

Two events in the 1790s with unlikely connections

Looking at historical events for the month of June I was struck by two main events which took place in the first week in the 1790s which had a Maynooth connection and which were interconnected in themselves. These were the Royal Assent by George III for the establishment of the Royal College of St. Patrick on the 6th June 1795 and the death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald who died in Newgate Prison Dublin on the 4th June 1798.

The origin of how St. Patrick's College came about has been widely researched and publicised. In brief there were a number of factors that came together that saw its establishment. We can go back to the American Revolution and the thoughts expressed by Thomas Paine in his famous publication *The Rights of Man* which advocated that all men are equal by nature and before the law and were entitled to Liberty, Property, Equality and Security. Ideas that subsequently informed the political upheaval culminating in the French Revolution (1789-1799).

Before the French Revolution there were 348 Irish scholars and 17 masters in various colleges in France of which 180 scholars were in Paris in the College des Lombards and Community Rue Cheval Vert. The remaining students were in Nantes, Bordeaux, Douay, Toulouse and Lisle. The total number of Irish students on the continent was 478 students and 27 masters.

One of the arguments put forward for the establishment of the College by Irish bishops and other supporters was that Irish scholars would pick up these revolutionary ideas and bring them to Ireland. They pointed out that Irish scholars "might be contaminated by the contagion of sedition and infidelity"... and thus become "the means of introducing into this country the pernicious maxims of a licentious philosophy"

After the French Revolution it was also the case that foreign colleges had nearly all been closed, especially those in France, another factor which added to the case for the establishment of the



Thomas Paine 1737-1809



**William Robert
2nd Duke of Leinster (1749-1820)**



**Stoyte House, from *Maynooth College
its Centenary History* (1895)
by Rev. John Healy**

college. There was a strong anti clericalism aspect to the French Revolution.

After much debate royal assent was granted on 5th June 1795 by George III. The first meeting of the 21 Trustees took place on 24th June 1795 with one item agreed — "That notices be published in the Newspapers that the Trustees will receive proposals for lands and buildings, in the vicinity of Dublin for the new Seminary, and that applications for that purpose be made to Mr. Strange, Dr. Troy or Dr. Hussey". A considerable number of proposals were examined. The Trustees chose Maynooth as the most suitable. The 2nd Duke of Leinster was influential in this decision and the house of his steward John Stoyte was acquired along with some acreage. The first ordinations took place on 6th June 1800.

Lord Edward Fitzgerald, the son of the 1st Duke of Leinster, and brother to the 2nd Duke, had taken part in the American Revolution on the British side and later supported the ideals espoused by the *Rights of Man*. He had been to Paris, met Thomas Paine and became a friend follower of Wolfe Tone. Tone was inspired by the writings of Thomas Paine and wanted to form an organization for political change, one that was "A brotherhood uniting all Irishmen, high and low, catholic and protestant" So it was that the Society of the United Irishmen was established and the ill fated 1798 rebellion came about. Lord Edward Fitzgerald, a member of the organization was shot and wounded, captured and imprisoned. He did not receive medical help and died of his wound in Newgate Prison on 4th June 1798.

In exploring the links between the June dates in 1790s in this narrative, there is a certain irony. The establishment of St. Patrick's College at Maynooth was in part due to fear of revolutionary ideas being brought back by Irish students from the continent, and the person who actively brought back those revolutionary ideas and acted on them was an aristocrat, whose brother, the 2nd Duke of Leinster FitzGerald who country house was Carton, helped to found the Catholic

seminary at Maynooth in 1795.

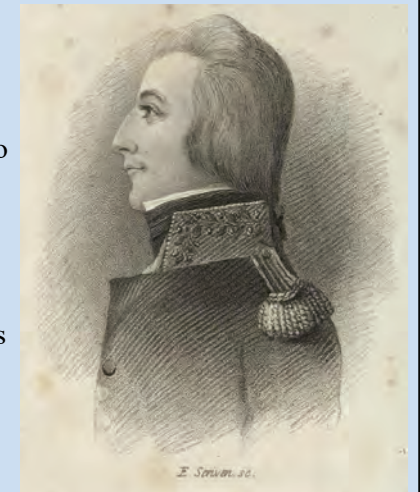
Susan Durack

Sources: *Maynooth College its centenary history* by Rev. John Healy (1895).

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**Lord Edward Fitzgerald
1763-1798**



**Theobald Wolfe Tone
1763-1798**



**Two men apprehending Lord Edward
Fitzgerald at gunpoint.**