of windows and the citizens welcomed the victorious army. Trestle tables were erected in the streets and food laid out for the hungry men.

Only two people met their end that day in Wexford. John Boyd (a brother of James Boyd the magistrate and yeoman leader), who had been hiding on board a vessel in the harbour was brought ashore and thinking his time had come tried to escape and ran down the quays where he was overtaken and piked. The other

¹⁸ Ibid. pg. 85

The Capture of Wexford

loyalist who lost his life that day was George Sparrow, a member of a respected and prominent merchant family of Wexford.

Other noted loyalists who had been hiding on the vessels in the harbour were brought ashore and lodged in the jail.

When dusk fell the throngs of rebels were persuaded to return to the camp at Windmill Hill. Others, who lived in the locality went to their homes. Wexford town had a peaceful night but in the morning all the rebels returned and their numbers were swelled even further by presence of Cornelius Grogan of Johnstown Castle at the head of the Barony of Forth rebels.

Although he was not an official member of the United Irishmen and held no office, he was asked, or rather compelled by his tenants to lead them to Wexford following unprovoked attacks on their homesteads by the fleeing erstwhile defenders of Wexford.

Grogan was the senior member of a very respected Wexford family. His brother John Knox Grogan fought with the yeomanry at Arklow and was killed there fighting against the rebels. Another brother, Captain Thomas Grogan raised the Healthfield cavalry corps at his own expense and was badly

The Capture of Wexford

wounded in an encounter with the rebel forces. Cornelius the eldest brother, a bachelor in his sixties, was a very wealthy man. His lands produced £10,000 a year.

Formerly the property of the Esmondés, Johnstown Castle and its lands were granted to Colonel Overstreet whose widow married Edward Withers. Withers sold the property to a Colonel Reynolds and an ancestor of the Grogans, John, married Reynold's daughter and so they came into possession of one of the richest properties in Wexford. John's grandfather was a humble carpenter from Enniscorthy.¹⁹



Johnstown Castle - Home of the Cornelius Esmonde (photo courtesy N. Furlong)

¹⁹ *History of the Town & County of Wexford* Vol.5 Hore pg.348

Cornelius was High Sheriff of Wexford in 1779 and was an M.P. for Enniscorthy for six years. Caught in the overwhelming tide of events he was made a commisar with responsibility for finding and managing provisions in Wexford during the time it was occupied by the rebel forces. He saved many known loyalists from being executed. However he himself was hanged by Government forces in Wexford on the 27th of June. On the way to the place of execution Bagenal Harvey, who was also going to his death, shook hands with Grogan and said - " My dear Grogan, you indeed suffer death innocently".

Ebenezer Jacob lost no time in meeting with the rebel leaders who by now had liberated Bagenal Harvey. Plans were put in place to make sure that the administration and policing of Wexford would continue apace. Matthew Keogh was appointed Governor of Wexford and he was to be assisted by Ebenezer Jacob as medical officer. They were given the elderly Cornelius Grogan as commisar.

Keogh was a veteran of the War of Independence in America and was also a de facto Colonel of the Forth/Bargy district in the United Irishmen.²⁰ However according to Madden, Keogh joined the

²⁰ *Wexford History & Society* - ed. Kevin Whelan

The Capture of Wexford

Yeomanry on Whit Sunday and was busy organising the town defences on Tuesday the 29th. May. When the rebels advanced into the town he threw off his yeoman's uniform and joined the rebels.²¹ He saved many loyalists from the executioners during the two weeks that the town was in rebel hands but suffered death on the scaffold on the 25th. June



A typical 1798 rebel from a contemporary sketch

During the day (31st. May) the leaders prevailed on the rebels to retire to their camp and the streets were cleared. It was decided to hold a council of war. By this time Fitzgerald had arrived back and John Henry

²¹ *The United Irishmen* - Vol. XI - R.R. Madden

The Capture of Wexford

Colclough and his wife had also reached the town. The leaders held a meeting that went on for some time to consider their next course of action. They had no idea what was happening in the rest of the country. According to the United plans all other counties should have risen by now, and Dublin itself should have been in the hands of the insurgents.

The task of the Wexford United Irishmen was to secure Co. Wexford. To this end they agreed to send three armies to capture the border towns of Gorey, New Ross and Newtownbarry. The southern army was to be led by Bagenal Harvey, who was also elected Commander-in-Chief of the entire county. He had as his close aides, John Boxwell (his cousin and fellow student in Trinity), John Henry Colclough, Thomas Cloney John Kelly, Henry Hughes and Matthew Furlong.²²

The northern army was headed by Edward Roche and Fr. John Murphy assisted by Edward Fitzgerald John Hay, Fr. Mogue Kearns, Fr. Philip Roche, Fr. Michael Murphy, Garret Byrne and Miles Byrne. The leadership was further augmented by the presence of Anthony Perry, who joined them at Carrigrew and Esmonde Kyan, an army veteran who had also been arrested and lodged in Gorey under detention. The

²² For further information on Harvey, Kelly and Boxwell see next chapter.

northern army was joined by two groups of Wexford town rebels led by a very colourful character, Richard Monaghan, 'the mayor of John Street' known as Dick Monk.²³



²³*Fr. John Murphy of Boolavogue - Nicky Furlong*pg.92

The Battle of New Ross

After his liberation and after being elected as Commander-in-Chief of the rebel forces, with the task of taking New Ross, Harvey paused and drew breath. The leaders of the Northern Army however, had left town and were moving towards Gorey and Enniscorthy.

Harvey decided that there was time to relax a little and to that end he gave orders to his household staff to prepare a dinner for himself, his officers and some of the town gentlemen, including Ebenezer Jacob and Matthew Keogh. Another guest who attended was Edward Turner of Newfort, who had been at the battle of Oulart, with the North Cork Militia, and who had set fire to the cabins in the village of Oulart. Some rebels noticed him going in to Harvey's house and demanded that he be jailed. Some of the diners came out and remonstrated with the crowd but in vain. Harvey was compelled to allow Turner to be dragged off to jail, from where some weeks later he was taken to be executed on Wexford bridge.

The dinner was over before dusk and Harvey marshalled what men he could find. Some of the minor leaders such as Thomas Cloney had taken time out to go to their homes to settle affairs and see to their families, promising to join the army en route to Ross. Harvey with his straggling army got as far as Taghmon and decided to wait there until daylight. It was felt that New Ross could be attacked on the following day the 1st. June.

When day dawned Harvey mustered his army and set off to Carrigbyrne, a hill about six miles from New Ross. There he set up a camp and decided to wait for more rebel forces to arrive, notably the Bantry men, led by Cloney. By nightfall some men had come in from the barony of Forth, but Harvey still did not feel sufficiently strong to attack. The next three days were spent waiting for the stragglers to come into the camp.

Who was Bagenal Harvey and what was his story? He was christened Beauchamp Bagenal Harvey by his father who rather revered his cousin and friend Beauchamp Bagenal of Dunleckny in Co. Carlow (for details of this man and his family background see ‘*The Battles of 1798 - Carlow*’). The Harveys of Bargy Castle were descended from Francis Harvey, a merchant, of Wexford, who acquired Killiane Castle

The Battle of New Ross

from Colonel Bunbury the Cromwellian grantee of that castle and estate, formerly owned by the Hays. Bargy was either purchased or built in the mid 18th century, by Francis Harvey, the father of Beauchamp Bagenal and James (Beauchamp Bagenal's only brother).



Bargy Castle, home of Bagenal Harvey (photo courtesy Rosemary Deacon)

Having attended Trinity College, Beauchamp Bagenal became a barrister. He became a member of the United Irishmen and was a friend and confidante of Lord Edward Fitzgerald and many of the other founding members of that society.

He was generous to his friends and relations. He gave John Boxwell, his cousin, a loan of money. He bought

1000 acres of land in the Newtownbarry area in trust for his brother James and he offered to support his cousin, Miss Palliser of Carne who was a ward of Chancery.

Although small of stature and pock marked, Beauchamp Bagenal was something of a ladies man. He had a relationship with a Miss James of Clonegal, whose father was a magistrate, and with a local girl, Elizabeth Smith from Mayglass, who had two sons for him. Neither of the two ladies were suitable matches and he later married Miss Judith Dockrell in secret.

