

# *climb The Liberty Tree*

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



**TEACHERS BOOKLET 4**

## TEACHER NOTES

# Fourth Branch— Down in DOWN

This unit of work allows pupils opportunities to:

- Learn about the causes and course of the 1798 Rebellion in Co. Down
- Explore the characters associated with the 1798 Rebellion in Co. Down and the motivations of people on both sides of the conflict
- Take part in a class discussion to consider issues of faith and of morality raised by rebellion and conflict
- Reflect on the documented experiences of eye witnesses
- Take part in a group discussion on the issues of responsibility for suffering caused during violent conflict
- Re-present information in a variety of ways employing creative and imaginative approaches
- Memorise information employing visual, auditory and kinaesthetic methods
- Take part in a role-play to demonstrate a hostile political interview.
- Make a presentation supported by a multi-media package such as PowerPoint for a peer group

### KEY STAGE 3 CURRICULUM

The activities in this unit would fit into work on Citizenship and also into aspects of the General Learning Areas of The Arts, including Art and Design and Music; English including Media Education and Drama; Environment and Society, particularly History.

The unit provides opportunities to teach, practise and assess some of the following skills and capabilities:

- Critical and Creative Thinking Skills—creativity; managing information; problem solving/decision making
- Personal and Interpersonal Skills—self-management, working with others
- Communication
- ICT

## BACKGROUND NOTES

# Roots of the Rebellion in Down

1. The historian Trevor McCavery believes that “radical politics in North Down grew out of the area’s Presbyterian culture”. Although many Presbyterians believed that “rebellion was as the sin of witchcraft” (1 Samuel 15: ), as many as nine ministers and five licentiates (young men who had completed theological training) were involved in the Rising in County Down. (See McCavery’s essay, in *The 1798 Rebellion in County Down: “A System of Terror is Completely Established”*)
2. Rev William Steel Dickson, thought to have been the Commander-in Chief of the Ards rebels, was minister first at Ballyhalbert and then at Portaferry. Other prominent Presbyterian radicals included:  
Rev James Porter, Greyabbey  
Rev Ledlie Birch, Saintfield  
Rev Samuel Barber, Rathfriland  
Rev Arthur McMahan, Holywood  
Rev James Simpson, Newtownards  
  
David Bailie Warden  
Archibald Warwick
3. The area had many Volunteer companies in which support for the French Revolution and for The Rights of Man was openly expressed.
4. The Marquis of Londonderry’s family at Mountstewart, near Greyabbey, were themselves Ulster-Scots. They had supported reform of the Penal laws which affected Catholics and Presbyterians. Support for reform was dropped, however, when Lord Londonderry wished to develop his political career. This caused great anger among the family’s tenants on the Ards Peninsula, as did his spy network, which was designed to find out if any of his tenants supported the United Irishmen. Those who were informed against were arrested.
5. Rev John Cleland was an agent for Lord Londonderry. In 1792 he began to demand that Presbyterians pay tithes, causing further resentment of the Church of Ireland and of the British State. Rev James Porter at Greyabbey published a series of satirical articles in the *Northern Star* newspaper attacking the behaviour of Lord Londonderry during this period.
6. Lord Londonderry attempted to raise a force of yeomen who were loyal to himself and to the Crown from among his tenants. This was fairly unsuccessful because many of those tenants belonged to the United Irishmen and because those who did not may have been intimidated when they attempted to join.

7. In 1798 Lord Castlereagh, eldest son of the Londonderry family, was appointed Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. Other prominent members of the aristocracy in Co. Down included The Londonderrys' neighbour Lord Downshire, and Lord Moira whose estate at Montalto was occupied by the rebels before the Battle of Ballynahinch.

