

# Rower District of South Kilkenny beat to the sound of the drum in impressive and moving 1798 Commemoration event

The Pikemen of Carrighbyrne, Co. Wexford, joined The Rower Pikemen from South Kilkenny in an impressive display of marching as part of the Rower commemoration event to mark the 200th anniversary of the 1798 rebellion on Thursday night week last.

Leading them was a Colour Party drawn from the F.C.A. and the Graighnamanagh Brass Band, Kilkenny, after 200 years had at last recognised the gallant men and women who gave their lives for Irish self-rule, all of those years ago.

The Rower 1798 Committee should be very much pleased with the turn out and the impressive and detailed speeches that was part of this commemoration event. 50 men were killed here on a site which now takes up the local cemetery on the 11th June, 1798, by British Crown Forces. Their Commander was General Asgill and a Fr. Philip Roche was the Commander of the Southern Army of the Wexford Republic, of a 10,000 strong rebel force.

The Rower and Glenmore districts of South Kilkenny were part of this army and through informers or good Army principles. The Rower camp was set upon by the British forces, killing 50, wounding many, many more and sending many more to jails "across the water" and further afield.

General Asgill, put down the rising in this part of Co. Kilkenny and also at the Goresbridge Camp and that also of the Castlecomer uprising.

The United Irishmen had become a body committed to its enterprise by violent means. The Rower, Goresbridge, Castlecomer and there is also some evidence that Glenmore was involved, where units were set up and men were being drilled.

The picture of marching pikemen from Co. Wexford and local Rower men and women was a most moving scene on the Thursday night.

A typical cell 200 years ago, would have 12 men and ten cells made up a section commanded by a 'Captain'. They were all ready for the promised help from France of officers, and arms and a hard core of professional soldiers.

Historian Brian Cleary in his address to the gathering in the cemetery in The Rower on Thursday night traced the importance of the United Irishmen, the role played by their leaders, the Movement commencing he felt with the White Boys in the area.

Asgill, the Crown Forces leader in the Kilkenny/Carlow and Laois counties had by iron fist methods crushed any attempt to dislodge British Rule in the three counties. He kept on top of his brief and was one of the better British Generals in Ireland at the time. He rounded up all the 'usual suspects' and transported them prior to the rising of 1798 to Australia and other British centres of rule.

Areas like Graighnamanagh and Goresbridge as well as Glenmore were ready to join the Wexford men in their uprising. Through informers and other means, Asgill was a step ahead and repressed any such move with his attack on The Rower camp on the 11th June, 1798.

In the wreath-laying ceremony in the graveyard, Mary and Alice Audley, members of an old Rower family placed wreaths on the graves of Martin Harrington and Charles Audley (both direct descendants) both killed in 1798 with 48 others.

A ceremony jointly conducted by Rev. Canon McEvoy, P.P., The Rower/Inistioge and Mrs. Joan Deacon representing Rev. Sandes from the Church of Ireland was held also in the graveyard.

The unveiling of the commemorative stone in honour of all who died in the 1798 uprising in the district was performed by Councillor Dick Dowling, Chairman of Kilkenny Co. Council.

Dick, was introduced by Mrs. Rita Kavanagh, M.C. for the proceedings.

Mr. Dowling in a well researched speech spoke in Irish and English on the importance of the 1798 rebellion and the proud tradition of Kilkenny people in it. He congratulated all concerned in this event and the work of the Tidy Towns for their involve-

ment in it. He spoke of the Battle of Ross and the huge loss of life which occurred there.

He made reference to the fact that many from the South Kilkenny area had been involved in it. Some, he stated, from his own parish of Glenmore. He commended the members of the local community for the input they had in this wonderful event. He felt that the 1798 rebellion was at last been honoured with dignity and civic pride and was only too delighted and honoured to have the task of unveiling the commemorative stone.

The commemorative stones were erected by the Tidy Towns, per Sean Higgins and Matt Crotty.

Matt joined Ger Mackey, Rita Kavanagh and Martin Kavanagh in the research into this event and in the organising afterwards of this commemoration to its honour.

The Carrighbyrne pikemen were under the command of Bill Murray, while the 40-strong local section was under Jim Murphy from The Rower Village.

The ceremony concluded with the playing of the last post by Thomas Kavanagh, a member of the Army No. 1 Band and who is a member of a family with long association with the Inistioge/Rower area.

This with the lowering of the National Tricolour flag was a fitting and dignified ending to a great event.

Research is continuing on The Rower camp of 1798. The core group will stay in place and it is their intention of having a publication on this important event in Irish history published before the year ends.

Time was not on our side to stay afterwards and join with the local Rower Community and visiting groups in the talk and discussion on the 1798 event. We were honoured to be present. The whole ceremony and its different parts was very well done and organised.

These men and women of 200 years ago were idealists, they were motivated by the highest and noblest aspirations. With a few exceptions they wanted to break the connection with England. Like all organisations there were many differences of opinion being waged between property and no property, between the high and the low, the rich and the poor. The country it seemed was ripe for new ideas. Among them, however, were informers. The units or cells were infiltrated by agents of the Crown Forces. Punishments were carried out and as stated by the Wexford historian, Mr Cleary, in his address in the graveyard of The Rower. Cart loads of Irishmen and women left Co. Wexford fishing port of Duncannon for Botany Bay and other ports in Australia and beyond.

**Footnote:** Theobald Wolf Tone (1763-98). Educated at Trinity College, he graduated in Law, but soon became a politician. A champion of the cause of Catholic Emancipation, he with others founded the United Irishmen. His thinking had a profound influence on subsequent Republican thought which have been used up to modern-day Ireland. He died on the 19th November after been found guilty of treason and sentenced to be executed. Prior to it been carried out, Tone committed suicide. He was buried in Bodenstown Churchyard, near Sallins in Co. Kildare and as an Irishman I have been proud to have visited his grave on occasions and hopefully in future years as well.

We enjoyed our visit to The Rower; we thank them for their kind invitation for tea and refreshments afterwards, which we were unable to take up. However, on a future occasion when perhaps the publication of their book on the local involvement in the 1798 Rebellion is been launched we will join this civic-minded group for a revisit to the area and its people.

We also learned a thing or two about the 1798 event which we hope to come back to at a later time also that Goresbridge 1798 Commemorative Committee are active and will towards the end of the month have their own event to mark the Goresbridge involvement.