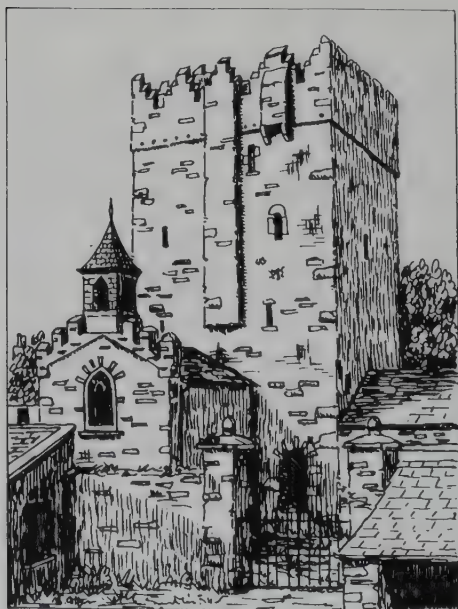
After the defeats of New Ross and Goff's bridge, Harvey seems to have withdrawn from the rebellion. He did however do some administrative work in Wexford for a couple of weeks, until it became clear that the rebellion had no chance of success. Then with his friend John Colclough he tried to escape. The two men and their wives fled to the Saltee Islands, from where they hoped to escape to the Continent. Apparently they lit a fire on the island and so alerted people on the mainland to the fact of their presence there. They were betrayed by a local man, Richard Waddy of Clougheast. The military went to the island and arrested the men. They were brought to Wexford and after a summary court martial they were executed on June 28th. on Wexford Bridge.

His property was confiscated but after much legal wrangling and expense, his brother James succeeded in having the castle and lands restored to him in 1810. James died shortly after this and he left the Bargy castle and estate to his first cousin John Harvey of Tagunnan, and he left the north Wexford lands to William Harvey of Kyle, another relative.

Another officer in Harvey's army was Henry Hughes of Ballytrent. Although described by Daniel Gahan as a 'farmer', Henry Hughes was a member of the Gentry, on an equal social footing with Harvey, Grogan, Colclough and Boxwell. He was of Cromwellian stock originally from Wales, but he was known for his liberal views and was a committed United Irishman. Amazingly he managed to escape detection when the rebellion was crushed and survived long enough to become involved in the Emmet Insurrection of 1803. However he was arrested and the cost of defending himself in the courts forced him to sell Ballytrent and he had to retire to Wexford town, where he ended his days.

John Boxwell was a member of the well known Boxwell family of Sarshill. Another branch of the family owned Lingstown Castle and Butlerstown Castle was the seat of the main branch. He was a Trinity College student at the same time that his

cousin Bagenal Harvey was there. When he left Trinity he joined the army and was trained as a gunner. He retired early and went home to Sarshill, where he and his wife lived. His wife was Susannah Berry and her sister Elizabeth married Dr. John Colclough of Ballyteigue. When the rebellion broke out John Boxwell joined the Rebel forces. He was killed at Ross, manning a gun. Though severely wounded he insisted on being tied to his gun and kept firing until the rebels retreated. He was then put on his horse and tied to prevent his falling off. He got as far as Carrigbyrne and died there.²⁴



Butlerstown Castle. One of the ancestral homes of the Boxwells. (Sketch courtesy Hilary Murphy)

²⁴ *The Wexford Gentry* Vol.1 - Art Kavanagh & Rory Murphy pg.41

Another member of the Harvey entourage was Matthew Furlong of Templescoby. He was in fact Harvey's aide-de-camp. The Furlongs were an old aristocratic family of Norman descent whose family seat was at Horetown. After the Cromwellian Confiscations James Furlong, the representative of the senior line became a tenant on a farm near Glynn. A descendant of his, John Furlong, married Mary Martin of Templescoby and their son was Matthew Furlong. Matthew lost his life at Ross when he was shot while carrying a flag of truce.

Perhaps the most colourful of the leaders in Harvey's army was John Kelly of Killan. Like Cloney he was the son of a wealthy middleman, who bought and sold grain and leased out huge farms of land. John Kelly was a young man of gigantic stature, who fought bravely at the Three Rocks and again at New Ross, where he was severely wounded. He was brought back to Wexford for medical attention and during his stay there the town was recaptured. Young Kelly was taken prisoner, court martialled, and executed on Wexford bridge.

It would appear that the Harvey led army numbered between ten and fifteen thousand men, mostly armed with pikes but some fifteen hundred of whom had guns. In addition they had six field pieces. It would

The Battle of New Ross

seem also that the entire rebel army moved towards New Ross on the night of the 4th of June because both Hay and Cloney in their accounts of the affair stated that Harvey and his leaders held a conference in Talbot Hall on that night. Talbot Hall is very close to the town of New Ross. The very fine mansion, which was not burnt by the rebels, was owned by the Catholic Talbot family who also owned Castle Talbot near Blackwater. The plan for the assault on the town was formulated that night.

The townspeople of New Ross hadn't wasted the three valuable days gained by the hesitancy of the rebel forces. The New Ross Yeomanry led by Charles Tottenham were very active in preparing their defences.

Charles Tottenham was a member of the very famous Tottenham family, formerly of Tottenham Green. He was descended from a legendary figure known as 'Tottenham in his boots' - Colonel Charles Tottenham. He became a legend because of his ride from New Ross to Dublin in one night to vote for the opposition in Parliament. He arrived at the House, covered in mud and wearing a huge pair of jack boots. He was just in time and insisted on being allowed into the chamber, though it was against the rules of the House to go in without changing into proper attire. His vote was critical and the opposition

won the vote, which ensured that the sum of £60,000 pounds in the Treasury was spent on the country and not given to the king. This event happened in the 1730s and was still talked about a hundred years on.

The Charles who was in charge of the New Ross yeomanry was in fact a grandson of 'Tottenham in his Boots'. His father, also Charles, was the man to whom there was a mural slab erected in the front of Trinity Hospital in 1772. He was the Master of the hospital. He also bought the town of New Ross from the Annesleys and much of the town is still in the possession of the Tottenham family to this day. That Charles, the Master of the hospital, was responsible for having many of the fine buildings in New Ross erected, such as the Charter School, the Sessions House, the Market House and a fine vaulted Assembly Room.²⁵ Another son of 'Tottenham in his Boots' called John, married a daughter of Lord Loftus of Loftus Hall and the senior branch of his family became the Earls and Marquises of Ely. The present 8th Marquess now lives in Canada.²⁶

The defence of the town was in the overall charge of a professional Army officer called Major General Henry Johnson. This man had served in America. He was an Irish Protestant and he was energetic and

²⁵ Amyas Griffith 1764

²⁶ *The Wexford Gentry* Vol.2 - Art Kavanagh & Rory Murphy

brave.²⁷ These traits were in evidence during the battle. It is said that he had four different horses shot from under him and that but for his doggedness in rallying the fleeing troops the Government forces would have lost the town. For the five years previous to the rebellion he had been given the post of recruiting officer for the British regiments. When the Government put itself on a war footing Johnson was put in charge of the third biggest garrison in the country at Waterford. He was ordered to go to New Ross on the 1st. of June and he brought with him over 1000 men including a detachment commanded by General Eustace. He lost no time in ordering his defences and had trenches dug at the main outposts using local labourers.

He was fortunate also in having a young officer called Colonel Robert Crauford on his staff. Crauford distinguished himself in the battle of New Ross and later earned himself a brilliant reputation with the Light Brigade fighting Napoleon's forces in the Peninsular War.

Another man of note in Johnson's retinue was a temporary aide de camp, a yeoman called McCormick. It was said that McCormick in the height of the battle got cut off and though surrounded

²⁷ *The Year of Liberty* - Thomas Pakenham p.222

by a hundred rebels he managed to fight his way out of the tight corner.

Johnson's force was further augmented by the arrival of the Dublin militia, commanded by Lord Mountjoy and detachments of the Donegal and Clare militias also. The defenders now numbered about 2000 regular troops with yeomanry support and in addition they had six cannon.

Mountjoy was very popular with the Dublin militia who were mainly Catholic.²⁸ He was a landed gentleman, Luke Gardiner, who was created Lord Mountjoy in the 1770s. He was an elderly man in 1798 and far from being the tyrant as portrayed in a popular ballad, he was in fact a liberal, who had successfully proposed the first Catholic Relief Act. The reason for the assumption of tyranny may have been that he was confused with another Lord Mountjoy, Charles Blount, who defeated the O'Neills and O'Donnells in the Nine Years War a century before. Lord Mountjoy was killed at Ross while trying to parley with the rebels.

The town of Ross was a mediaeval walled town, though the walls had fallen into disrepair since the time of Cromwell. Nonetheless, there were only three

²⁸ Ibid. pg.223

main entrances to the town from the direction the attack was to materialise. These points were the Three Bullet Gate on the east, the Bishop's Gate on the north and the Priory Gate to the south. These points were to be heavily defended. In addition then the barracks, the market place and the bridge across the river were manned in numbers sufficient for their defence. A troop of cavalry was held in readiness on the quays.

