



The 1798 Rebellion

An educational resource



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Introduction

The 1798 Rebellion was influenced by political and social conditions in Ireland in the late 18th century, combined with the political unrest which gripped America and spread throughout Europe in the latter decades of the 18th century. The 1798 Rebellion was a pivotal event in Irish history. It involved members from all sections of society rebelling against English interference in Irish affairs. Numerous devastating battles took place over the course of the Rebellion, leading to large scale loss of life and widespread destruction of property. The 1798 Rebellion influenced the course of Irish history for centuries to come. The leaders of the Rebellion are credited with inspiring future generations of Irish revolutionaries. Their vision for a union of all Irish citizens and an independent Ireland left an indelible mark on Irish society.



Vinegar Hill, Charge of the 5th Dragoon Guards on the insurgents

Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

Vinegar Hill



The Age of Revolution

Ireland was not the only country to stage a rebellion in the late 1700's, many countries throughout Europe and North America saw their populations rise up against their governments for various reasons. Some of the more famous revolutions from this time included: the American War of Independence 1775, the Dutch Netherlands 1785, Hungary 1790, Poland 1791, Russia 1793, Sardinia 1793 and the Austrian Netherlands in 1797. While all of above mentioned revolutions shared similarities, it was the American War of Independence and the French Revolution which would have the greatest impact on political thought in Ireland in the late 18th century.

What inspired countries to Rebel?

One of the main reasons that led countries to rebellion was the division of wealth between the upper and lower classes. The upper classes of society comprising of the aristocracy, the nobility and the clergy, monopolised economic wealth and political power. The lower classes of society were forced to live in extreme poverty and had little influence over the laws which governed them. This division of social class throughout Europe in the latter half of the 18th century led to widespread revolutionary activity. The ideals of Enlightenment philosophers also influenced political thinking and contributed to uprisings and revolts. Enlightenment philosophers such as Locke, Kant and Voltaire stressed the importance of reason, they pushed for the advancement of science and were critical of religion. However, it was the democratic ideals of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, introduced by enlightenment philosophers which had the most profound impact on the lower and middle classes, as it led them to question the way in which they were treated by the ruling classes. ⁱ

The American War of Independence

The American War of Independence occurred due to dissatisfaction amongst the American colonists with taxes imposed on the colonies by the British government. Furthermore, commercial trading restrictions were put in place, which meant the colonists could not trade with other European countries outside of Britain. The colonists then refused to pay taxes or accept trading restrictions, when they did not have representation in the London parliament. The slogan, 'No taxation without representation' was employed by the colonists to emphasise their case. The American War of Independence commenced at Lexington in 1775. By 1776, 13 Colonies of America, led by George Washington, were at war with the British. Initially, the British Army inflicted terrible defeats on the American colonists. This was due to the superior weaponry and training available to the British army. However, the course of the war changed when the Spanish and French came to the aid of the colonists. Lord Cornwallis a leading British general, surrendered at Yorktown, Virginia in 1781. American Independence from Britain was then recognised with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in 1783. ⁱⁱ

The French Revolution

The French Revolution broke out with the storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1789. The main factors which influenced the French Revolution were Enlightenment Ideals, dissatisfaction with King Louis XVI and Queen Marie-Antoinette and the economic crisis which gripped the country in the 1780's. France was experiencing severe economic difficulties in the 1780's. This was a result of the sheer expense of the many wars in which the French had been involved in during previous decades. An increase in food prices in the 1780's, combined with poor grain harvests led to the peasantry suffering from starvation. Furthermore, French peasants had to pay tax on the land they owned or rented as well as paying taxes to the church. The monarchy was living lavishly at

the expense of the peasantry, while nobles and clergy were exempt from many of the taxes imposed on the peasantry. These factors led the French peasantry to resent the privileged upper classes of French society. In the years which followed the storming of the Bastille, the French peasants defeated their opponents and overthrew the aristocracy. ⁱⁱⁱ

In 1791, a new French constitution, centered around the rights of citizens was introduced. This constitution was based on the ideals of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Liberty granted freedom to all citizens, Equality meant that all citizens would be treated equally and Fraternity granted all citizens religious freedom. In Ireland, the ideals of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity inspired constitutional reform efforts in the early 1790's and ultimately the 1798 Rebellion.

Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*

The writings of the political theorist Thomas Paine also impacted on political thinking in Ireland in the 1790's. Paine's *Rights of Man*, emphasized the need for equal rights for all citizens. He also expressed the belief that revolution can be justified if a government does not protect the rights of citizens. In the first year following its publication over 40,000 copies of *The Rights of Man* were sold throughout Ireland. In 1792, Paine was made an honorary member of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen. This is testament to the influence of Thomas Paine's political writings on the Society of United Irishmen. ^{iv}



 Battle of Vinegar Hill Re-enactment

Late Eighteenth Century Ireland

Political Power & Landownership in Ireland

The Irish parliament campaigned for and achieved legislative independence in 1782. Poynings' Law was altered giving the Irish Parliament complete rights over the introduction of legislation. However, large sections of Irish society remained excluded from or under-represented in parliament. In the late 18th century there were 150 constituencies represented in the Irish House of Commons and over half of these constituencies were dominated by individuals or small groups of wealth landowners.^v Catholics were excluded from voting rights until 1793 and were excluded from holding seats in parliament until 1829. Presbyterians, while not excluded from parliament, were under-represented, as property restrictions ruled many Presbyterians out of standing for parliament. Following the successful campaign for legislative independence, a campaign for parliamentary reform was launched. The aim of the campaign was to grant a greater majority of citizens' voting rights and seats in parliament. However, reform proposals were rejected by the Irish parliament. The failure of the campaign for parliamentary reform left Irish society divided, with Protestants as first-class citizens, Presbyterians as second-class citizens and Catholics as third-class members of society.^{vi}

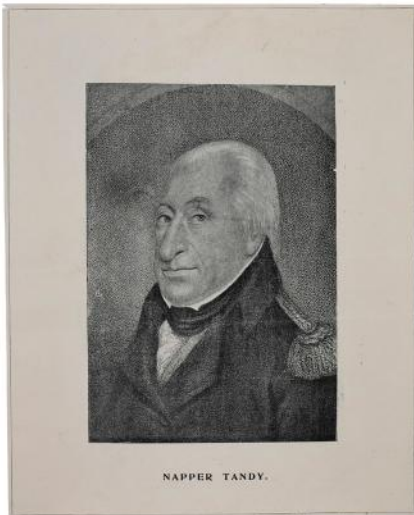
Over the course of the 18th century the Irish economy grew swiftly. Agriculture prospered, new industries emerged and established industries such as linen manufacturing and brewing thrived. Ireland also experienced rapid population growth during the 18th century. The population increased from 2 million in 1740 to 4 million in 1790. This increased population growth and economic prosperity led to increased demands for land.^{vii} The vast majority of land in late 18th century Ireland was owned by Protestant landowners. In the previous century, vast amounts of land were confiscated from Catholic and Presbyterian landowners during the Cromwellian and Williamite land settlements. However, it was not just Catholics and Presbyterians who felt aggrieved,

members of the Ireland's Protestant Ascendancy were also critical of English interference in Irish political affairs in the late 18th century. Therefore, by the latter decades of the 18th century Catholics, Presbyterians and Protestants were dissatisfied with elements of English rule in Ireland.

