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# **Restive without Rebellion**

*A study of rebellion ideas and activity in Cork in the  
1790's*

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## Abstract

The 1790's was a decade characterised by rebellion in Ireland. The United Irishmen aimed to free the Irish people from British colonial rule and emancipate the country with violence coming to a head in the summer of 1798. According to scholars the people of Cork did not rise alongside their fellow countrymen and this thesis aims to examine the reasons why Cork this is the. This research will focus on the spread of ideas in Cork by the *Cork Gazette* and highlight that ideas are only turned into insurrection when the people have nothing to lose. This research will compare the rural North and East of Cork to the more urban and prosperous South of the county, the cutoff for the south of Cork will be from Cobh and can be seen on the map below. In doing so I will highlight that these two parts of the county had different experiences in the 1790's. The North and East had a history of agrarian movements with the Whiteboys, and ideas from Thomas Paine gave peasant farmers an incentive to become increasingly violent. The trade prevalent in the urban South of Cork allowed for the creation of Catholic merchant class, the same ideas were circulated in this area but they did not lead to organised violence as the Catholic merchant class had too much to lose. Through looking at the primary sources such as the *Cork Gazette* and court-records this thesis examines the relationship between political ideas and when and where they manifest into violence.

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‘Where are the Munstermen or is it true they’re still alive,  
That they didn’t come around us and help us in the fight,  
For it’s hard to strike ports as the English boors are driving us out,  
From our dear native homes that our ancestors before us always had.’

- From the folk song *Maidin Luan Cincise*



Map of Cork. Copyright of Ancestry Official, 2014.

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## Introduction

The 1798 Rebellion was an insurrection against the British Crown by what was then the Kingdom of Ireland. Fighting mainly took place on the east coast in Ulster, the most northerly province, and Leinster, the province on the east coast. Cork is the largest and most southerly county in Munster, the most southern province, where there was no attempt at insurrection. This thesis will examine why there was no rebellion in Cork.

The origins of the 1798 Rebellion can be traced to the setting up of the Society of United Irishmen in Belfast in October 1791. They were inspired by the French Revolution and were led by Theobald Wolfe Tone and Thomas Russell.<sup>1</sup> The United Irishmen were driven underground after the breakout of war between France and England in 1793, and for the years following, as their numbers grew, they had to operate in complete secrecy.<sup>2</sup> The Insurrection Act in 1796 made the United Irishmen, the Whiteboys and the Defenders, known as the secret societies, illegal in an effort to maintain public peace. Driven underground, the United Irishmen re-constituted itself as an oath-bound organisation dedicated to the pursuit of a republican form of government in a separate and independent Ireland. This was to be achieved primarily by direct French military intervention. The United Irishmen were a larger group that had members from both the Defenders in Ulster and the Whiteboys in Munster. Fighting was most prominent in Ulster and Leinster in the summer of 1798, with limited victories for the United Irishmen in Wexford and heavy defeats elsewhere. 1798 was a bloody summer of fighting that took the lives of an estimated 50,000.<sup>3</sup>

The 1790's had begun with the founding of the United Irishmen, with hopes for true Catholic Emancipation and universal manhood suffrage, where all men could vote, but closed with increased sectarian bitterness. It also saw the end of the Irish parliament, and Ireland and England drawn ever closer together constitutionally with the Act of Union in 1801.

The Irish government was run from Dublin by a Protestant ruling elite, made up of landed gentry. The majority Catholic population were oppressed by the Penal Laws. The Penal Laws were various acts passed in the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century to repress the Catholics of Ireland and Britain. Catholics were banned from practicing, and priests caught giving sermons could be sentenced to prison or hung. Catholics were also not allowed to own land, vote or hold public office, this meant that although Ireland had its own parliament there was no Catholic representation.

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<sup>1</sup> Bartlett. *The Irish Rebellion of 1798*. p.17

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.34

<sup>3</sup> Pakenham. *The Year of Liberty*. p.342

The United Irishmen argued for full Penal Law repeals and parliamentary reform, allowing Catholics to be represented in parliament.

The Protestant ruling class were grouped together due to their common interest in exerting control and power in Ireland. The concept of the 'Protestant Ascendancy' dates to the 1780's as a way of describing this group. Their members were landowners, military officers, and politicians who wielded an outsized amount of power in Ireland. Before the term 'Protestant Ascendancy', Protestants that were exclusively Anglican or Church of Ireland, grouped themselves together as 'the Protestant interest'.<sup>4</sup> The word was popularised by Edmund Burke who used it ironically. The concept of a 'Protestant Ascendancy' can be seen as a response to the call to repeal the Penal Laws and the challenges posed to traditional dominance.<sup>5</sup> Protestants believed that by diluting the Penal Laws there would be an undermining of the Protestant interest by weakening the constitutional, economic and religious supports which it was built upon.<sup>6</sup> They wanted to protect their 'Ascendancy' and so the phrase was coined. This is where the inherent conflict of the time lies, the Catholics and Presbyterians wanted the right to vote, own land and practice their religion freely, while the Protestants wanted to continue their control in Ireland.

If Cork is compared to the two main locations of fighting in Ireland there can be clear comparisons drawn. Armagh and Wexford were the sites of the most violent uprisings but their conditions beforehand were different to each other and to Cork. Wexford had the largest settlement of Protestants outside of Ulster and falling grain prices added to sectarian rivalries already prevalent.

Armagh is an interesting case study as there are three distinct groups in a densely populated area.<sup>7</sup> The Protestants controlled the growing linen industry, and the Presbyterians and the Catholics wanted emancipation as well as a slice of the linen production. The Catholics of Cork had a prosperous port city as an economic incentive in the same way that the Catholics of Armagh had the incentive of the linen industry, however Catholics in Cork did not have a need for control in the same way as the Catholics or Presbyterians in Armagh as they greatly outnumbered the Protestants in Cork and had established a clear trade route with Britain and Europe.<sup>8</sup> The numerous goods that were exported from Cork created a wealthy Catholic merchant class, and rebellion would risk the

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<sup>4</sup> Kelly. 'Eighteenth Century Ireland'. p.174

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.175

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.177

<sup>7</sup> Bartlett. *The Irish Rebellion of 1798*. p.111

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.113

wealth the Catholics had established.<sup>9</sup> Wexford did not have an economic prize for rebellion, but they also had nothing to lose. The Catholics in Armagh rose up to fight for their freedom but also to gain control of the linen industry, this was not necessary in Cork as the Catholics already had autonomy, if not control, of trade in Cork.

The middle-class Catholics in Cork wanted reform and not revolution and therefore stopped short of insurrection in the same way that France had.<sup>10</sup> However, the idea that the Catholic peasants joined forces with United Irishmen because they had nowhere else to go is wrong as it largely undersells the impact of the Whiteboy movement in Cork, while also underselling how ideas inspired rural violence.

David Dickson has labelled the 1790's in Munster 'Smoke without fire',<sup>11</sup> while others have commented on the 'tranquility'<sup>12</sup>, but anyone who has devoted time to studying Cork in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century will note that there was a significant feeling that violence could break out in the county without a truly violent outburst. Seán Ó Coindealbháin believes it is unfair to say that there was not a strong feeling of rebellion in Cork.<sup>13</sup> He notes that the uptake of United Irishmen in Cork may have been slower than in the rest of the country, but a change was noticeable after 1796 where numbers increased. The historiography makes frequent notice to the fact that Cork, the second largest county in Ireland, with its distinct agrarian movement (the Whiteboys) did not rebel, and there is a level of shame surrounding Cork.<sup>14</sup> The lyrics of the song *Maidin Luan Cincise* exemplify that shame. The song tells a story of Munster letting their fellow countrymen down in 1798, that this was a fight where the whole country was to be united, but Munster was not there for Leinster or Ulster.