The rebel leaders who met at Talbot Hall decided to send in an emissary to the commanding officer of the garrison (General Johnson) with terms of surrender. They felt very confident that, faced with the prospect of a terrible battle against immensely superior numbers, the commanding officer would have the common sense to withdraw and leave them in possession of the town. Matthew Furlong of Templescoby was the emissary chosen by the rebel forces. At dawn, about 4 a.m., he left on his mission carrying a white flag of truce in one hand.

His massed comrades on Corbet Hill, above the town saw him riding towards the enemy outpost. And they saw him being riddled with bullets despite his white flag. The die was now cast and the enraged watching rebels now began firing at the troops below. They were restrained with difficulty from swarming down the hill. The leaders met again and decided to adhere

to their plans of the previous night. Their original plan was simple. The Bantry men, under Kelly and Cloney would take the Three Bullet Gate and wait there for further instructions. Colclough's men were to attack the Bishop's gate, while the men under Boxwell were to capture the Priory gate. The vast majority of these men had never fought in a battle before. Only a couple of hundred of the Bantry men had been involved in the battle at the Three Rocks.

The barony of Forth men, led by Colclough appeared to lose courage at the very beginning of the conflict and soon left the battlefield. They began their retreat before the real fighting had commenced. Colclough followed them.²⁹

In addition to the soldiers at the main defence points, Johnson had stationed smaller groups of soldiers at strategic points within the town itself, to further hinder the progress of the rebels, should they break through the outer defences.

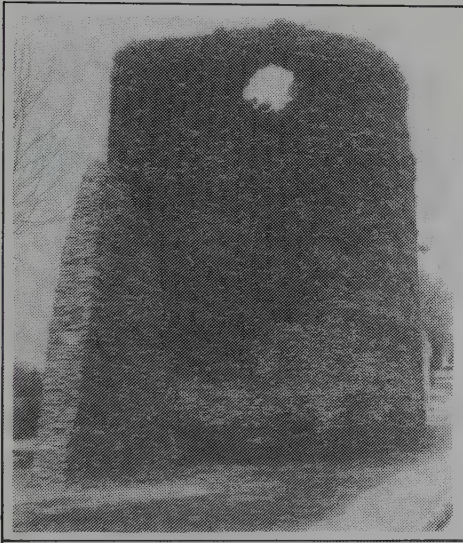
John Kelly led the Bantry men towards the Three Bullet Gate, under heavy fire. Some of the battalion at the rear retreated up the hill. This was possibly a manoeuvre to get the enemy to come outside the wall and try to contain Kelly's men in a pincer movement.

²⁹ *The People's Rising* - Daniel Gahan

The ploy worked and Johnson sent about one hundred mounted troopers to cut off Kelly's men at the rear. As they galloped under the hill the 'retreating' men suddenly turned and rushed down on them. At the same time Kelly and his rebel force attacked them from the other side. The dragoons were overwhelmed and dispersed and many of them were cut down.

The jubilant Bantry men now drove through the Three Bullet Gate and Kelly halted them short of the trenches when he saw a lone horseman come forward. A group of the Bantry men surrounded him and piked him to death. He was Lord Mountjoy, the commander of the Dublin Militia who had come out to persuade them to abandon the attack on New Ross. Fierce fighting now broke out at the trenches behind the Three Bullet Gate and at the Priory Gate. Cabins were set on fire behind the soldiers, no doubt the work of rebel sympathisers, and the soldiers began to falter. Despite heavy losses, Kelly and Boxwell pressed on. Quite suddenly the soldiers broke and the rebel forces streamed into the town, many taking side streets, where they met barricades manned with artillery. At this stage John Kelly was wounded in the thigh and with his leg shattered he had to be carried back from the field of action. His demoralised men were now commanded by Thomas Cloney. Harvey moved his headquarters down to the Three Bullet

Gate. The rebels had control of the southern half of the town by 8.00 a.m., but with very heavy casualties.³⁰



The wall tower at New Ross, close to the Three Bullet Gate, scene of bitter fighting (photo courtesy John Joyce).

General Johnson had regrouped his forces in the northern half and the rebel army was now faced with the prospect of heavy street fighting where they would have to inch their way forward and take one house at a time.

Because of the pall of smoke now hanging over the town and because of the badly placed site of rebel headquarters at Three Bullet gate, Harvey and his advisers were not in a position to know what exactly was going on. The attack which now resumed after a

³⁰ Ibid.

brief lull was therefore uncoordinated. This was disastrous for the rebel groups who now faced cannon and musket fire in the narrow streets and lanes.

Their action was later described by Colonel Crauford "I never saw any troops attack with more enthusiasm and bravery than the rebels did." Johnson was equally impressed and described their courage as 'extraordinary'.³¹

In the face of the cannon and the withering musket fire of the professional troops, the rebels pressed on. Soon the Government forces were streaming across the bridge. General Johnson himself, always in the thick of the battle, was forced to cross the bridge to try to rally his routed men.

Again, the almost leaderless rebels faltered and halted within sight of victory. Johnson seeing their indecision redoubled his efforts and appealed to his wavering troops not to desert their comrades still holding out in the town. His appeal was successful and the Dublin Militia were the first to recross the bridge, closely followed by the other Government forces.

³¹ *The Year of Liberty* - Thomas Pakenham pg.230

The Battle of New Ross

The rebels now tried to bring their cannon into play. John Boxwell manned one of the guns, but because of ineptness on the part of some of the inexperienced crew he was seriously injured. He insisted on being tied to his gun and continued directing its fire until the rebels began their retreat. Then he was tied on his horse which brought him back to Carrigbyrne where he died.³² Another cannon was manned by a gunner who had been taken prisoner at the Three Rocks. He deliberately aimed the gun high and was shot dead by an irate rebel.

By about 9 a.m. Johnson's forces had pushed the rebels back almost out of the town.

During the course of the battle about a hundred of the rebel wounded had been brought back to a four storey house near the top of the hill, which was turned into a temporary hospital. When the victorious soldiers discovered what the house was being used for they set fire to the ground floor. The fire quickly spread upwards and the helpless wounded died where they lay. It is said that their screams could be heard all over the town.³³

Fleeing rebels who had witnessed this diabolic act were responsible for the even more horrible massacre

³² *The Wexford Gentry* Vol.1 - Art Kavanagh & Rory Murphy

³³ *The People's Rising* - Daniel Gahan

at Scullabogue where over one hundred Protestants were murdered. Some thirty of the men were shot outside the building and the remainder including many women and children were burned to death in a barn. This dreadful event occurred at 10 a.m. or 11.00 a.m.³⁴



Neville Street, New Ross, where heavy fighting took place

Back in the town the rebel forces now reduced considerably due to casualties and desertions continued to mount counter attacks. Thomas Cloney was the principal leader at this time. Here is his account of the final attack. ‘ Having fallen back on the Three Bullet Gate, it was quite disheartening to

³⁴ Ibid.

behold the smallness of our numbers. Yet the few who remained seemed to prefer death to the abandonment of victory... I proposed to General Harvey that we should send some men as a kind of forlorn hope, through some open fields called Bourheena Slanaig to attack the Clare Militia, which throughout the day maintained their positions in the Irishtown, but we could not muster above forty men for the purpose. Our party advanced rapidly through the first field, but when I arrived at the ditch which separated us from the main body, I could not get a man to ascend it, so we had to retreat with greater precipitation than we advanced, exposed to a most galling fire by which numbers of our men were either killed or wounded. Here the contest ended, after about thirteen hours almost constant fighting, with considerable losses on both sides.'

The victorious soldiers, now almost out of control, ran amok in the town. They killed every wounded rebel they came across. They killed many of the town's inhabitants who had been forced to take to the streets when their houses were burnt. Johnson restored some semblance of order with great difficulty, even ordering his men to hand up their ammunition. There were many reports of looting and other crimes on that night.

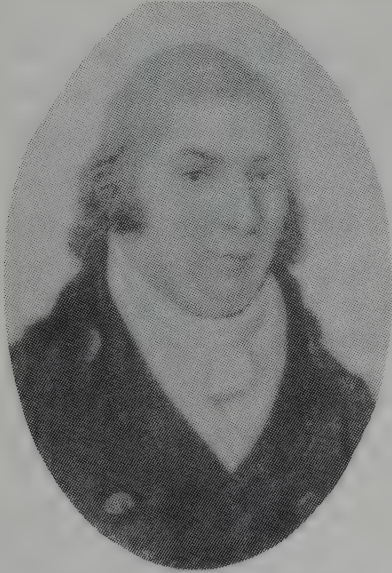
Then, on the following morning, the awful job of cleaning up the town commenced. Hundreds of bodies were thrown into the Barrow. The remainder were pitched into hastily dug pits.

