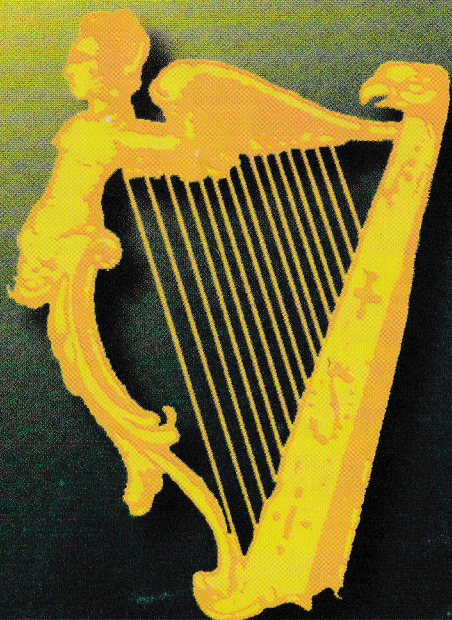


THE RISING OF
1798
AND WHAT IT MEANS



The Rising of 1798 was Separatist, Republican and Democratic in its objectives. Ever since the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1169 Irish Separatists resisted England's claim to occupy and rule Ireland. The native Irish, for example the O'Neills and O'Donnells and those of Norman stock who became Irish, like the FitzGerald and Patrick Sarsfield, endeavoured to win back Irish independence.

The century which followed the Treaty of Limerick (1691) was one of the most wretched in Irish history. In 1727 Dean Swift commented that: "The dress and appearance of the people is miserable – the families of farmers who pay great rents are living on potatoes and buttermilk, without a shoe or stocking to their feet." The land had been seized in the various Plantations over the centuries and the peasantry paid rents to landlords (often absent) who charged what rents they pleased, and which were collected through middlemen.

The Church of Ireland was the established church and Catholics were deprived of their rights under the Penal laws; Presbyterians suffered disabilities but to a lesser extent. In 1740 over 400,000 people died of starvation.

Societies like the Whiteboys were organised to fight back against the injustice of the system. The Irish people yearned for their ancient rights and their freedom. Most of them spoke Irish and many of their songs praised Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Scottish Stuarts, whom they regarded as allies against English tyranny.

Liberty, Equality, Fraternity

But a new dawn was awakening. In Europe it was the Age of Enlightenment and Reason, with talk of ending Monarchy and establishing Democracy. France gave the lead when the fall of the Bastille heralded the Revolution in 1789. "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" became the rallying cry of the Revolutionaries.

In the New World the American colonists fought and won their own War of Independence (1776-1781) against England. Monarchs trembled on their thrones as their "Divine Right" was questioned, the Rights of Man were debated and the new Republics of France and the United States were established.

Theobald Wolfe Tone, a law graduate of Trinity College, Dublin and a Protestant, along with others, mostly Presbyterians, founded the Society of United Irishmen in Belfast in October 1791. A Dublin Society was founded

three weeks later and a newspaper called the *Northern Star* was launched. Their initial demands were for reform, “a society of equality which would include people of all religious persuasions – and of none”.

Tone had previously worked strenuously and effectively for the rights of Catholics, but the British government of the time opposed the moderate demands of the United Irishmen. They refused to concede Equality, Democracy and Civil Rights. Gradually the United movement became more Radical and Republican.

Break the Connection with England



Theobald Wolfe Tone

After 1793 England was at war with France and she chose the path of coercion in Ireland, using strong-arm tactics against the reformers. They brought in an Insurrection Act in 1796 and Martial Law was imposed in many areas in 1797. The United Irishmen sought the help of the new French Republic and prepared to fight for an Irish Republic. “Break the connection with England,” declared Tone.

In December 1796 a French fleet of 46 ships carrying an army of 14,000 men sailed from the port of Brest under the command of General Lazare Hoche. Wolfe Tone accompanied them and they planned to land at Bantry Bay, seize the city of Cork and then with a general uprising they would march on Dublin, the centre of English rule. Winter storms scattered the fleet, only 16 vessels reached Bantry and even then the weather made a landing impossible. They sailed back to France.

