

NAAS LOCAL HISTORY GROUP



MICHAEL REYNOLDS -1798

When one thinks of 1798 and the rebellion, places like Wexford and Gorey might be foremost in people's minds. However let us not forget that a mighty battle was fought in Naas and the leader was a local man, Michael Reynolds, a farmer from nearby Johnstown.

On the night of 23rd May 1798, the Munster coach was attacked, burned and the passengers all killed. This was the sign that the rising instigated by the United Irishmen was taking place. The rebels who numbered about one thousand strong assembled at Tipper quarries on Thursday 24th May and led by Michael Reynolds in his scarlet regimentals, marched on the town. This was about 2.30 am in the morning.

Naas was the strongest garrison in County Kildare and numbered about two hundred and fifty soldiers supported by some yeomen. Prominent among the defenders were soldiers of the Armagh Militia. There was also North Naas Cavalry under Cpt. Neville and two field pieces under the command of Colonel Lord Gosford.

The main attack along the Johnstown Road was led by Reynolds and it nearly made it to the Jail but was eventually repulsed. The rebel attack was launched from three directions and achieved some degree of success. A series of fierce attacks on the barracks saw heavy fighting. The rebel attack on the barracks was finally beaten back when the military managed to bring two artillery pieces to bear on the rebels. This was only achieved after the demolition of several buildings including the Alms House facilitated the use of the cannon. The casualties inflicted were one hundred and twenty five rebels and twenty five defenders. About eight hundred pikes and twenty to thirty firelocks were captured, many of which were found in the Tipper quarries. After the battle was over Michael Reynolds escaped into the Wicklow Hills where he continued a rebel in arms. On 25th June 1798 he was mortally wounded in the battle of Hacketstown and died a few days later.

Although his exploits are now largely forgotten he remains a folk hero when thoughts turn to the men of 1798.