

likely to know, indicates that the combination of the colours green, white and orange—or yellow—had a limited use for nationalist favours with a separatist connotation prior to 1916. Tom Clarke, the 'father' of the 1916 rising, told John Devoy in May 1914 that the Ladies' Irish Volunteer Committee had adopted a design for a badge which had been submitted by Mrs Clarke: 'a combination bow badge—orange and green on the wings with white in the centre'. Clarke said that his wife 'explained the symbolical meaning of the badge as indicating one of the basic principles of their organisation' and that the committee unanimously adopted it. Apparently it had been necessary, more than eighty years after Amelia Eleanor Hamilton had done the same thing, to explain the symbolism. It would be very interesting to know if the same explanation was given in 1914 as in 1830, or 1848.<sup>47</sup> In their early days when their uniform had not been established and, later on, when few of them had acquired uniform, the Volunteers had sometimes worn green armlets lettered *IV*. It has been said that Pearse favoured the use of the tricolour by the Volunteers,<sup>48</sup> and much has been made of the fact that they occasionally wore tricolour armlets in the early months of 1916; for example, at the St Patrick's day parade in Ballymote, Co. Sligo in that year 'a feature of the day, both in the procession and out of it, was the universal sporting of the colours. All the Volunteers wore tricolour armlets and the horsemen who led the procession tricolour scarfs'.<sup>49</sup> Armlets were worn by some of the Volunteers who occupied the General Post Office on Easter Monday, but they were yellow ones.<sup>50</sup> A tricolour armlet with horizontal stripes of green, white and orange (or a rich yellow) which was found in Liberty Hall after the insurrection is preserved in the National Museum of Ireland.

These slender indications of Volunteer acceptance before the date of the rising of the colours green, white and orange have, in the light of the impending emergence of the tricolour as the favoured national flag, been looked upon as matters of great significance. It has been suggested that they showed the 'true colours' of at least the I.R.B. element in the Volunteers. The references seem scarcely to

sustain this interpretation. After all, the 1798 Centenary Committee and the committee which arranged James Stephens's funeral had provided recent precedents for the use of the three colours. There is no question that the tricolour was known—if not widely known—as 'the Republican flag' before the rising, but that the I.R.B. deliberately concealed their acceptance of it with a view to its sudden display is another thing. There appears to have been at least one other occasion of the use of the three colours. An order given to a Dublin drapery store by Seán Mac Diarmada, a member of the executive of the Volunteers and an architect of the rising, for a large number of Irish linen tricoloured favours is still remembered; the fact that they were to be of linen may suggest armlets rather than favours. These were intended for wear on the occasion of a Volunteer march, or possibly for wear by the Fianna Éireann boy scouts. The colours were green, white and yellow—not orange—and Mac Diarmada wished them to be arranged in a manner which he apparently specified. But his specific directions were not complied with. Mac Diarmada was very vexed; he refused to accept the favours and cancelled the order.<sup>51</sup>

#### FLAGS OF THE RISING

When the insurrection commenced on Easter Monday 1916 and the members of the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic called upon the people to rise in arms they did so in the following words:

Irishmen and Irishwomen: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.<sup>52</sup>