This thesis aims to examine how ideas spread to Cork in the 1790's and then answer the question of why Cork did not have an organised rebellion in 1798. In the first chapter I will analyse the spread of ideas stemming from the French Revolution and Thomas Paine, while the second chapter will highlight how these ideas impacted the agrarian disputes. The final chapter will focus on why Cork did not rise because it was one of the wealthiest counties in Ireland and was blossoming with trade in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>9</sup> For Cork's trade see Chapter III

<sup>10</sup> Kennedy. 'Catholics in Ireland and the French Revolution' p.227

<sup>11</sup> Dickson. 'Smoke without fire'. p.1

<sup>12</sup> Priestley. *Local Experience of the 1798 rebellion: a comparative context*. p.26

<sup>13</sup> Ó Coindealbháin. 'United Irishmen in Cork county'. p.53

<sup>14</sup> The reason for that shame and Cork's proud history of rebellion is touched on in the conclusion



There has been a lot of writing about the economic history of Ireland in the 18<sup>th</sup> century where Cork has been frequently mentioned as a centre for trade that led to a Catholic merchant class, but this has not been explicitly pointed out as a reason why Cork did not join the eastern counties in rebellion in 1798.<sup>15</sup> Ian McBride and Foster are the foremost historians on Irish economic and social history, and I took their work on the economic conditions of Cork and used it to explain why the prosperous areas of Cork did not rebel. I have also looked at the work of Stephen Small in examining the role of political thought in conflict in Ireland. 1798 has an abundance of historical writing from different perspectives and the work of Dickson, Hugh Gough, Kevin Whelan, Thomas Bartlett and Thomas Pakenham have given a nuanced look at the rebellion that has greatly informed the background research of this thesis.

James Kelly claims that the French Revolution intensified pre-existing tensions rather than caused a radical break from the past.<sup>16</sup> This thesis disagrees as the French Revolution was a direct influence on the United Irishmen who took a fight to the government causing the death of tens of thousands across the country. However, it can be argued that the ideas of the French Revolution were discussed greatly while the violent sentiment was seen more in the rural areas as the merchant class of the city had much more to lose with a full-scale rebellion. Kelly notes that the revolutionary ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity did not penetrate deeply into Irish society. Gough and Dickson disagree and argue that the will to retaliate, as well as agrarian discontent lead the lower classes in particular to buy so feverishly into the ideas from France.

This thesis makes use of the *Cork Gazette* as its main primary source, this is the first research to use the *Cork Gazette* as the foundation for research. The *Cork Gazette* and Denis Driscoll have been mentioned throughout the historiography as a bastion of republicanism in Cork but there has yet to be an extensive close reading of the original issues. In reading the issues available I aimed to trace the development of the paper and I concluded that the paper was not a call to arms as some have suggested, but instead an outlet for ideas and political thinkers to be placed at the forefront of the most pressing debates of the time. I have also concluded that the paper, in its anti-religious sentiment, can be said to have alienated its Catholic readership rather than uniting them.

A common reason stated for the rebellion only occurring in the east coast is because it was the most anglicised area of the country. It is true that the vast majority of the fighting took place on

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<sup>15</sup> McBride, Foster, O'Brien and Crawford have all written extensively on the economic conditions of Ireland at this time.

<sup>16</sup> Kelly. 'Eighteenth Century Ireland'. p.183

the east coast but that is not the reason why rebellion did not come to Cork. The reason typically stated is that the Irish speaking counties or areas were not spoken for by the United Irishmen<sup>17</sup>, however in west cork, a traditionally Gaeltacht (Irish speaking) area, there is evidence that the *Cork Gazette* was read in chapel-yards and lead to politicisation of the local population with debates occurring over equality and liberty.<sup>18</sup>I have also used court-records and letters as primary sources to understand the type of violence that was present in North and East Cork.

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<sup>17</sup> Dickson. *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radiclaism and Rebellion*. p.292

<sup>18</sup> Dickson. 'Smoke without fire'. P.155

## Chapter I: The spread of ideas

The aim of this chapter is to show how ideas created a philosophical and intellectual desire for rebellion in Cork without an insurrection. This chapter will look at the influence of Thomas Paine's writing and how the *Cork Gazette* used Paine and other 18<sup>th</sup> political thinkers to stir up emotions and spread ideas about individual rights and freedoms. This chapter will also focus on how some of these ideas made Cork a more revolutionary place as the decade progressed but also alienated the Catholic population rather than galvanising the county under the banner of republicanism. The *Cork Gazette* has been misinterpreted in the historiography as an overtly republican newspaper that wanted a full-scale insurrection in Ireland. It is my belief that this is not the case and that the *Cork Gazette* provided an outlet for ideas rather than a definite call for action.

The French Revolution was covered extensively in newspapers across Ireland. The population was largely illiterate but public readings of the press were common and included an up-to-date following of foreign affairs.<sup>19</sup> Cork had six newspapers at one period in the late 1790s, compared to five in Dublin and two in Belfast.<sup>20</sup> This meant that the people of Cork had a certain level of understanding about the situation in France, with near-daily updates in all of the most popular papers. This coverage continued throughout the 1790's and often featured articles from the *London Gazette*.

Political thought is still undervalued in the historiography of the 1790's.<sup>22</sup> The United Irishmen can be grouped with 17<sup>th</sup> century classical Republicanism or the Whig ideas of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century Commonwealth.<sup>23</sup> The American revolution and its ideas on brotherhood does not appear to have penetrated into Cork's political thought in the 1790's. The French revolution is more influential, which can be corroborated through the extensive coverage of French political life in newspapers, especially the *Cork Gazette*, with little to no mention of the American Revolution in Cork newspapers in the 1790's.<sup>24</sup> The new ideological landscape created by the French Revolution encouraged radicals to become republicans and some to become revolutionaries, meaning that ideas gave a disenfranchised group, which in Cork meant the peasant farmers, a direction for their

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<sup>19</sup> Donnelly. 'Propagating the Cause of the United Irishmen'. p.7

<sup>20</sup> McDowell. *Ireland in the age of Imperialism and Revolution 1760-1801*. p.146

<sup>21</sup> The *Harp of Éire* ran for a few weeks in March of 1798

<sup>22</sup> Bartlett, Whelan and Kelly in particular underestimate political thought.

<sup>23</sup> Small. *Political Thought in Ireland 1776-1798*. p.7

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p.49

frustrations.<sup>25</sup> This chapter aims to incorporate the political thought of the time and examine how it was represented in Cork.

### **The influence of Thomas Paine in Cork**

The work of Thomas Paine was read and studied across Ireland but especially in Cork. I will lay out why Cork had such a strong affiliation with Paine as no reason has previously been given. It was originally the Whigs from Dublin that were publishing and distributing the cheap versions of *Rights of Man* (1791), where it was celebrated in Dublin and Belfast.<sup>26</sup> By 1795, several thousand copies of his work were distributed in Cork.<sup>27</sup> Cheap copies were widespread across Ireland, but it is the work of the *Cork Gazette* and its persistence on covering Paine that has led to his work becoming so influential in Cork in particular.<sup>28</sup> It has been widely reiterated that in county Cork Paine's work was read by boys at every school and that in most houses they were as common as the Psalter and Prayer Book.<sup>29</sup> Handbills became especially important in the aftermath of the breakout of rebellion, however it was Paine who set the pace for a revolutionary mood in Ireland with his appeal to soldiers to change sides over to the revolutionary cause through the writing in *Rights of Man*. Handbills and passages of text from Paine were in circulation soon after its release where soldiers, citizens and brothers of Ireland were addressed directly.<sup>30</sup> There is never a clear reason by any historian as to why Cork in particular became fascinated with the work of Paine. It is possible that the popularity he gained from his role in the American War of Independence and the French Revolution gave his words a heft that other political writers did not. He also directly addressed and was acutely aware of the situation in Ireland. Despite Paine's disappointment at the course taken by the French Revolution and his subsequent imprisonment in late 1793 he still believed in the possibility of a revolution in Ireland.<sup>31</sup> Cheap copies were widespread across Ireland, but it is the work of the *Cork Gazette* and its persistence on covering Paine that is the clearest reason for his popularity and influence Cork in particular.<sup>32</sup> The *Cork Gazette* was the only paper publishing Paine's views at the time.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p.227

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p.176

<sup>27</sup> Donnelly. 'Propagating the Cause of the United Irishmen'. p.8

<sup>28</sup> Thompson. 'Thomas Paine and the United Irishmen'. p.111

<sup>29</sup> Donnelly. 'Propagating the Cause of the United Irishmen'. p.7

This quote has been attributed to the barrister Leonard McNally and has been quoted multiple times in different publications.