It is estimated that upwards of 1000 rebels died that day in Ross. Many hundreds more who were wounded left the scene of the battle and made their way as best they could to Carrigbyrne, or to their homes. Thousands deserted. Of the 10,000 men who had assembled for the attack on New Ross less than 3000 remained together twenty four hours later.

These stragglers convened on Carrigbyrne. Harvey, utterly demoralised by the defeat at Ross and scandalised by the awful massacre of Scullabogue organised a collection from among his officers to pay for the burial of those who died at Scullabogue. He spent the next day trying to consolidate his scattered forces and impose some kind of discipline on his men. He seems to have been able to convince Colclough to return to the camp, as Colclough and his men were present later at the battle of Goff's Bridge or Foulkesmills.

Edward Roche of Garrylough, who had marched in the northern army was sent south when the news of the catastrophe of Ross reached them. He was appointed as the new Commander - in - Chief to

replace Harvey and he in turn appointed Fr. Philip Roche as the commander of the southern army.



*General Edward
Roche of
Garrylough,
appointed
Commander-in-
Chief of the Rebel
forces on June 6th.*

As a palliative, Harvey was offered the post of President of the Administrative Council of Wexford. He left the rebel camp which had now moved to Lacken Hill (just a couple of miles outside New Ross), and went to Wexford. He busied himself there trying to impose some kind of law in the town and prevent useless slaughter of loyalist prisoners. In addition he was party to trying to organise a diplomatic response to General Lake's emissary Tunks who was allowed into Wexford town in mid June. The hawks among the rebel leadership won the

day and the mission to General Lake was intercepted and prevented from reaching Arklow.³⁵

Meanwhile Fr. Philip Roche decided on a second attack on New Ross, but in order to do so he had to replenish his armaments. Thomas Cloney was given the task. His mission was to attack Borris House, where it was known that arms were stored.

³⁵ Ibid. pg.176

The Attack on Borris House

Cloney looked for volunteers from among those present on Lacken Hill and easily found about two hundred men willing to go. A deputation was sent to Vinegar Hill, requesting some men with guns and ammunition. A party was assembled at Vinegar Hill and it was agreed to rendezvous with Cloney's party at Sculloge Gap, between Killealy in Co. Wexford and Ballymurphy in Co. Carlow.



Borris House, ancestral home of the Kavanaghs since c.1600

They met in the early morning of June 12th and headed for Borris.

Walter Kavanagh was descended from Art McMurrugh Kavanagh the formidable foe of the English in the late 13th. and early 14th. century. Another famous ancestor was Cahir McAirt of Borris and Polmonty, who was an equally staunch defender of Ui Chinnsealaigh (Wexford, Carlow, South Wicklow and part of East Kilkenny) in the 16th. century. In order to preserve his lands the grandson of Cahir McAirt, who had been forced to go to an English school, turned Protestant. The Borris Kavanaghs became part of the Ascendancy class.³⁶ By the year 1798 the Borris Kavanaghs' lands had shrunk to about 28,000 acres, five thousand of which were in Co. Wexford. They were immensely wealthy by any standards and were now loyal to the Government. Their record as landlords seems to have been exemplary, so much so in fact that Cloneyone of their tenants, was somewhat reluctant to attack the House.

Walter Kavanagh was most instrumental in having Cloney saved from the gallows in the aftermath of the rebellion and was the only landlord in the area willing to let lands to him when Cloney finally made his home

³⁶ *The Wexford Gentry* Vol.1 - Art Kavanagh & Rory Murphy pg.131

in Graiguenamanagh. John Joyce in his book *General Thomas Cloney* stated that he was of the opinion that Cloney may in fact have been distantly related to the Kavanaghs through his mother.

Of course blood relationships did not prevent another Kavanagh, Morgan of St. Mullins, a Carlow rebel Colonel, from attacking the house with about 200 followers on the 25th. May. In that attack some blacksmiths who had been kept captive in the house were freed, but the attack was unsuccessful and two of the rebel party were killed and many were wounded.

On the 12th. June the house was defended by a party of the Donegal Militia aided by the local infantry numbering about 40 in all and Walter Kavanagh's corps of yeomanry. The cavalry was deployed on the Ballymurphy road and had determined to attack the rebels before they reached their objective. However when they saw how numerous was the attacking party they fled out the Kilkenny road leaving the garrison in the house to fend for themselves as Walter Kavanagh himself related in a letter to his brother: 'from the first statement of their force it was my intention to defend the bridge (at the bottom of the town). However subsequent information from patrols induced me to order the infantry into the house and the Cavalry was drawn up on the road at the top of

the town. In this situation I went to reconnoitre before the house, and saw about 300 rebels spread themselves over the hill of Ballycopingen- and the roads every place alive with their cries. I retreated to the Cavalry and was hardly arrived when a cannon shot passed over our heads. We then retreated to the end of the demense (at Graigue Cross Roads) and I'll own I gave up the poor fellows in the house for lost.³⁷

A breakaway group of rebels decided to attack some loyalist houses in the town and it was with the utmost difficulty that Cloney persuaded them to stop. He ordered the leader of this group at sword point to man an attacking covered car which was used as shelter for the group in the attack on the house. Cloney said "I drove him and his little band almost under the walls of Mr. Kavanagh's house, and I absolutely wedged their leader up against one of the covered cars that was exposed to a hot fire from the windows."³⁸

The attackers now brought their one cannon into play but to their amazement the balls just bounced off the walls and took no effect. Despite the desperate sorties they made they were unable to make any progress against the defenders who picked off exposed men at

³⁷ *General Thomas Cloney* - John Joyce pg. 60

³⁸ *Cloney's Narrative*

will. According to Walter Kavanagh the rebels lost about 50 men killed or wounded.

As the day wore on it became obvious that the attack would fail. In addition troop movements were reported from the Kilkenny direction and Cloney called off the attack in the evening. The dejected attackers left Borris and separated where they had met. The Vinegar Hill contingent insisted on taking with them the small cannon that had been used in the attack. Cloney and his dispirited men went back to Lacken Hill where they bivouacked for the night. The next day was spent trying to prevent desertions, but, despite the efforts of Fr. Philip Roche and Cloney, many managed to escape. The Lacken Hill army was now reduced to about 1000 men.

They remained there until June 19th. trying to recruit men and gather up arms for the second assault on New Ross. Unknown to the rebel leaders the New Ross garrison had been heavily reinforced and now numbered 3000 experienced soldiers. General Johnson had been ordered to attack Lacken Hill on the 19th. June.

Rain prevented a dawn attack and when the government forces did arrive at the hill by mid morning the rebels began a tactical retreat eastwards

The Attack on Borris House

and after a brief halt to discuss tactics they decided to march back to Wexford town.

The Battle of Goff's Bridge

Fr. Philip Roche's exhausted men reached the Three Rock Mountain by nightfall on the 19th and he himself went into Wexford town for a conference with the rebel leadership of Harvey, Edward Roche, Keogh and the notorious Captain Dixon. It was decided that all available men in Wexford would march west the next day to meet the Government forces.

The New Ross Government forces had split into two divisions, one led by General Johnson and the other by General Sir John Moore (later to achieve fame fighting against Napoleon). After they discovered the rebels had retreated on the previous day Johnson had taken his army back to New Ross to prepare to march on Enniscorthy the next day as ordered by General Lake, the Commander in chief of the Government forces. General Moore encamped near

Foulksmills on the lands of Caesar Sutton of Longraigue. He was supposed to rendezvous with a force lately landed from England at Duncannon under the command of Lord Dalhousie. When Dalhousie failed to show by mid afternoon Moore decided to move westwards and broke camp. His force was about 1000 strong. Just as they got into full marching order they noticed a cloud of dust approaching from the west. This was the newly formed rebel army led by Fr. Philip Roche numbering some 6000 men. The advance parties of both armies met at Goff's Bridge. Moore's men had reached the vicinity of the Bridge first and when Moore realised that he was faced with a formidable enemy he ordered his infantry to fan out across the adjoining fields and he set his cannon at the ready, aimed at the Bridge.