47 Letter of T.J. Clarke to John Devoy, 14 May 1914; O'Brien and Ryan (eds), *Devoy's post bag*, ii, p.446.

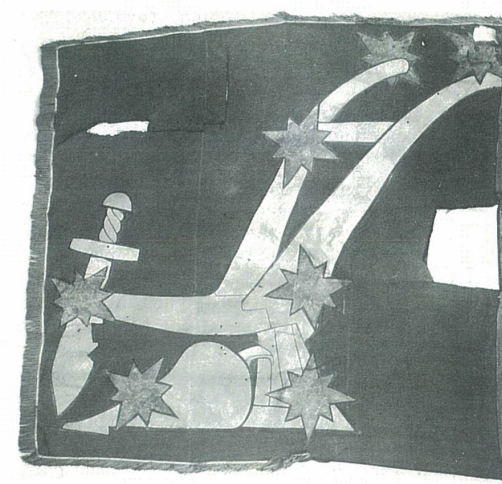
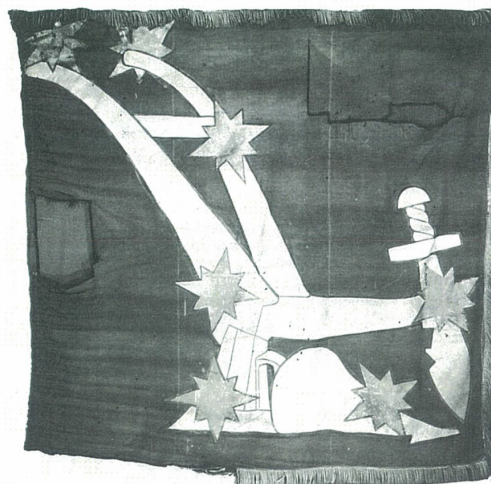
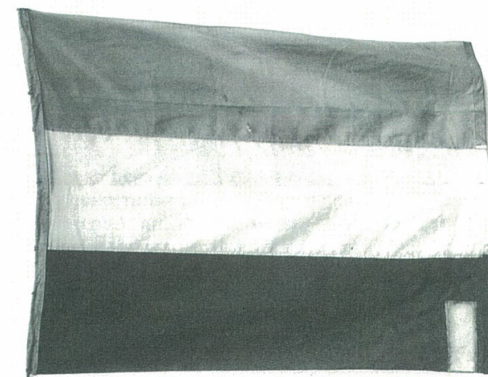
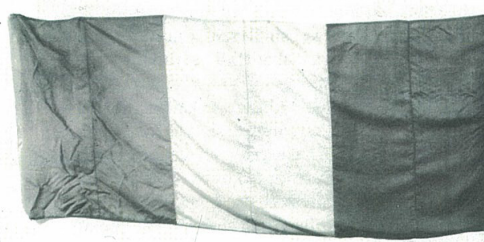
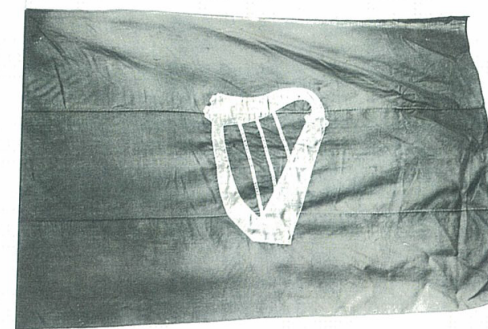
48 E.H. Baxter, *National flags* (1934), pp.18f, says that 'in 1914 Patrick Pearse adopted it (the tricolour) for his company of Irish Volunteers'.

49 *The Irish Volunteer*, loc. cit.

50 D. Ryan, *The rising* (1949, 3rd edn, 1957), p.124.

51 Information from Fr John M. Heuston, O.P., whose sister subsequently altered some of the favours to produce the desired arrangement and whose brother, Seán Heuston, later to be executed, issued them for wear either to his Volunteer company or to his unit of the Fianna.

52 Proclamation of the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic to the people of Ireland.



Flags of 1916 Rising. *Top left* 'Irish Republic' flag on G.P.O. *Top right* Green harp flag at Marrowbone Lane distillery. *Centre left* Tricolour made for Willie Pearse (but too late for use in Rising). *Centre right* Tricolour at Mendicity Institution. *Bottom* Irish Citizen Army flag on the Imperial Hotel, O'Connell Street (two sides) [all photographs NMI].



Was the reference to the Irish flag merely an ornatory flourish, or did the signatories of the proclamation have an actual flag in mind?

The Irish Volunteers, Irish Citizen Army men, boys of Fianna Éireann, men of the Hibernian Rifles and women of Cumann na mBan and other organisations who took part in the insurrection fought under two flags, the tricolour and the green harp flag. Which of these two flags was considered as the flag appropriate to Ireland by each of the individual signatories—the members of the military council of the I.R.B.— we shall never know. However, it would be wrong to omit from consideration that the tricolours which were flown in Dublin during the insurrection were undoubtedly provided for the event, or that appearances indicate that they may all have come from the same source, that is, from the architects of the revolt.

**Connolly's Green Harp Flag**

On Palm Sunday, 16 April, eight days before the commencement of the insurrection, James Connolly staged a 'Solemn Ceremony of Hoisting the Irish Flag' at the headquarters of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union and of the Irish Citizen Army, Liberty Hall. Connolly had already stated in his journal, *The Workers' Republic*, in the previous October that the ideal of the Citizen Army was 'an Ireland ruled, and owned, by Irish men and women, sovereign and independent from the centre to the sea, and flying its own flag outward over all the oceans'.<sup>53</sup> On 16 April, in the presence of an enthusiastic crowd and with the armed and uniformed Citizen Army drawn up on parade outside the building, Miss Molly Reilly of the Irish Women Workers' Union, on Connolly's instructions, hoisted 'the Green Flag of Ireland, emblazoned with the Harp without the Crown, the sacred emblem of Ireland's unconquered soul', on the roof of Liberty Hall.<sup>54</sup> This flag had, previous to the hoisting, been the centrepiece of what was, for the Citizen Army, an elaborate ceremony. It had been assigned a colour guard of sixteen men, had been placed in traditional fashion on a pile of drums and had, to the accompaniment of the music of pipes and drums, been formally saluted.