The Founding of the Society of United Irishmen

The ideals of the enlightenment age, combined with the French and American Revolutions deeply impacted on the political thinking of the middle and lower classes in Irish society. Inspired by the ideals of the Enlightenment and the successful revolutions in France and America, the Society of the United Irishmen was founded in Belfast in October 1791. Some of its founding members included Samuel Neilson, Thomas Russell, James 'Napper' Tandy and Theobald Wolfe Tone. Its founders believed that social and political change were required in Ireland. The 'Declaration and Resolutions' of the Society of United Irishmen proclaimed, that Ireland's lack of a National Government had resulted in the interests of

the country being grievously overlooked. Their 'Declaration' also stated, 'Ireland is being ruled by corrupt Englishmen and the servants of Englishmen, whose source of strength is the disunion of Irishmen.'^{viii}



Napper Tandy

Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

The Society of United Irishmen aimed to remedy this situation by ensuring that each citizen was represented in parliament. Once this had been achieved, a campaign for a reduction of English influence in Irish affairs would commence. Achieving a union of all Irish citizens was a central goal of the United Irishmen, as only through such a union could parliament be reformed and English influence in Irish affairs be reduced. At the time of its foundation the society aimed to achieve its goals by peaceful means. The United Irishmen utilised pamphlets and 'The Northern Star' newspaper to spread their message. ^{ix} A branch of the Society of United Irishmen was soon established in Dublin, with Wolfe Tone acting as the link between the Belfast and Dublin societies. In Wexford, the first branch of the society was formed in Gorey in 1792.

French symbols adopted by the United Irishmen

The Tree of Liberty was a symbol of the successful revolution in France. In Ireland, liberty trees were planted throughout the country in the 1790's. ^x The Society of United Irishmen also adopted a catechism surrounding the Tree of Liberty which read;

What is that in your hand? - It is a branch

Of What? - Of the Tree of Liberty

Where did it first grow? - In America

Where does it bloom? - In France

Where did the seed fall? - In Ireland.



Battle of Vinegar Hill Re-enactment

The Suppression of the Society of United Irishmen

Initially, the Society of United Irishmen was accepted as a reform movement by the English administration. However, when war broke out between England and France in 1793, the English government utilised a policy of appeasement and repression in Ireland. The Catholic Relief Act was passed, it granted Catholic landowners voting rights but did not encompass the full Catholic emancipation which campaigners had hoped for. The outbreak of war and fears of a possible alliance between the Society of United Irishmen and the French led to the introduction of the Gunpowder Act, Militia Act and Convention Act in 1793. These legislative acts combined with the arrests and imprisonment of several leading members of the United Irishmen, led their leaders to believe that further reform efforts were futile.^{xi}

As a result of the setbacks to reform efforts in 1793, the leaders of the United Irishmen began to believe that a United Ireland where all of its citizens would be treated equally was not achievable by constitutional means. Their new aim was to achieve a United Ireland independent from England by staging an armed rebellion. In 1794, Wolfe Tone expressed his belief that a French invasion would be welcomed in Ireland:

From reason, reflection, interest, prejudice, the spirit of change, the misery of the great bulk of the nation, and above all the hatred of the English name resulting from the tyranny of near seven centuries, there seems little doubt, but an invasion insufficient force would be supported by the people.^{xii}

This statement by Wolfe Tone provides evidence of the transformation from a reform movement to a revolutionary body, which the Society of United Irishmen was undergoing.

In 1795, Lord William Fitzwilliam was appointed to the role of Lord Lieutenant in Ireland. Fitzwilliam was a supporter of 'Catholic Emancipation'. Therefore, his appointment was greeted with optimism. However, hopes that greater rights would be granted to Catholics or reform of parliament would take place were dashed when Fitzwilliam was recalled in February 1795. This led to the radicalisation of many reformers, who now concluded that only through more radical measures was there a viable prospect of improving the political situation in Ireland.^{xiii}

The Society of United Irishmen underwent a significant organisational transformation in 1795. A new constitution was drafted, they became a secret oath bound society, more radical members were recruited, and preparations commenced for an armed uprising.^{xiv} In the same year Wolfe Tone travelled to America with the aim of contacting the French and securing assistance to stage a rebellion in Ireland.

Theobald Wolfe Tone

Theobald Wolfe Tone was born in Dublin, in June 1763, into a middle-class family. Tone was educated at private schools from an early age and was prevented from following a military career by his father. Tone entered Trinity College in 1781. While at Trinity, Tone married Matilda Witherington. Matilda was 16 at the time of their marriage which resulted in her family, particularly her uncle the future Lord Chancellor of Ireland John Fitzgibbon, becoming deeply hostile towards Tone. ^{xv}

Tone entered the legal profession. He soon became involved in politics through the Whig party and began to turn his attentions to political writing. During parliamentary debates in 1790, Tone befriended Thomas Russell. In July 1791, Russell requested that Tone compile a set of resolutions for an event taking place in Belfast, to commemorate the fall of the Bastille. When the Society of United Irishmen was founded in Belfast in October 1791, its declaration and resolutions were based on Tone's resolutions. ^{xvi}

In the early 1790's Tone continued to write on behalf of the Society of United Irishmen, however his main focus at this time was the political rights of Catholics. In July 1792, he was appointed assistant secretary to the Catholic Committee. He played a prominent role in coordinating the efforts of Catholics throughout Ireland which culminated in the creation of a representative assembly. ^{xvii} Tone was bitterly disappointed with the results of the Catholic Relief Act of 1793, although voting rights were granted, Catholics were still excluded from seats in parliament. In 1794, Tone became involved with the French agent William Jackson. Tone wrote a 'Memorandum on the situation of Ireland' in which he presented his belief that a French invasion would be welcomed if France did not attempt to conquest Ireland. This Memorandum, composed by Tone fell into the hands of the government. Tone made an agreement with government officials which meant he could avoid imprisonment if he went into exile. ^{xviii}



Theobald Wolfe Tone

Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland



Tone left Ireland for America in June 1795. It is evident from discussions which Tone held with members of the Society of United Irishmen prior to his departure for America, that his paramount objective was the removal of English influence from Irish affairs. Tone's memoirs reflect on a day spent in Belfast with Thomas Russell and Samuel Neilson, where a solemn pledge was taken never to cease in their efforts until they had 'subverted the authority of England over our country and asserted her independence.'^{xix} Tone departed for America with the intention of securing French assistance to end English influence in Irish affairs.