<sup>30</sup> Gough and Dickson. *Ireland and the French Revolution*. p.190

<sup>31</sup> Thompson. 'Thomas Paine and the United Irishmen' p.113

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p.111

<sup>33</sup> Dickson, Keogh and Whelan. *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism and Rebellion*. p.145

*Rights of Man* is dedicated to George Washington and is a direct argument against Edmund Burke, who was critical of the French Revolution. Thomas Paine claimed that Burke was unacquainted with French affairs.<sup>34</sup> In *Rights of Man* Paine argued for a republic and felt Burke wanted to hold onto hereditary tradition. The key takeaways for Ireland from *Rights of Man* are that monarchy is obsolete, that governments should be built on individual rights and that individuals can revolt if the government no longer serves their needs. In *Rights of Man*, Paine writes: “Though I mean not to touch upon any sectarian principle of religion, yet it may be worth observing, that the genealogy of Christ is traced to Adam. Why then not trace the rights of man to the creation of man? I will answer the question. Because there have been upstart governments, thrusting themselves between, and presumptuously working to un-make man.”<sup>35</sup> It is clear throughout Paine’s writing that he is anti-religion as a force for morality.

*The Age of Reason* (1794) was an attack on institutional Christianity and was published while he was imprisoned.<sup>36</sup> The *Cork Gazette* praised the *Age of Reason* and attacked religious ‘quackery’ from priests of all sects.<sup>37</sup> In Paine’s pamphlet *Agrarian Justice* (1797) he argues that poverty is not just a result of taxation but due to the structure of civilisation. He argued the case for a land tax and state intervention for welfare.<sup>38</sup> This essay was published in the *Cork Gazette* in 1797. Paine argued for the taxation of landed wealth and not commercial wealth, which would affect the Protestant Ascendancy and less so the Catholic merchant middle class. The work of Paine was crucial to the drive for rural popular support for the United Irishmen from 1796 to 1798. His writing always had a clear focus on the issues between Ireland and Britain. Paine’s writing in *Prospects on the Rubicon* (1787) sees him theorise that England governs Ireland so that Ireland does not become a trade rival, and this oppression will mean that Ireland will always hold an ingrained hostility with England.<sup>39</sup> Paine’s arguments struck a chord with the people of Cork but it is clear that people had an issue with his anti-religious stance.

Not everyone was a supporter of the work of Paine in Cork. Thomas Hincks wrote a controversial series of 10 letters to the people of Cork that outlined Paine’s work as dangerous and directed against Christianity. He declared Paine’s work unworthy of the attention it was getting and his second letter dealt directly with defending religion from what he saw as attacks by Paine.<sup>40</sup> In his Letter V he wrote that: “It is one of the great objects of Mr. Paine’s work to show that reason

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<sup>34</sup> Burke. *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. p.7

<sup>35</sup> Paine. *Rights of Man*. p.37

<sup>36</sup> Dickson, Keogh and Whelan. *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism and Rebellion*. p.144

<sup>37</sup> McDowell. *Ireland in the age of Imperialism and Revolution 1760-1801*. p.200

<sup>38</sup> Dickson, Keogh and Whelan. *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism and Rebellion*. p.147

<sup>39</sup> Thompson. ‘Thomas Paine and the United Irishmen’. p.110

<sup>40</sup> Hincks. *Letters Addressed to the Inhabitants of Cork*. p.7

alone is sufficient to teach us all that it is necessary for us to know, and consequently there was no occasion for further revelation.”<sup>41</sup> Paine believed that higher revelation is a fiction that was unworthy of the common people, something that the *Cork Gazette* clearly agreed with as it is mentioned repeatedly throughout the years of its printing. The *Cork Gazette* calls on the philosopher to be the one ‘worshipped’ as their goal is to search for the truth, the only worthy revelation.<sup>42</sup>

In July 1794 the *Cork Gazette* dedicated the first page of the newspaper to rebuttals against Bishop of Llandaff’s letters to Thomas Paine. The *Cork Gazette* wrote that the Bishop’s response in his second letter was, “barren and will satisfy no person but a bigot.”<sup>43</sup> The Bishop had taken umbrage with Paine’s distaste for religion and for the factual accuracy of who wrote the Bible. A large part of the debate in the *Cork Gazette* refers to whether or not Moses is the author of the books ascribed to him in the Bible. The *Cork Gazette* claims the Bible is spurious and quotes from Exodus to make its point, stating that the book claims to be four or five hundred years more ancient than the subject it speaks about. The *Cork Gazette* believed that religion is an act to control the masses. Upon reporting that a man named Lanhor was to be made Tythe Proctor in Innishannon, the *Cork Gazette* remarked: “Happy the flock who have such Rectors to guide them, and such Proctors to fleece them.”<sup>44</sup> The *Cork Gazette* continued throughout the 1790’s to make a connection between religion, government and coercive control, which alienated Catholic readers.

Both Paine’s and the *Cork Gazette*’s attacks on religion did not help to garner support for revolution in Cork from the Catholic population. Catholic bishops in Ireland were so strong in their opposition to the French revolution and its ideas that they cooperated with the government to destroy revolutionary sentiment.<sup>45</sup> The theory that Catholic peasants joined the United Irishmen or the Whiteboys because they had no other outlet for the rising rents is untrue as it does not note the connection between French ideas and increasing agrarian violence in Cork.<sup>46</sup> This theory undervalues the role of political theory and ideas in uniting the country in the latter half of the decade, as the *Cork Gazette* and Paine influenced United Irishmen leaders with more advanced versions of their original ideas. These ideas were born out of the French Revolution and were passed onto to the people by the cult of Paine and outlets such as the *Cork Gazette*. The Paineite popularisation of politics brought out the full force of Irish radicalism and the destruction of broad

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p.25

<sup>42</sup> Driscoll. *Cork Gazette*. July 6th 1794

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Driscoll. *Cork Gazette*. June 12th 1797

<sup>45</sup> Kennedy. ‘Catholics in Ireland and the French Revolution’. p.222

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p.227

Irish Patriotism across Ireland.<sup>47</sup> The insurrection Act of 1796 was a cut off point for the United Irishmen, from this point on they saw that reform was no longer an option for the Irish people and they looked to a Paineite model of republican democracy. The reasons that Cork did not rise despite the depth of ideas spread in the county is because those ideas alienated the Catholics as has been shown in the letters of Hincks and the Catholic merchants also had too much to lose due to the prosperity of trade in the city.

### **Denis Driscoll and the *Cork Gazette* (1790-1797)**

The *Cork Gazette* was founded in 1789 and published between 1790 and 1797. The *Cork Gazette* was initially printed by John and James Jones but the paper was taken over in 1795 by John Swiney (1773-1844), who changed the banner to read, *Magna est Veritas et Praevalebit* (Great is Truth, and It Must Prevail), a reflection of the radical sympathies of the paper. Swiney was a leading member of the Munster branch of the United Irishmen.<sup>48</sup> There are no metrics to gauge the readership of the paper but from the advertising throughout the years of its run it is clear that it has readers across Cork County as there are advertisements placed from rural areas in West, East and North Cork.

From its inception, the paper was edited by Denis Driscoll, a former Catholic priest who returned from pastoral practice in Europe and converted to Protestantism, becoming a curate at the French Reformed Church in Cork. After his dismissal from the curacy in 1791, Driscoll steered the paper towards an outspoken advocacy of the values of the French Revolution, which also reflected his links with the United Irishmen.<sup>49</sup> The paper became more radical and by the end of 1792 looked completely different to its starting point. His absolute principles represent the mind of a recent convert, full of zealotry and personal disappointment.<sup>50</sup> Driscoll openly avowed anticlerical Deism and promoted agrarian law, where rural farm workers would band together to no longer pay rent to the collecting middlemen.

