

AN HISTORICAL REFLECTION ON FREEMASONRY IN IRELAND AND THE ROLE OF FREEMASONS IN THE 1798 REBELLION.

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Introduction

Freemasonry as an organization does not engage in political or religious activity and indeed forbids such discussion within a Lodge.¹ Nevertheless, the events that occurred in Ireland during the 18th Century cast a long shadow within the Craft. The development of Freemasonry in

¹Religion and Politics in Relation to Freemasonry. Pietre-Stones review of Freemasonry,
From: http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/religion_politics_freemasonry.html
Retrieved December 2, 2020.

Ireland coincided with a period of intense political turmoil and upheaval. It would not be surprising therefore to find that some Freemasons, as individuals, were caught up in the political dramas of the time. This paper briefly examines the history of Freemasonry in Ireland during this volatile period. It discusses the involvement of some of the brethren who were actively engaged in the failure that was the 1798 Rebellion which led to the Act of Union of 1801.

Origins of Freemasonry in Ireland

According to Bro. John Heron Lepper, Worshipful Master of Quatuor Coronati Lodge, No. 2076, English Constitution, 'The eastern seaports of Ireland have been constantly affected by English influence from the year 1173, when Henry II granted the City of Dublin to the subjects of his City of Bristol to inhabit,...'.²

English Freemasons in London and Westminster formed a central body in 1717 and this idea most probably crossed the sea to John Bull's Other Island resulting in the formation of a Grand Lodge.³ However, there is compelling evidence of Freemasonry being in existence in Ireland as early as 1507. During an excavation in Limerick a Mason's square was discovered in the foundation of a bridge, known as Baal's Bridge. The Baal's Bridge Square has the inscription:

I will strive to live with love & care

Upon the Level and the Square

The square was discovered in 1830 when an old Tudor Bridge on the River Shannon was being rebuilt. In order to commence the building of the new bridge foundations had to be dug and it was during this operation that a stonemason's square was found buried in the clay substrate. The

² Lepper, Bro. J. H., May 1925, "*Adhuc Stat*" *A Sketch of the History of the Grand Lodge of Ireland*, The Builder, Vol. 11, No.5.

From: http://www.skirret.com/papers/history_of_GLI.html

Retrieved October 20, 2020.

³G.B. Shaw, *John Bull's Other Island*, 1904, From: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3612/3612-h/3612-h.htm>
Retrieved November 30, 2020.

square measures 5 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches (148 cm) from tip to tip. A question arises as to whether the square was accidentally dropped during the building of the original bridge or perhaps its purpose was more ritualistically intended as a blessing or offering in the hope that the work would go smoothly. The square was found under the north-east corner of the bridge which is the place where a stonemason would commence the erection of a structure. It would be somewhat coincidental if the square had merely been lost in this exact spot. A cynic might ask if the square was genuinely found at the site and this is not an unreasonable question. However, I am inclined to accept the evidence as presented and leave the question to be mulled over by conspiracy theorists and fellow travellers.

The Baal's Bridge Square is held in the care of Union Lodge No.13 in Limerick, Ireland. The lodge has been warranted since 1732 but almost certainly predates this as many lodges in Ireland, Scotland and England were in existence before being formally warranted.



Baal's Bridge Square with lapel pin shown beside it.

Other evidence of speculative Freemasonry was discovered at Trinity College, Dublin, where a lodge is thought to have been in existence in 1688. A 'Tripos' was being read by John Jones, a Candidate for a bachelor's degree. The reading contained the lines:

...for Sir Warren, for being made a Freemason the NEW [sic] way, five shillings.

The Candidate was a friend of Jonathan Swift, then Dean of Dublin Cathedral, the author of Gulliver's Travels. Swift is credited with authoring many Masonic pamphlets.