Tone's interview with Napoleon, December 23rd 1797

Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

He took up residence in New Jersey, however Tone was disappointed by the American political system which he had admired from afar. In America, Tone approached the French Minister Pierre Adet, and he informed Adet of his plan to go to France to negotiate a French intervention in Ireland. Tone left America for France in January 1796. Tone's political writings impressed the French government and it was agreed that troops would be sent to Ireland.^{xx} However, the first attempt at invasion ended in disaster, when a storm hit the French fleet. In June 1798, Tone received news that the Rebellion had broken out in Ireland. In September 1798, Tone sailed to Ireland on board the flagship Hoche, as part of a French invading force. Tone was aware that his voyage to Ireland would end in failure. He was captured off the coast of Donegal, on 12 October, tried and sentenced to death. Tone requested his execution be carried out by a firing squad, but this request was not granted. Tone died in November 1798.

Countdown to Rebellion

The Failed French Landing

On 16 December 1796, a fleet of over 35 ships carrying 12,000 armed French troops set sail for Bantry Bay. The French troops were led by General Lazare Hoche. However, Hoche's ship was swept off course when trying to avoid the English navy and while the rest of the fleet waited for his arrival outside Bantry Bay, they were hit by a terrible storm. This storm destroyed many of the French ships and following the storm, the remainder of the French fleet set sail back to France. This was a major setback for the United Irishmen. However, they continued to pursue their plan for an armed uprising. ^{xxi}

Government Clampdown

Aware of the threat posed by a possible alliance between the United Irishmen and the French, government put in place a number of measures to ensure order was maintained and any potential threat curtailed. In 1796, they established a new force of part-time soldiers known as Yeomen. The function of the Yeomanry was to police their local areas and provide support to regular troops. The Militia Act passed in 1793, allowed for the establishment of local militia to defend Ireland in the absence of regular crown troops. The Insurrection Act passed in 1796, allowed for the implementation of martial law in areas where the threat of an uprising existed. ^{xxii}

Between October 1796 and May 1797, the membership of the United Irishmen in Ulster increased from 38,567 to 117,917. ^{xxiii} In 1797, the Crown Forces in Ulster under the leadership of General Gerard Lake, engaged in an attempt to stamp out all revolutionary activity in the province. Martial law was declared, weapons searches were carried out and those suspected of being members of the United Irishmen were arrested and imprisoned. General Lake's clampdown was a major setback to the United Irishmen and their preparations for a rebellion in Ulster. ^{xxiv}

In the spring of 1798, Government Viceroy Lord Camden declared Ireland to be in a state of rebellion and widespread implementation of Martial Law ensued. Yeomanry and Militia units were dispatched across the country in an effort to clamp down on the United Irishmen. They were instructed to reveal their members and seize their weapons. Various torture techniques were implemented to extract information from those believed to be supporters or members of the United Irishmen. Pitchcapping was one of the worst torture methods carried out in the lead up to and during the 1798 Rebellion. Pitchcapping involved pouring hot tar into a half circular cap. The cap was then upturned and pressed down on a victim's head, the hot tar would boil a victim's scalp and also run down their face into their eyes and mouth. Once the tar had cooled, the pitch cap was pulled off, along with a victim's hair and scalp. ^{xxv}

In the months leading up to the outbreak of rebellion, members of the Militia and Yeomanry burned homes, killed livestock and destroyed crops. Lord Cornwallis, Commander-in-Chief and Viceroy of the Crown forces in Ireland during 1798, wrote about the ill-discipline of the Yeomen and Militia. Cornwallis stated;

The Irish militia are totally without discipline, contemptible before the enemy when any serious resistance is made to them, but ferocious and cruel in the extreme when any poor wretches either with or without arms come within their power; in short murder appears to be their favourite pastime. ^{xxvi}



**Capt. Swayne pitch-capping
the people of Prosperous, Co. Kildare.**

Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

Outbreak of Rebellion

Rebellion in Dublin & surrounding counties

In early 1798, United Irishmen delegates, Wolfe Tone and Edward Lewins were involved in negotiations with Napoleon Bonaparte. Initially, Bonaparte agreed to send an invading force to Ireland in the spring of 1798. However, Bonaparte later changed his plans and decided to send his troops on an expedition to Egypt instead. This resulted in the French expedition to Ireland being significantly delayed. Disagreements arose amongst the leadership of the United Irishmen, regarding whether to wait for French aid to arrive or commence the rebellion by themselves. ^{xxvii}

A decision was made to commence the Rebellion in Dublin in April 1798. However, in March 1798 the rebellion plans suffered a setback. On 12 March 1798, leading members of the Leinster Directory of the Society of United Irishmen were arrested in Dublin, when their meeting at the home of Oliver Bond was raided by Crown Forces. A total of sixteen leading members of the Society of United Irishmen were arrested across Dublin on this date. ^{xxviii}

The Rebellion was then postponed until late May. The United Irishmen's plan was to seize Dublin on 23 May and simultaneously United Irishmen in the counties of Meath, Kildare, Wicklow and Carlow were to engage the Crown Forces in their given county to prevent military reinforcements from entering Dublin. Finally, it was aimed that other counties across Ireland would join the Rebellion. In Dublin, the United Irishmen planned to occupy key public buildings, such as Dublin Castle. Mail coaches would be stopped as a signal to the United Irishmen in other counties that the rebellion had commenced. The intelligence available to the Crown Forces enabled them to intercept the United Irishmen and as a result the Rebellion in Dublin was a failure. The Crown Forces mobilised 4,000 troops and took possession of key points in the city. Clashes took place between the United Irishmen and Crown Forces at Clontarf, Santry, the North Strand, Ringsend and Donnybrook, with the United Irishmen defeated at each location. ^{xxix}

Uprisings in counties surrounding Dublin were also unsuccessful. In County Kildare, the Rebels took the town of Prosperous and the village of Kilcullen before suffering defeats at the hands of the Crown Forces at Nass and Clane. In County Wicklow, the Rebels attempted unsuccessfully to capture the towns of Dunlavin and Baltinglass. In County Meath, the Rebels lost several hundred men when their camp at Tara Hill was attacked.