Many of the ideas set out by Driscoll in the *Gazette* were more advanced than those put forward by the United Irishmen. He advocated for universal manhood suffrage, annual parliaments, abolition of property qualifications, and payment for MPs before these became official policies of the United Irishmen in 1794. In April 1794 he was convicted of seditious libel, being unsuccessfully defended by the Sheares Brothers and Thomas Addis Emmet, who were key figures in the United

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<sup>47</sup> Small. *Political Thought in Ireland 1778-1798*. p.176

<sup>48</sup> Hayter-Hames. *Arthur O'Connor*. p.123

<sup>49</sup> Durey. 'Denis Driscoll in Ireland and America, 1793-1810'. p.61

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* p.57

Irishmen in Cork and Dublin. Driscoll spent two years in prison until 1796 but returned as editor until the close of the paper. By 1794, Driscoll's appeal had become fully revolutionary. His anticlericalism, his attack on tithes, and his land redistribution demands, when combined with his Paineite Jacobinism, encouraged a union between urban radicalism and peasant Whiteboy Defenderism which the authorities feared. Most United Irishmen leaders recoiled from a radical republican sentiment until 1797. Driscoll's commitment to revolutionary conspiracy and his promotion of an agrarian law proved too much for even the urban radicals to stomach.<sup>51</sup> Despite Driscoll's imprisonment the government stayed largely away from the *Gazette* until 1797.<sup>52</sup> In 1797 the paper became financially unviable as it was no longer receiving credit from banks due to government interference. The price of printing also increased and there were repeated callings throughout the year for subscribers to pay off their outstanding debts so that the paper could continue. The final edition again asked for outstanding debts to be paid and claims that, "For more than seven years the Proprietor has devoted his time and labour to what he conceived to be in the interest of Ireland; and if he has in any way succeeded, he is rewarded without PLACE, PENSION, BRIBE or PROMISE."<sup>53</sup>

Driscoll derived inspiration from a radical interpretation of John Locke's writings, which he advised the 'calm observer' to read diligently.<sup>54</sup> The final edition of the paper features an extract of Locke's writing on Civil Government. Throughout the 1790s in Cork, there were two strands of thought that were evident from Paine's writings, a laissez faire individualism or equating the common good with communitarianism, social harmony, and the general will of the public. The *Cork Gazette* focused firmly on the latter as it believed its duty was to aid in the enlightenment of people, in particular for their, "moral rectitude, philosophy and national happiness".<sup>55</sup>

In 1797 the *Cork Gazette* wrote more frequently on the work of Edmund Burke. Burke was a complicated figure and could be described as a reactionary revolutionary and one of the first conservatives. Burke's writing influenced what can be considered the peak of Conservative Protestant thought in Britain and Ireland, ranging from 1780 to 1840. He was also opposed to the French revolution and did not believe the revolutionaries were capable of wielding power responsibly. Edmund Burke also strongly opposed the Penal Laws in Ireland. January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1797 opens with a piece entitled 'Political Aphorisms from Burke'. The piece features selected quotes from Burke, one in particular from volume II of his work stands out, "the Rights of Man, that is to

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid. p.64

<sup>52</sup> Donnelly. 'Propagating the Cause of the United Irishmen'. p.6

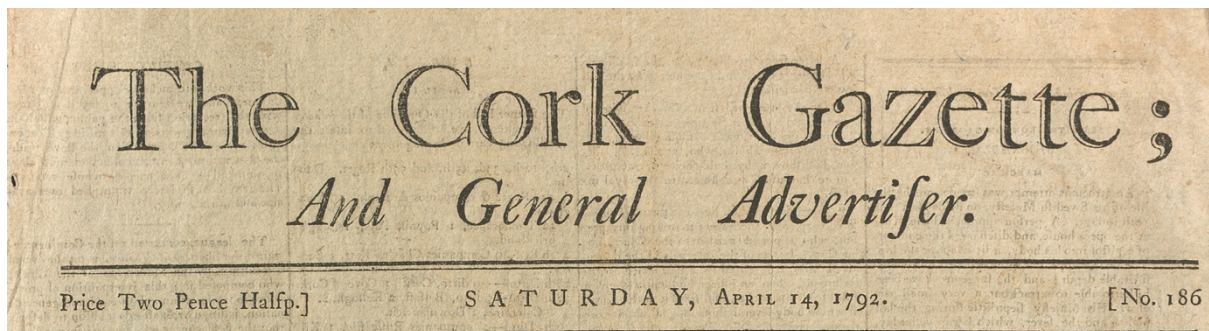
<sup>53</sup> Driscoll. *Cork Gazette*. September 16th 1797

<sup>54</sup> Durey. 'Denis Driscoll in Ireland and America, 1793-1810' p.57

<sup>55</sup> Driscoll. *Cork Gazette*. January 4th 1797



say the natural rights of mankind are indeed sacred things: and if any public measure is proved mischievously to affect them, the objection ought to be fatal, even if no charter at all could be set against it.”<sup>56</sup> Burke and the *Cork Gazette* are calling for those who have been repeatedly pushed down to rise up even if it is a daunting challenge without precedent. A later 1797 edition of the paper mentions Burke’s *Swinish Multitude* in reference to the mistreatment of farmers and rural workers who cannot afford rent. “The landlord insists on his usual rents and the farmer has not his usual prices.”<sup>57</sup> This highlights that although the paper focused mainly on ideas and the city’s dealings, they were aware of rural issues too. The *Gazette* promoting the work of Burke in 1797 just as the United Irishmen were turning to a Paineite model of republicanism may at first appear contradictory but can be explained as Driscoll and the paper’s favour of ideas over violent action. The paper believed in the political thinker, the philosopher, and the search for truth, and as violence became a likely possibility in 1797, they were wary of the dangers of the United Irishmen in power. Writing on the eve of Bastille Day 1794 the *Cork Gazette* calls for a similar uprising in Ireland. The front page reads, “Tomorrow will be a day ever memorable in the history of man, and in the revolutions of Empire.”<sup>58</sup> The paper is in many ways conflicted, as it lays out the need for peace and comes across as anti-violence while also calling for Ireland to rise up by any means against an aggressor. In the same edition where Burke’s writings call for a revolt against oppression there is clear sentiments of regret that violence is now on the doorstep of Ireland. This same issue congratulates the patriots who attempted to anchor at Bantry bay.



The *Cork Gazette*, Edition of April 14<sup>th</sup>, 1792

The *Cork Gazette* differed to the *Northern Star*; the official publication of the United Irishman published in Belfast. The *Northern Star* had a wider circulation as it focused on local news as well as political ideas whereas the *Gazette* did not consistently focus on the localities in Cork. The *Gazette* was anti-religion and alienated the religious population of Cork. The *Northern Star*

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

<sup>58</sup> Driscoll. *Cork Gazette*. July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1794

took its views directly from the United Irishmen and its leadership, but the *Cork Gazette* was more radical and influenced the United Irishmen.

French revolutionary ideas in Cork were spread from the work of Thomas Paine and the *Cork Gazette*. The republican views of the United Irishmen in the latter half of the 1790's derived from the principles of Paine. The *Cork Gazette* promoted the philosophy of Paine thereby radicalising the United Irishmen in their policies. By examining the *Cork Gazette* as a primary source it becomes clear that the more revolutionary the paper became the more the United Irishmen followed suit, this is traced in the following chapters as Whiteboyism becomes more violent and sophisticated in its practice in rural Cork. The *Cork Gazette* was not a mouthpiece for the United Irishmen in the same way the *Northern Star* was, and it acted as a paper for ideas rather than a call for action. The *Cork Gazette* wanted to promote the philosophers that Driscoll was interested in, and not tell the Cork people how to think or when to act, this is something that until now has been overlooked.

## Chapter II: Agrarian violence in North and East Cork

This chapter will focus on the baronies of Avondhu, Imokilly and Duhallow, which are all connected by the river Blackwater. Avondhu is an area in north Cork with the principal town being Fermoy, Duhallow borders Avondhu to the west with its largest town being Mallow, Imokilly borders Avondhu to the east and south where the largest towns are Youghal and Midleton. This chapter looks at the rural areas of north and east Cork to trace the path of increasing violence from the Whiteboys and by extension the United Irishmen which came to a head post-1798. These areas were the poorest and most agrarian areas in the county. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century anything from Cork city and below was considered south Cork, which includes West Cork and anything above is North Cork. This chapter uses court-records as a primary source to establish a difference in tactics and violence of the Whiteboys in the North and East regions in Cork. The term ‘Educated Whiteboys’ means the evolution of thought surrounding the Whiteboy movement, this chapter builds on this term and instead of situating it within the context of a tithe-war I have focused on how the spread of ideas evolved the Whiteboys.<sup>59</sup>

This chapter will show the evolution of the Whiteboys in this area and how they become entangled with the republican ideas of the time. The main purpose of this chapter is to show that the Whiteboys became more organised and more violent as the decade progressed.

### Development of the Whiteboys

‘The Whiteboys’ is a generic term for the agrarian secret societies originating in the 1760s.<sup>60</sup> The Whiteboys originated in south Munster in the 1760’s and were active in this period as local disputes came up between landlords and peasant farmers. They were also named the ‘Rightboys’ and were said to be led by the fictitious ‘Captain Right’. The Whiteboys allegedly got their name from their white uniforms and were sworn by secrecy and organised in the small villages or town lands.<sup>61</sup> The secret societies, including the Whiteboys in Munster and the Defenders in Ulster, were the foundation stones to the building of the United Irishmen.<sup>62</sup> The United Irishmen were not established until 1791 and represented an all-Ireland approach, aiming to give Ireland greater independence from Britain through parliamentary reform. In the period up to 1797 the Whiteboys

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<sup>59</sup> Patterson coined the phrase ‘Educated Whiteboyism’

<sup>60</sup> Patterson. ‘Educated Whiteboyism’: The Cork Tithe War, 1798-9’. p25

<sup>61</sup> Mac Cormaic. *1798! Rebel Cork in Insurrection*. p.12

<sup>62</sup> Ibid

are depicted as a reactive force with a focus on small local disputes, as the decade progressed, they became more organised and aggressive.