Connolly, who appeared in his Commandant's uniform for the first time, commanded the parade and concluded the ceremony by declaring that he and those who heard him would give their lives if necessary 'to keep the Irish flag flying'.<sup>55</sup> The playwright Seán O'Casey, earlier secretary of the Citizen Army and its first historian, said in 1919 that the flag which was hoisted was 'the Irish Tricolour of Orange, Green and White'.<sup>56</sup> In this he was certainly mistaken. The flag was the harp flag. R.M. Fox, the second historian of the Citizen Army, said that Connolly 'staged the ceremony of hoisting the national flag at Liberty Hall with the definite idea of challenging all the ideas and loyalties which clung round the British connection'.<sup>57</sup> Diarmuid Lynch believed that it was 'ridiculous to attribute to this hoisting any such highfalutin meaning'.<sup>58</sup> There were, as we shall see, one or more tricolour flags in Liberty Hall—although how long they were there prior to the insurrection we do not know—so that O'Casey, if his memory was at fault, may be said to have been understandably in the wrong. Of the other two views, Lynch's was coloured by the fact that the ultimate displacement of the green flag by the tricolour was absolute, and that he was one of those who helped to bring it about. To him, writing thirty years after the event, the only national flag worthy of the name was the tricolour and the hoisting of the green flag seemed to be no challenge to Britain. Lynch believed that Pearse's honouring of the green flag was camouflage and suspected that Connolly's might have been the same.<sup>59</sup> Connolly appears to have been, of all the 1916 leaders, the one who was most interested in flags. Since the universally accepted Irish national flag was, in

53 *The Workers' Republic*, 30 October 1915.  
 54 The editorial in *The Workers' Republic*, no. 48, 22 April 1916, written by Connolly, describes the ceremony in most fulsome language. The issue of 15 April contained a formal notice that the ceremony would be held. See also R.M. Fox, *The history of the Irish Citizen Army* (1943), p.124.  
 55 A poem which was written for the occasion and was printed in *The Workers' Republic* of 22 April ends with the lines: 'For never did or shall a foreign crown/ Be raised above the Irish flag of green.'  
 56 P. Ó Cathasaigh (S. O'Casey), *The story of the Irish Citizen Army* (1919), p.56.  
 57 R.M. Fox, *Green banners* (1938), p.191.  
 58 Lynch (ed. O'Donoghue), *I.R.B. and 1916*, p.92.  
 59 *Ibid.*, p.74.



I Ulster Volunteer Force



II Irish Volunteers - Celtic Park, Derry



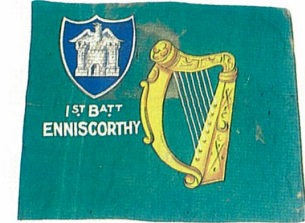
III Irish Volunteers - Aughrim, Co. Wicklow



IV Clan na Gael



V reverse side of IV



VI Irish Volunteers - Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford



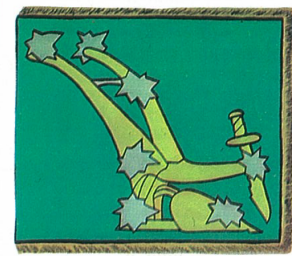
VIII Willie Pearse's flag



IX 'Irish Republic' flag - G.P.O.



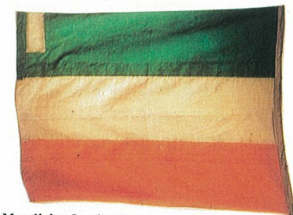
VII Fianna Éireann



XI The Plough and the Stars



XII Marrowbone Lane



X Mendicity Institution



XIV Trades Union flag (1934)



XV Naval pennant



XIII Four Courts



XVI Irish Army - 2nd Batt., 1954

**Flags 1900 - 1916 (I-VII)**  
**Flags Of The 1916 Rising (VIII-XIII)**  
**Flags In The New Ireland (XIV-XVI)**





G.P.O. (roof) during 1916 Rising showing 'Irish Republic' flag [NMI].

figure of Hibernia above the tympanum. The photograph, subject to the proviso that the positions of the flags were not changed, must disprove President O'Kelly's assertion that a green harp flag flew at the Prince's Street corner. When the photograph was taken it was the *Irish Republic* flag which was in position.<sup>62</sup> Lynch bears this out.