^{xxx}



Battle of Vinegar Hill Re-enactment

Rebellion in Ulster

The Rebellion broke out in Antrim on 7 June. The Rebels under the leadership of Henry Joy McCracken captured the towns of Ballymena and Randalstown. However, after these initial successes the Rebels suffered a heavy defeat when they attempted to seize Antrim town. On 9 June, Rebels in County Down mobilised. They took the town of Saintfield and later they successfully captured Newtownards and Ballynahinch. The Rebels in County Down were eventually defeated at Ballynahinch. ^{xxxi}

The Rebellion in County Wexford

Skirmish at the Harrow

By 26 May 1798, news of the Rebellion waging in Dublin, Meath and Kildare began to filter into Co. Wexford. Local Militia and Yeomanry units traversed the county arresting suspected United Irishmen and in doing so terrifying the local population. On this day, a group of men from the parish of Boolavogue were cutting turf for local Priest Fr. John Murphy, when a patrol of about twenty members of the Yeomen Cavalry from Camolin were seen approaching. The Cavalry led by Lieutenant Bookey, rode to a dwelling of a suspected United Irishman. Finding their target was not at home, they set fire to the cabin. When returning, the Cavalry was ambushed by Fr. Murphy and his men, which led to the deaths of Lieutenant Bookey and Private John Donovan. ^{xxxii}

The Battle of Oulart Hill

The skirmish at the Harrow ignited the Rebellion in County Wexford and in the hours that followed, Fr. John Murphy and his men were joined by hundreds of Rebels who had made their way towards Oulart Hill. Meanwhile, news of the skirmish at the Harrow had now reached the Crown Forces in Wexford town. On the morning of 27 May, the majority of its garrison, 110 North Cork Militia were ordered to crush the Rebellion. The Militia reached Oulart at 2 pm and immediately began to advance upon the 2000 rebels on Oulart Hill. Upon firing a number of unsuccessful volleys which failed to break the rebel lines, the Rebels themselves launched a major pike charge, which annihilated the Militia leaving only five survivors. ^{xxxiii}



Battle of Oulart Hill 1798

Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland



The Battle of Enniscorthy Re-enactment

The Battle of Enniscorthy

Following their victory at Oulart and with their numbers continuing to grow, the Rebel forces made their way towards Enniscorthy on 28 May. The main Rebel command at this stage consisted of Fr. Michael Murphy, Fr. John Murphy (no relation), Miles Byrne and Edward Roche. The Rebel forces numbered 6,000 to 7,000 with approximately 600 to 1000 bearing firearms. Facing this large host was a much smaller contingent of Crown Forces which consisted of 300 Yeomen and Militia, along with an unknown number of

loyal citizens. The Rebels sought to attack the town at various locations. The main body of pike and musket men would attack the defenders around the Duffry Gate area, while large flanking parties would extend to the right and left and attack the town from different directions. In order to break into the town, Rebel commanders decided to stampede

cattle into the ranks of defenders. The Infantry were sent into disarray and the Rebels pressed their advantage by sending a full pike charge at the retreating soldiers. Following several hours of intense fighting, the Rebels succeeded in capturing Enniscorthy Town, they then set up their main camp on Vinegar Hill.^{xxxiv} News of their success filtered across the parishes in the surrounding countryside. Over the course of the next 24 hours, Rebel leaders from the local parishes gathered their forces and made their way to the encampment on Vinegar Hill, considerably bolstering the rebel numbers. The permanent camp on Vinegar Hill also acted as a place of refuge from attacks by the Crown Forces for family members of the Rebels or other non-combatants who sympathised with the Rebels' cause.

The Battle of Three Rocks

After their success at Enniscorthy, the leadership of the Rebel forces argued over which town to attack next. Many opted to attack New Ross in the belief that a successful battle would result in United Irishmen in neighbouring counties joining the Rebellion. Others opted to attack a town in the north of the county for similar reasons. Edward Fitzgerald and John Henry Colclough were released from prison to negotiate with the Rebels in Enniscorthy. Fitzgerald and Colclough brought news that many other senior figures were imprisoned in Wexford town and it was thus decided that the onus should be on freeing these leaders. A decision was then reached to march on the garrison at Wexford town. Late in the afternoon a force of up to 10,000 Rebels left Vinegar Hill and set up camp at Forth Mountain before attacking Wexford Town.^{xxxv}



Battle of Vinegar Hill Re-enactment

While encamped on Forth Mountain, the Rebel forces learnt of a column of Meath Militia travelling to bolster the garrison defending Wexford town. After quick deliberations, Rebels from the Barony of Bantry sprang an ambush on these reinforcements and annihilated the column at the Battle of Three Rocks. After hearing of the ambush, the 1,200 strong garrison of Crown Forces under Colonel Maxwell abandoned Wexford town for Duncannon. Now almost all of County Wexford was in control of the Rebels.^{xxxvi}

Following deliberations, it was decided to divide their forces into two attacking groups, commonly referred to as the North Division and the South Division. The latter, under the leadership of Bagenal Harvey marched west to attack the town of New Ross, while the former would split in two, with a detachment led by Myles Byrne to attack the town of Newtownbarry and a larger force under the leadership of Anthony Perry to attack the towns of Gorey and Arklow.^{xxxvii}

The Battle of New Ross

The Battle of New Ross commenced at dawn on 5 June. Crown Forces, expecting the Rebel assault, had prepared defences in advance. They had a compliment of 2,000 soldiers under the command of General Johnson. Bagenal Harvey leading approximately 10,000 Rebels, divided his troops into three groups. Initial Rebel success occurred under John Kelly via his men succeeding in breaching Three Bullet Gate and seizing two-thirds of the town. However, in the early afternoon the Crown Forces rallied, and re-took all of

New Ross. The remaining Rebels withdrew to the east, having sustained approximately 2,500 casualties. The Crown Forces lost approximately 250 personnel. ^{xxxviii}

The Battle of Newtownbarry

Four days earlier, a 5,000-strong Rebel force under the joint command of Myles Byrne and Fr. Mogue Kearns attacked the garrison town of Newtownbarry (now Bunclody). Positioning an artillery piece aimed at Yeomanry on the outskirts of the town, they forced all Crown Forces back into the town. Pikemen then drove the majority of the enemy across the bridge into Co. Carlow. However, British sharpshooters still within the confines of Newtownbarry caused havoc amongst the Rebels and upon hearing the gunfire, the main force of the Redcoats returned, inflicting 400 deaths on the Rebels and leading to their withdrawal. ^{xxxix}

The Battle of Arklow

On 4 June, a column of 400 Crown Forces consisting of Cavalry, Yeomanry and Militia led by Lt. Col. Walpole, were successfully ambushed as they traversed a narrow pass at Tubberneering, Co. Wexford, by Rebels of the North Division. Walpole himself was slain along with 100 of his troops. During this engagement, the Rebels captured 3 cannons and would soon utilize these at the Battle of Arklow.