The Whiteboys are different to the United Irishmen or the Defenders as they came before them and were originally loosely grouped together causing rural disturbances with no clear leadership structure or overarching philosophy. Their goal was simply to retaliate against local landlords, whereas later iterations developed a wider revolutionary philosophy. There is overlap in the 1790's of rural people who could be classified as part of the Whiteboy movement and were also members of the United Irishmen.

The Whiteboy insurrections of the 1760's can be viewed as a class war between the Munster cottagers and their landlords. The landlords were often Catholic, and the disputes were not secretarian but conservative reactions to landlords changing the farmland each year between tillage, dairy and grazing to suit the market conditions.<sup>63</sup> The original Whiteboys were fighting against the colonial idea of improvement and were defending their Gaelic culture and customs.<sup>64</sup> The switch between self-defense of native customs to a progressive republicanism comes from the ideas prevailing at the time, spread by the *Cork Gazette*, spoken about at United Irishmen committee meetings, and influenced by Thomas Paine.

The activity of the Whiteboys in the late 1780's is very different to the activity a decade later. In the initial agrarian disputes neighbours would be brought together by concrete grievances causing a sense of injustice.<sup>65</sup> In 1786 and 1787 there were a number of recorded attacks in North and East Cork. In Duhallow in a village called Churchtown there was evidence of an organised attack on Charles Percival. In the court martial of John Heffernan on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1786, it was reported that, "a mob of Right Boys rode into the grounds" and "demanded that he (Percival) give up the notes on his person."<sup>66</sup> The dispute was over the increasing of tithes for the people of Churchtown to £10 a year. A notice was given from 'Captain Right', a stand in for the Right Boys, to the parish priest demanding that the tythe be overturned. Another group of Right Boys blocked a road in Buttevant to prevent a Michael Cooly from taking his horse and alerting others. The court found the Heffernan guilty, "on account of his dislike and hate of the country".<sup>67</sup> Here it is evident that tithes were the direct cause for the Whiteboy activity in the area, and this hatred and outburst against

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<sup>63</sup> McBride. *Eighteenth century Ireland*. p.134

<sup>64</sup> Bartlett. *The 1798 Rebellion*. p.315

<sup>65</sup> McDowell. *Ireland in the age of Imperialism and Revolution 1760-1801*. p.82

<sup>66</sup> Heffernan. *Brief for the Crown in prosecution of several defendants on charges of Whiteboy activity*. 5<sup>th</sup> June 1786

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

tithes remains in the late 1790's but retaliation against tithes alone does not explain why the Whiteboys became more violent in this period. The ideas that were presented to them led them to believe they could rise up and that a monumental change would be coming if they did so.

The Percival family were landed gentry, members of the Protestant Ascendancy, who lived in Egmont house and were significant landholders in the Kanturk and Churchtown areas. There was no record of violence in this incident, although there was a threat of violence in the way the Right Boys approached the house in a threatening manner in number and in the middle of the night. There was a similar attack from Whiteboys in Glanworth in 1787 on numerous Protestant houses in the village in the middle of the night.<sup>68</sup> These types of attacks were frequent during the late 1780s and into the early period of the 1790s, however they did not cause death or widespread destruction. The reaction from the ruling government was less egregious than in the later period, but still remained stringent to stamp out further incidents.

The primary weapon for the Whiteboys was a long pike with a spearhead, this became known as the symbol of revolution.<sup>69</sup> Throughout the 1790's, ash trees were continuously cut down in Cork to create pikes that would act as weapons. In response to this the British increased the number of men to round up weapons in localities, they used methods such as free quartering and triangles to extract information and weapons. Free quartering was a policy from the government where soldiers lived in the homes of suspected rebels, doing as they pleased as a means of collective punishment and intimidation. This would include eating the food of the family and raping the women in the home. Triangles involved forming a teepee shaped from three wooden poles, suspected rebels were then hung by their wrists and flogged in order to extract confessions.<sup>70</sup> Punishment and retaliation carried out from the British side was always excessive.<sup>71</sup>

The people of rural Cork were most frustrated by oppressive tithes. The emerging market economy of the time led to tax collecting middlemen.<sup>72</sup> A tithe-farmer was a middleman who purchased the rights to collect tithes for the Protestant clergymen and landlords. These were very unpopular groups who were more efficient and ruthless than the clergy. These middlemen could also be Catholic, and this highlights how due to the prosperity in Cork at the time there was money for Catholics to be made, making republican ideas unlikely to break through to those who were

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<sup>68</sup> Keffe. *Brief for the Crown in prosecution of several defendants on charges of Whiteboy activity*. 18<sup>th</sup> April 1787

<sup>69</sup> Fitzpatrick. *Rebel Aghada 1798-1923: The Untold Story of an East Cork Parish*. p.1

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. p.3

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.p.2

<sup>72</sup> Patterson. "Educated Whiteboyism": The Cork Tithe War, 1798-9'. p25

benefitting financially. However, the republican ideas did permeate in the rural areas of Cork, where they had less to lose. The changes in rural violence and republican moods in the 1790's were due to the ideas spread from Paine. The ideologically driven war between Britain and France and the rise of radical republicanism in Ireland created a large amount of fear in Irish loyalists and the government, who responded with increasingly savage repression.<sup>73</sup>

The original movements of the Whiteboys did not challenge the system of land ownership, the Glanworth manifesto, which appeared in January of 1799 asked for the abolition of tithes rather than their mitigation, forbidding any man to pay or take tithes. In doing this the now 'educated Whiteboys' were questioning the Protestant Ascendancy and their right to enforce taxes on the Catholic majority, something that had not been questioned in the 1760's by the original Whiteboys.<sup>74</sup> This evolution of thought is directly influenced by the groundswell of ideas present in Cork at the time.

The Whiteboys have been represented as a comprehensively organised society in the latter half of the 1790's where they are depicted as a co-ordinated myriad structure.<sup>75</sup> Two or three locally elected officers may have hundreds under their command. In North and East Cork by 1799 there was an assassination committee of Whiteboys in every village.<sup>76</sup> The Whiteboys were not out to simply plunder Protestant landlords, they targeted the Anglican Church due to their control of wealth, but also attacked the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church did not support a revolution in Ireland and were wary of the French Revolution.<sup>77</sup>

### **Increased agrarian violence**

There were two incidents of violence that capture the mood of unrest at the end of the 1790's in rural north and east Cork. The first of these is the attack on Robert Hutchinson. This took place just outside Ahabolloghue, a village in east Cork. This area was a stronghold for the United Irishmen, claiming that 95% of the village were sworn into the organisation in 1796.<sup>78</sup> Tension was high in the area as the local landlords shot and killed several local United Irishmen.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p.26

<sup>75</sup> Mac Cormaic. *1798! Rebel Cork in Insurrection*. p.12

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. p.34

<sup>77</sup> Kennedy. *Catholics in Ireland and the French Revolution*. p.222

<sup>78</sup> Mac Cormaic. *1798! Rebel Cork in Insurrection*. p.20

The Whiteboys in the area garnered intelligence from United Irishmen Daniel Ring who worked as a servant in Hutchinson's estate.<sup>79</sup> Ring informed the United Irishmen of the weapons such as muskets, blunderbusses and pistols which they would be able to use if they carried out a successful raid, this signifies a change in ideology for the Whiteboys who were now targeting weapons to expand their operations rather than isolated attacks in an effort to frighten. This is also specific to Cork as official United Irishmen national leadership vetoed the idea of stealing guns from landlords as a policy, but this was largely ignored in Cork.<sup>80</sup><sup>81</sup> Earlier Whiteboy violence was sporadic and occurred when a local group had a specific grievance. In the 1790's violence was more structured as the Whiteboys were mobilised. They attacked with clearer purpose, for example to recover guns and court records, and were united under the umbrella of ideas.