Thomas Cloney and John Colclough prevailed on Fr. Roche to mass his gunmen to attack the centre position of the enemy which was in fact near Goff's Bridge. Their plan then was to move most of their pikemen to the rear of the Government forces and entrap them in a pincer movement. The gunmen commanded by Fr. Roche suffered severe casualties from the enemy fire and were forced to retreat back across the river which in the initial stages they had managed to carry.

On the flank, Moore's light infantry harassed the pikemen in the scrub and woods which they had to travel through to get to Moore's rear. Despite being outnumbered by six to one the Government forces managed to hold the rebels. In the centre Fr. Roche now ordered his pikemen to rush the river and assault the redcoats. Despite their most valiant efforts the rebels were unable to withstand the firepower directed against them and were forced to withdraw.

Thomas Cloney's account of the battle varies somewhat from the account given above. At the commencement of the engagement Coclough moved off westwards and Fr. Roche sent Cloney with a band of his men to order his return.³⁹ Instead of an agreed pincer movement as described above Cloney alleges that Colclough, pursuing an independent course, informed him that he intended to get between the enemy and the town of New Ross in order to cut off their retreat. Cloney himself decided to return to the main body but found that he and his men were cut off from them by a division of the Government forces who saw their manoeuvre.

Cloney then describes a strange incident that occurred. 'Seeing a few of our gunsmen retreating, I entreated them to give up their muskets to myself and

³⁹ *General Thomas Cloney* - John Joyce pg.29

some men I had with me, and that we would, as they seemed in such a hurry to retreat, furnish them with horses to carry them off. The terms were acceded to by all but two persons, who were enraged at the imputation being cast on their courage. I now put on a cartouche box filled with ammunition, obtained a new musket, and had a few more men furnished with muskets. With these and a strong body of pikemen I resolved to make my way, if possible, to the main body at all hazards.

The adjacent fields were now covered with dense smoke, so that no object was perceptible to us on the south side (where the battle was raging) at the distance of about one hundred yards, nor could we conjecture what were the relative positions occupied by the contending parties. We had scarcely crossed two small fields, when we found ourselves nearly enclosed between two bodies of the King's troops, from whom, after exchanging a few shots, we were obliged to retreat, and advance in another direction.

The smoke was so thick that it intercepted our view of the enemy until we came within a few perches of them. They commenced a fire upon us, which we could only make a feeble attempt to return. Our numbers or our state of preparation for combat was not such as to enable us to stand any serious contest. We, however, with much difficulty advanced towards

The Battle of Goff's Bridge

and joined the main body, with loss of some four or five men killed and wounded.

After four hours of fighting the rebel leaders realised that they could no longer continue the assault. They began an orderly retreat to Wexford. Both sides lost a considerable amount of men. It is estimated that the rebels lost about 300 men while the Government forces lost 100.

The main body of the rebel army camped on the Three Rock mountain but the leaders and some of the more senior officers went into the town.

In their absence the notorious Captain Dixon had murdered over one hundred loyalist prisoners, thus reducing their chances of obtaining a favourable truce.

The Battle of Tuberneering

The northern army as we have seen, was headed by Edward Roche and Fr. John Murphy assisted by Edward Fitzgerald, John Hay, Fr. Mogue Kearns, Fr. Philip RocheFr. Michael MurphyGarret Byrneand Miles Byrne and later Anthony Perry and Esmonde Kyan.

In the booklet in the Battle of 1798 series entitled 'The Harrow' a brief pen picture of Fr. John Murphy was given. Likewise in the booklet 'Enniscorthy' there are pen pictures of Miles Byrne, Fr. Michael Murphy and Fr. Philip RocheA brief description of the life of Edward Roche is given in the booklet 'Oulart'.

At this juncture it might be appropriate to give some background information on Garret & Billy Byrne,John, Edward and Philip Hay, Anthony Perry and Esmonde Kyan.

Garret Byrne of Ballymanus was the eldest of the family. His younger brother Billy, another rebel leader was hanged in 1799. Although genealogists cannot agree on whether the Ballymanus family was of direct

descent from the famous Feagh McHugh O'Byrne (The 'wolf of the mountains' who was killed by the English in 1597) it is quite likely that they were an important sub branch of the famous O'Byrnes.

In any event the Ballymanus family was connected by marriage with some of the more important gentry families of Co. Wexford, notably the Colcloughs and the Mastersons.⁴⁰ In addition they were socially connected with the Countess Juliana (formerly a Donovan of Ballymore), wife of Lord Anglesey, whose residence was at Camolin, Co. Wexford.⁴¹ Garret's father known as 'old Garret' was the man who reputedly gave Hunter Gowan a whipping for 'daring to ride to hounds, like a gentleman'.

Strange to relate Garret and Billy Byrne had two brothers, John and Colclough who were both members of the Carlow militia.

Garret himself was married to a lady called Mary Sparling, the adopted niece of James Cullen a wealthy Hacketstown distiller. The marriage was not a happy one and it appears that Garret and his wife became estranged. They do not appear to have had children.⁴²

⁴⁰ *Wicklow History & Society* - ed. Ken Hannigan & Wm. Nolan

⁴¹ *Ibid.* pg. 316

⁴² *Ibid.* pg. 326

Garret Byrne with a group of about 30 men, joined the rebel camp at Vinegar Hill on Tuesday 29th. May.⁴³ They probably marched to the Three Rocks with the main army. According to Ruan O'Donnell, writing in *Wicklow History & Society* they were present at the Battle of New Ross with Joseph Holt, another celebrated Wicklow Rebel, but they do not appear to have taken part in the battle. They may well have been part of the Colclough contingent.

Gahan seems to think that Garret Byrne and his men went north with Fr. John Murphy and Edward Roche. He definitely fought at the battle of Arklow and later at Vinegar Hill. When the rebel army retreated to Wexford after the defeat of Vinegar Hill they divided into two separate groups, one led by Edward Roche and the other led by Fr. John Murphy. Garret Byrne joined Edward Roche and his army and marched north towards the Wicklow mountains. After numerous small engagements the ever dwindling army moved northwards into Co. Meath. There they met with several serious defeats and the army was fragmented. Garret Byrne surrendered to General John Moore on condition that he be exiled forever. He went to Hamburg with Edward Fitzgerald who received like terms. Garret Byrne is reputed to have died in Paris.

⁴³ *The People's Rising* - Daniel Gahan

The Battle of Tuberneering

William or Billy Byrne did not join the rebel forces until June 8th. when he marched into the Kilcavan camp, near Carnew, Co. Wicklow, with about 300 Wicklowmen. He, too, fought at Arklow and Vinegar Hill, but retired from the war soon after that defeat. He went to Dublin but was arrested and tried for treason etc. in May 1799. Despite pleas for his life, made by his sisters and some influential friends the sentence of death was affirmed. He was hanged outside Wicklow town on 26th September 1799.

The Hay family resided at Ballinkeelee, between Enniscorthy and Wexford. They were descended from a Norman family who had several holdings in Wexford, in the middle ages, particularly at Slad, Hayestown, Killiane, Tacumshane, Castlehayestown and they also owned Hay's castle in Wexford town. After the Cromwellian Confiscations they lost most of their Barony of Forth lands and the main branch of the family settled at Ballinkeelee.

In 1798 there were three brothers Edward, John and Philip who became involved in the rising. Edward Hay was the contemporary historian of the period who wrote extensively about the rebellion. Although directly involved with the United Irishmen, he does not appear to have taken part in any battle. He was

The Battle of Tuberneering

appointed head of munitions manufacturing in Wexford during the period the rebels held the town.

When all was lost after the battle of Vinegar Hill he was appointed as an emissary to General Needham and in fact met General Lake. Lake refused the conditions of surrender and sent Hay back to Wexford to communicate this to the rebels. While he had been out of the town the loyalists had regained control and he was commissioned to go back to General Lake to inform him of this in an attempt to spare the town.



*Edward Hay of
Ballinkeele, Rebel,
Patriot, Journalist and
Historian.*

In the event the town was spared but many of the citizens of the town and district suffered much maltreatment at the hands of the soldiers. Edward Hay was never arrested and in the early years of the 19th

century he went around the county collecting material for his book *Insurrection*, which was published in 1803. He removed to Dublin with his family and seems to have fallen on hard times in his latter days and died in poverty.

Both John and Philip Hay fought in 1798.

John was an officer in Dillon's regiment in the Irish Brigade long before the rebellion, but by then he had retired from the Continent and had settled at Newcastle in Co. Wexford. He was an experienced gunner. He joined the rebellion on Tuesday 29th May at Vinegar Hill. He commanded one of the captured cannon guns on Forth Mountain and he probably fought at Arklow and Vinegar Hill.