### **The Course of the Rebellion in Co. Down**

Henry Joy McCracken had expected that risings would start simultaneously in Antrim and Down. In fact, his plans were communicated to General Nugent. Reverend Steel Dickson was arrested on June 4 and David Bailie Warden was promoted to replace him. On June 7, when McCracken's men were gathering at Craigarogan for the march to Antrim, Warden climbed Scrabo Hill expecting to see his own troops gathering there. No-one appeared, but he could see that the lights were on in the Market House in Newtownards where Colonel Stapylton saw that the lights were on in the Market House in Newtownards where Colonel Stapylton and 300 of the York Fencible Regiment had their barracks. Clearly, Stapylton was expecting trouble. Events then took the following course:

**June 7:** The insurgents took Donaghadee, and many loyal to the Crown evacuated to Stranraer. A meeting took place between the Donaghadee insurgents and sympathisers in Greyabbey.

**June 8:** United men from Donaghadee, Cottown and Six Road Ends marched on Saintfield.

**June 9:** The McKee family, who were loyalists and suspected of being informers, were murdered when their home near Saintfield was set alight.

### **The Battle of Saintfield**

Stapylton had marched his men to Saintfield from Newtownards, but they were ambushed by an insurgent force and after suffering some casualties retreated through Comber and Dundonald to Belfast.

Warden ordered companies to assemble that night in Movilla cemetery near Newtownards, Greyabbey, Ballywalter and Kircubbin. He planned to attack Newtownards.

**June 10, "Pike Sunday":** Insurgents attacked Newtownards. The garrison retreated to Belfast.

There were disturbances in Bangor where insurgents were joined by others from Conlig and Holywood.



The insurgents attacked Portaferry and the garrison left for Strangford on a Revenue Cutter.

The Ards Peninsula and North Down were now in the hands of the United Irishmen.

On the same day Reverend Ledlie Birch preached to insurgent troops gathered at Creevy Rocks outside Saintfield on the road to Ballynahinch. The United Irishmen drilled there and prepared for further battle.

**June 11:** A French Revolution-style Committee of Public Safety was set up to govern Newtownards.

Henry Monro was appointed General of the United Irishmen in Co. Down.

**June 12:** Monro led his men to Ballynahinch where they occupied Lord Moira's Montalto estate.

### **June 13: The Battle of Ballynahinch**

A detailed account of events in Ballynahinch is included in the Fourth Branch Pupil Workbook.

#### **Military Forces and Armaments at Ballynahinch:**

**General Nugent commanded –** The Fife Fencible Infantry  
The Monaghan Militia  
60 of the 22nd Dragoons  
They had 6 six-pounder canon.

**Colonel Stewart commanded –** The Argyll Fencibles  
100 York Fencibles  
Hillsborough Yeomanry Cavalry  
Downpatrick Yeomanry Infantry.

The combined force totalled over 2,000 men.

The United Irishmen had over 4000 (some reports say nearly 7000) men, but they were poorly armed – see Thomson's account in the Pupil Workbook. They were also undisciplined and frightened. David Bailie Warden and other commanders report refusals to obey orders and desertions. James Orr's poem Donegore Hill paints a similar picture of behaviour at the Battle of Antrim.

The United Irishmen were defeated. Troops looted and burned the surrounding countryside in the search for fleeing insurgents.

A detailed account of events in Ballynahinch is included in this Teacher's book and in the Fourth Branch Pupil Workbook.

The Rebellion in Down was crushed when the following events took place:

**June 15:** William Holmes, a farmer, betrayed Monro who had hidden in his pig house on Slieve Croob.

**June 16:** Monro was hanged and went to his death with great dignity.

#### **Other Executions and Sentences:**

Rev William Steel Dickson was imprisoned in Fort George, Scotland, for several years.

David Bailie Warden was captured but allowed to emigrate, as was Rev Ledlie Birch.

Rev James Porter and Archibald Warwick were both hanged.

#### **Sources**

Hill, M., Turner, B. & Dawson, K. eds.,  
Stewart ATQ,  
Wilsdon, Bill,

*1798 Rebellion in County Down*

*The Summer Soldiers*

*The 1798 Rising in Antrim and Down*

# NOTES ON ACTIVITIES

## Page 4

**Suggest some reasons why the Stewart family opposed the Rebellion. Some possible answers would include:**

1. Senior members of the family were involved in politics on the side of the British government and did not wish to damage their careers.
2. The family owned much land and property and did not wish to see it destroyed in any battles
3. There may have been fear that a “reign of terror” might develop as had happened in France, and that members of wealthy, aristocratic families might be imprisoned or executed.
4. They may genuinely have wished to spare the country and its people the bloodshed and suffering that happen in any violent conflict.