Jonathan Swift - Dean of Dublin Cathedral -possibly a Freemason

Unfortunately, it is not possible to place an exact date on the formation of a Grand Lodge in Dublin, but one was in existence in 1725. This fact is verified by reference to its existence in a report in a Dublin newspaper of that year which referred to a meeting of about 100 brethren belonging to six lodges of 'Gentlemen Freemasons meeting under the jurisdiction of a Grandmaster'. The report refers to the wearing of 'Aprons, White Gloves and other parts of the Distinguishing Dress of that Worshipful Order'. According to the same report there was an election and the Earl of Rosse was declared the Grand Master.

Following the ceremony, the brethren dined together and finished the evening by attending a play in full Masonic costume. As far as I can ascertain this is the earliest record of a meeting of the Dublin Grand Lodge. During this period there was not just one 'unified' Irish

Grand Lodge as the following year, according to Bro. Lepper, yet another Grand Lodge was established in Cork City and was named the Grand Lodge of Munster (Munster being one of the four Irish Provinces).⁴ At this time, some brethren were members of both English and Irish Lodges. Lord Kingston was elected G.M. of England in 1728 and in 1730 became G.M. of Ireland and the following year was appointed as G.M. of Munster. This led to the fusion of the two Irish Grand Lodges into the single entity that exists today.

The Irish rite is thought by some to be the most unaltered version now in existence of the early 18th Century ritual, but it had its genesis in the primitive English rite existing prior to 1730. The evidence shows that the concept of issuing a warrant for Masonic proceedings originated in Ireland with the first of these warrants to hold a lodge and create Masons being issued on 7 February 1732. This Irish innovation was later adopted by the Grand Lodge of the Antients in England and later by the Grand Lodge of the Moderns. As is often the way it would appear that there was some resistance to change and not all lodges throughout Ireland applied for a warrant. It can be argued that some lodges, particularly rural lodges, tried to adhere to the “old ways” but they withered on the vine and the new order prevailed.

Warrants were issued to military lodges as early as 1732 and this helped to spread Freemasonry across the globe. These warrants were not attached to a specific location and are known as ambulatory warrants. Their existence in Ireland within the military, combined with the immense migration from Ireland to America during the eighteenth century, had a profound and founding effect on American Freemasonry. The widespread influence of the Grand Lodge of Ireland is not generally realized by the Craft. The USA has been discussed in the foregoing commentary, but Irish Lodges were working in Canada, the British West Indies, Portugal, Peru, and Brazil. The first Australian Lodge met under Irish warrant No. 227 which was held in the old 46th Regiment. New Zealand, South Africa and India all have lodges which still retain allegiance to the old Irish Constitution.

Having described the honourable place of Irish Freemasonry in the international development of Freemasonry, the focus of the remainder of this paper is to examine the role of

⁴ Lepper (op. cit. n 2)

Freemasons in the Irish Rebellion of 1798. In order to set the stage for this it is necessary to consider some influential events that occurred during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The Ascension of a Dutchman to the British Throne

The defeat of King James II by his Son-in-Law William, Prince of the House of Orange-Nassau, was to have an ongoing influence on Irish history which persists up to the present day. William of Orange, after defeating King James II, became William III and shared the throne with his wife, Mary II.⁵ This is not the forum to develop a thorough examination of the implications of William's defeat of his Father-in-Law, King James II, suffice to say that following James's defeat at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 both he and William left Ireland and neither ever returned.

There remained, however, strong support in Ireland for the Jacobite cause and, according to the Royal Arch Chapter historian, James Penny, this was to 'have an effect on Freemasonry in Ireland up to the final defeat of Charles Edward at Culloden in 1746'.⁶ The Charles Edward referred to was, of course, Charles Edward Stuart otherwise known as Bonny Prince Charlie. Charles Edward Stuart went into exile in France as had King James II before him. It is probable, according to the French Grand Orient, that the first Masonic Lodge in France was formed by Irish supporters who had followed the vanquished King James II into exile. The ascension to the British throne of a Dutchman is an event that requires some explanation and it had its genesis in

⁵ T.B. Macaulay, (1848). *History of England to the Death of William III*. Vol III. edn. 1967, Heron Books, London.

⁶ J. Penny, *The Royal Arch Chapter and its Place in the Development of Irish Freemasonry*.