The attack took place in the early hours of Friday April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1799, with 19 United Irishmen involved.<sup>82</sup> Charles Mac Carthy, a local United Irishmen leader, went upstairs and a struggle ensued between him and Hutchinson, where Mac Carthy took out his gun and shot him through the chest, killing him instantly. The raiders searched the house for arms, they also took documents relating to trials of United Irishmen in the area. They fled through the countryside and were pursued by the Muskerry Cavalry. Both the *Freemans Journal* and the *Hibernian Chronicle* documented the incident the following Monday. The *Freemans Journal* described the attackers as "inhuman perpetrators of this barbarous act" and that they would, "shortly be apprehended and given into the hands of justice."<sup>83</sup> The *Chronicle* described them as, "horrid perpetrators of this cruel and atrocious murder."<sup>84</sup>

Dozens of men allegedly involved in the murder were hauled into the Gaol in Macroom and some were tortured using a hot and cold bath system where they were put in a bath of boiling water in chains and then placed in freezing water, this was repeated several times.<sup>85</sup> There was a £50 reward for the capture of Charles Mac Carthy as reported in the *New Cork Evening Post* on Tuesday May 2<sup>nd</sup> 1799.<sup>86</sup> The description of the men were published in said paper.

On May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1799, thousands gathered outside Macroom Castle to witness the hanging at Brideswell. The walls to the Castle were lined with boiling pots of tar to pour on anyone who tried

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid. p.22

<sup>80</sup> Tuipéar. *The Battle of the Big Cross*. p.5

<sup>81</sup> In January 1799 the home of Mr. Blackwood was broken into, and his rifles and arms were stolen, while the soldier on duty was murdered. Musgrave *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland from the Arrival of the British*. p.664

<sup>82</sup> Mac Cormaic. *1798! Rebel Cork in Insurrection*. p.23

<sup>83</sup> Fearon. *Freemans Journal*. 20th April 1799

<sup>84</sup> Flyn. *Hibernian Chronicle*. 25th April 1799

<sup>85</sup> Mac Cormaic. *1798! Rebel Cork in Insurrection*. p.27

<sup>86</sup> Knight. *New Cork Evening Post*. May 2<sup>nd</sup> 1799

to scale it.<sup>87</sup> The murder of Hutchinson was a clearly thought out and perpetrated attack, he was a symbol of the oppression in the area and his murder represents a more organised and violent type of Whiteboy activity. However, the British acted quickly and with violence of their own, suppressing any chance of further uprisings in the area by removing the perpetrators. The perpetrators of the Hutchinson attack were not just peasant farmers but stone masons, blacksmiths, quarrymen, and coopers.

The second example of Whiteboy violence was the murder of Patrick Murphy and the subsequent arrest of Fr. Peter O'Neill. This took place in east Cork within the confines of Youghal. Fr. O'Neill was the parish Priest for Ballymacoda and was arrested on June 1<sup>st</sup> 1798 for allegedly having information pertaining to the murder of a soldier.<sup>88</sup> The context of this trial is within a tense atmosphere in Youghal and the surrounding areas.<sup>89</sup> The Wexford Militia were garrisoned in Youghal, where loyalists were reaching a fever pitch.<sup>90</sup> This was during the height of fighting in Wexford, with reports coming into the town that Enniscorthy was almost burnt down.<sup>91</sup> Upon the outbreak of violence in Wexford the 200 or so United Irishmen in the Youghal area were allegedly keen to rise alongside their fellow Irishmen.<sup>92</sup> Every farmer was asked to leave a horse out for a United Irishman to ride on to seize the town, the plot leaked, and the yeomanry came to protect the town. The yeomanry then responded with increased violence, Patrick Mccarthy, a local blacksmith was flogged in the ball-alley. Charles O' Brien, who was believed to be the leader, and Charles Gallagher were sentenced to death at a court martial in June of 1798.<sup>93</sup> Lord Longueville wrote on Sunday the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June that he had, "sent 74 pikes of a mortal construction to the officer commanding at Cloyne. I have more to send."<sup>94</sup> There is a clear level of co-operation between rural people in east Cork in the summer of 1798 as they were united by republican ideas.

Fr. O'Neill was arrested the day after the murder and questioned for days about his involvement. The questioning focused on the Church's confession and the British belief that United Irishmen had confessed to Fr. O'Neill their intention to murder Murphy. The British believed that Fr. O'Neill would not under oath tell the truth due to sacredness of confession. "Fr. O' Neill was flogged in the ball alley at Youghal on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> June."<sup>37</sup> Fr. O'Neill's 'Remonstrance' in 1803

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<sup>87</sup> Mac Cormaic. *1798! Rebel Cork in Insurrection*. p.42

<sup>88</sup> O'Neill. *The Barrow Uncrossed*. p.50

<sup>89</sup> Ó Coindealbháin. 'The United Irishmen in Cork County'. p.52

<sup>90</sup> O'Neill. *The Barrow Uncrossed*. p.49

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. p.51

<sup>92</sup> Ó Coindealbháin. 'The United Irishmen in Cork County'. p.55

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. p.56

<sup>94</sup> Lord Longueville. *200 in jail*. 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1798



details the ‘barbarous’ treatment at the hands of the yeomanry to garner details about his involvement in the murder of Murphy.

Thomas O’Neill, brother of Fr. O’Neill, was court-martialled on the 8<sup>th</sup> of June 1798. He was a Catholic landowner who owned an 800-acre farm and was allegedly on good terms with the Protestant ruling class in the area.<sup>95</sup> The charge against him was for, “aiding and assisting in the Rebellion, and for aiding in the murder of Patrick Murphy.”<sup>96</sup> Three witnesses for the prosecution were brought to the stand. James Hyde testified that he was at a United Irishmen meeting the night of the murder where it was decided Murphy was to be killed. William Fitzgibbon claimed he was at two meetings and that he said nothing against the murder plot. James Daly said O’Neill was present the night Murphy was killed.<sup>97</sup>

O’Neill was hung by the Crown forces on a lamp post. Before his execution he made the following statement. “I, Thomas O’Neill, do at awful moment acknowledge the justice of the sentence now going to be executed on me, and that I was present at the murder of Patrick Murphy. But I must declare that it was against my will, and from threats of destruction against myself, my family, and my property, and that I have been brought to confess to this wicked conspiracy. I further declare that I ever had any knowledge respecting the Rev. Mr. O’Neill of Ballymacoda having been a part in any conspiracy whatsoever.”<sup>98</sup> This is the only written statement Thomas O’Neill gave regarding Fr. O’Neill.

In historian Phillip O’Neill’s book, the *Barrow Uncrossed*, he insinuates that the river Barrow, separating Cork and Waterford from Wexford, physically provided a border to the true rebellion.<sup>99</sup> O’Neill states that had there been an igniting incident, rebellion would have crossed the river and Cork and Munster would have joined forces with the Wexford rebellion. The arrest and brutality faced by Fr O’Neill is the closest east Cork came to this incident.

### **Legacy of the Whiteboys**

The Rightboy movement of the 1780s was only responsible for 4 deaths from 1785 to 1791. Violence involving death was far more frequent post-1798. What exactly caused this outburst

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<sup>95</sup> O’Neill. *The Barrow Uncrossed*. p.53

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. p.59

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. p.59

<sup>98</sup> Court martial at Cork-Thomas Neal. 14<sup>th</sup> June 1798

<sup>99</sup> O’Neill. *The Barrow Uncrossed*. p.1

of violence? The government tacitly sanctioned the creation of an environment in which capital force was the norm.<sup>100</sup> Others have focused on the Penal Laws as a restraining status quo.<sup>101</sup> Many have tried to re-write the narrative that the United Irishmen were irrelevant in Cork. There was clearly increasing violence, however, no true outbreak. The fighting in Wexford did not travel west and connect Waterford, Wexford and Cork, but if there had been an inciting incident there is evidence of an appetite for violence in rural Cork.

What is clear in the evolution of rebellion activity in north and east Cork in the 1790's is that organisation of the Whiteboys and United Irishmen became more widespread in the latter half of the decade. This led to an increased violent aspect to the United Irishmen in Cork that was not evident in the earlier iterations of the Whiteboys. The rural areas of the county were inspired by the revolutionary ideas present in Cork and believed violence was a way of ascertaining freedom from oppression.