## **I Samuel 15:23 says:**

For rebellion is like the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is like iniquity and idolatry.

This verse would have deterred many devout Presbyterians from supporting rebellion. They may have felt that even if the government was treating them unfairly, God would disapprove of any attack on the civil and military authorities. Many believed only He had the right to overturn such authorities and would point to passages in the New Testament, such as Paul telling first century Christians to obey the government, as further proof.

## Page 6

**Unjumble town names:**

Newtownards

Portaferry

Saintfield

Ballynahinch

## Page 16

**Write a Response.**

1. They did not have uniforms but wanted to look as smart as possible to show they understood how serious the event was. (Accept other valid suggestions) **2 marks**
2. They were using traditional Irish colours and symbols to show they had the good of their country at heart. **2 marks**
3. Most ordinary people were armed with pikes, which were very dangerous, but only at close quarters with the enemy. Some had old, inefficient swords or even farm implements such as pitchforks. Only better off people had guns. **8 marks - 4 for weapons and 4 for evaluation.**

4. To James at twelve years old the idea of a battle would have been very exciting. He probably knew many of the people involved and may even have wished he could take part. He would have heard adult members of his family talking about how serious this event was and expressing their hopes and fears about it. The scene was a very colourful one with the emblems mentioned. (Credit any other valid responses.) **8 marks for a fully developed answer - 4 reasons properly commented upon**

### **Page 19**

#### **Concluding Activity**

This activity could be easily adapted to form a Key Stage 3 IT accreditation task. To make it viable, pupils should also seek information from electronic or online resources and a pupil report on the activity should be included.



# Recalling the Rebellion in CO. DOWN

**Name Cards for “The Big Names” Activity:  
Students sort these into piles for “Government” or “Rebels”**

**Warden**

**Porter**

**Castlereagh**

**Chetwynd**

**Millin**

**Dickson**

**McKee**

**Hewitt**

**Birch**

**Warwick**

# Recalling the Rebellion in CO. DOWN

**Name Cards for “The Big Names” Activity:  
Students sort these into piles for “Government” or “Rebels”**

**Stapylton**

**Monro**

**Nugent**

**Thomson**

# Recalling the Rebellion in CO. DOWN

## 10 Newsflashes to put in order and present (1)

**BREAKING  
NEWS**

Lord Castlereagh is made Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland.

**BREAKING  
NEWS**

Rev. Steel Dickson says ministers have a duty to correct Governments if they are treating people wrongly.

**BREAKING  
NEWS**

Rev John Clelland begins collecting tithes from Presbyterians.

**BREAKING  
NEWS**

June 9. The McKee family die in a fire after their home is attacked by United Irishmen.

**BREAKING  
NEWS**

June 9. The Battle of Saintfield.  
Captain Chetwynd is killed.  
Colonel Stapylton Retreats.

# Recalling the Rebellion in CO. DOWN

## 10 Newsflashes to put in order and present (2)

**BREAKING  
NEWS**

June 10: Pike Sunday.  
Rebels attack Newtownards and Portaferry.  
Most of Ards Peninsula is in rebel hands.

**BREAKING  
NEWS**

June 10: Pike Sunday  
Rebels at Creevy Rocks, preparing to march on  
Ballynahinch. Henry Monro elected leader.

**BREAKING  
NEWS**

Rebels camp on Ednavaddy Hill overlooking  
Ballynahinch. General Nugent on his way with  
troops to confront them.

**BREAKING  
NEWS**

June 12: Rebels overrun Ballynahinch. They get  
as far as the Market Square but flee in fear of  
counter-attack from Nugent's men.

**BREAKING  
NEWS**

June 15: Monro hides in a pig house belonging  
to William Holmes who betrays him to Nugent's  
soldiers.