The *Irish Republic* flag is described by Desmond Ryan, who was a member of the G.P.O. garrison, as a green flag bearing the inscription *Irish Republic* 'in Celtic letters, half-gold, half-white'.<sup>63</sup> Miss L. Stokes, who was in O'Connell Street on Monday afternoon, says that the insurgents had 'their green flag with Irish Republic in gold across it flying from the G.P.O.'<sup>64</sup> A member of the scratch force which defended Trinity College saw the flag at the same time and described it as 'a huge green banner with the inscription in white letters "Irish Republic"', although how he could call such a small flag huge does not appear.<sup>65</sup> Another eyewitness, present on Monday afternoon, says 'clearly against the



"Irish Republic" flag held (upside down) by British soldiers on being taken down from GPO [NMI].

bright blue sky above the roof rose the flag of the Irish Republic declared that morning'.<sup>66</sup> Seán MacEntee saw the flag on the following Wednesday: 'a green flag with white letters, the flag [as he says] of the Workers' Republic'.<sup>67</sup> MacEntee viewed the G.P.O. from the north, from the Rotunda; he saw only the *Irish Republic* flag and 'a tricolour of green, white and orange', that is, the flags at the Henry Street and Prince's Street corners.

The *Irish Republic* flag is said to have been made in Fry's poplin factory in Cork Street to the order of A.P. Reynolds of Fianna Éireann, and the inscription is said to have been painted in Surrey House, Leinster Road, Rathmines, the home of Countess Markievicz, by Theobald Wolfe Tone Fitzgerald of Brunswick Street. The flag hung on the wall of a bedroom in Surrey House for about a week

62 There is a print of this photograph in the National Museum of Ireland.

63 Ryan, *op. cit.*, p.126.

64 L. Stokes's account in R. McHugh (ed.), *Dublin 1916* (1966), p.68.

65 Article in *Blackwood's Magazine*, July 1916, reprinted *ibid.*, p.159.

66 E.R. Dodds (ed), *Journal and letters of Stephen MacKenna* (1936), p.50. The eyewitness was Austin Clarke.

67 S. MacEntee, *Episode at Easter* (1966), p.133.

previous to the insurrection.<sup>68</sup> Miss Margaret Skinnider of Cumann na mBan claimed that she saw in Liberty Hall some days before Easter Monday 'the flag of the Republic which would be raised when the rising started';<sup>69</sup> this may have been either the *Irish Republic* flag or a tricolour. Who brought the *Irish Republic* flag to the G.P.O. and whether it was brought there from Liberty Hall, as it seems to have been, are matters unrecorded. It remained on the roof throughout the week, survived the bombardment and the fire which destroyed the G.P.O. and was eventually removed by the troops after the insurgents' surrender, either on Sunday, 30 April or on the day following. A photograph taken at the time shows a group of soldiers holding it upside down at the base of the Parnell monument in O'Connell Street.<sup>70</sup> Thereafter, it was placed in the Imperial War Museum, London. It was presented by the British government to the Irish government on the fiftieth anniversary of the rising in 1966.<sup>71</sup>

#### Tricolour on the G.P.O.

There is evidence from several of those who saw it that the tricolour flag flew on the G.P.O. Diarmuid Lynch agrees with President O'Kelly that it flew at the Henry Street corner of the building. Desmond Ryan said that three flags were flown and claimed that two of them were tricolours.<sup>72</sup> Margaret Skinnider remembered seeing 'the tricolour, green, white and orange' appearing 'above the roof of the G.P.O.' R. Humphreys, another eyewitness, saw 'the tricolour Republican flag' on the G.P.O. on Easter Monday.<sup>73</sup> J.F. Cronin, still another eyewitness, saw 'the Irish Republican flag (clearly the inscribed flag) and another flag I did not know, a green, white and pink affair (a description of the tricolour which contains a warning for us to allow for differences in the sense of colour of its observers) flying from the Post Office'.<sup>74</sup> **Ernie O'Malley**, who was later to play a prominent part in the Irish guerrilla warfare, saw what was to him a new flag on the G.P.O. during the week of the insurrection, 'a tri-coloured one of green, white and orange, the colours running out from the mast'. O'Malley's description suggests that the arrangement of the colours of the headquarters tricolour was a horizontal rather than a ver-

tical one, a feature of which—if our interpretation of his words is correct—his seems to be the only record. When he visited O'Connell Street again on the Monday following the surrender O'Malley saw that the G.P.O. was a burnt out shell 'from which the tricolour still floated'.<sup>75</sup> **Dr James Ryan**, who passed down O'Connell Street with his fellow prisoners of the surrendered garrison on Sunday morning, also noted that the tricolour still flew. He saw a soldier trying to reach it with a piece of wire in an effort to pull it down.<sup>76</sup>