From:

http://www.irishmasonichistory.com/uploads/1/0/3/8/10381775/royal_arch_chapter_ex_comp_james_penny.pdf

Retrieved October 20, 2020.

the religious divisions that came about following the Protestant Reformation. An understanding of this reformation takes the story back to the beginning of the sixteenth century.

The reformation began in Germany on 31 October 1517 (All Hallow's Eve) when the German Monk, Martin Luther, nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of All Saints Church in Wittenberg. Luther was protesting what he saw as corruption within the Catholic Church. This was largely a protest against the sale of indulgences which allowed purchasers to buy remission from their temporal sins in exchange for money. Luther was considered by the Catholic Church to be a heretic and was excommunicated for his trouble.

After Luther was excommunicated the idea of reform (hence the 'Reformation') took hold in Europe. Living in France at the time was a lawyer and theologian, John Calvin, who broke with the Catholic Church in 1530 and developed his own religious ideas. Calvin's work and writings made an impact on religious thought and Protestantism, as the new philosophy was now called, spread across Europe with Geneva becoming its centre. This change created the environment for conflict and very soon the French Wars of Religion broke out - a conflict that lasted from 1562 until 1598 and claimed the lives of over three million people in France. The reformation in Europe was based entirely on theological differences and church practices. In England around the same time another religious problem was developing. King Henry VIII wanted an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon and the Pope was opposed to the King's request. In 1534 Henry ended the Papal jurisdiction in England and through a piece of legislation called the *Act of Supremacy* he had himself declared as the '...only Supreme Head on earth of the Church of England'. Another policy was put into effect between 1534 and 1540 and this became known as the *Dissolution of the Monasteries*.

After Henry VIII's death on 24 January 1547, he was succeeded by Edward VI who reigned from 28 April 1547 to 6 July 1553. Edward died, probably from tuberculosis, and was succeeded (if we ignore Lady Jane Grey who reigned for 9 days before being deposed) by Mary I who was a Roman Catholic. During her reign of just over five years Mary reversed the fortunes of the Catholic Church. Her reign was short however and she died most likely from uterine cancer. Mary was succeeded by her half-sister Elizabeth who reversed her policy on the Roman Catholic Church. The *Elizabethan Settlement* as it was known formed Anglicanism into the distinctive church that it is today.

The period of Elizabeth I's reign was turbulent, and the religious atmosphere was tense with fear of a resurgence of Catholicism. The death of Elizabeth I brought the Tudor period to an end and it was replaced by the House of Stuart. King James VI of Scotland became King James I of England and he was a staunch Protestant. He sponsored a new edition of the Bible which was to become known as the King James Version (KJV). He also wrote a treatise on Witchcraft, published in three volumes, titled *Daemonologie*. Some historians believe that this book influenced Shakespeare and that his depiction of witches in the play Macbeth was based on King James's writing on the subject.

By now Protestantism was firmly established in Britain and a Protestant King occupied the Throne. Charles I followed King James I and he was eventually to alienate himself from his Parliament resulting in the English Civil War which ran from 1642 until 1651. The Royalist forces were defeated, and the King was tried, found guilty of treason, and beheaded at Whitehall Palace in 1649 at the age of forty-eight. England was ruled directly by the 'Rump Parliament', a period known as the Commonwealth of England. Oliver Cromwell seized power, dissolved Parliament, and established 'The Protectorate' with himself as the Lord Protector. Cromwell ruled for nearly five years and when he died his son, Richard, briefly ruled the Country. Richard Cromwell was soon deposed which gained him the nickname of Tumbledown Dick and George Monck took control for less than a year. The Monarchy was restored with the return of Charles II and his reign of twenty-four years was relatively peaceful.

Religious tensions still existed and there was a hope in some quarters that Catholicism might be reinstated in Britain. As a consequence, there was unease among the Protestant population when Charles II was succeeded by his openly Catholic brother James II. Charles II was himself received into the Catholic Church on his deathbed with the rites being carried out by Father John Huddleston, a priest who had been kept close to hand. There is some doubt that Charles was conscious at the time and whether he had consented to the last-minute conversion.