More French expeditions were planned and the United Irishmen hesitated between striking first or waiting until the French would actually arrive. Meanwhile the Government of England brought in more emergency laws and the Yeomanry (mostly Protestant) and Militias (mostly Catholic) as well as the regular English regiments were used to terrorise the populace. Pitch caps, floggings and half-hangings were used to extract information from people. Informers were paid huge sums to betray their comrades.

Wexford, Antrim and Down



Henry Joy McCracken

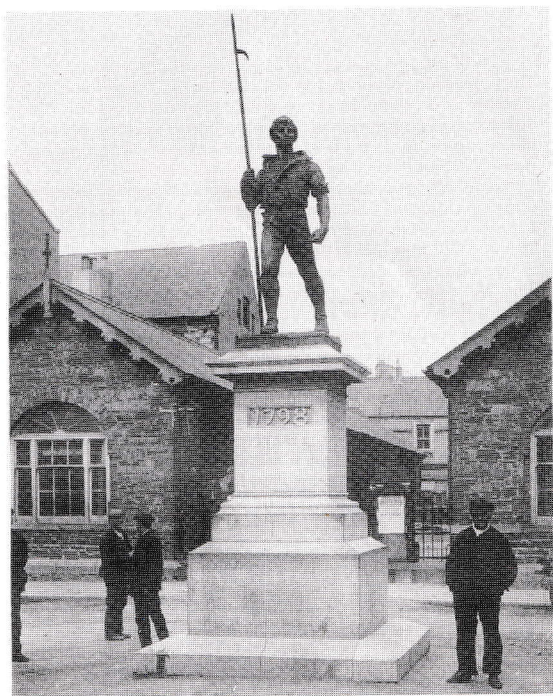
The Rising itself was planned for May 23, 1798. In the event, the main centres of Irish resistance to English rule were in Wexford, Antrim and Down. But there was action in other areas also, including Wicklow, Carlow, Kilkenny, Kildare, Meath, Dublin, Westmeath, Longford, Cork, Tipperary and in the West later in the year.

The Wexford Insurgents drove the Crown Forces out of Co Wexford and attempted to spread the rising to Cos Carlow, Kilkenny and Wicklow, with Dublin city as their major objective. Armed mostly with pikes they fought with great skill and determination. As most of the country failed to rise simultaneously the English brought massive forces to bear on the Wexfordmen at New Ross, Arklow and eventually at Vinegar Hill near Enniscorthy where the Wexford Rising was effectively crushed on June 21, 1798.

The people of Wexford are justly proud of their achievement, their bravery and example in 1798. The names of leaders like Father Murphy and Bagenal Harvey are remembered with pride and the Wexford pike and pikemen are symbols of their heroic contribution to the fight for Irish freedom.

In Antrim and Down the Dissenters or Presbyterians were prominent in the Rising, and the insurgents occupied several towns in both counties, showing great valour against a formidable enemy. Henry Joy McCracken led the attack on Antrim town on June 7 and was afterwards court-martialled and hanged in the Cornmarket in Belfast. In Co Down Henry Munro led the insurgents to victory at Saintfield, but they also were defeated at Ballynahinch on June 13. He was hanged in front of his home in Lisburn. Historians record that 30 Presbyterian ministers were involved in the Rising and several of them were hanged by the Crown.





1798 Memorial, Wexford

General Lake, Commander of British Forces in Ireland, earned the name of the 'Butcher of Wexford' because of the severity of the measures he used to suppress the Rising.

Victory at Castlebar

When news of the Rising reached France the Republican Government ordered the organisation of three expeditions, under Generals Humbert, Hardy and Kilmaine to sail to Ireland "to help the United Irish who have taken up arms to throw off the yoke of English oppression".

General Jean-Joseph Humbert's small army of 1,100 men landed in Killala, Co Mayo in August. They were joined by the "Men of the West" and together they won a spectacular victory at Castlebar on August 27. Humbert liberated Co Mayo, proclaimed a Republic of Connacht and marched audaciously across five counties, penetrating as far as Co Longford where he was eventually forced to surrender at Ballinamuck on September 8.



General Humbert

General Hardy's army of 3,000 men reached Loch Swilly, Co Donegal on October 12. Their fleet of 10 ships was intercepted and defeated by the Royal Navy and Wolfe Tone was arrested and brought to Dublin in chains. He told his captors: "For the cause which I have embraced, I feel prouder to wear these chains, than if I were decorated with the Star and Garter of England". He was tried by court-martial and sentenced to death. He died in prison in suspicious circumstances after the Chief Justice had

issued a writ to suspend his execution. He was aged 35.

