

*Climb The Liberty Tree*

**AN EXPLORATION OF THE  
ULSTER-SCOTS' ROLE IN  
THE UNITED IRISHMEN'S  
REBELLION OF 1798**



**PUPIL WORKBOOK 6**



**So What's the Point?**  
**Lessons Learned from '98**



## Brainstorm!

Mary Ann McCracken, Thomas Russell and Jemmy Hope survived the executions of the summer of '98, but by the autumn many leaders were dead, imprisoned, exiled to America or thoroughly disheartened. It is said that William McCracken, who took part in the Battle of Antrim under Henry's leadership, never fully recovered from grief at his brother's death.

In whole class discussion have a "brainstorming" session on these questions:

1. How would the survivors have felt about the defeat and about all the executions following the Rebellion?
2. Would they have decided they had been in the wrong?
3. In the circumstances, what thoughts may have been in their minds when they looked to the future?
4. What sort of Ireland had the rebels wished to create? You may need to search the earlier booklets to help you remember the details.



# Further Blows for the United Irishmen



1. **1801:** The Act of Union Ireland was no longer to have a Parliament in Dublin but would be governed from London.
2. **1803:** Thomas Russell joined Robert Emmet in a further attempt at rebellion. Their plot was quickly crushed and both Russell and Emmet were hanged.

It would be many years before anything like democracy was introduced in British politics, still longer before Catholics were given the rights that were eventually extended to the Presbyterians.

Many surviving supporters of the rebellion emigrated to America or were exiled there as an alternative to hanging. The weaver poet James Orr was one of these, although he was eventually allowed to return home.

# Mary Ann McCracken's Story

## Group Work



Each group member should take 5 minutes to write down everything memorable about Mary Ann McCracken's part in the United Irishmen's story so far. Then the accounts should be read to the group to establish the main facts.

### Next, think about these facts:

1. Mary Ann's parents were elderly. They still had businesses to run.
2. Mary Ann discovered shortly after Henry's death that he had a young daughter. Henry had hidden in her mother's cottage on Cave Hill before his arrest.
3. Wealthy women in 1798 were expected to marry rather than work.
4. Mary Ann was very independent and still a believer in "liberty", or freedom.
5. Most of the men Mary had admired were dead or in exile.
6. Mary Ann lived until she was in her nineties.

### Group Prediction:

What did Mary Ann do with her life for the next sixty years?  
Hear each group's prediction as a whole class.





In groups discover something of what actually happened to Mary Ann from the information in these sources and consider the questions below.

<http://www.ulsterhistory.co.uk/maryannmccracken.htm>

- Is anything very different from your group's prediction?
- What do you think was most admirable about her later life?
- She is less famous than her brother Henry. Why do you think was?
- Do you think this is fair?

Report your findings and opinions to the whole class.

# 1798 in Mary Ann's Own Words

When she was in her eighties Mary Ann was asked by a historian for an account of her memories of 1798. In reflecting on the experience she made the following remarks.

*In considering the unsuccessful struggle in which my brother was engaged, many are too apt to forget the evils of the time: the grinding oppression under which the people laboured; the contempt in which public opinion was held; the policy which prevented its expression and intimidated the press. The only means then existing of stemming the torrent of corruption and oppression was tried, and they failed, but the failure . . . was not without its beneficial effects.*

*Notwithstanding the grief which overcame every feeling for a time, and still lingers in my breast, connecting every passing event with the remembrance of former circumstances which recall some act or thought of his, I never once wished that my beloved brother had taken any other part than that which he did take.*

*.....the evils attending an attempt to change the government of a country by force of arms, so certain of producing evil and the uncertainty of doing good.*



How does the first quotation suggest that life has changed for the better since 1798?