James II replaced Charles II on 6 February 1685 but because he was Catholic he was unpopular with the Protestant majority in Britain. King James II's daughter Mary was married to a Dutchman, William of Orange, who was sovereign Prince of Orange within the Dutch Republic. William had participated in several wars against the Catholic French King Louis XIV. These wars were fought by a coalition of Protestant and Catholic powers within Europe against

the French Monarchy. Protestants in England saw William of Orange as the saviour of their country and Protestant faith.

When James II's second wife, Mary of Modena, gave birth to a son, James Francis Edward Stuart, she provided a Catholic male heir to the throne. James to this point had no male heirs and Mary had suffered a string of miscarriages. It looked as if she was incapable of bearing a child. Immediately there was suspicion about the birth and a rumour began to circulate that an imposter baby had been smuggled into the bedchamber in a warming pan. James was forced to issue a denial signed by witnesses who were said to have been present at the birth.⁷

Up to this point the expectation of the British public and Parliament was that James II would be succeeded by a Protestant daughter and the birth of a son created political tension as James's son now became first in the line of succession. Public anger had also been intensified by the trial of seven bishops who had opposed James II's Declaration of Indulgence which allowed religious freedom to his subjects. This was a policy that was seen as threatening the now established Anglican Church. Consequently, a delegation of political figures which became known as the 'Immortal Seven' was dispatched to Holland to formally invite William of Orange to invade England. This he did landing at Brixham on 5 November 1688. James II fled and in an act of defiance he threw the Great Seal of State into the Thames. During his flight he was recognized by some fishermen as he made his way to the coast and they brought him back to London. His Son-in-Law, William of Orange, allowed him to leave the Country. In doing so he was attempting to prevent James becoming a Catholic martyr.

On 13 February 1689 Parliament passed the *Declaration of Right* effectively saying that James II had vacated the throne. William and Mary were crowned as joint sovereigns at Westminster Abbey on 11 April 1689. This was not an equal sharing of power however as William astutely constructed the formal arrangement to include a clause that '*...the sole and full exercise of the regal power would be only in and executed by the said Prince of Orange in the names of the said Prince and Princess during their joint lives.*'

James II tried to regain the throne by joining Franco-Irish Jacobites who arrived in Ireland from France with French forces. This culminated in the Battle of the Boyne which took

⁷ The 'warming pan baby': James Francis Stuart. From: <https://thehistoryofparliament.wordpress.com/2013/07/26/the-warming-pan-baby-james-edward-francis-stuart/> Retrieved December 1, 2020.

place at Oldbridge on the morning 1 July 1690 (Old Style Calendar). James II fled the battlefield and returned to France. Neither James nor William ever set foot in Ireland again. This Battle is commemorated in Northern Ireland and Scotland annually on 12 July.⁸ There is a certain irony in the fact that the commemoration of this Protestant victory is celebrated on 12 July rather than the actual date of 1 July. This change was brought about because of the move from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar instituted by Pope Gregory in 1582 and adopted by England in 1752.



King William III at the Battle of the Boyne

The French Revolution and the Irish Rebellion

The storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1789, was the event that heralded the start of the French Revolution, Penny states that “many of its leaders were also Freemasons”.⁹ The French Revolution was one of the primary influences on the Irish Rebellion of 1798. The causes of the French Revolution are complex, and its ideals of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity were to spread

⁸ D. Hume, J. Mattison and D. Scott. *Beyond the Banners*, Booklink, 120 High Street, Holywood, County Down.