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<sup>100</sup> Patterson. "Educated Whiteboyism!: The Cork Tithe War, 1798-9". p.27

<sup>101</sup> Mac Cormaic. *1798! Rebel Cork in Insurrection*. p.11

### **Chapter III: Prosperity and Absenteeism: Why Cork never truly rebelled**

It has been established that there was a violent mood in Cork that came from the spread of ideas in the county, it is also pertinent to look at why that violent mood did not turn into a rebellion akin to that on the east coast. This chapter will focus on two main ideas for a lack of rebellion that have been underdeveloped in the historiography. The first point is that the leaders of the United Irishmen in Cork were not physically present in the county to organise a rebellion in Cork in 1798. The second point is that the economic conditions at the time, made the Catholic merchant class unlikely to want to risk the wealth they had accumulated with rebellion.

Cork was the second city of Ireland in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, larger and more prosperous than the growing industrial city of Belfast and behind only Dublin. Cork's population was around half of Dublin's, and twice that of Belfast, oscillating around 80,000 in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>102</sup> Cork was a city famed for its trade, the port was one of the largest in Europe and Cork was the centre of exports for Munster. Cork was also an important naval station, with protection provided for the West and East Indian trade routes.

#### **The absentee leaders and lack of structure**

Cork men were prominent in the United Irishmen, Arthur O'Connor, Thomas Addison Emmet, Thomas Russell and the Sheares Brothers were all originally from Cork. However, no one in the United Irishmen directory, the decision-making positions, actually lived in Cork, this was a major reason why Cork was neglected as a place for rebellion. These leaders left at different times to Dublin to become involved in leadership roles, and by 1794 they had all left and did not return. They each had their own plan for both Cork and the country as a whole. Thomas Addison Emmet, a barrister, came out and supported universal suffrage, stating a plan that would see Ireland divided into 500 electoral districts.<sup>103</sup> There was an open rivalry between Thomas Addis Emmet and Arthur O'Connor. Emmet was a steady force and clashed with the more aggravated personality of O'Connor. Emmet was a moderate who wanted to wait for a French invasion whereas O'Connor was in favour of a popular insurrection.

Arthur O'Connor, who was high sheriff of Cork in the late 1780's and early 1790's, in 1798, claimed the Cork Catholics were addicted to monarchy, and it was the ideas of the French

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<sup>102</sup> O'Brien. *The Economic History of Ireland in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*. p.326

<sup>103</sup> McDowell. *Ireland in the age of Imperialism and Revolution*. p.366

Revolution that shook them from this belief.<sup>104</sup> O'Connor was wrong in his statement that the Catholic population were addicted to monarchy as prosperity was their true addiction. The ideas of the French Revolution failed to penetrate those with something significant to lose.

The O'Connors and the Sheares brothers welcomed Paines anti-deism and saw it as an opportunity to cement cross-denomination political alliances.<sup>105</sup> Emmet, a protestant, was against this and worked closely with Wolfe Tone to create an environment where full Catholic Emancipation was a possibility. Paines anti-deism was a failed policy in Cork as it fractured the Catholic support. The United Irishmen tried to homogenise popular culture but overestimated their ability to transcend the politics of religion.<sup>106</sup> The United Irishmen believed that the Protestant population would wake up to the deception of the self-serving government and politicians and expected massive defections from the military and the yeomanry that never came.<sup>107</sup> They also did not successfully garner Catholic support in Cork.

The clearest example of the ideas of the time upsetting the Catholics in Cork comes from the Bishop of Cork, Most Rev. Dr. Moylan who was vehemently against the United Irishmen and urged loyalty to the government. Other priests in the city spoke to the clergy and recommended early retiring hours and sobriety in an effort to calm the rebellion spirit as tension raged up in 1797 and 1798.<sup>108</sup> There was a plot to murder the outspoken Bishop Moylan, but it was decided this would significantly anger the Catholic population of Cork.<sup>109</sup>

The failure to land a significant number of French ships at Bantry Bay was a turning point for the United Irishmen in Cork and highlighted that they did not have the popular support they believed in the county. In late 1796 a fleet of French ships got past the Royal Navy and landed in west Cork at Bantry Bay. The landing at Bantry Bay was a failure due to so many ships being blown off course and failing to moor, but the United Irishmen remained hopeful that the French would come again.<sup>110</sup> This optimism was misplaced as the four ships and 1,500 men lost was a major blow to the French. The men who did land were hungry and were not greeted with a large

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<sup>104</sup> Ó Coindealbháin. 'United Irishmen in Cork county' p.115

<sup>105</sup> Dickson. *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism and Rebellion*. p.145

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. p.296

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. p.296

<sup>108</sup> Musgrave. *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland from the Arrival of the British*. p.664

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. p.655

<sup>110</sup> Bartlett. *The 1798 Rebellion*. p.63

army, as Wolfe Tone had promised.<sup>111</sup> All the locals had prepared for the French landing was potatoes to take with them on the road, a major disappointment to the French.<sup>112</sup>

Bantry also served as a warning to the British who were now better prepared for a future attack. The British improved its naval blockade tactics, focusing on blocking enemy ports.<sup>113</sup> The performance of the yeomanry in Cork was celebrated by the British for its enthusiasm and loyalty in 1796. Their wages subsequently went up and they took over garrison duties following an increase in their numbers.<sup>114</sup> A Secret Committee of the Irish House of Commons was set up in April of 1797 to prove that the United Irishmen were looking to form an Irish republic and had moved past their original goal of Catholic emancipation. This investigation would give the British parliamentary grounds for increasing security and brutality in Ireland.<sup>115</sup> The findings were then endorsed by a further investigation in 1797 by the Irish House of Lords.

After the failure of Bantry Bay the organisation of the United Irishmen became even more disjointed. In mid-1797 there were no links at national level to the local units in Cork.<sup>116</sup> The yeomanry were exceptionally loyal to the government during the tensest periods in Cork city. Sir James Stewart, baronet, who was commanding at Cork was given orders to send men to Wexford but refused until a second set of more pressing orders were given. He refused initially as he had strong apprehensions of an insurrection in Cork.<sup>117</sup> Stewart asked his superiors to double, treble or quadruple the soldier's presence in Cork until the peace could be maintained. He believed it was necessary for the soldiers to free quarter to bring about peace in the county, and used stringent measures to collect unpaid rents.<sup>118</sup> As the leadership did not live in Cork and the organisation was not fully connected they did not know that the yeomanry in Cork were displaying extreme loyalty and there was not a huge support for a French invasion given the lack of numbers and preparations made for a French landing.

Arthur O'Connor left the day-to-day running of the city to his younger brother Roger. It was his responsibility to increase membership and strengthen the United Irishmen, but policy and operations were to come from Dublin. The organisation of the city was divided into three, north,

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid. p.64

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.p.65

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.p.67

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. p.73

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.p.75

<sup>116</sup> Tuipear. *The Battle of the Big Cross*. p.7

<sup>117</sup> Musgrave. *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland from the Arrival of the British*. p.655

<sup>118</sup> Ó Coindealbháin. 'United Irishmen in Cork county' p.125

centre, and south, with a sergeant heading up a group of twelve men in each section.<sup>119</sup> At the most critical juncture of 1798, just as rebellion was breaking out on the east coast, the leadership of Cork men were arrested and dispersed. In 1798 Roger O'Connor was in prison, and although numbers of United Irishmen in the county increased in 1797 and 1798 there is no evidence of an organised and connected force that was prepared to take the fighting to the government forces. At the end of March 1798, the Sheares brothers took control of running the Cork city branch, but there is no evidence they ever returned south to Cork. John Sheares was director of the United Irishmen for Cork in 1798 and was arrested on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June.<sup>120</sup> Both Sheares brothers were executed on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July.

The leadership in Cork failed to recognise that their policies of secularisation were not working in Cork. This is evident in the lack of numbers to support a French invasion in 1796. The absenteeism of the leadership and the lack of communication from Dublin meant that Cork was not in a position to rebel.

### **Catholic prosperity in Cork south**

There is a difference between reading radical ideas and acting radically. It is clear from the success of the *Cork Gazette* and the popularity of Thomas Paine that the people of Cork had an appetite for republican ideas. The more educated wealthier Catholic merchants of the city, who may have had genuine grievances with the Protestant Ascendancy may enjoy reading the work of Thomas Paine in theory but may not have the sufficient willingness to sacrifice a status quo which benefitted them.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Catholics had a stronghold on domestic and foreign trade in Cork city. Cork was at its peak as an Atlantic trading port at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>121</sup> The main areas for trade were beef, butter and textiles. The butter exchange was set up in 1770 and operated on a large scale in the heart of the city. The butter market in Cork became the largest in the world by 1800.<sup>122</sup> Cork supplied beef and butter to the British navy, Corks exports can be considered colonial or imperial, although they had strong independent ties to European countries.<sup>123</sup> Cork merchants could buy land in these European countries, particularly France, and live a peaceful life.