On learning of the Rebels' victory at Tubberneering, the forces of the Crown abandoned Gorey. The way was now clear for the United Irishmen to engage with the Crown Forces at Arklow and if successful, march on to Dublin. On 9 June, Rebel forces commanded by Fr. Michael Murphy, Anthony Perry, Edward Roche and Billy Byrne commenced their assault on Arklow, Co. Wicklow. They opened with cannon fire from various strategic points around the outskirts of the town. Crown Forces under the authority of General Needham, numbering 1,700, returned artillery fire from the fortified barricades they had constructed at all the main entry points to the town. The Rebel forces numbering approximately 10,000 and divided into separate contingents, bravely moved towards them. However, they were pushed back at all locations. Although a British cavalry charge

was repulsed back across the Avoca River by the Rebels, they were defeated and forced to withdraw at nightfall under cover of darkness. They were unaware that Crown Forces throughout the town were almost out of ammunition. Fr. Michael Murphy lost his life during the battle, along with almost 500 of his men. The Crown Forces lost approximately 100 men. With the loss at Arklow and combined losses at New Ross and Newtownbarry, everything was now about to change for the United Irishmen. ^{xl}



Battle of Vinegar Hill Re-enactment

The Battle of Foulksmills

Following the Rebels' defeat at Arklow, the threat of the Rebellion spreading beyond the borders of County Wexford was greatly reduced. On 19 June, Sir. John Moore led his forces out of New Ross with the intention of linking up with the garrison at Duncannon. The plan to link up with the Duncannon garrison did not materialise and Moore's troops headed for the village of Taghmon. Upon nearing Goff's Bridge at Foulkesmill, Moore was informed that Rebel forces under the leadership of Fr. Philip Roche were heading towards them. Initially Moore's troops were overwhelmed. However, they managed to hold their lines until reinforcements arrived. When reinforcements arrived, the Crown Forces overcame the threat posed by the Rebels.^{xli}



Battle of Vinegar Hill Re-enactment

The Battle of Vinegar Hill

When the Rebellion was successfully defeated in Ulster, General Lake, Commander in Chief of the Crown Forces turned his attention to ending the Rebellion in Wexford. On 16 June, thousands of troops arrived in Dublin. This enabled General Lake to redeploy troops to Wexford. The Battle of Vinegar Hill took place on 21 June. General Lake ordered his forces to surround the Rebels on all sides of Vinegar Hill to prevent any escape. However, there was a flaw in General Lake's plan. General Needham who was instructed to position his troops on the southern slope of Vinegar Hill, had not arrived by the time the battle commenced.^{xlii}

On the morning of 21 June, there were approximately 10,000 Crown Forces in position. The Crown Forces were well armed with cannons and muskets, in comparison to the Rebels who had meagre weapons such as pikes. The Rebels' position ahead of the battle was further weakened by the absence of Edward Roche and re-enforcements from Wexford town, who had yet to arrive. Furthermore, in the weeks leading up to the Battle of Vinegar Hill, the Rebels had made no attempt to make the hill a formidable defensive

position. ^{xliii} Miles Byrne one of the youngest rebel leaders who fought at Vinegar Hill gives the following account;

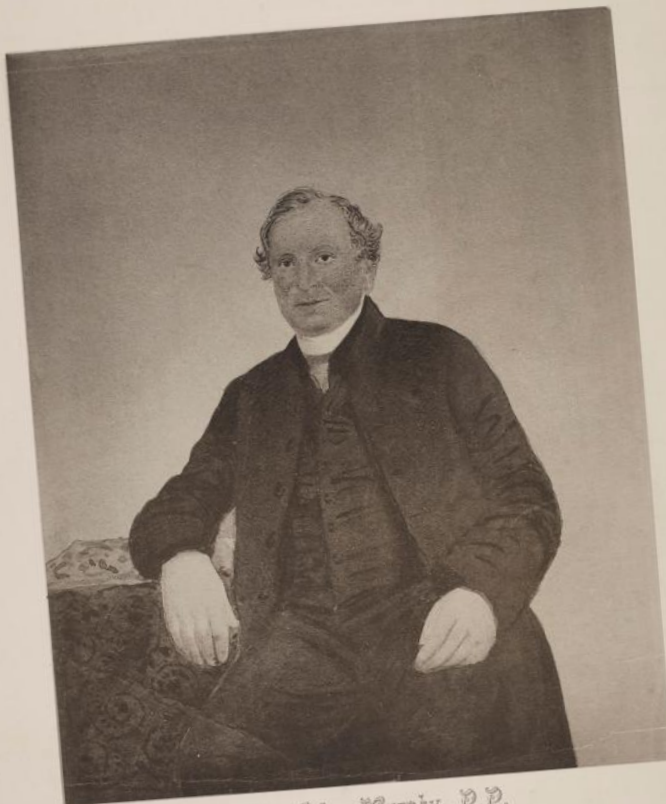
I had not seen Vinegar Hill since the morning after the Battle of Newtownbarry, the 2nd. of June, and I was surprised to find that scarcely anything had been done to make it formidable against the enemy; the vast fences and ditches which surrounded it on three sides, and which should have been levelled to the ground, for at least a cannon shot, or half a mile's distance, were all left untouched. ^{xliv}

On June 21, at 3 am the battle commenced. General Johnson commenced artillery bombardment on the Rebel positions on the outskirts of Enniscorthy town, while General Lake commenced artillery bombardment of the Rebel positions on Vinegar Hill. Following intense artillery bombardment Rebel leaders positioned on the outskirts of the town retreated towards the Duffry Gate.

At 7 am, Lake's forces commenced infantry assault on the Rebels on Vinegar Hill. By this time the Rebels in the town were engaged in intense house to house fighting with General Johnson's troops. The Rebels based in the town pulled back over Enniscorthy Bridge and a stalemate ensued. During the stalemate the Rebels and Crown forces inflicted heavy casualties upon each other.