⁹ Penny (op. cit. n 5).

to other nations. Ireland was ripe for the types of political changes that were being advanced, and the 1798 Rebellion was, in part, a direct response to the upheaval in France. Unfortunately, the political turmoil in France was to create a rift within the membership of the Grand Lodge in Ireland. In the South, Lord Fitzgerald, the younger brother of the Duke of Leinster, Grand Master of Ireland, was at the forefront of the Rising. In the North, Brother Henry Joy McCracken was to lead the Rebellion. The North-East of Ireland is populated by a people, many of whom are of a different origin to the rest of the country. This is particularly true of County Down and County Antrim both of which have a strong Scottish component within the population. The largely Scotch/Irish non-conformists were referred to as dissenters. Many of the Presbyterians and indeed Church of Ireland Anglicans, united with their Catholic neighbours to oppose British rule. Freemasons were undoubtedly among this faction and, as Penny concludes, they “paid the ultimate price for their folly.”

The Rebellion of 1798 had its origins in the formation of an organization known as the Society of United Irishmen. It is important to recall the international events that were occurring at the time to fully appreciate the stimuli that led to the creation of this organization. The American Revolution (1765-1783) had given England a bloody nose and provided an impetus for revolt further afield. The French Revolution (1789-1799) was a further source of inspiration for those who sought a change in how Ireland was governed.

The Society of United Irishmen and the role of Freemasons

The main leaders of the United Irishmen were Theobald Wolfe Tone, Henry Joy McCracken, Thomas Russell and William Drennan. While Freemasonry as an organization did not support the cause of the United Irishmen, many Lodges were supportive and this is particularly true of Ulster in the Northern part of the island. Henry Joy McCracken was a Freemason as were many other United Irishmen (McCabe, Teeling and Orr to name but three) and it is reasonable to postulate that Freemasons' Lodges were used to provide venues for meetings of United Irishmen and to provide a source of recruitment to the Society



Henry Joy McCracken -Painting by Sarah Cecilia Harrison (1863-1941)

The original objective of the United Irishmen was to bring about a reform of the Irish Parliament.¹⁰ To do this they intended to unite Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter under the banner of the Society. The representatives of the English Government at Dublin Castle were always extremely suspicious of the United Irishmen and this suspicion became hostility with the outbreak of the war between Britain and France in February 1793. These were difficult political times and the admiration that the United Irishmen had for the French and their revolution was seen as being treasonable by the English Government. This came to a head when the Government discovered that some United Irishmen, amongst them Theobald Wolfe Tone, were engaged in negotiations with the French Government and the United Irishmen were suppressed in May 1794. This was a critical turn of events and the consequence of it was to cause the United Irishmen to become a secret, oath-bound, organization with the objective of achieving an Irish nation entirely independent of Britain. This, of course, had ramifications that would reverberate through the years until the present and it helps to inform the curious about some (but not all) of the causes of the more recent conflict in Northern Ireland known as ‘The Troubles’.¹¹

¹⁰ B. Inglis. *The Story of Ireland*, Faber and Faber, 2nd edn, 1960, (pp. 68-72)

¹¹ The Troubles. From: https://www.wikiwand.com/en/The_Troubles, Retrieved December 1, 2020.

The cause of the United Irishmen was supported by France and the outcome could have been different to that which ensued had the French invasion fleet been able to land its 14,000 soldiers on Irish soil. However, the weather conditions were such that it was unable to land and the fleet had to return to France. As a consequence of the attempt by the French to support a rebellion by the United Irishmen the British Government intensified its suppression of the United Irishmen and hopes of French assistance in a rebellion faded. However, a small force of 1,100 French soldiers landed in County Mayo in August under the command of General Humbert and although they had an initial victory at Castlebar their campaign failed and they became prisoners of war and as such were treated honourably by the victorious British which is more than could be said for the treatment of the local militias who had joined in the affray.

The rebellion was effectively ended, its leaders were executed, and the Irish Parliament was abolished. The Act of Union was passed in 1801 to formally bind Britain and Ireland together and a decade that had begun with high ideals ended with increased sectarian bitterness that has had long-lasting ramifications.

In an article published in the Irish News (28 April 2003), Kenneth Dawson stated that ‘The 1798 rising found a seemingly unlikely ally in some elements within Freemasonry’.¹² He argues that Freemasonry developed in parallel with the United Irishmen and their predecessors in the Volunteer movement. While acknowledging that the hierarchy of Freemasonry abhorred the activities of the United Irishmen he is nonetheless firm in his belief that ‘many Freemasons’ Lodges, particularly in Ulster – rallied to the radical cause’.