When the defeated rebel army divided in Wexford on 21st June, John Hay marched northwards with them as far as Peppard's Castle, where the army halted for the night. Many men left the rebel army that night, refusing to go any further. John Hay also left the camp and went to Ballinkeelee. He was arrested by an army patrol and taken back to Wexford. Incriminating documents were found on him and he was tried and sentenced to death. He was hanged and beheaded in Wexford on Saturday 23rd June.

The Battle of Tuberneering

Philip Hay was an officer in the 18th. Light Dragoons and was in Wexford on leave when the rebellion broke out. He was found on board a ship in Wexford harbour and was forced to join the insurgents. He fought through the campaign and was present at Tuberneering, Arklow and Vinegar Hill. After the defeat of Vinegar Hill he appears to have given himself up to the authorities. He was court martialled and acquitted. In the aftermath of the rebellion he received compensation as a 'suffering loyalist'⁴⁴



Ballinkee House, birthplace of John, Edward and Philip Hay, now owned by John and Margaret Maher

⁴⁴ *Families of Co. Wexford*- Hilary Murphy

Anthony Perry of Perrymount, Inch, Co. Wexford was an extensive landowner. His wife was Kathleen Forde, a relative of the gentry family of that name who had two properties, one at Seaforde in Co. Down and the other at Coolgraney, near Inch in Co. Wexford. Perry's father was a wealthy 'card manufacturer' from the North who had settled in Dublin and when the young Anthony Perry married Kathleen Forde he was given Forde lands at Inch.

He was involved with the United Irishmen from the start of that Society in Co. Wexford and he was the area organiser in the months prior to the outbreak of rebellion. He was, like many of his equals in the Society, a Protestant. He was also a man of high ideals who was fascinated by the principles and lofty aspirations of the United Irishmen.

He was one of the first men to be arrested in May (21st.) of 1798 and he was interrogated in Gorey by the militia. The information he gave, even under the most severe torture of pitchcapping, was generally vague, but he did name names. As a result of his intelligence to the authorities, Edward Fitzgerald Esmonde Kyan, Bagenal Harvey and Dr. John Colclough were arrested on the fateful Saturday May 26th.

After his confession he was released pending a trial. He went to the house of a friend in or near Gorey where he was nursed. His head and face were in a dreadful state as a result of the pitchcapping and torture. Gorey was evacuated by the militia and yeomen, who fled to Arklow, with many of the loyalist inhabitants, when they heard of the rebel triumphs. Perry remained in the house in Gorey until the 31st. May when, he, with other prisoners who had escaped being shot, headed for Carrigrew hill where the main rebel encampment for the northern army was set up.

He was immediately given his position as one of the main chiefs of the rebel forces. When Edward Roche had assumed the post of Commander-in-Chief on June 7th. (after the defeat of Harvey at New Ross) he appointed Perry as the overall commander of the northern army.

Perry fought in all the major engagements. He was at Arklow, Vinegar Hill, Ballyellis, Hacketstown and Ballygullen. He travelled with the remnants of the northern army which tried to get to Ulster. He was with them in the last desperate battle at Knightstown on the Meath/Louth border. There the last of the rebel army was splintered into small desperate bands who now fought for survival. Perry along with Fr. Mogue Kearns and William Alyward and some of the

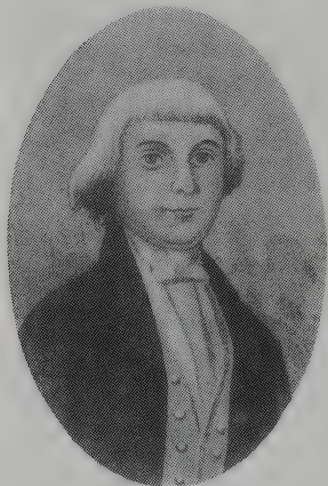
remnants of the rebel army headed south towards Kildare. There, Fr. Kearns and Anthony Perry were caught and arrested. They were brought to Edenderry and after a summary trial they were hanged.

Esmonde Kyan was descended from an old Gaelic family the O'Cahans, princes of Derry and a branch of the O'Neills of Tyrone. The last O'Cahan chieftain was dispossessed in 1607 and his eldest son, James, was sent to Trinity College to be educated on the orders of the Lord Deputy. He became a Church of Ireland minister and was appointed to the parish of Rathbeggan in Co. Meath. His great grandson, Adam Kyan married Mary Howard of Mount Howard, Co. Wexford and of Ballymurtagh, Co. Wicklow. By his marriage he acquired two estates. The family were involved in copper mining in Ballymurtagh. They were related through marriage with the Byrnes of Ballymanus.⁴⁵

Adam was the grandfather of Esmonde Kyan. Esmonde had three brothers, John, James and Francis. Like Bagenal Harvey, John Colclough and John Boxwell, Esmonde Kyan was of the Gentry class.

⁴⁵ Ibid. pg.323

Francis Kyan was a high ranking officer in the British Army. When Esmonde was sentenced to death Francis did all in his power to have the sentence revoked. His efforts were successful but the messenger carrying the revocation order arrived in Wexford half an hour too late.



Esmonde Kyan, of Mounthoward, the one armed gunner of 1798 who was executed on Wexford Bridge.

Esmonde Kyan was born in 1850 and was married twice. His first wife was a Miss Byrne by whom he had five daughters. His second wife bore him two sons, both of whom died in infancy and a daughter Margaret. Two of the daughters of the first marriage had husbands. Mary was married to a Mr. Purcell and Fanny's husband was Richard Edgeworth. Esmonde Kyan was a British Army veteran. At some stage in his career he lost an arm in a duel and was fitted with a prosthesis.

Esmonde Kyan was arrested and charged with being a United Irishman after the confession of Anthony Perry. He was detained in Gorey on the 26th. May and was still there on June 4th. After the defeat of Walpole on that day the military evacuated Gorey for the second time and fled to Arklow. Kyan was in the Market House in the upper storey with other prisoners. The fleeing soldiers began firing randomly at the windows and Kyan ordered all the prisoners to lie down on the floor, thus saving their lives.

He immediately joined the rebel forces that took possession of the town. He fought in the battle of Arklow, where his artificial arm was blown off. He was manning a cannon at the time. He continued with his work. After that battle he retired to Wexford town to recover from his injuries. He was there on 21st June when the defeated rebel forces arrived in the town.

Kyan opted to join the contingent under Edward Roche, which headed north. He was present at all the engagements - Ballyellis, Hacketstown and Ballygullen and travelled with the remnants of the northern army which tried to get to Ulster. He was with them in the last battle at Knightstown on the Meath/Louth border. With Garret Byrne and Edward Fitzgerald he headed south and managed to get back to the outskirts of Wexford town. Towards the end

The Battle of Tuberneering

of July he surrendered to the authorities, was tried, convicted and sentenced to death. Esmonde Kyan was hanged on Wexford Bridge.

The battle of Tuberneering was fought on Monday 4th. June.

Government forces had commenced their campaign in north Wexford on June 2nd. when 500 men under the command of Colonel Walpole arrived in Carnew, a small village on the Wexford/ Wicklow border. He was a young career army officer, impatient to get to grips with the rebels. He surveyed their camp at Carrigrew (half way between Gorey and Camolin) from the top of Slieveboy, a prominent hill about four miles distant from the rebel camp. He remained in Carnew awaiting orders.

Government plans were to attack the rebels from the north i.e. the Arklow/Gorey direction, from the west via Newtownbarry and from the south via New Ross. General Lake, the acting Commander-in-Chief of the Government forces was in Dublin and was unaware of the fact that there were two rebel armies in the field.

He sent General Loftus with a sizeable force to Arklow with instructions that he and Walpole were to

The Battle of Tuberneering

join up. Loftus sent a messenger to Carnew to alert Walpole about their part in the plan.

Both officers were probably fully aware of the setbacks suffered by the rebels at Newtownbarry on June 1st and an equally crushing defeat of about 2000 rebels commanded by Anthony Perry on the same day in the vicinity of Gorey.

The Perry force had unexpectedly been confronted by about 200 cavalry including yeomen from Gorey at Ballyminaun Hill near that town. In the ensuing skirmish the rebels had suffered a defeat. They lost about 100 men before fleeing back to Carrigrew Hill and the safety of their encampment.



Ballymore House, (now partly a museum) used as the H.Q. of the rebel forces on Carrigrew - still owned by the Donovans

The Battle of Tuberneering.