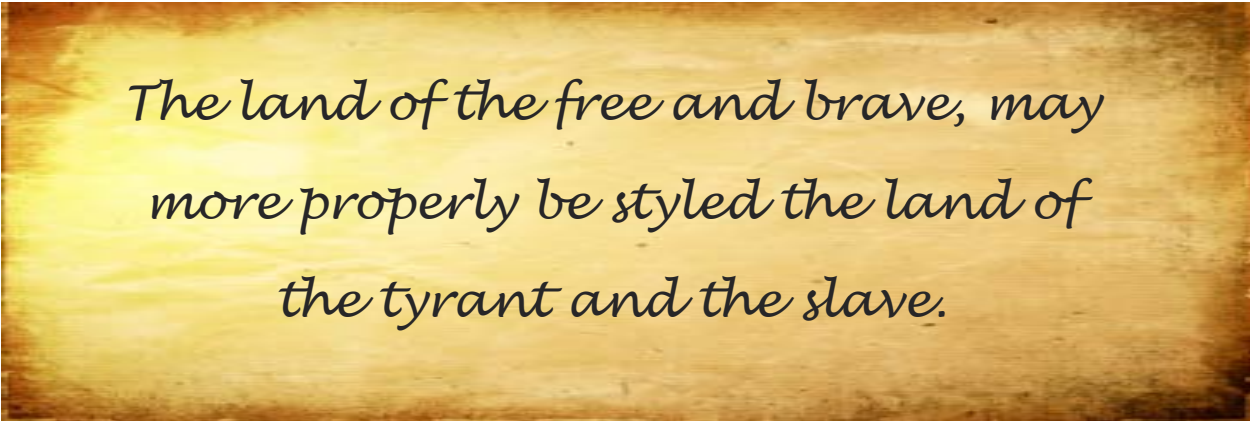
Why does Mary Ann not regret what Henry did even though she still misses her brother?

Look carefully at the final quotation. Think about the atrocities that followed the Battle of Antrim and all the executions after the Rebellion was crushed. What lesson has Mary Ann learned about using violence to bring about change



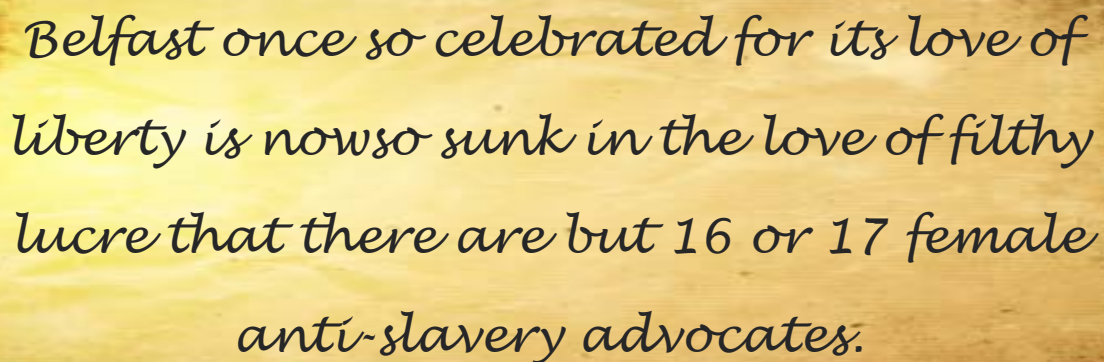
# The Liberty campaign continues

Mary Ann was very disappointed when the American Republic which had inspired the United Irishmen to “plant the liberty tree” in Ireland permitted slavery to continue in many of its southern states until well into the nineteenth century. She wrote that:



*The land of the free and brave, may  
more properly be styled the land of  
the tyrant and the slave.*

She was also shocked when the possibility arose of a Belfast shipping company participating in the slave trade and frustrated at the small numbers of people in Belfast who bothered to support the anti-slavery movement:



*Belfast once so celebrated for its love of  
liberty is now so sunk in the love of filthy  
lucre that there are but 16 or 17 female  
anti-slavery advocates.*

The United Irishmen had opposed slavery. Thomas Russell always refused to eat foods flavoured with sugar, because he knew it had been produced by slaves forced to labour on sugar plantations in the West Indies.

# Non-Violent Protest

In 1859, aged 89, Mary Ann was to be seen in the Belfast docks, standing beside a ship that was to take emigrants to the United States.

As people boarded for the journey to the new land she handed them leaflets asking them to oppose the continuation of slavery and discrimination against black people in America.