The Irish author, Brendan Behan, writing in *Brendan Behan’s Island*, briefly discusses perhaps the most famous (or infamous depending on your politics!) United Irishman, Theobald Wolfe Tone. Behan states, perhaps with an element of hyperbole, that: ‘Tone was the greatest Irishman who ever lived and his autobiography is the seminal book of Irish radical republicanism. The United Irishmen were stronger in Belfast than anywhere else during his time, and Frank MacDermot points out in his biography of Tone that there was *a very close connexion in the North between Freemasonry and the Republican organisation – so much so*

¹² Dawson, K.L., April 28, 2003, Moment of unity – Irish rebels and Freemasons, *Irish News*, From: http://www.nuzhound.com/articles/irish_news/arts2003/apr28_moment_of_unity.php

that in 1797 and 1798 “a large proportion of Masonic Lodges were practically revolutionary committees”. The bosses of the Masonic Order had to suspend its existence in 1798’ (italics added).¹³

That many eminent citizens were participants in the Belfast Society of United Irishmen is evidenced by the attendance record of its first meeting on 14 October 1791. To use a contemporary term that today attaches to another conflict, it was not just the more ‘radicalised’ elements of Belfast society that attended but a cross-section of civic and economic life. Respectable merchants and trades people attended. William Tenant and Henry Haslett who were merchants and Thomas McCabe, a clockmaker, were present and they were Freemasons. Tenant and Haslett were members of Lodge No. 257 and McCabe was a member of Lodge No. 684. Chairing the meeting was Sam McTier who was also a Freemason. Lodge No. 257 also had as a member William McCracken who was a brother of Henry Joy McCracken.¹⁴ A solicitor, James McGuickan and ship broker Robert Hunter were both members of Lodge No. 257, the latter being arrested and imprisoned at Fort George in Invernesshire. In Dublin, James Napper Tandy and Archibald Hamilton Rowan were Freemasons. A version of the old rebel song, *The Wearing of the Green*, specifically refers to Tandy with the following refrain:

I met with Napper Tandy and he took me by the hand
And he said “How’s poor old Ireland and how does she stand
She’s the most distressful country that ever yet was seen
For they’re hanging men and women for the Wearin’ o the Green.

The meeting of the Dublin Society was held at the Tailors’ Guild Hall which was the headquarters of the Grand Lodge of Ireland.

In his article in the Irish News, Dawson points out that the first martyr of the United Irishmen was William Orr, from Farranshane, near Carrickfergus.¹⁵ Carrickfergus incidentally is the town where King William of Orange landed in 1690 to pursue the battle with his Father-in-

¹³ B. Behan and P. Hogarth, (1963). *Brendan Behan’s Island*, Readers Union, Hutchinson, London.

¹⁴ Dawson (op.cit. n12)

¹⁵ William Orr of Farranshane, Co. Antrim. Irish Patriot. From: <http://ornamestudy.com/william.htm>
Retrieved November 2, 2020.

Law, James II which culminated at the Battle of the Boyne and thereby created the material for future sectarian conflict that is seen today in the processions that occur in Northern Ireland on 12 July. Orr was accused of administering the United Irish oath. Although the evidence was doubtful he was found guilty and hanged in October 1797. It is significant that following the execution he was given a Masonic funeral. Both his solicitor, James McGuickan (previously mentioned) and his defence counsel, John Philpott Curran, were Masons.

