

1798 Rebellion - Timeline

1791

- The Society of United Irishmen was formed in Belfast and Dublin. Leading members included William Drennan, a Presbyterian doctor originally from Belfast and Wolfe Tone, an Anglican lawyer from Dublin. It was a secret society and its members were bound by an oath.
- The citizens of Belfast turned out in huge numbers to celebrate the second anniversary of the fall of the Bastille at the beginning of the French Revolution in 1789.

1792

- In January the Northern Star, the United Irish newspaper was launched. Its editor was the Belfast Presbyterian and woollen merchant, Samuel Neilson. The paper's masthead motto announced its democratic credentials: 'The public will our guide; the public good our end'. Throughout the 1790s it expressed strong criticism of British Government policies and printed news of the successes or failures of revolutionary movements abroad. Its poetry column 'The Muses Retreat' allowed many middle and working-class Ulster poets to express their political views and their sense of distinctive cultural identity.
- Belfast radical Presbyterians met to call for the immediate emancipation of Catholics, though some present were prepared to work for this more gradually.

1793

- Britain went to war with revolutionary France.
- A Catholic Relief Act gave limited voting rights to middle-class Catholics.
- State-funded local regiments of militia were established to patrol the country and keep United Irish activity in check.

1794

- William Drennan was tried for seditious libel because of his outspoken support for reform.
- The United Irish societies were declared illegal. This forced them underground and encouraged the development of their revolutionary spirit.

1795

- The United Irishmen strengthened their contacts with radical societies throughout these slands and made contact with the French, whose help they hoped to call on in the event of a rebellion.
- Wolfe Tone was implicated in the plot to involve the French and escaped imprisonment by agreeing to emigrate to America. He stayed there only a short time before sailing to France in order to continue lobbying for support. Before he left he visited the Belfast Society of United Irishmen.



- In June Tone, his friend Thomas Russell (the librarian of the Belfast reading society) Sam Neilson and others, including the young Presbyterian radical Henry Joy McCracken, climbed the Cave Hill and took an oath to achieve their country's independence, or die in the attempt.

- In September the Battle of the Diamond took place in Armagh. It was between two secret rural societies: the Protestant Peep o'Day Boys and the Catholic Defenders. The Protestants won this engagement and after this the Orange Order was formed, but strong links were then established between the Defenders and the United Irishmen.

1796:

- The Insurrection Act was passed to clamp down further on United Irish activity. It permitted those suspected of plotting against the state to be forcibly pressed into service with the Royal Navy. It also made the administering of an 'illegal oath' i.e. the United Irish oath, a capital offence.

- In the autumn many United Irish leaders, including Henry Joy McCracken and Sam Neilson, were arrested and imprisoned. McCracken was a prisoner in Kilmainham, Dublin until late in 1797.

- On 22 December a French fleet arrived in Bantry Bay with Wolfe Tone on board, but the ships were driven off by a fierce storm.

1797

- For much of this year parts of Ireland and certainly Ulster were in a state of oppressed rebellion. General Gerard Lake was the British commander-in-chief in Ulster and he was determined to find and disarm all potential rebels. He was prepared to act with extreme severity if necessary, permitting the military to carry out floggings and other brutal punishments on the civilian population.

- 17 May: Four members of the Monaghan Militia, stationed at Belfast, were convicted of taking the United Irish oath and shot.

- 20 May: The Monaghan Militia entered the premises of the Northern Star off the High Street in Belfast. They smashed the printing presses, after which the paper was forced to cease publication.

- 14 October: the execution of William Orr, a young County Antrim Presbyterian farmer, charged with swearing two members of the Fifeshire Fencible regiment into the Society of United Irishmen. Orr's trial is generally believed to have been 'fixed'. He was hanged at Carrickfergus, saying that he 'died for a persecuted country'. Many Presbyterians regarded him as a martyr.

- In December Lake became military commander-in-chief in Ireland. Major-General Nugent was given command of the North.



1798

- 12 March: 14 of the southern United Irish leaders were arrested. This was a great blow.
- 30 March: Martial Law was proclaimed throughout Ireland.
- 19 May: Lord Edward Fitzgerald, commander-in-chief of the United Irish army was arrested at his lodgings in Dublin and shot. The wound later killed him. Rebellion broke out in Leinster but was quickly crushed.
- 23 May: this was the date chosen for a Rising of United Irishmen and Defenders throughout Ireland. A large uprising did occur in Wexford a few days later, led by Father John Murphy.
- 4 /5 June: The County Antrim leadership were unwilling to proceed to rebellion without clear evidence of French support. This decision was rejected, Henry Joy McCracken was elected leader and he gave instructions for the United Irish Army of Ulster to proceed with plans to rise, beginning with assaults on the garrison of Randalstown and the town of Antrim.
- 5 June: The Wexford insurgents suffered heavy losses at Arklow. The rising had taken on a sectarian character in this area and many Protestants were massacred at Scullabogue.
- 7 June: The Battle of Antrim. McCracken's force was defeated. He and a few hundred supporters went into hiding in the County Antrim hills.
- 9 June: In the Battle of Saintfield, the County Down United Irishmen forced several hundred of the Yorkshire Fencible regiment to retreat to Newtownards.
- 12/13 June: The rising in Down was quelled with the defeat of Henry Munro's forces at the Battle of Ballynahinch.
- 15 June: Execution of Henry Munro.
- 21 June: The Wexford Rising was quelled at Vinegar Hill
- 17 July: Henry Joy McCracken, earlier captured as he tried to escape to America, was executed in Corn Market, Belfast.
- 22 August: A French force landed in Mayo under General Humbert.
- 27 August: Humbert had a victory over British troops at Castlebar.
- 8 September: Humbert had to surrender to General Cornwallis at Ballinamuck in County Longford.
- October: Wolfe Tone was arrested at Bunrana in County Donegal. He had accompanied a further French invasion force to Lough Swilly.
- November 10: Tone was convicted of treason and sentenced to hang.
- November 19: Tone died in prison. He had attempted unsuccessfully to cut his own throat.