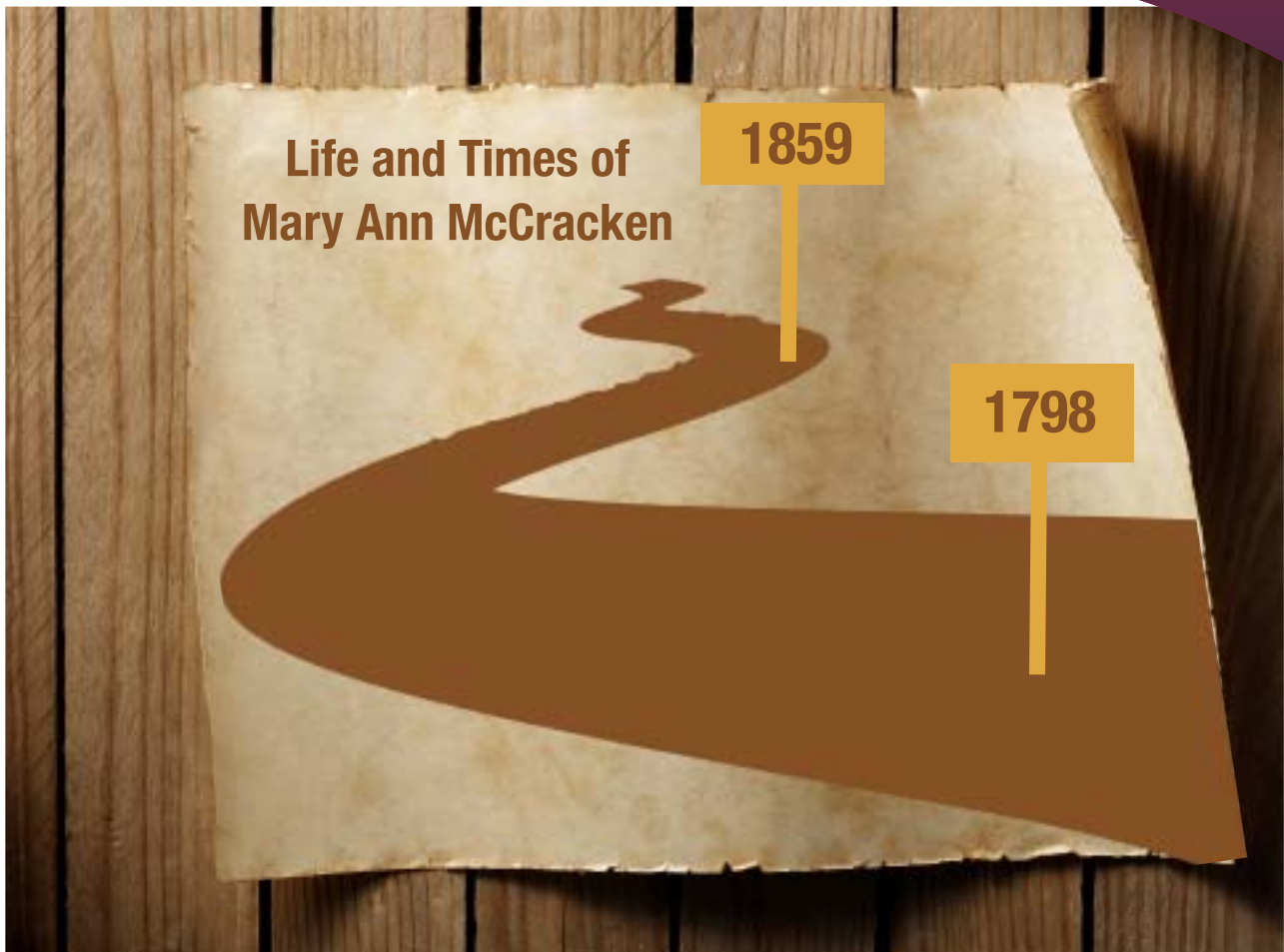
## The Slave Trade

Do some research on the Slave Trade.

Use an Internet Search Engine such as “Google” for information.

Then use a computer programme such as Word, to create a three-column leaflet of the kind Mary Ann might have used to influence emigrants.

Think about the facts she would wish to communicate and what she could say to make them feel they had a responsibility to do something.



1. In groups create a wall chart to inform about the “Life and Times of Mary Ann McCracken”.

The design should be eye-catching e.g. in the shape of a winding path.

Choose significant moments from Mary’s life and include their dates. Write a brief description of each and accompany this with a small illustration.

2. Finally, in your group create a brief play illustrating 3 important moments in Mary’s life.

Link the 3 scenes with narrative passages and conclude with a comment on what you feel we can learn from a study of her life and experiences.