**Rev. John Murphy,
PP of Monageer and Boolavogue**

Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland



*Rev. John Murphy, P.P.
OF MONAGEER AND BOOLAVOGUE,
WHO FELL WHILE FIGHTING FOR THE LIBERTY OF HIS COUNTRY IN '98.
(Taken from a Painting in the possession of his Grand Nephew, John Murphy.)*

James Peckham.

By 9 am, the Rebel leaders believed that their defence of Vinegar Hill was futile without reinforcements from Wexford town. They made the decision to retreat towards Wexford town. This retreat was only possible because General Needham who was meant to be positioned on the southern slope, was late for the battle. As the Rebels retreated towards Wexford they encountered General Needham and his troops. Needham pursued the Rebels and had it not been for the arrival of reinforcements from Wexford town, under the leadership of Edward Roche, the retreating Rebels would have suffered significant casualties. Roche's forces engaged with Needham and his troops, until Needham gave up his pursuit of the retreating Rebels. ^{xlv}

The Rebels managed an orderly retreat towards Wexford town. Civilians who had been taking refuge on Vinegar Hill were not so fortunate. It is estimated that 1,500 hundred lives were lost during the Battle of Vinegar Hill, the majority of these were women and children who had been taking shelter in the Rebel camp. ^{xlvi}

After being defeated at Vinegar Hill the Rebels regrouped at Wexford Town. Some of their leaders went into hiding, for example Bagenal Harvey went to the Saltee Islands. Others such as Thomas Cloney and Edward Hay attempted to negotiate a surrender. When General Lake offered no terms of surrender, Rebel leaders Anthony Perry, Miles Byrne, Father John Murphy and Edward Roche, left Wexford. Meanwhile, General Lake and his forces were rounding up and executing suspected Rebel leaders. ^{xlvii}

Rebels led by Fr. John Murphy and Myles Byrne headed for Killedmond, Carlow where they defeated government forces. They were also victorious at Goresbridge and Castlecomer. On 26 June, Fr John Murphy and a companion became separated from the main body of Rebels, which under Miles Byrne fought its way back to Wexford. At Wexford most of them dispersed, but Byrne and a few hundred supporters headed to Wicklow. Father Murphy and his bodyguard James Gallaher were captured and sentenced to death in Tullow, Co. Carlow. ^{xlviii}

Rebel forces under the leadership of Edward Roche and Anthony Perry, unsuccessfully attacked Hacketstown, but were victorious at Ballyellis. They then set out for Carnew, failing to capture the town. They were joined by Miles Byrne and the remnant of the Fr Murphy Column. They headed for County Wicklow, marched North to Blessington, into Kildare and onto Meath and then south again to Dublin, fighting skirmishes along the way. Their intention to link up with Rebel forces from Ulster did not materialise. The last major clash was at Ballyboghil, in North Dublin, where the Rebels were defeated by General Gordon's forces. ^{xlix}

Wexford Leaders

Myles Byrne

Born in Ballylusk, Monaseed, Co. Wexford in 1780. He joined the United Irishmen in 1797. Byrne participated in the Rebellion at Bunclody, Tubberneering, Arklow and Vinegar Hill. Accompanied Fr. John Murphy on the advance to and retreat from Castlecomer, Co. Kilkenny. Byrne continued in the field until the end, he later escaped to Dublin, where he remained undetected. He was involved in Robert Emmet's uprising in Dublin in 1803. After the failure of the Emmet's Rising, Byrne left Ireland for Paris. He became an infantry officer in the Irish Legion and fought in the Napoleonic wars. Byrne died in Paris in 1862. His 'Memoirs' were published by his widow in 1863.^{li}

Fr. John Murphy

Studied for the priesthood in Spain and returned to Ireland in 1785 and became curate at Boolavogue. Prior to the outbreak of the 1798 Rebellion, many Catholic clergymen swore allegiance to the Crown, and encouraged local people to give up their weapons, in return for protections from the government. However, many people had to leave their homes to avoid persecution by the Yeomanry. This is believed to have driven Fr. Murphy to join the Rebellion. On 27 May, Fr. Murphy led a large group of pikemen and defeated a party of government troops at Oulart. The next day he took Camolin, followed by Enniscorthy and encamped on Vinegar Hill. After defeats at Arklow and Vinegar Hill, Fr. Murphy joined a rebel group that fought small battles and skirmishes in Counties Carlow and Kilkenny, before being defeated at Kilcumney. On 2 July, Fr. Murphy was arrested and executed with along with James Gallagher in Tullow, Co. Carlow.^{lii}

John Kelly 'of Killanne'

Kelly served in the Rebel army for approximately one week and fought twice. On 29 May after the battle at Enniscorthy, Kelly and other men from Killanne joined the Rebel camp at Vinegar Hill. Kelly fought and was badly wounded at the Battle of New Ross. He was then brought to Wexford. He remained there until General Lake entered the town. Following this he was tried by court martial and sentenced to death.

Bagenal Harvey

Harvey, a lawyer by profession and a member of the United Irishmen, supported the ideals of government reform and emancipation. He was arrested at his home on 26 May and held in Wexford Gaol. Harvey remained in Wexford until it was occupied by the Rebels and he was freed. He was then appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Rebel forces in County Wexford.^{liii}

Harvey was in command at the Battle of New Ross, which ended in defeat for the Rebels. On 7 June, he was replaced as Commander-in-Chief by Fr. Philip Roche. He returned to Wexford, where he was appointed President of the town committee. Following the Rebels' defeat at Vinegar Hill, Harvey made his way to a cave on the Saltee Islands. From there he planned to escape to France by sea. However, Harvey's plan was scuppered as he was found, arrested and brought back to Wexford, where he was sentenced to death on 28 June 1798.^{liv}

Fr. Michael Murphy

Fr. Michael Murphy was born at Kilnew, County Wexford and educated at a hedge school in Oulart. He was ordained at Wexford in 1785 and the following autumn he left Ireland for France.