#### Other Flags on the G.P.O.?

As well as the *Irish Republic* flag, which has survived almost in its entirety, although the paint of the inscription has in places been rubbed off, some fragments of what appear to have been two other flags were rescued from the ruin of the building and are now in the National Museum of Ireland. A post office workman who was engaged in clearing the debris at the Prince's Street side of the yard behind the O'Connell Street frontage shortly after the rising found two small fragments of cloth pressed together under a stone. They are charred at their edges and were apparently saved from being burnt by their position. One is a piece of cloth which resembles bunting and which was, it seems, white. The other, which is of similar material, is made up of two pieces sewn together, one piece green, the other of the same uncertain white. The fragments appear to be portions of a flag which was burnt. If they are, and if we are correct in saying that the light

68 Letter of Mrs M. Galligan in *The Evening Herald*, 22 June 1964.

69 *The Irish Press*, 9 April 1966, p.12.

70 This was reproduced on a postcard in 1916. There is a copy in the National Museum.

71 The Earl of Longford and T.P. O'Neill, *Eamon de Valera* (1970), p.37, say that the *Irish Republic* flag was hoisted at the Prince's Street corner at 3 p.m. and that the tricolour floated 'above the royal arms of the pediment', that is, above the centre of the building. Neither statement appears to be borne out by the evidence.

72 Ryan, *op. cit.*, pp.126, 137, 154. He said: 'It was just before 3 p.m. as the flags went up' (p.126). This timing is much later than that given by Lynch.

73 R. Humphreys, 'A rebel's diary', in *The Belvederian*, xxi, no. 2 (1966), p.159.

74 J.F. Cronin's account of the rising printed at the time in *The Preston Herald* and reprinted in McHugh (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.87.

75 E. O'Malley, *On another man's wound* (1936), pp.30, 41.

76 J. Ryan in *The Sunday Press*, 10 April 1966, p.11.

It was Diarmuid Lynch that took down the tricolour flag. It was kept at Vauxhall Hotel for safe keeping and used on the 21<sup>st</sup> / 1919.



his abortive rising in 1803, wore a dark green tail coat laced in gold and with gold epaulettes, a white waistcoat, white cloth pantaloons, a black stock, a sash and a cocked hat with a white feather. 'Green jackets and white pantaloons' were made for the other would-be insurgent leaders, and Emmet sent green coats to Wicklow to the insurgent Michael Dwyer.<sup>19</sup>

Although the arrest of the leaders and the failure of the United Irishmen to concert their arrangements for rebellion sent the insurgents into the field in 1798 with little opportunity to provide themselves with uniforms,<sup>20</sup> efforts were still made in Wexford, in the midlands and in Ulster to show the green coat. Matthew Keogh, the insurgent governor of Wexford town, wore a uniform of green and gold,<sup>21</sup> Dick Monk had 'a light horseman's jacket of green' and 'a green helmet-cap, with a white ostrich feather across the top'.<sup>22</sup> Others wore green spencers, or short coats, articles of civilian attire which were made to do duty as uniform.<sup>23</sup> A rebel leader in Meath was 'in full regimentals', his coat being a green one.<sup>24</sup> The insurgent leaders at Saintfield, Co. Down were dressed 'in green jackets, turned up with white,

two feet long', which was part of the hussar uniform, seems to have been a mirliton or hussar cap such as worn in some of the European armies of the time, and was worn in the British army in the early years of the nineteenth century, see the *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, xx, (1941), p.63.

19 W. Ridgeway, *Report of the proceedings in cases of high treason* (1803), ii, pp.25, 43ff, 58, 67. C. Dickson, *Life of Michael Dwyer*, pp.231,233. An informer of this time told the government that 'a green coat with a pea-green cape one would think to be a sort of party uniform worn by the people, or by the heads of them. Many men notoriously disaffected appear in that dress': H. Landreth, *The pursuit of Robert Emmet* (1948), p.148.