The rebels spent the next two days drilling and preparing for the forthcoming battles. The rebel army had now swelled to about 10,000. Ballymore House, the residence of the Donovans, was taken over as the headquarters of the insurgent forces and it was there the leaders lived for the time Carrigrew was controlled by them. The Protestant Donovan family had fled to Dublin at the outset of the rebellion.



Carrigrew Hill- the original camp of the Northern Army

On the afternoon of the 3rd. June Colonel Walpole moved 400 of his force to Gorey, where he met up with General Loftus. The plan they drew up was to attack the rebels on Carrigrew hill from two points.

Loftus would lead his troops down the Gorey/Wexford road and attack from the north east side. Walpole was to lead a frontal assault from the north. His march would bring him down the Gorey/Ferns road.

A rebel intelligence man in Gorey heard the officers' plans and that night he made his way to Carrigrew and informed the rebel leadership about the Government plans.

At dawn on the 4th. June Walpole and Loftus each took 600 troops and marched in their appointed directions.

On Carrigrew, the rebel forces mobilised at dawn also, and the bulk of the army headed north to engage Walpole's unit.

Walpole and his men got to a small village, called Clogh, on the main Gorey/Ferns road and from there they took a side road which would bring them up to Carrigrew. This road went through a townland called Tuberneering. The Government force was spotted by a rebel patrol. A large detachment of insurgents left the road and moved onto high ground overlooking the road.

The Battle of Tuberneering

Colonel Walpole was persuaded to send out a scout to see if the way ahead was clear. The scout returned saying he only saw one man with a gun in the distance. Walpole decided to press on.

The road was a winding twisty road and before Walpole's men had reached the point where the rebels were concealed on the high ground, other rebel units, mostly pikemen, had hidden themselves behind the ditches. Walpole and his troops marched straight into the trap. As soon as the complete column had passed, the men on the high ground opened fire and almost simultaneously the pikemen poured over the ditches and began to engage the hemmed in troops. The main rebel force arrived in front of the shocked soldiers, numbers of whom had already been killed including Walpole. The other officers, however, rallied the men and succeeded in turning their artillery to rake the high ground where the rebel gunmen were concentrated.

Edward Roche directed the rebel attack. He ordered his men to hem the redcoats in from the two sides and from the front. Fighting was fierce and the battle to win the cannon was even fiercer. The rebels took the cannon only to lose it again to the determined soldiers. A stronger assault bore fruit and the rebels once again captured the cannon and drove the soldiers back towards Clogh. Though suffering some

casualties the remnants of Walpole's column retreated in good order to Clogh, where they were reinforced by about 100 of the Loftus column. They, too, were forced to retreat to Gory in the face of the vast numbers of reasonably well armed rebels.

When Walpole's routed detachment reached the town of Gorey they found that rebel elements had already taken up positions in the houses on the Main Street and had placed a barricade across it. The retreating soldiers realised they would have to retreat even further to Arklow. They fired into the windows of the houses and broke through the barrier. Esmonde Kyan and numerous others were being held captive in the upper floor of the Market House and this received special attention from the retreating soldiers. Kyan's prompt action in ordering all to lie on the floor ensured that no prisoner was either killed or injured by the sustained volleys from the militia men. Hundreds of loyalists fled from the town also.

When the rebels arrived they set up camp on Gorey Hill and placed their captured cannon there. As soon as the Loftus column arrived back along the Clogh road towards Gorey they were fired on by the rebel cannon. This had the effect of forcing Loftus to turn about and retreat towards Clogh and Camolin. From there he headed out across country to the safety of

Carnew and from there he pushed further west and finally encamped at Tullow.

The Battle of Arklow

The jubilant rebels moved most of their men to Gorey Hill, leaving a reasonable force to hold Carrigrew. Patrols were sent out to watch for the possible counter attack which in fact never materialised. During the next two days, the 5th and 6th. of June bands of Wicklow insurgents began to arrive in the Gorey camp. They brought the news that Arklow had been evacuated. Despite this news the rebel leadership made no effort to make a forced march on the town with a view to securing it at this time - a fact they would deeply regret later. In fact they spent the two days trying to replenish their stocks of food and ammunition.

According to Gahan 'revenge' burnings were carried out on two houses owned by the Ram family - Ramsfort and Clonattin.⁴⁶ Mount Nebo, the residence of Hunter Gowan was also burnt.

⁴⁶ *The People's Rising* - Daniel Gahan pg.137

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While Gowan was not a man of any great account, the Ram family had been in Gorey for over 150 years. The progenitor of the family was Bishop Thomas Ram, who acquired large estates in Wexford in 1626.



*The Right Rev. Thomas Ram, Bishop of Ferns and Leighlin
(Photo courtesy Michael FitzPatrick)*

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The Bishop got estates not alone in the Gorey area but also in the south of the county where the village of Ramsgrange still reminds us of Bishop Thomas.

His descendants, were prominent loyalists in the area and invariably a Ram was the chief officer on the town Corporation. In the years prior to '98 the family was represented by Stephen and Abel Ram. However there does not appear to have been any charges of cruelty or blatant wrongdoing laid at the Ram door. Many of this family in the pre '98 period were in fact simply figureheads of the authorities in a political sense. The Rams fled from Gorey in the early days of the rebellion and did not return until the country was peaceful once again.



*Stephen Ram,
whose residence
Ramsfort was
burnt in 1798.
The Rams
became Catholic
in the
19th. century.*

Hunter Gowan was an opportunist. He earned himself the sobriquet 'Hunter' because for a period in his life he was an outlaw hunter. He then became a middleman, renting lands from the Earl of Fitzwilliam. He was a local magistrate. He was the man who was reputedly horsewhipped by old Garret Byrne of Ballymanus for 'daring to ride to hounds'. During the period immediately prior to the rebellion Gowan became notorious as a relentless pursuer of United Irishmen. He was attributed with having committed outrages against the people in general, including the torture and murder of suspects.

His origins were humble and his parents seem to have been from Gorey. He settled at Mount Nebo (Gowan's name for his house and estate) where he reared a large family of daughters. Apparently these ladies were being conveyed to Arklow, just after the attack on Tuberneering when they were apprehended by a group of rebels led by Miles Byrne. Although the rebels knew who the ladies were, the women and their driver were allowed to proceed on their journey unmolested.

Gowan fought in some of the battles and managed to escape with his life. He was one of the men named by the revolutionary committee of Wexford town as being a public enemy of the revolution and an outlaw.

Despite this he survived '98 and went back to live in Mount Nebo. He was quite active in the post '98 purges and was involved in some legal dispute in the early 1800s. He died sometime in the first decade of the 19th century.

The government forces had regrouped in Wicklow and General Needham now made preparations to regarrison Arklow. He gathered all available forces and went to Arklow on the 6th. June. His men were dug in there by the evening of that day and had completed certain fortifications to face a possible rebel attack. Needham's forces included yeoman cavalry units and one of these, the Castletown Yeoman Cavalry was commanded by John Knox Grogan. Another was commanded by Lord Mountnorris.

Mountnorris was, if anything, a liberal man who did all in his power to keep his estates peaceful. His residence was at Camolin and was one of the first buildings to be attacked by the rebel forces in the early days of the rebellion. He was descended from Sir Francis Annesley who received over 11,000 acres of land in north Wexford in the Plantation of Wexford in the early 17th. century. This immensely powerful and wealthy family also got lands in Ulster during the plantation of that province. Richard Annesley was the 6th. Lord Altham, 8th. Lord Valentia and 7th. Earl of

Anglesey. He was created Baron Mountnorris in 1795. Significantly too, he was one of the 'Virtuous and Independent Forty Five' - a group of Protestant gentry which included Bagenal Harvey and John Colclough. These men had put their reputations on the line by voting in Wexford for increased measures of freedom for Catholics. His daughter was married to John Maxwell Barry of Newtownbarry.⁴⁷

John Knox Grogan was in fact a brother of Cornelius Grogan, now the rebel commisar in Wexford town. He pursued a career in the Army in his younger days but had retired in the 1780s.

As we have seen the Grogan were an extremely wealthy Wexford family and two of their estates were at Castletown and Monaseed. John Knox Grogan was the owner of those estates and had raised a corps of cavalry in 1797. Miles Byrne had nothing but good things to say about John Knox Grogan. 'It was', he said, 'difficult to find a more upright, honourable man, though he was not very well fitted for command, being subject to the gout.' Sir Thomas Esmonde of Ballinastreagh was the first Lieutenant of the corps and Lawrence Doyle, Esmonde's first cousin, was second Lieutenant. Many of the better

⁴⁷ *The Wexford Gentry* Vol. 1 - Art Kavanagh & Rory Murphy pg. 17

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tenants of the Monaseed and Castletown estates joined the corps including Miles Byrne.