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid. p.126

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.p128

<sup>121</sup> Foster. *Modern Ireland*. p.203

<sup>122</sup> O'Brien. *The Economic History of Ireland in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*. p.363

<sup>123</sup> Foster. *Modern Ireland*. p.201

The newly created Catholic merchant class was particularly strong in Cork.<sup>124</sup> Catholic merchants were a powerful interest group and although the Penal Laws restricted land ownership, they could make fortunes in moneylending and investments.<sup>125</sup> Cork city prices set the market or dairy across southwest Ireland as they dominated the industry.<sup>126</sup> The trade available, particularly to France in the 18<sup>th</sup> century allowed for a Catholic revival. Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century there was a mass-building of houses and increasing of religious fraternities in the county. Catholics complained of a ‘quarterage tax’, which were payments amounting to guild membership without any of the political rights that would usually be associated with such membership.<sup>127</sup> However, this was an irritant rather than a financial burden. The strength of the Catholic revival meant that the Catholics were connected as a common interest group. This is something the leaders of the United Irishmen failed to grasp. The ideas prevalent in Cork did not permeate the Catholic urban areas as they had too much to lose in rebellion, and the anti-religious views of Paine and Driscoll were an affront to the Catholic population.

There were attempts to settle Northern trade workers in Cork during the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century to establish a linen industry, these were not as successful as the plantation in north Wexford that took place at the same time.<sup>128</sup> This meant that Catholics in Cork were in control of the production of textiles, unlike their counterparts in Armagh. Camlets, high quality cloth woven from wool and yarn, were shipped to Portugal on boats carrying butter. The late 18<sup>th</sup> century saw the port of Cork divest its trade by sending yarn to Bristol and Exeter as well as France. Smuggling declined as Catholic merchants were able to turn a healthy profit from trade of wool, butter, and beef.<sup>129</sup> By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century cotton was being produced in Cork as well.<sup>130</sup> By the mid-century banking was centred in Cork and Dublin, and merchants provided short-term banking functions. Cash supply increased ten-fold in the period from 1720’s until the 1790’s and the Bank of Ireland was set up in 1783.<sup>131</sup> There was increasing cashflow in the area and the people were keen to continue their ties with Britain as long as the trade continued.

Cork was favourable to the Act of Union, as it was at the centre of the provisions trade and the Union would secure the linen trade its principal market and expose the cotton industry to the full

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<sup>124</sup> McBride. *Eighteenth century Ireland*. p.126

<sup>125</sup> Foster. *Modern Ireland*. p.204

<sup>126</sup> Burke. ‘County Cork in the Eighteenth Century’. p.79

<sup>127</sup> McBride. *Eighteenth century Ireland*. p.126

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* p.200

<sup>129</sup> Crawford. *Aspects of Irish Social History 1750-1800*. p.142

<sup>130</sup> McDowell. *Ireland in the age of Imperialism and Revolution*. p.17

<sup>131</sup> Foster. *Modern Ireland*. p.203

extent of British competition.<sup>132</sup> Dublin was strongly opposed to the Act of Union, and it went against the beliefs of the United Irishmen. Cork was different to the rest of the country as it had a low Protestant population and a wealthy Catholic-merchant class.

The potential of the north Cork lowland farms was not fully realised in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, instead Cork grew around the more urban South. South Cork developed the most intensive agriculture, the most active urban areas and the densest population as it became more and more closely tied to the European economy.<sup>133</sup> The south of Cork developed networks labelled 'butter roads' that connected the farms to the export of goods from the city. This explains why violent activity was more prevalent in the North and East where they had less to lose, the ideas that the *Cork Gazette* and Thomas Paine were spreading throughout the 1790's sounded much more appealing to the peasant farmer rather than the wealthy Catholic merchant.

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<sup>132</sup> McDowell. *Ireland in the age of Imperialism and Revolution*. p.701

<sup>133</sup> Burke. 'County Cork in the Eighteenth Century'. p.81



## Conclusion and Final Remarks

The Act of Union (1801) was the conclusion to the 1798 rebellion in Ireland. The Irish parliament was dismantled, and Ireland was tied constitutively to Britain. At the time William Pitt, Prime Minister of Great Britain, believed that the Union would strengthen the economic connection between the two islands. This was welcomed by the Catholics of Cork. Catholic priests in Cork city believed that the atrocities committed by both sides in 1798, especially the burning of churches, meant that a change needed to occur throughout the country. They supported emancipation, which Pitt believed he would be able to grant through concessions when the Catholics became a minority through the Union, and they believed a Union would bring an end to the Penal codes.<sup>134</sup> Cork is a unique case study for this period as it welcomed the Act of Union, this is due to the prosperity in the South of the county. Dublin responded to the Act of Union with the 1803 rebellion lead by a renewed group of United Irishmen who aimed to enlist the aid of Napoleon to overthrow British rule and the Union.

The aim of this research was to show that republican ideas were prevalent in Cork and were facilitated by the *Cork Gazette*, they were then present in the increasing violence in the rural North and East Cork. Tying the whole thesis together was the idea in the historiography that Cork did not participate in the rebellion, and I wanted to provide a new look at why that was. I believed I would find that Cork did have its own rebellion that was not written about but that was not the case. The absentee leaders have been written about, but it has never been focused on as a reason why Cork was not connected to the rebellion. The prosperity in Cork and the merchant Catholic class has also been covered extensively in economic history and long form looks at 18<sup>th</sup> century Ireland but have been under-recognised as reasons why Cork did not rebel. I combined these established historical reasons with a close reading of the *Cork Gazette* to understand why if there was a newspaper so intent on promoting radical ideas did Cork does not rise. I found that the *Cork Gazette* was a promotion of thoughts rather than a call to arms and it alienated the Catholic readership with its anti-deism. The only place where ideas led to action was in the North and East regions of Cork where the economic conditions were worse, and they had much less to lose.

Thomas Paine was uniquely successful in Cork, and I linked that success to the work of Denis Driscoll and the *Cork Gazette*, something I felt was missing from the historiography. I do not

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<sup>134</sup> Walsh. *In the Tradition of St. Finbarr*. p.14

conflate the close of the *Cork Gazette* in 1797 as a factor in why there was no rebellion in Cork. The *Cork Gazette* stirred up revolutionary feeling but ultimately it promoted ideas rather than action. I then took the work of Patterson and his term the 'Educated Whiteboy' to explain the connection between ideas and agrarian violence in North and East Cork. Whiteboy aggression became more organised and more dangerous in this region, but they were ultimately futile as they did not have the power or resources to support an agrarian insurrection. I was then able to examine the reasons why the urban areas in Cork, particularly the city did not rebel. As stated, this was due to absenteeism and prosperity. It was not just that leaders such as Arthur O' Connor and the Sheares brothers were not physically present in Cork, it was that they were out of touch with the reality of the situation in Cork. I concluded that ideas will only run so deep and that when it had the potential to impact the finances of urban Cork it ruled out the chance of rebellion.

To answer the question why study Cork, a county with no insurrection when there was fighting in many distinct areas in this period, I looked at breaking down myths. Cork has always been portrayed as a 'Rebel' county; this is a nickname that dates back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Cork has produced rebels and martyrs from the 20<sup>th</sup> century such as Michael Collins and Tom Barry. I enjoyed dismantling the myth of rebellion in Cork and understanding that the prosperity that Cork enjoyed was more important than fighting for a perceived freedom. I believe this can be taken forward to other regions when noting why one area rises and another maintains the status quo.

A key takeaway from the research on this thesis is that ideas can only take you so far. A region, such as Cork, will not rise up against an oppressive force if they are benefitting economically. Catholics in Cork could not vote or own land but that did not matter because they could still live out wealthy lives. Conversely, the peasant farmers in North and East Cork did become violent because they did not experience the same prosperity, their voices were not heard AND they did not see any economic benefits, and this is when ideas inspire action. If this is the case within one county, in this case Cork, a broader study of Munster can be looked at or why was the West of Ireland not as involved in the 1798 rebellion. This research can also be taken out of the context of Ireland and taken to other rebellions against colonial powers to note why one region rises and another is quiet. Overall, it was the economic prosperity that allowed Cork to remain quiet in 1798 and the lack thereof caused the Whiteboys in North and East Cork to believe that increased violence would garner their freedom.

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## Appendix A Plagiarism rules awareness statement

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