Upon return from France, he became parish priest of Ballycanew. It is believed that he joined the Rebellion when his church was ransacked by the Yeomanry on 27 May. He travelled to Gorey and then to Kiltomas Hill and was joined by Fr. John Murphy on Ballyorrl Hill. Fr. Michael Murphy was killed at the Battle of Arklow, on 9 June 1798.^{lv}

Thomas Cloney

Cloney was from Moneyhore, Co. Wexford. He played a leading role in the Battle of Three Rocks and also participated in the Battle of New Ross.^{lvi} Following the Rebels' defeat, he went into hiding at his father's house. In June 1799, Cloney was arrested and jailed in Wexford. He was court-martialled on a charge of accessory to murder, found guilty and sentenced to death. His sentence was reduced to two years in exile. He went to England for the duration of his exile and returned to Ireland, in February 1803, taking up residence in Graiguenamanagh. He died on 20 February 1850 at the age of seventy-six.^{lvii}



The men of '98
by John Arigho & James Walker

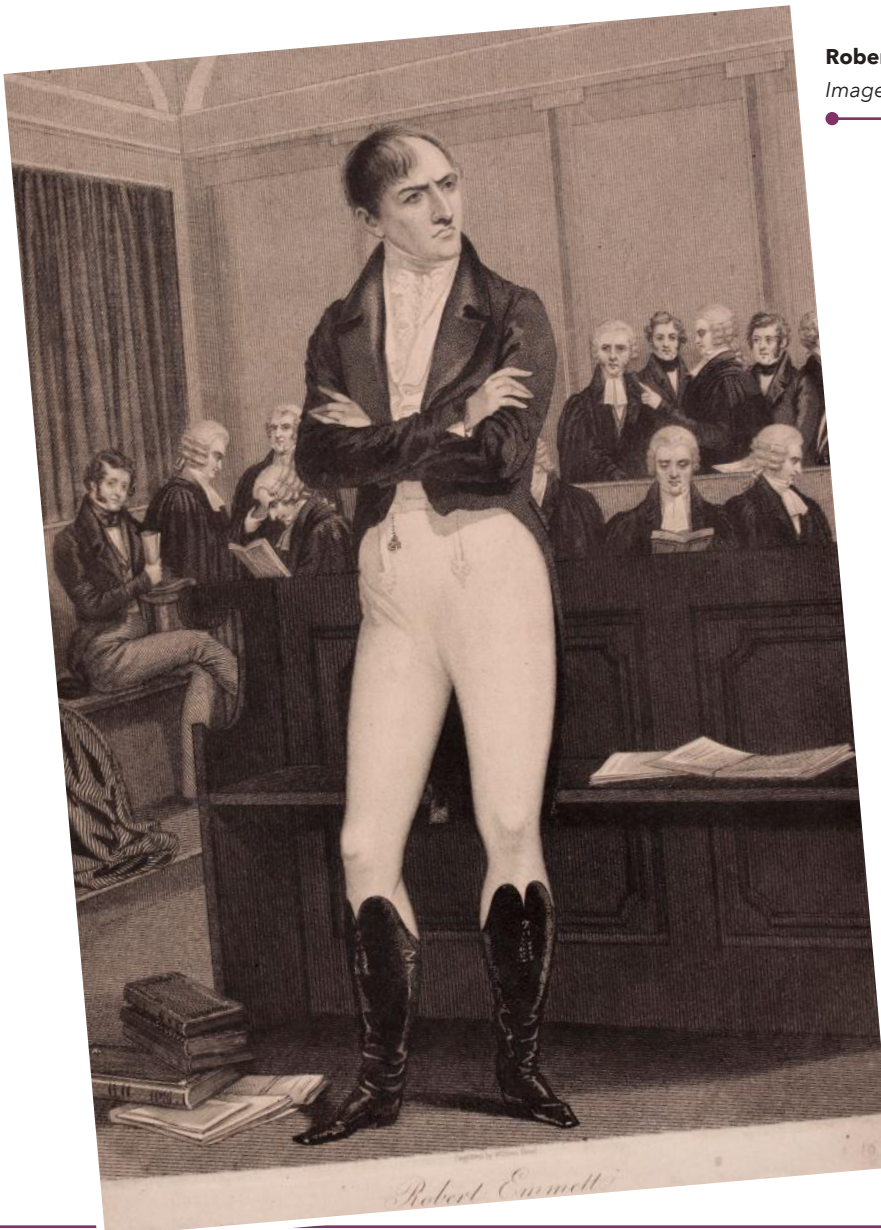
Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

The French Landing & Aftermath of the 1798 Rebellion

French Landing at Killala

In August 1798, when the long awaited French assistance arrived, the Rebellion in Leinster and Ulster had been comprehensively defeated. However, the French troops numbering approximately 1,000 under the command of General Humbert, joined with United Irishmen in Connaught and proceeded to fight a number of battles and skirmishes. They won some important victories at Ballina and Castlebar. The Rebellion then broke out on the border of counties Westmeath and Longford.^{lviii}

By early September, government troops began to close in on the combined French and Rebel forces. General Humbert and his troops fought battles and skirmishes in counties Sligo and Leitrim, before being defeated at the Battle of Ballinamuck, Co. Longford. The French surrendered to the Crown Forces and were made prisoners of war, while many of the captured Rebels were sentenced to death. Following the Battle of Ballinamuck on 8 September, only Killala and Ballina in County Mayo remained in the hands of the Rebels. A stalemate between Crown Forces and the Rebels ensued at Ballina and Killala. This stalemate lasted until 23 September, when the Rebels were finally defeated, bringing an end to the 1798 Rebellion.^{lix}



Robert Emmet

Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

Aftermath of the 1798 Rebellion

Over 30,000 lives were lost throughout Ireland as a result of the fighting which took place during the 1798 Rebellion. The Rebellion also resulted in widespread destruction of property, with thousands of people left homeless, numerous churches burned and farmland destroyed.

In the aftermath of the 1798 Rebellion measures were required to maintain English rule in Ireland and this led to the passage of the Act of Union in 1800. The Act of Union meant that Ireland would be directly ruled from the London parliament and the Irish House of Commons dissolved.

Although the 1798 Rebellion failed to achieve its aim of ending English interference in Irish affairs, it did serve as an inspiration to future generations of revolutionaries. For example, Robert Emmett's Rebellion in 1803, came about as a direct result of the 1798 Rebellion. While a student at Trinity College, Emmett joined the United Irishmen, perhaps encouraged to join by his older brother Thomas Addis Emmett who was a prominent member. In the aftermath of the Rebellion, Robert left Ireland for France. In 1802, he held discussions with Napoleon Bonaparte, however Napoleon wished to invade England directly. Therefore, with little hope of further French assistance on the horizon, Emmett returned to Ireland and began preparing for an uprising in Dublin without French aid. An explosion at an arms depot forced him to stage his rebellion prematurely on 23 July 1803. Emmett's Rebellion amounted to little more than a street skirmish in Dublin and was easily defeated. Emmet was captured, convicted of treason and sentenced to death. ix The participants in the Young Irelander's uprising in 1848, the 1916 Rising and the Irish War of Independence also drew inspiration from the ideals of the 1798 Rebellion. 1916 Rising leader Patrick Pearse, credited the leaders of the 1798 Rebellion with providing Irish people with 'a clear, precise and worthy concept of Nationality'. lxi Pearse's words are testament to the impact of the 1798 Rebellion on later generations of revolutionaries.