Just prior to the rebellion all of Grogan's corps resigned, except the officers, when they refused to take the oath of allegiance. Grogan got replacements for them from among his poorer Protestant tenants for whom he had to buy horses. Both Esmonde and Doyle fought at Arklow and were with Grogan when he was killed there. After the battle they were arrested and sent to Dublin, where they were later tried for treason (being Catholics) and acquitted.

On the 7th. June a large part of the rebel force decided to march against Carnew. They soon discovered the town was undefended. The buildings owned by extreme loyalists were set ablaze. The flames spread to adjoining buildings and soon the whole town was on fire. After this the rebel force under their new commander, Anthony Perry, marched out to Kilcavan Hill, to encamp for the night. There they heard about the regarrisoning of Arklow. After a debate the leaders decided to march back to Gorey Hill in the morning.

They marched back the next day and were still undecided about their next move until they heard about the defeat at New Ross. It was now becoming clear that if the revolution were to succeed they must

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break out of the county and hope for help from rebels in neighbouring counties and from the French. It was decided to attack Arklow on Saturday 9th. June.

Fr. John Murphy was opposed to mounting this attack and held his men back towards the rear. The journey to Arklow, a distance of about 12 miles took six hours, because of delays of one kind or another, including the bickering between Fr. John Murphy and the other leaders. A halt at Coolgraney had not helped matters, with large amounts of whiskey being consumed by some men.

In Arklow, General Needham's forces now numbered 2,000 men with ample artillery, guns and ammunition. The soldiers had the place well fortified and were waiting for the rebel attack.



The memorial to Fr. Michael Murphy who died at the Battle of Arklow, June 11th. 1798

At about four o'clock the vanguard of the rebels appeared near the town. Needham was well prepared and had all the approaches well defended. Many trenches had been dug and the soldiers were well protected. The rebels sent a large detachment towards the sea side of the town to effect an entrance from that quarter. The main rebel thrust, Needham expected, would be towards the Main Street.

There was another delay when the rebels attacked and demolished a house belonging to an accredited loyalist at the entrance to the town.

Anthony Perry eventually got his men into position, with the entire rebel army fanned out in a crescent from the western side of the Main Street across to the sea on the east. This manoeuvre was accomplished with the loss of some of his best men, who were picked off by Needham's sharpshooters as they crossed open ground. The rebel artillery, commanded by Esmonde Kyan aided by Dick Monk and his Wexford townsmen, was placed on a slope roughly in the centre of the crescent.

The artillery commenced the attack. They eventually found the range and disabled one of Needham's guns. Another shot blew up a small ammunition store and at least one of the defenders was killed and a few were

wounded. Needham pulled back his defenders to a line about a hundred yards to the rear of their original entrenchment. In the course of the artillery duel Esmonde Kyan's artificial arm and part of the stump were blown off, but he continued to man his guns until the moment of retreat.

At the sea side the rebel infantry had already begun their battle. They stormed in among the fishermen's huts and these were soon set ablaze. The defending cavalry repeatedly charged the attackers and there were casualties on both sides.

In the centre and to the westward side the rebel pikemen supported by their gunmen began their attack. A huge wave of men, numbering about 6000 moved forward gathering speed as they went. The dug in soldiers replied with a withering fire and the defenders' artillery now came into play cutting down dozens of men at a time. The attack shuddered to a halt and then the rebel forces began to retreat out of range of the guns. They dragged their wounded with them. The dead they left behind. Again and again they regrouped and made further futile attempts to assault the militia. And again and again they were repulsed with many being either killed or wounded. In one of these desperate assaults Fr. Michael Murphy led his men right up to the mouths of the cannon, only to be blown away himself. After the battle his body was

found half in and half out of one of the burning cabins and was subjected to much indignity.

According to Miles Byrne, while the loss of Fr. Michael Murphy was keenly felt, the heroic efforts made by his namesake Fr. John Murphy compensated in some degree. Here is what Miles Byrne wrote about Fr. John Murphy: 'there was still one in our ranks who enjoyed a greater ascendancy over the masses than the unfortunate man who was killed. Father John Murphy apparently with the simplicity of a child, was a lion in the fight; in short he never knew, nor cared, nor feared danger, from the moment he was forced to take the field...'⁴⁸ If Nicky Furlong's account of Fr. Murphy is correct then Fr. John did not fight at Arklow at all and only came towards the town when the battle was over. The reason for his absence was his disagreement with the plan to attack Arklow in the first place.

The rebels on the sea side, like their comrades in the centre and on the westward side, renewed their attacks vigorously, but were as vigorously opposed. They broke through almost as far as the bridge (on the site where the modern bridge stands). Again they were repulsed and driven back. The cavalry gave hot

⁴⁸ *Memoirs of Miles Byrne* pg.102

pursuit and in one of the charges John Knox Grogan was killed.

The battle appears to have lasted about four hours before the attacking party gave up and began their retreat.

If we are to believe Miles Byrne the rebel army had no commander-in-chief and he did not know who gave the order to retreat.⁴⁹ It was also his belief that the defenders were on the point of evacuating the town when the rebel retreat was ordered.

According to Musgrave the rebels lost about 1000 men killed and wounded. Gahan and Pakenham put the number of killed at about 500 with as many or more wounded. Government casualties were light in comparison but no one seems to know what the figures were.

The victorious defenders did not dare to follow up the retreating army and wisely stayed in their trenches for the night.

When they reached the Gorey camp the rebels saw to their wounded comrades whom they had managed to cart away from Arklow. Most of them were sent to

⁴⁹ Ibid. pg. 103

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their own homes to be cared for by their relatives. The remainder settled down for the night facing an uncertain dawn.

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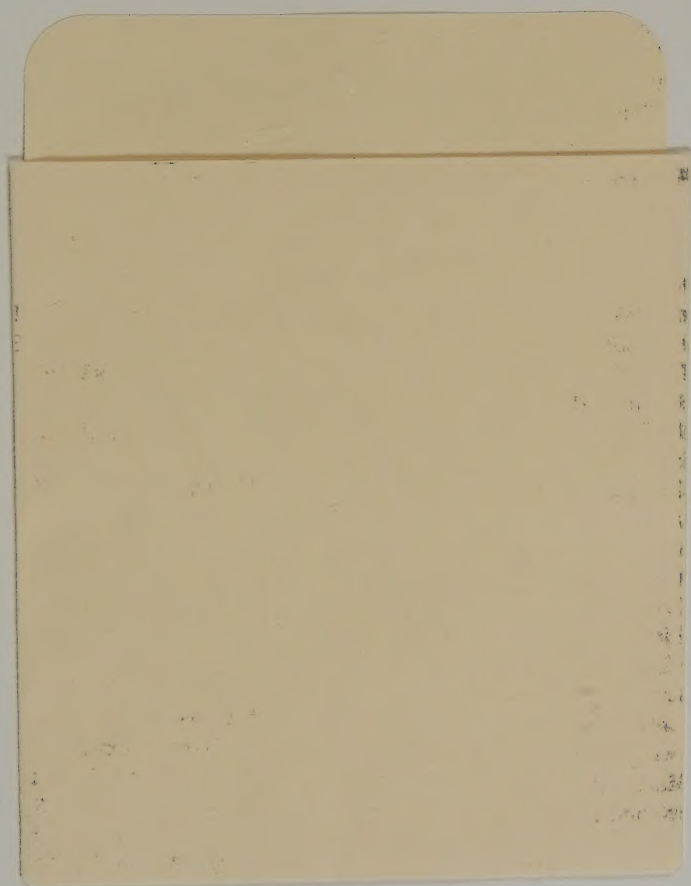
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About the Author

Art Kavanagh, a Bunclody man, is a former teacher who took early retirement in 1994.

He has published to date

In the Shadow of Mount Leinster - a book dealing with the early history of Ui Chinnsealaigh (Wexford, Carlow, South Wicklow and East Kilkenny) up to 1650 Published 1992

The Wexford Gentry Vol 1 - a study of 23 different Gentry families with numerous anecdotes, illustrations etc. Published 1994

The Wexford Gentry Vol 2 - a study of a further 20 Gentry families Published 1996

The Battles of 1798 - a series giving accounts of 15 major actions in the South East. The first part of the series giving accounts of five battles published 1996. Part two published in May 1997 and part three will be published in Autumn 1997

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