20 Some of the Wexford insurgent leaders fought in what had been their Yeomanry corps uniforms, for example, Edward Roche at the Three Rocks (T. Cloney, *A personal narrative of 1798*, p.20) and Perry at Arklow (*The trial of William Byrne of Ballymanus*, 1799, p.14).

21 T.C. Croker, *Researches in the south of Ireland* (1824), p.365.

22 C Jackson, *A narrative of the sufferings and escape of Charles Jackson* (1798), p.19.

23 *The trial of William Byrne*, pp.8, 22.

24 *Concise history of the rebellion in Ireland* (Liverpool 1798), pp.13, 23. Lecky, *op. cit.* iv, p.377. J.A. Froude, *The English in Ireland in the eighteenth century*, iii, p.420. I.H. Mackay Scobie, *An old Highland Fencible corps* (1914), pp.166ff.

25 J. Jones, *Impartial narrative of the most important engagements during the Irish rebellion, 1798* (2nd edn, 1799), p.60.

26 Walker's *Hibernian Magazine*, Dublin, August 1798, p.573.

27 J.Thomson's account in *The Belfast Magazine*, i, no. 1,

other yellow; white vests, buckskin breeches, half-boots, hats with white cock-neck feathers and green cockades'<sup>25</sup> Where green could not be had for uniform coats, the facings of the garments which were worn were of that colour.<sup>26</sup> Some of the leaders at Ballinahinch, Co. Down wore green coats.<sup>27</sup>

In fact, green appeared everywhere. It was 'the favourite colour'.<sup>28</sup> Immediately hostilities commenced in Co. Kildare rebel sympathisers came out in green clothes and went from house to house collecting green cloth.<sup>29</sup> At Ballinahinch the one particular of dress in which the insurgents concurred was the wearing of green, 'almost every individual having a knot of ribbons of that colour, sometimes mixed with yellow, in his hat'.<sup>30</sup> The rebel rank and file wore brown coats,<sup>31</sup> grey coats,<sup>32</sup> their 'Sunday clothes'<sup>33</sup> or 'clean shirts',<sup>34</sup> but they did their best to have green and white plumes,<sup>35</sup> green cockades,<sup>36</sup> and green sashes<sup>37</sup> as well. In Wexford and Westmeath they had white paper bands round their hats.<sup>38</sup> In Wexford 'some of a higher order' had on their hat bands 'the Irish harp drawn in gold leaf upon a green ground, encircled with the words

(1825), quoted in C. Dickson, *Revolt in the north*, pp.227ff.

28 M. Byrne, *Memoirs* (1907 edn), i, p.69.

29 *Leadbeater papers* (1862), i, pp.218, 221. On the other hand we have the account of a girl's petticoat being cut off her back by sabre simply because it was green (T. Pakenham, *The year of liberty*, London 1969, p.85).

30 'Most of them besides had their hats and buttonholes decorated with laurel', cf. J. Thomson's account already quoted.

31 C. Ross (ed.), *Correspondence of Charles, first Marquis Cornwallis* (1859), ii, p.355. H.F.B. Wheeler and A.M. Broadley, *The war in Wexford* (1910), p.305.

32 H.S. Keating, *On the defence of Ireland* (1795, and later editions), p.41. Grey or brown homespun was the ordinary material of clothing, forming for the people in general the 'coloured clothes' or civilian attire of the time. Irishmen are described as wearing 'grey frieze coats' in 1683, cf. *Historical manuscripts commission, 14th report* (Ormonde MSS), appendix, pt. vii, p.105.

33 Thomson's account, quoted n. 27 above.

34 Jones, *Impartial narrative* . . . 1798, p.62.

35 Lecky, *History of Ireland*, iv, p.424.

36 Jackson, quoted n. 22 above, p.19. Jones, *op. cit.*, pp.61, 64.

37 *The trial of William Byrne*, p.22. E. Hay, *History of the Irish insurrection of 1798* (1842), p.142.

38 Jackson, *op. cit.*, pp.19, 40f. Jones, *op. cit.*, p.61. Note that Cruikshank's drawings in W.H. Maxwell, *History of the Irish rebellion in 1798* show this feature. It is reminiscent of the field marks or field signs of opposing forces in the seventeenth century, when pieces of white paper or foliage were widely worn. For this see C.H. Firth, *Cromwell's army* (1962 edn), pp.99f. An Irish example is provided by the procedure followed at the battle



1798 Rising (I-V) Robert Emmet(VI)  
 Young Ireland And Repeal(VII-XII)  
**Rebellion And Repeal, 1798-1848**