It is important to be aware that Freemasons were also among those who supported the British Government in Ireland and wished to play no part in the Rising. The Catholic emancipator and lawyer, Daniel O'Connell, was a vocal opponent of the 1798 Rebellion and a Freemason. He remained a Freemason for at least ten years having been raised in 1797 and becoming Worshipful Master of Lodge 189 in Dublin in 1800. He was also a member of Lodge No. 13 in Limerick and a charter member of a Lodge in Tralee. He resigned from Freemasonry when he was put under pressure by Archbishop Troy of Dublin. From the early days of the Craft the Papacy was hostile to it, seeing it as being subversive to the teachings of the Church. This was far from the truth as Masonry has no dogma and is not opposed to any religion. However, it did not promote Christianity over other faiths. Consequently, a Papal Bull of Pope Leo XII was widely promulgated in Ireland in 1826 which threatened excommunication for Catholics who were members of the Craft. The result of this decree was that a great many, probably the majority, of Irish Catholic Freemasons resigned.



Daniel O'Connell -The Great Liberator

The issuance of a Papal Decree on the matter of Freemasonry membership was nothing new and they had been issued periodically for over fifty years. McClintock in an article published in *The Craft and the Cross* stated: 'For more than half a century those decrees were largely ignored, as is Ireland's way with authority, but in the 1840s a particularly zealous bishop of Dublin, Bishop Troy, set about enforcing them with vigour'.¹⁶ Bishop Troy pursued O'Connell because of his high position and esteem within Irish Catholic society. Under the circumstances prevailing at the time O'Connell had no other course of action but to resign.

Following the death of his wife, Mary, O'Connell became more conservative and devout and one can speculate this increased enthusiasm for his faith contributed in no little way to his decision to resign from the Craft. He also killed a man in a duel and it would be reasonable to suppose that this had an effect on his devoutness. Some evidence in support of this supposition is provided by the suggestion that, following the duel, he always covered his right hand with a handkerchief when entering church as he felt that to have the hand that killed a man uncovered would be an affront to God. Under pressure from those who felt that he was still a Freemason he felt compelled to write a letter to a London Newspaper, *The Pilot*, on 19 April 1837 denying that he was still a Freemason.

¹⁶ C. D. McClintock, *The Craft and the Cross: The True Story of the Sun of God*, Aesun Publishing, Coleraine, 2009.



Daniel O'Connell at the Duel

Conclusion

Freemasonry has a long history in Ireland and, depending on which source one relies, its antecedents hark back to at least the 16th Century. It was certainly well-established during the period that preceded the 1798 rising and it is no surprise that some Freemasons were involved in that momentous event. That is not to say that the official position, as represented by the Grand Lodge of Ireland, was in any sense supportive of the insurrection, nor indeed was it in opposition to it. That Freemasons were involved in the Society of United Irishmen is beyond dispute. It is also likely that Lodge meetings were held that promulgated support for the United Irishmen. However, according to a letter from David Rudland, published in Issue 4 (Winter, 1998), of the Journal, *History Ireland*, 'It was also around this period that a number of Masonic lodges adopted titles which would have been more at home on Orange banners although whether these were adopted before or after the crisis period of 1797/98 would have a bearing on their significance'. Some Masonic Lodges had names such as True Blues, Ancient Boyne and Glorious Memory Orange Lodge of Dungannon.

The political tensions of the time were such that it is not surprising that individuals and individual lodges supported one side or the other. The Minutes of the Grand Lodge of Ireland for this period and a copy of which is held in Freemason's Hall, London, '...are a masterpiece of understatement and diplomacy'. Daniel O'Connell was one of the Chairmen of the meetings that were held at this time. The Grand Lodge Committee did not meet from May until November 1798 and when it met, according to Rudland, it was: 'in a spirit of retribution'. The month after the meeting it firmly reiterated that religious and political dissension was against its fundamental principles. Given the turbulence of the time quoting Minutes of Grand Lodge has some risk attached to it. In the same Issue of History Ireland referred to above, Petri Mirala of Trinity College, Dublin, urges caution. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that Freemasonry had an influence on the 1798 Rebellion. This paper has identified and discussed the personal involvement of Freemasons in the Rebellion. Beyond the involvement of its members in the rising, Masonry, through its doctrine of universal brotherhood seems, according to Rudland, to have provided some degree of inspiration to the United Irishmen in their attempt to overthrow the Government of the day.