The man who organised his generation to bring about an Ireland united, independent and democratic was buried in Bodenstown, Co Kildare. Two hundred years later his aims have not yet been achieved. This is indeed a sobering thought.

**God grant you glory, brave Father Murphy
And open Heaven to all your men;
For the cause that called you may call tomorrow
In another fight for the Green again.
(PJ McCall)**

It is estimated that 30,000 people died in the Rising of 1798. To those gallant people who suffered and sacrificed so much we owe an enormous debt of gratitude. Under the United Irish leadership Irish separatism became one of the most progressive movements in the world, seeking as well as national independence, Equality, Democracy and the Rights of Man. Irish women made their own important contribution and the names of Molly Doyle of Wexford, Anne Devlin of Wicklow and Betsy Gray of Down are remembered too for their courage and fidelity to the cause.

An Unbroken Tradition

Robert Emmet (1803), the Young Irelanders (1848), the Fenians (1867) and the Irish Volunteers and Irish Citizen Army (1916) were all in the same Republican Separatist tradition of the United Irishmen. In more recent times, Bobby Sands, Republican TD for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, and his comrades who died on hunger strike in

Long Kesh Camp and in English prisons, represent the ultimate sacrifice in Ireland's long struggle for freedom. The true Republicans of today are those who actively strive to end English rule in Ireland and establish the sovereignty, democracy and rights of the Irish Nation.

Patrick Pearse was clear and eloquent in his interpretation



Patrick Pearse

of Irish Republican objectives. There was no evasion, equivocation or double-talk when he wrote, at Christmas, 1915:

“If we today are fighting for something either greater than or less than the thing our fathers fought for, either our fathers did not fight for freedom at all, or we are not fighting for freedom. If I do not hold the faith of Tone, and if Tone was not a heretic, then I am.

“If Tone said ‘**BREAK** the connection with England’, and if I say ‘**MAINTAIN** the connection with England’, I may be preaching a saner (as I am certainly preaching a safer) gospel than his, but I am obviously not preaching the same gospel.

“Separatism, in fact, is the national position. Whenever an Irish leader has taken up a position different from the national position he has been repudiated by the next generation. The United Irishmen repudiated Grattan. The Young Irelanders repudiated Daniel O’Connell. The Irish Volunteers have repudiated Mr Redmond. The chain of the Separatist tradition has never once snapped during the centuries.”

The Irish Republican Movement was founded 200 years ago. Despite English might, native collaboration and misrepresentation this Movement has endured to this day, in its aims and methods, to break the connection with England and establish national and civil rights in Ireland. This continuity is the guarantee of ultimate success.





The Words of Tone

“To break the connection with England, the never-failing source of all our political evils, and to assert the independence of my country – these were my objects. To unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past dissensions, and to substitute the common name of Irishman in place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter – these were my means.

“From my earliest youth I have regarded the connection between Ireland and Great Britain as the curse of the Irish nation, and felt convinced that, whilst it lasted, this country could never be free nor happy.”

Ómós An Phiarsaigh

“Dob é Tiobóid Wolfe Tone an fear dob fhearr de Ghaeil ná de Ghall-Ghaeil dar gineadh riamh in Éirinn. Cromaimid ár gceann agus feacaimid ár nglún ina fhianaise, agus gairimid é thar ar síolraíodh de dhea-fhear-aibh anseo ó dealbhadh Éire, ar mhórgacht a anama, ar dhoimhneacht a intleachta, ar mhéid a fhóirithine do chlanna Gael. Ní bheadh Éire ann inniu mura mbeadh an fear sin. A chuimhne sin agus a theagasc sin do choinnigh beo go nuige seo í.

“Dob uafar í doimhneacht intleachta Wolfe Tone agus dob iontach í géire a intinne. Do thuig sé dála Gael agus cúrsaí Gall go hiomlán. Dob é an chéad duine do thuig ina gceart iad. Is é a thug léargas agus solas ar an gcúis sin dá dtáinig ina dhiaidh.”

— *An Piarsach*, 1912