Battle of Vinegar Hill Re-enactment

1798 Ballads & Weaponry

The 1798 Rebellion inspired numerous ballads. Among the most famous ballads are 'At Boolavogue' and 'Kelly from Killanne', both composed by P. J. McCall. 'At Boolavogue' focuses on the role played by Fr. John Murphy during the 1798 Rebellion. While 'Kelly from Killanne' remembers John Kelly, a young man who fought and died during the Rebellion. Both ballads were composed in the late 1890's to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the 1798 Rebellion. ^{lxii}



Battle of Vinegar Hill Re-enactment

'AT BOOLAVOGUE' – P.J. MCCALL

At Boolavogue as the sun was setting
O'er the bright May meadows of
Shelmalier,
A rebel hand set the heather blazing
And brought the neighbours from
far and near
Then Father Murphy, from old Kilcormack,
Spurred up the rocks with a warning cry,
"Arm, Arm!" he cried, "for I've come to
lead you,
For Ireland's freedom we'll fight or die."
He led us on 'against the coming soldiers,
And the cowardly Yeomen we put to flight;
'Twas at the Harrow the boys of Wexford
Showed Bookey's regiment how men
could fight.
Look out for hirelings, King George of
England,
Search every kingdom where
breathes a slave.
For Father Murphy from the
County Wexford

Sweeps o'er the land like a mighty wave.
We took Camolin and Enniscorthy,
And Wexford storming drove out our foes;
'Twas at Sliabh Coillte our pikes were
reeking with crimson stream of the
beaten Yeos.
At Tubberneering and Ballyellis
Full many a Hessian lay in his gore,
Ah, Father Murphy, had aid come over
The green flag floated from shore
to shore!
At Vinegar Hill, o'er the pleasant Slaney,
Our heroes vainly stood back to back,
And the Yeos at Tullow took
Father Murphy
And burned his body upon the rack.
God grant you glory, brave Father Murphy,
And open heaven to all your men;
The cause that called you may
call to-morrow
In another fight for the Green again.



Battle of Vinegar Hill Re-enactment

'KELLY THE BOY FROM KILLANE'

What's the news, what's the news oh my bold Shelmalier
With your long barrelled guns from the sea
Say what wind from the south brings a
messenger here
With the hymn of the dawn for the free
Goodly news, goodly news do I bring youth of Forth
Goodly news shall you hear Bargy man
For the boys march at dawn from the south to the north
Led by Kelly the boy from Killane
Tell me who is that giant with the gold curling hair
He who rides at the head of your band
Seven feet is his height with some inches to spare
And he looks like a king in command
Ah my boys that's the pride of the bold Shelmaliers
'Mongst greatest of hero's a man
Fling your beavers aloft and give three
ringing cheers.
For John Kelly the boy from Killane
Enniscorthys in flames and old Wexford is won
And tomorrow the Barrow we will cross
On a hill o'er the town we have planted a gun
That will batter the gateway to Ross
All the Forth men and Bargy men will march
o'er the heath
With brave Harvey to lead in the van
But the foremost of all in that grim gap of death
Will be Kelly the boy from Killane
But the gold sun of freedom grew darkened at Ross
And it set by the Slaney's red wave
And poor Wexford stripped naked, hung high
on a cross
For the cause of long down trodden man
Glory-o to Mount Leinster's own darling and pride
Dauntless Kelly the boy from Killane.



Weaponry:

THE CROWN FORCES

Flintlock Musket:

The Flintlock Musket was the primary standard infantry weapon of rank and file soldiers. It was in use by the Crown Forces from 1722 until 1838. Commonly known at the time as the 'Brown Bess,' this .75 calibre weapon fired a one-ounce musket ball up to 200 metres. Soldiers were trained to the standard of loading each shot and firing 3 musket balls every 60 seconds. Bayonets were often fixed to muskets for hand-to-hand combat.

Flintlock Pistol:

Cavalrymen of the Crown Forces were issued with Flintlock pistols to complement their 1796-pattern sabres. These pistols fired one round with an effective range of 30-50 metres. In length, the pistols ranged from 15cm to 40cm, but were not a particularly favourite weapon of cavalrymen. Officers often carried this weapon too.

Cavalry Sabre:

Utilized by Light Cavalry from 1796 to 1821, it was in full use during the Battle of Vinegar Hill and the fighting in Enniscorthy town in the hours preceding the attack on the hill. Designed with a pronounced curve by British Brigadier-Major John Gaspard Le Marchant, it allowed for slashing the bodies of enemy foot soldiers enabling it to be more effective than its straight sword predecessor. Le Marchant had the blades widened at the end which, although affecting the balance of the blade, made the slashes more severe.



Battle of Vinegar Hill Re-enactment

Flintlock Blunderbuss:

This weapon was an early form of shotgun. The name 'Blunderbuss' comes from the German term 'Donnerbuchse,' meaning Thunder Gun. It was in the arsenal of the Crown Forces during the Battle of Vinegar Hill and in other battles and skirmishes during the 1798 Irish Rebellion.

Cannon Balls:

The most common cannon ball propelled by the British during the Rebellion was the 6-Pounder, heavily in action at the Battle of New Ross. They also had 2-Pounders and 4-Pounders in use during the Rebellion.



Battle of Vinegar Hill Re-enactment

SOCIETY OF UNITED IRISHMEN

Flintlock Musket:

The Rebels attained large numbers of Flintlock Muskets during the 1798 Rebellion. These were primarily captured in battle from dead and injured members of the Crown Forces. The Rebels had little time for training, due to the nature of the pace of the war and other factors. However, many succeeded in learning to load and fire at least two shots in 60 seconds, even when under Crown Force fire.

The Pike:

The pike is perhaps the weapon most associated with the 1798 Rebellion. Used by the Rebels, it was originally made of ash wood but as oak was far more abundant in the Irish countryside, this became its chief source allied with the metal attached to the wood, made by Rebel blacksmiths.

The shaft of the pike tended to be double the height of the soldier using it. The pike, utilized for stabbing the enemy in close-quarter combat, had a hook near its top which was successfully applied in many cases in grabbing the reins of British Cavalry horses, thereby pulling down both horse and rider. The Rebel pike was also successful in blocking slashing by the sabres of the Royal Cavalry.



Battle of Vinegar Hill Re-enactment

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